

# Black Song Green Close Readings

## Chapter 1; January

**The Passage:** *“The only way to outfox Hangman is to think one sentence ahead, and if you see a stammer-word coming up, alter your sentence so you won’t need to use it. Of course, you have to do this without the person you’re talking to catching on. Reading dictionaries like I do helps you do these ducks and dives, but you have to remember who you’re talking to. (If I was speaking to another thirteen-year-old and said the word ‘melancholy’ to avoid stammering on ‘sad’, for example, I’d be a laughing stock, ‘cause kids aren’t s’posed to use adult words like ‘melancholy’. Not at Upton upon Severn Comprehensive, anyway.) Another strategy is to buy time by saying ‘Er...’ in the hope that Hangman’s concentration’ll lapse and you can sneak the word out. But if you say ‘er...’ too much you come across as a right dimmer. Lastly, if a teacher asks you a question directly and the answer’s a stammer-word, it’s best to pretend you don’t know. I couldn’t count how often I’ve done this. Sometimes teachers lose their rag (specially if they’ve just spent half a lesson explaining something) but anything’s better than getting labelled ‘School Stutterboy.’”*

### First Impressions:

#### 1. What is the first thing you notice about the passage?

- *The first thing I noticed is how much the main character worries about stammering and how they have to alter a large portion of his life by using certain words while speaking, particularly in situations where he wants to avoid embarrassment or negative attention.*

#### 2. What is the second thing?

- *The second thing I notice is that the author has been intentionally using informal language and a conversational tone, like if the passage is being narrated by a teenager.*

#### 3. Do the two things you noticed complement each other? Or contradict each other?

- *I think the author altering sentences and using filler words like "er," are helpful with the informal and conversational tone of writing.*

#### 4. What mood does the passage create in you as a reader? Why?

- *The kind of mood I got from this passage is the inner turmoil of an insecure teen. The majority of this paragraph is on the topic of an extreme insecurity.*

### Vocabulary and Diction:

- 1. Which words do you notice first? Why did they stand out from the others?**
  - *The informal tone was what I noticed first throughout this novel.*
- 2. How do the important words relate to one another?**
  - *The important words, I think, are related to themes of communication and social dynamics/hierarchy. It highlights challenges the narrator faces when trying to express themselves and avoid negative judgments.*
- 3. Does a phrase here appear elsewhere in the story or poem?**
  - *I don't think a phrase here will reappear, however his issue with stuttering, I believe, will be a reoccurring concern in the novel.*
- 4. Do any words seem oddly used to you? Why? Is that a result of archaic language? Or deliberate weirdness?**
  - *Although the tone of voice in this paragraph may seem odd at first, it makes total sense as it is being narrated by a 12-year-old. It's not necessarily 'archaic' language but a deliberate choice to reflect an informal tone and the narrator's voice. It creates a sense of authenticity and relatability.*
- 5. Do any words have double meanings? Triple meanings? What are all the possible ways to read it?**
  - *I did not notice any sort of double meaning in any of the words or sentences within this paragraph.*
- 6. Look up any unfamiliar words. For a pre-20th century text, look in the Oxford English Dictionary for possible outdated meanings. Look up very common words as well since they often have several possible meanings.**
  - *I did not have to look anything up, all of the words I was already aware of.*

#### **Discerning Patterns:**

- 1. Does an image here remind you of an image elsewhere in the book?**
  - *There is no specific image that reminds me of an image elsewhere in the book since the passage does not provide detailed visual descriptions.*
- 2. How does this pattern fit into the pattern of the book as a whole?**
  - *The pattern of talking about strategies for communication and social dynamics fits into the main pattern of the book in terms of exploring themes of self-expression, social interactions, and the challenges faced by the narrator in these kinds of situations.*
- 3. How could this passage symbolize something in the entire work? Could this passage serve as a microcosm, a little picture, of what's taking place in the whole narrative or poem?**
  - *This passage could symbolize one of the main themes by serving as a 'microcosm' of the narrator's experiences and struggles throughout the narrative.*

*It captures the anxieties, self-consciousness, and need for acceptance that paints the way for the narrative.*

**4. What is the sentence rhythm like? Short and choppy? Long and flowing? Does it build on itself or stay at an even pace? How does that structure relate to the content?**

- *The sentence rhythm in the paragraph is varied. It includes both short, choppy sentences and longer, flowing sentences. This structure reflects the narrator's natural flow of thoughts and emotions.*

**5. Look at the punctuation. Is there anything unusual about it? What about capitalization?**

- *The punctuation follows the standard rules, with commas, ellipses, and quotation marks used properly to indicate pauses, interruptions, and dialogue.*

**6. Is there any repetition within the passage? What words are repeated? Why are they repeated?**

- *There is repetition in the passage, mostly with words like "sentence," "word," and "stammer."*

**7. How many types of writing are in the passage? (e.g., narration, description, argument, dialogue, rhymed or alliterative poetry inserted into the prose passage, etc.)**

- *The types of writing in this paragraph are just narration and reflection. It's the narrator sharing their thoughts and experiences, with a conversational and informal tone.*

**8. Can you identify paradoxes in the author's thought or subject?**

- *I could not find any paradoxes in this paragraph.*

**9. What is left out or silenced? What would you expect the author to say that the author seems to have avoided or ignored? What could the author have done differently—and what's the effect of the current choice?**

- *The passage doesn't exactly implicate that something is left out.*

**Point of View and Characterization:**

**1. How does the passage make us react, or think about any characters or events within the narrative?**

- *The paragraph opens our eyes to think about the narrator's experiences and challenges in communication. It gives us insight into the narrator's self-consciousness, anxieties, and need for social acceptance. We can try to*

*empathize with his struggles and reflect on how social dynamics can have an impact on one's self-expression and confidence.*

**2. Are there colors, sounds, physical description that appeals to the senses? Does this imagery form a pattern? Why might the author have chosen that color, sound, or physical description? Is it symbolic? Foreshadowing?**

- *The paragraph does not heavily rely on colors, sounds, or physical descriptions. The imagery primarily revolves around the ideas and strategies discussed rather than sensory details.*

**3. Who speaks in the passage? To whom does he or she speak? Does the narrator have partial or omniscient viewpoint? How does that viewpoint help or hinder the reader's comprehension?**

- This paragraph is narrated in first person, by a pre-teen boy attempting to overcome his main struggle, stuttering.

**Symbolism, Schemes, Tropes:**

**1. Are there metaphors, similes, figures of speech? What kinds? Why might the author have chosen them?**

- *The passage does not contain explicit metaphors, similes, or other figures of speech. The language used is primarily conversational and straightforward.*

**2. Is there one controlling metaphor? If not, how many different metaphors are there, and in what order do they occur? How might that be significant? Consult the "Schemes and Tropes" section of the Course Packet or on the class website under "Rhetoric" and see if any of these rhetorical tools appear in the writing.**

- *There is no controlling metaphor in the paragraph, it focuses more on practical languages and experiences rather than symbolic or rhetorical devices.*

**Importance (the most vital part of the exercise):**

**1. Why is it important for the reader to know what you have just analyzed and explained? How does the passage you have chosen to help us understand the story, poem, or play more completely?**

- *Understanding the ins and outs of a paragraph is important for the reader as it provides insights and helps us read in between the lines of the challenges faced by the narrator and helps us empathize with their struggles. It deepens our understanding of the story by shedding light on themes of communication, identity, and social acceptance.*

## Chapter 2; Hangman

**The Passage:** *“If God made each minute last six months, I’d be middle aged by breakfast and dead by the time I got on the school bus. I could sleep for ever. I tried to push away what was in store by lying back and imagining the ceiling was the unmapped surface of a G-class planet orbiting Alpha Centauri. Nobody was there. I’d never have to say a word.”*

### First Impressions:

**5. What is the first thing you notice about the passage?**

- *The first thing I notice is the mention of time and the concept of time passing quickly or slowly.*

**6. What is the second thing?**

- *The second thing I notice is his desire for an escape and his imaginative thoughts.*

7. Do the two things you noticed complement each other? Or contradict each other?

**8. What mood does the passage create in you as a reader? Why?**

- *This paragraph creates an introspective mood in me as a reader. The mention of time passing quickly and his longing for escape brings in a sense of longing, dissatisfaction, and the desire to break free from the constraints of daily life.*

### Vocabulary and Diction:

7. Which words do you notice first? Why did they stand out from the others?

**8. How do the important words relate to one another?**

- *The important words in the passage relate to each other through the themes of time, escape, and the narrator's desire for a different reality.*

**9. Does a phrase here appear elsewhere in the story or poem?**

- *I did not notice any sort of reoccurring phrase in this paragraph.*

**10. Do any words seem oddly used to you? Why? Is that a result of archaic language? Or deliberate weirdness?**

- *Nothing really seemed oddly used to me. However, I can see that the use of “middle aged” with “breakfast” and “dead” by the time of the “school bus” are calculated to get his message across.*

**11. Do any words have double meanings? Triple meanings? What are all the possible ways to read it?**

- *I did not notice any sort of double or triple meanings in this paragraph.*

**12. Look up any unfamiliar words. For a pre-20th century text, look in the Oxford English Dictionary for possible outdated meanings. Look up very common words as well since they often have several possible meanings.**

- *I did not need to look up any sort of word in this paragraph as I knew them all pretty well.*

**Discerning Patterns:**

**10. Does an image here remind you of an image elsewhere in the book?**

- *There is no specific image in this passage that reminds me of an image elsewhere in the book.*

**11. How does this pattern fit into the pattern of the book as a whole?**

- *I think this could possibly fit in to the pattern of the book as a whole because of his constant wish to get older or overcome his pre-teen issues and abnormalities like his stutter.*

**12. How could this passage symbolize something in the entire work? Could this passage serve as a microcosm, a little picture, of what's taking place in the whole narrative or poem?**

- *This passage can symbolize the narrator's longing for escape and their dissatisfaction with the passage of time. It could also reflect the fact that he may want to age quicker to get past his stutter issue.*

**13. What is the sentence rhythm like? Short and choppy? Long and flowing? Does it build on itself or stay at an even pace? How does that structure relate to the content?**

- *The sentence rhythm in the passage is a mix of short and long sentences. It varies the pace and reflects the fluctuating thoughts and emotions of the narrator.*

**14. Look at the punctuation. Is there anything unusual about it? What about capitalization?**

- *The punctuation is used correctly, without any unusual features. The capitalization also follows standard rules.*

**15. Is there any repetition within the passage? What words are repeated? Why are they repeated?**

- *I did not notice any sort of repetition within the passage.*

**16. How many types of writing are in the passage? (e.g., narration, description, argument, dialogue, rhymed or alliterative poetry inserted into the prose passage, etc.)**

- The passage primarily consists of narration through his stream of consciousness of thoughts from the main character.

**17. Can you identify paradoxes in the author's thought or subject?**

- *I did not notice any sort of paradox within the paragraph.*

**18. What is left out or silenced? What would you expect the author to say that the author seems to have avoided or ignored? What could the author have done differently—and what's the effect of the current choice?**

- *What I think is specifically left out in this passage is the true reason or cause behind the narrator's desire for escape. The author could have provided more context or explanation, but the current choice of leaving it unknown adds to the reader's curiosity.*

#### **Point of View and Characterization:**

4. How does the passage make us react, or think about any characters or events within the narrative?

**5. Are there colors, sounds, physical description that appeals to the senses? Does this imagery form a pattern? Why might the author have chosen that color, sound, or physical description? Is it symbolic? Foreshadowing?**

- *There are no colors, sounds or physical descriptions in this paragraph as the passage's focus is to showcase the narrator's thought process.*

**6. Who speaks in the passage? To whom does he or she speak? Does the narrator have partial or omniscient viewpoint? How does that viewpoint help or hinder the reader's comprehension?**

- *The passage is narrated in the first person, with the narrator speaking to themselves. The viewpoint is partial, providing insight into the narrator's thoughts and emotions.*

#### **Symbolism, Schemes, Tropes:**

**3. Are there metaphors, similes, figures of speech? What kinds? Why might the author have chosen them?**

- *I did not notice any sort of metaphor in this paragraph.*

**4. Is there one controlling metaphor? If not, how many different metaphors are there, and in what order do they occur? How might that be significant?**

- *There are no metaphors in this passage. The language/choice of words used in this paragraph are meant to convey the narrator's thought process rather than the use of literary devices.*

**Importance (the most vital part of the exercise):**

2. Why is it important for the reader to know what you have just analyzed and explained? How does the passage you have chosen to help us understand the story, poem, or play more completely?

## Chapter 3; Relatives

**The Passage:** *“The green or grey of Hugo’s eyes depends on the weather. ‘This “not today” attitude of yours is a cancer. Cancer of the character. It stunts your growth. Other kids sense your not-todayness, and despise you for it. “Nottoday” is why those plebs in the Black Swan make you nervous. “Not today” – I would bet – is at the root of that speech defect of yours.’ (A shame-bomb blew my head off.) “Not today” condemns you to be the lapdog of authority, any bully, any shitehawk. They sense you won’t stand up to them. Not today, not ever. “Not today” is the blind slave of every petty rule. Even the rule that says’ (Hugo did this bleaty voice) “No, smoking is BAD! Don’t listen to naughty Hugo Lamb!” Jason, you have to kill “not today”. This was so appallingly true I could only try to smile.’*

**First Impressions:**

**9. What is the first thing you notice about the passage?**

- *The first thing I noticed was all of the comparisons.*

**10. What is the second thing?**

- *The second thing I notice is the emphasis on the "not today" attitude and its negative consequences.*

**11. Do the two things you noticed complement each other? Or contradict each other?**

- *The two things I noticed complement each other as they both contribute to the characterization of Hugo and his attitude.*



**12. What mood does the passage create in you as a reader? Why?**

- *The passage creates a somewhat somber and introspective mood. It gives you a nudge to self-reflect and the weight of the negative attitude.*

**Vocabulary and Diction:****13. Which words do you notice first? Why did they stand out from the others?**

- *The words that stand out are "not today," "cancer of the character," and "plebs." They stand out because they are repeated and carry strong connotations.*

**14. How do the important words relate to one another?**

- *The important words are used to showcase the effects of the "not today" attitude on Hugo's character and his interactions with others.*

**15. Does a phrase here appear elsewhere in the story or poem?**

- *Since I'm only 3 chapters in, I do not remember seeing a reference or any foreshadowing to this passage anywhere else in the story.*

**16. Do any words seem oddly used to you? Why? Is that a result of archaic language? Or deliberate weirdness?**

- *I don't think the words are oddly used, but they convey a deliberate intensity and emotional charge.*

**17. Do any words have double meanings? Triple meanings? What are all the possible ways to read it?**

- *I thought that the phrase "not today" could also be read as a refusal to engage in the present moment, a lack of motivation or drive, and as a metaphorical obstacle to growth.*

**18. Look up any unfamiliar words. For a pre-20th century text, look in the Oxford English Dictionary for possible outdated meanings. Look up very common words as well since they often have several possible meanings.**

- *There were no unfamiliar words in this paragraph.*

**Discerning Patterns:****19. Does an image here remind you of an image elsewhere in the book?**

- *There is no specific image in the passage that directly reminds me of an image elsewhere in the book.*

**20. How does this pattern fit into the pattern of the book as a whole?**

- *The pattern of negative consequences of the "not today" attitude contributes to the overall theme of personal growth of this novel as an autobiography.*

**21. How could this passage symbolize something in the entire work? Could this passage serve as a microcosm, a little picture, of what's taking place in the whole narrative or poem?**

- *This passage can symbolize the internal struggle and the need for overcoming one's own self-defeating attitudes and behaviors. It can serve as a microcosm of the larger theme of personal transformation and the challenges faced by the characters.*

**22. What is the sentence rhythm like? Short and choppy? Long and flowing? Does it build on itself or stay at an even pace? How does that structure relate to the content?**

- *The sentence rhythm is varied, with a mix of short and long sentences. It builds on itself, gradually intensifying the impact of the message.*

**23. Look at the punctuation. Is there anything unusual about it? What about capitalization?**

- *I don't see anything unusual about the punctuation in this passage.*

**24. Is there any repetition within the passage? What words are repeated? Why are they repeated?**

- *The repetition in the phrase "not today" and the mention of Hugo's speech defect. They are repeated to reinforce their significance and the impact they have on Hugo's life.*

**25. How many types of writing are in the passage? (e.g., narration, description, argument, dialogue, rhymed or alliterative poetry inserted into the prose passage, etc.)**

- *Like the entirety of what I read, this passage is primarily made up of dialogue with some internal thoughts and reflections, making it a combination of dialogue and introspection.*

**26. Can you identify paradoxes in the author's thought or subject?**

- *I couldn't find any paradoxes.*

**27. What is left out or silenced? What would you expect the author to say that the author seems to have avoided or ignored? What could the author have done differently—and what's the effect of the current choice?**

- *The paragraph doesn't really mention what the author may have avoided or ignored. However, it focuses on the negative aspects of the "not today" attitude without providing a balanced perspective on its possible benefits of the character's situation. The author could have provided more context on different viewpoints, but the effect of the current choice is to emphasize the negative consequences and the need for change.*

**Point of View and Characterization:****7. How does the passage make us react, or think about any characters or events within the narrative?**

- *The passage makes us react by highlighting the negative impact of the "not today" attitude on the character of Hugo. It gets us to think about the consequences of such an attitude on relationships and personal growth.*

**8. Are there colors, sounds, physical description that appeals to the senses? Does this imagery form a pattern? Why might the author have chosen that color, sound, or physical description? Is it symbolic? Foreshadowing?**

- *The paragraph mentions the colours of Hugo's eyes, green or grey, which depend on the weather. This physical description appeals to the senses and adds a visual element to the characterization. The choice of colors could symbolize the unpredictability of Hugo's attitude.*

**Symbolism, Schemes, Tropes:****5. Are there metaphors, similes, figures of speech? What kinds? Why might the author have chosen them?**

- *There are figures of speech such as the phrases "cancer of the character," "stunts your growth," and "blind slave of every petty rule." These figures of speech enhance the emotional impact of the sentence and emphasize the negative consequences of the "not today" attitude.*

**6. Is there one controlling metaphor? If not, how many different metaphors are there, and in what order do they occur? How might that be significant? Consult the "Schemes and Tropes" section of the Course Packet or on the class website under "Rhetoric" and see if any of these rhetorical tools appear in the writing.**

- *I couldn't find any one controlling metaphor in the passage. However, there are several metaphoric expressions used to convey the detrimental effects of the attitude, such as cancer, stunted growth, and being a blind slave.*

**Importance (the most vital part of the exercise):****3. Why is it important for the reader to know what you have just analyzed and explained? How does the passage you have chosen to help us understand the story, poem, or play more completely?**

- *It is important for the reader to analyze and understand because it helps you to understand Hugo and his attitude. By examining the language, imagery, and rhetorical devices used, we gain insight into the thematic elements of personal*

*growth, self-defeating attitudes, and the consequences of such attitudes on relationships. This analysis helps us understand the story more completely by deepening our understanding of the character dynamics and the challenges faced by the characters in their journey towards personal transformation.*