

Name: _____ Class: _____

A September Night

By George Marion McClellan
1916

George Marion McClellan (1860-1934) was a minister, teacher, fiction writer, and distinguished African American poet. He is best known for his two poetry collections, Songs of a Southerner and The Path of Dreams. In this poem, the speaker describes a September night in Anguilla, Mississippi. As you read, take notes on the author's use of personification.

- [1] The full September moon sheds floods of light,
And all the bayou's face is gemmed with stars,
Save where are dropped fantastic shadows down
From sycamores and moss-hung cypress trees.
- [5] With slumberous sound the waters half asleep
Creep on and on their way, 'twixt rankish¹ reeds,
Through marsh and lowlands stretching to the
Gulf.
Begirt² with cotton fields, Anguilla³ sits
Half bird-like, dreaming on her Summer nest.
- [10] Amid her spreading figs and roses, still
In bloom with all their Spring and Summer hues,
Pomegranates hang with dapple⁴ cheeks full ripe,
And over all the town a dreamy haze
Drops down. The great plantations, stretching far
- [15] Away, are plains of cotton, downy white.
O, glorious is this night of joyous sounds;
Too full for sleep. Aromas wild and sweet,
From muscadine,⁵ late blooming jessamine,
And roses, all the heavy air suffuse.
- [20] Faint bellows from the alligators come
From swamps afar, where sluggish lagoons give
To them a peaceful home. The katydids⁶
Make ceaseless cries. Ten thousand insects' wings
Stir in the moonlight haze and joyous shouts
- [25] Of Negro song and mirth awake hard by
The cabin dance. O, glorious is this night!
The Summer sweetness fills my heart with songs
I cannot sing, with loves I cannot speak.



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1. growing excessively or out of control
 2. surrounded by; encompassing
 3. a town in Mississippi
 4. marked with rounded spots of color
 5. a grapevine species native to the South
 6. an insect, also called a bush cricket, known for its loud mating calls

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What does the speaker's description of the setting reveal about Anguilla?
 - A. The speaker describes Anguilla as only superficially beautiful, overlooking its history of cotton plantations.
 - B. The speaker describes Anguilla as infested with various forms of wildlife, suggesting that it is difficult to live there.
 - C. The speaker describes Anguilla as a drowsy, listless bayou, suggesting it is a dull town.
 - D. The speaker describes the sounds, sights, and wildlife of Anguilla, showing its abundance of overwhelming beauty.

2. PART B: Which piece of evidence from the poem best supports your response to Part A?
 - A. "With slumberous sound the waters half asleep / Creep on and on their way, / 'twixt rankish reeds, / Through marsh and lowlands stretching to the Gulf." (Lines 5-7)
 - B. "The great plantations, stretching far / Away, are plains of cotton, downy white" (Lines 14-15)
 - C. "O, glorious is this night of joyous sounds; / Too full for sleep. Aromas wild and sweet, / From muscadine, late blooming jessamine, / And roses, all the heavy air suffuse." (Lines 16-19)
 - D. "Faint bellows from the alligators come / From swamps afar" (Lines 20-21)

3. As used in line 21, what does the word "sluggish" mean?
 - A. disturbed
 - B. indifferent
 - C. drowsy
 - D. slimy

4. What do lines 27-28 reveal about the speaker's point of view?
 - A. The speaker feels excluded from the natural beauty of the bayou.
 - B. The speaker is speechless in awe of the bayou.
 - C. The speaker does not feel worthy of the bayou.
 - D. The speaker is not allowed to sing or speak about the bayou.

5. Explain how the poem uses personification to describe the bayou in Anguilla. What effect does personification have on the meaning of the poem? Cite evidence from the text in your answer.
