

**CLASS: SSS 2**

**SUBJECT: LITERATURE**

**TOPIC:** “Black Woman”

**SUB-TOPICS:** (i) Subject matter ( line-by-line analysis)  
(ii) Structure

**ASPECT:** African Poetry

**ENABLE OBJECTIVES:** At the end of the lesson, students should be able to:

- (i) define the term, “Black Woman”.
- (ii) memorize the lines of the poem titled, “Black Woman” by Leopold Sedar Senghor.
- (iii) critically analyze the structure of the poem in relation to its subject matter

**REFERENCES:** (i) “Poetry Anthology Book for WASSCE & NECO (2021-2025)” by  
Sea groove Publications  
(ii) Ehis O Osajie’s “Complete Guide to Literature-in-English for WAEC  
and NECO candidates”. (2021-2025)

**CONTENT:** Introduction to African Poetry: “Black Woman” by Leopold Sedar Senghor.

## **“Black Woman” by Leopold Sedar Senghor**

Naked woman, black woman

Clothed with your colour which is life,  
with your form which is beauty!

In your shadow I have grown up; the  
gentleness of your hands was laid over my eyes.

And now, high up on the sun-baked  
pass, at the heart of summer, at the heart of noon,  
I come upon you, my Promised Land,  
And your beauty strikes me to the heart  
like the flash of an eagle.

Naked woman, dark woman

Firm-fleshed ripe fruit, sombre raptures  
of black wine, mouth making lyrical my mouth  
Savannah stretching to clear horizons,

savannah shuddering beneath the East Wind's  
eager caresses

Carved tom-tom, taut tom-tom, muttering  
under the Conqueror's fingers

Your solemn contralto voice is the  
spiritual song of the Beloved.

Naked woman, dark woman

Oil that no breath ruffles, calm oil on the  
athlete's flanks, on the flanks of the Princes of Mali  
Gazelle limbed in Paradise, pearls are stars on the  
night of your skin

Delights of the mind, the glinting of red  
gold against your watered skin

Under the shadow of your hair, my care  
is lightened by the neighbouring suns of your eyes.

Naked woman, black woman,  
I sing your beauty that passes, the form  
that I fix in the Eternal,

Before jealous fate turn you to ashes to  
feed the roots of life.

### **Subject matter ( line-by-line analysis)**

"Black Woman" is a poem first published in 1945 and written by [Léopold Senghor](#). Senghor was a leading figure of the Negritude movement, which originated in France and set out to celebrate African identity and culture. In the poem, Senghor personifies Africa as a beautiful woman, who

is sometimes a maternal figure and sometimes a lover. The poem is written from the first-person perspective and in [free verse](#)—meaning that it has no set rhyme scheme.

The first stanza comprises just a single line, "Naked woman, black woman," and this line (or a slight variant of it) is repeated three times throughout the poem. The woman, a [personification](#) of Africa, is beautiful in her blackness, and the fact that she stands "Naked" suggests that she is proud of her beauty.

In the second stanza, the blackness of Africa is said to be "life," and the "form" of Africa is "beauty." The point is that Africa's beauty is synonymous with its blackness. This is a point which is repeated for emphasis throughout the poem.

In the third stanza, the speaker describes how he has "grown up" in the "shadow" of Africa, and he remembers her gentle hands "laid over (his) eyes." Africa here is presented as a maternal figure to the speaker. The speaker in turn is positioned as the son.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker describes what seems like the end of a journey he has made to Africa. He stands "high up on the sun-baked pass, at the heart of summer, at the heart of noon," and before him he sees his "Promised Land," meaning Africa. Seeing Africa close up, he is struck by its beauty.

The fifth stanza, which is just the single line, "Naked woman, dark woman," is a variation of the poem's opening line. The repetition emphasizes the two key characteristics of Africa: her nakedness and her darkness.

In the sixth stanza, the speaker describes Africa much as one might describe a lover. He describes her "mouth making lyrical [his] mouth," suggesting two lovers kissing, and he describes the African savannah as "shuddering beneath the East Wind's / eager caresses." The words "shuddering" and "caresses" here are sexually charged. Here, Senghor suggests that African culture, symbolized by the "tom-tom" drums, has endured.

In the seventh stanza, the focus shifts to the "Conqueror's fingers." The reference here is to the European colonizers who colonized much of Africa in the nineteenth century. Specifically, Senghor is likely referencing French colonialism, given that he was born in Senegal, which was colonized by the French. Senghor also studied and lived in France for many years.

The musical theme continues into the eighth stanza, where Africa's voice is described as a "solemn contralto" and "the spiritual song of the Beloved." Presumably, Africa's song is solemn because of the European colonizers, but even through this oppression, Africa's maternal instincts endure, and she sings for her "Beloved" Africans who have been oppressed or uprooted.

Following these references to European colonization, we again have in the ninth stanza a variation of the line which began the poem: "Naked woman, dark woman."

**ASSIGNMENT:** Write the structure of the poem, "Black Woman" by Leopold Sedar Senghor.

**Teacher: Mrs Oloyede Ethel O.**