

Discussion Plan: “kitchenette building,” Gwendolyn Brooks

Very Brief Introductions: Please state your name and, briefly, name what has been the low point and high point for you in the past 24 hours

Expectations and Ground Rules:

- Please be respectful. Respect each other and especially their time. When you find yourself talking too much, please give or even create an opportunity for others to voice their opinion.
- Whether you are familiar with this particular poem/poet or not or you are reading poetry for the first time in many many years, please set that aside. I would like every one of us to approach the poem afresh.
- Under all circumstances, please use each others’ names as much as possible. Try to acknowledge one another’s comments and be encouraging.

Small Group – Opening Exercise:

Break into groups of 2-3 – with people *you do not know or have not talked to*. Take a couple of minutes to recall a dream that you had when you were little – what you wanted to do or to be when you grew up (in terms of profession). What happened to that dream? What helped you to achieve it? OR what stopped you from achieving it?

Reading: Kitchenette Building (ask someone to read aloud).

Questions for Discussion:

- What image do you get from reading this poem?
- “‘Dream’ makes a giddy sound” – how do you understand this? Why is it giddy? What makes it not as strong as “rent,” “feeding a wife” or “satisfying a man”?
- In the second stanza, when referring to “dream,” the speaker uses words like “send,” “fight,” “flutter” and “sing,” which are active verbs? How do you understand this?
- Do you think dream is an active agent, capable of making a change? Have you had any personal experience regarding this?
- The second and third stanzas form a question. What’s the speaker’s answer to it? Could you find it in the ending?
- Does the poem end on a positive and hopeful tone, or a tone of despair?
- Is dream capable of penetrating reality? Have you had such personal experiences?
- “But not well! Not for a minute!” – how do you understand this? What stops us from dreaming: external reasons such as “having no time” or internal decisions such as “opting for action than dreaming”?
- Throughout the poem, we see very concrete images of “reality,” which is created vividly with words like “rent,” “onion,” “fried potatoes,” etc. But dream remains very abstract. What do you make of this fact?

Closing exercise:

What is your personal answer to this question posed in the poem, i.e. could a dream send up through onion fumes its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes and yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall, flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms, even if we were willing to let it in, had time to warm it, keep it clean, anticipate a message, let it begin? YES or NO? Go around and voice out your one-word answer.