

Reading Section #1 - POVERTY AND UPLIFT cont. (opened Jan. 28 / complete READING by Jan 28.)

Due Monday by 11:59pm **Points** 0 **Available** Jan 14 at 12am - May 3 at 11:59pm 4 months

STUDENTS,

* First, we must understand the aspects of poverty and uplift and the mindset of Brooks that she conveys in the poem.

* You need to read (3) three plot summaries. I have provided you the 1st one. "Lovers of the Poor plot summary"

* Lovers of the Poor -- Plot Summary [_ \(https://owlcation.com/humanities/Analysis-of-Poem-The-Lovers-Of-The-Poor-by-Gwendolyn-Brooks\)](https://owlcation.com/humanities/Analysis-of-Poem-The-Lovers-Of-The-Poor-by-Gwendolyn-Brooks)

* [_ \(https://owlcation.com/humanities/Analysis-of-Poem-The-Lovers-Of-The-Poor-by-Gwendolyn-Brooks\)](https://owlcation.com/humanities/Analysis-of-Poem-The-Lovers-Of-The-Poor-by-Gwendolyn-Brooks)
* [_ \(https://owlcation.com/humanities/Analysis-of-Poem-The-Lovers-Of-The-Poor-by-Gwendolyn-Brooks\)](https://owlcation.com/humanities/Analysis-of-Poem-The-Lovers-Of-The-Poor-by-Gwendolyn-Brooks)

So, **GOOGLE** and **READ 2** more plot summaries on "Lovers of the Poor" by Gwendolyn Brooks.
"The Lovers of the Poor"

Lovers of the Poor [_ \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZ0Y8Si19q0\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZ0Y8Si19q0)



[_ \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZ0Y8Si19q0\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZ0Y8Si19q0)

Lovers of the Poor -- Analysis [_ \(https://owlcation.com/humanities/Analysis-of-Poem-The-Lovers-Of-The-Poor-by-Gwendolyn-Brooks\)](https://owlcation.com/humanities/Analysis-of-Poem-The-Lovers-Of-The-Poor-by-Gwendolyn-Brooks)

"The Lovers of the Poor Analysis" by Gwendolyn Brooks

"The Lovers of the Poor Analysis"

arrive. The Ladies from the Ladies' Betterment League
Arrive in the afternoon, the late light slanting
In diluted gold bars across the boulevard brag
Of proud, seamed faces with mercy and murder hinting
Here, there, interrupting, all deep and debonair,
The pink paint on the innocence of fear;

Walk in a gingerly manner up the hall.
Cutting with knives served by their softest care,
Served by their love, so barbarously fair.
Whose mothers taught: You'd better not be cruel!
You had better not throw stones upon the wrens!
Herein they kiss and coddle and assault
Anew and dearly in the innocence
With which they baffle nature. Who are full,
Sleek, tender-clad, fit, fiftyish, a-glow, all
Sweetly abortive, hinting at fat fruit,
Judge it high time that fiftyish fingers felt
Beneath the lovelier planes of enterprise.
To resurrect. To moisten with milky chill.
To be a random hitching-post or plush.
To be, for wet eyes, random and handy hem.
Their guild is giving money to the poor.
The worthy poor. The very very worthy
And beautiful poor. Perhaps just not too swarthy?
perhaps just not too dirty nor too dim
Nor—passionate. In truth, what they could wish
Is—something less than derelict or dull.
Not staunch enough to stab, though, gaze for gaze!
God shield them sharply from the beggar-bold!
The noxious needy ones whose battle's bald
Nonetheless for being voiceless, hits one down.
But it's all so bad! and entirely too much for them.
The stench; the urine, cabbage, and dead beans,
Dead porridges of assorted dusty grains,
The old smoke, heavy diapers, and, they're told,
Something called chitterlings. The darkness. Drawn
Darkness, or dirty light. The soil that stirs.
The soil that looks the soil of centuries.
And for that matter the general oldness. Old
Wood. Old marble. Old tile. Old old old.
Not homekind Oldness! Not Lake Forest, Glencoe.
Nothing is sturdy, nothing is majestic,
There is no quiet drama, no rubbed glaze, no
Unkillable infirmity of such
A tasteful turn as lately they have left,
Glencoe, Lake Forest, and to which their cars
Must presently restore them. When they're done
With dullards and distortions of this fistic

Patience of the poor and put-upon.

They've never seen such a make-do-ness as

Newspaper rugs before! In this, this "flat,"

Their hostess is gathering up the oozed, the rich

Rugs of the morning (tattered! the bespattered. . . .)

Readies to spread clean rugs for afternoon.

Here is a scene for you. The Ladies look,

In horror, behind a substantial citizeness

Whose trains clank out across her swollen heart.

Who, arms akimbo, almost fills a door.

All tumbling children, quilts dragged to the floor

And tortured thereover, potato peelings, soft-

Eyed kitten, hunched-up, haggard, to-be-hurt.

Their League is allotting largesse to the Lost.

But to put their clean, their pretty money, to put

Their money collected from delicate rose-fingers

Tipped with their hundred flawless rose-nails seems . . .

They own Spode, Lowestoft, candelabra,

Mantels, and hostess gowns, and sunburst clocks,

Turtle soup, Chippendale, red satin "hangings,"

Aubussons and Hattie Carnegie. They Winter

In Palm Beach; cross the Water in June; attend,

When suitable, the nice Art Institute;

Buy the right books in the best bindings; saunter

On Michigan, Easter mornings, in sun or wind.

Oh Squalor! This sick four-story hulk, this fibre

With fissures everywhere! Why, what are bringings

Of loathe-love largesse? What shall peril hungers

So old old, what shall flatter the desolate?

Tin can, blocked fire escape and chitterling

And swaggering seeking youth and the puzzled wreckage

Of the middle passage, and urine and stale shames

And, again, the porridges of the underslung

And children children children. Heavens! That

Was a rat, surely, off there, in the shadows? Long

And long-tailed? Gray? The Ladies from the Ladies'

Betterment League agree it will be better

To achieve the outer air that rights and steadies,

To hie to a house that does not holler, to ring

Bells elsetime, better presently to cater

To no more Possibilities, to get

Away. Perhaps the money can be posted.

Perhaps they two may choose another Slum!

Some serious sooty half-unhappy home!—

Where loathe-love likelier may be invested.

Keeping their scented bodies in the center

Of the hall as they walk down the hysterical hall,

They allow their lovely skirts to graze no wall,

Are off at what they manage of a canter,

And, resuming all the clues of what they were,

Try to avoid inhaling the laden air.

Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Lovers of the Poor" from Selected Poems. Copyright © 1963 by Gwendolyn Brooks. Reprinted with the permission of the Estate of Gwendolyn Brooks.

Source: Selected Poems (1963)

Analysis of Poem "The Lovers Of The Poor" by Gwendolyn Brooks

Updated on February 6, 2018



Andrew Spacey ▶ more

Andrew has a keen interest in all aspects of poetry and writes extensively on the subject. His poems are published online and in print.

Contact Author



Gwendolyn Brooks | Source

Gwendolyn Brooks and The Lovers of the Poor

The Lovers of the Poor concentrates on the reaction of the ladies who come from the Betterment League to visit the poor people in their *four-story hulk*, where newspapers make do for rugs and where there's a stench of urine and cabbages.

Oh dear. The ladies do not enjoy their visit one bit. They're well meaning but haven't the stomach for the reality of poverty, with its dirty children and offensive noises. They want to give their money *collected from delicate rose-fingers* but their urgent need to get away into the fresh air means they may well have to send it by post.



Gwendolyn Brooks wrote this poem as part of her study of local people in the South Side district of Bronzeville, Chicago, the city she lived in. It first appeared in her 1960 book, *The Bean Eaters*, which explores the lifestyles and characters of the black population.

Pulitzer prize winning poet Brooks - the first African American to gain this prestigious award - delves deep into the psyches of these unsuspecting, privileged women, who really don't seem to know what they're letting themselves in for.

- With powerful imagery and complex description, Brooks paints a picture of misplaced charity, of a group of do-gooders who can't wait to get the heck out of the slum they've somehow landed in. Soon they're surrounded by the *noxious needy ones*, breathing in *old smoke*, experiencing the whole *general oldness*.

They're just not made for such a place, with their scented bodies and lovely skirts. They're soon away, perhaps to somewhere else, another slum, where they can donate their *clean pretty money* and forget all about this dreadful *puzzled wreckage* in a run down old old house.

- With wit, sarcasm and insightfulness, Gwendolyn Brooks brings out the drama, the pathos and the potential comedy of the scene, but never loses sight of the essential seriousness of such a situation.
- Be aware of the unusual syntax in parts of this poem - the way words and clauses fit together to form meaning. Sometimes meaning is delayed, sense fragmented, left behind through the poet's use of punctuation and abrupt halts in proceedings.

Basically, some wealthy (white) people are wanting to give poor black people money. In order to know just where this donated cash might end up, they go to the place they presumably have chosen, to see for themselves. It could be argued that this is a noble thing to do but the question does arise - are their motives sincere?

The Lovers of the Poor

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 Served by their love, so barbarously fair.
 Whose mothers taught: You'd better not be cruel!
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 A new and dearly in the innocence
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 Sweetly abortive, hinting at fat fruit,
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 To resurrect. To moisten with milky chill.
 To be a random hitching-post or plush.
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 Nor passionate. In truth, what they could wish
 Is something less than derelict or dull.
 Not staunch enough to stab, though, gaze for gaze!



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Nonetheless for being voiceless, hits one down.

But it's all so bad! and entirely too much for them.

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Dead porridges of assorted dusty grains,

The old smoke, heavy diapers, and, they're told,

Something called chitterlings. The darkness. Drawn

Darkness, or dirty light. The soil that stirs.

The soil that looks the soil of centuries.

And for that matter the general oldness. Old

Wood. Old marble. Old tile. Old old old.

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Patience of the poor and put-upon.

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Newspaper rugs before! In this, this "flat,"

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Rugs of the morning (tattered! the bespattered. . . .)

Readies to spread clean rugs for afternoon.

Here is a scene for you. The Ladies look,

In horror, behind a substantial citizeness

Whose trains clank out across her swollen heart.

Who, arms akimbo, almost fills a door.

All tumbling children, quilts dragged to the floor

And tortured thereover, potato peelings, soft-

Eyed kitten, hunched-up, haggard, to-be-hurt.

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Tipped with their hundred flawless rose-nails seems . . .

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Turtle soup, Chippendale, red satin "hangings,"

Aubussons and Hattie Carnegie. They Winter

In Palm Beach; cross the Water in June; attend,

When suitable, the nice Art Institute;

Buy the right books in the best bindings; saunter

On Michigan, Easter mornings, in sun or wind.

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With fissures everywhere! Why, what are bringings

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And swaggering seeking youth and the puzzled wreckage

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And children children children. Heavens! That

Was a rat, surely, off there, in the shadows? Long

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Betterment League agree it will be better

To achieve the outer air that rights and steadies,

To die to a house that does not holler, to ring

Bells elsetime, better presently to cater

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Away. Perhaps the money can be posted.
Perhaps they two may choose another Slum!
Some serious sooty half-unhappy home!—
Where loathe-love likelier may be invested.
 Keeping their scented bodies in the center
Of the hall as they walk down the hysterical hall,
They allow their lovely skirts to graze no wall,
Are off at what they manage of a canter,
And, resuming all the clues of what they were,
Try to avoid inhaling the laden air.

Themes for Discussion

Privilege v Power

Poverty v Wealth

Charity v Self Help

Compassion v Self-righteousness

Analysis of The Lovers of the Poor

The Lovers of the Poor brings a unique insight into the world of charity, philanthropy and racial tension.

In its seven verse-paragraphs the speaker gives a running commentary on the reaction of visiting ladies from the Betterment League, to a poor person's house. They want to give money but, from the start, struggle to come to terms with the reality of poverty.

- The title of the poem is a slight give away because it is tongue-in-cheek - these ladies are not true lovers of the poor, they're anything but. The title itself runs straight into a lower case first word: *arrive*.

This enjambment is purposeful, the lower case meaningful. And the reader might take note that there is emphatic punctuation straight after the first word. Highly unusual, a sign of syntactical strangeness to come.

The arrival of the ladies is repeated, perhaps to underline their importance, their self-importance? They are contained in long lines of varied rhythm, with much alliteration accompanying, the speaker noting that the ladies *walk in a gingerly manner* no doubt because they're uncertain of what to expect.

But they hope to do something positive, at least; even to resurrect, bring back from the dead those poor who, they've been taught from an early age, one must never be cruel to.

Note the opposites at work within this first verse-paragraph. The ladies show the *softest care* that is *cutting with knives*...their love *so barbarously fair*....they *kiss and coddle and assault*...they are *sweetly abortive*....dispensers of *milky chill*.

In this first verse-paragraph the speaker has already established a kind of faux compassion in these ladies, and an unnerving duality, despite their well meaning intentions.

- More details are given about the reason for the visit. These ladies want to give money to the poor, surely a noble act? But the poor have to be worthy, very very worthy. And beautiful.

Just what is going on? Surely all poor people are worthy simply because they're poor. Who said anything about conditions? Who said anything about an ideal kind of poor person?

The speaker is sussing the ladies out, bit by bit. These ladies want their poor to be not too dirty, not too swarthy (of dark complexion). They want a tick-boxed poor and are obviously choosy who they give their money too.

This second verse-paragraph sees the speaker outline just what these ladies want their poor to look and be like. If they don't fit the criteria then they won't get the money.

- Then the reality of the poor house hits them. The cultural shock is almost too much to bear. The narrative focuses in on the raw unmentionables of that place : urine and cabbage, yuk, dead porridges, what? - a wonderful array of images spills out like dead beans.

This is a cultural clash of profound proportion. These ladies are from affluent districts of Chicago - but surely they knew about *chitterlings* (cooked small intestines of the pig) and *fistic* goings on (relates to boxing and fists).

In the third verse-paragraph their shortcomings are truly revealed. Their bubble of wealth, cozy luxury and privilege is perhaps about to burst.

More Analysis of The Lover of the Poor

- The scenes are well and truly full of drama, the syntax a little bizarre, but suited to this environment the ladies find themselves in. It's not quite a predicament but the feeling is growing - the ladies face the hostess who is busy cleaning up those infamous newspaper rugs.

The speaker relates the physical attributes of the hostess, a large woman who almost *fills a door*, who is big-hearted, looking after *tumbling children* and who has to get the domestic interior ready for the afternoon.

The fourth verse-paragraph is the key to the whole tone of the poem because here here is the hostess, there are the ladies, face to face as it were. And the result? Horror. For the representatives of the Betterment League this is the nadir, domestic chaos at its lowest. Tattered, bespattered newspaper rugs...whatever next?

- *Largesse* is money or gifts being given generously. The ladies really want to do this but the speaker's unsure - have they the strength of will to act on their promise?

Note the repeated *their money* which is *clean* and *pretty*. Note the *rose-fingers* and *rose-nails* which conjure up images of classy garden parties on the lawn of the rich and powerful, who give not because they want to but because they think the poor have to be somehow saved, from themselves.

This fifth verse-paragraph, the shortest of the seven, is in complete contrast to the earlier third verse-paragraph, with its mention of dirt, soil, oldness and swarthy complexion. Here all is light and delicate and flawless.

- The contrasts deepen. The speaker lists all of the luxuries the ladies are used to and compares them with the squalor of the poor house. This is all very Dickensian in certain respects, given the Windy City treatment.

The ladies bring their *loath-love largesse* but for what reason? The speaker has no definite answer but seems in this penultimate verse-paragraph to want the ladies gone and they themselves are keen to end the torture.

How can these two things be reconciled? It's not the poem's duty to answer but simply to be honest to itself.

Six verse-paragraphs have brought the reader all the way down the hall and into the belly of the poor house, where chitterlings are on the menu, where real poverty means real people having to get through their day performing real tasks. The ladies haven't quite got it. They are leaving, perhaps for some other poor house more suited to their temperaments.

- It seems the ladies are in a hurry to vacate the building. Over-dressed perhaps, out of touch maybe, they waste no time in their final goal - to reach the fresh air of the outside with minimum inhalation en route.



The seventh verse-paragraph, with its end slant rhymes and full rhyming couplet, completes the mini-drama. A highly visual, highly descriptive poem that is largely unforgiving in its depiction of those who want to do good, yet are perceived as pseudo-carers, more interested in soothing their own consciences than the well being of the poor.

More Analysis of The Lovers of the Poor

The Lovers of the Poor is a poem of ninety-nine lines split into seven verse-paragraphs of varying length.

Rhyme

It has no set rhyme scheme, no regular rhyming pattern, but does have occasional full and near rhyme, plus some internal rhyme, which tends to bond and tighten meaning and sense, as well as complete certain sounds.

Let's take a look at the first verse paragraph:

full end rhyme - *debonair/care/fair*.

near rhyme - *slanting/hinting.....fear/fair...assault/fruit/felt....hall/cruel/full/all/chill*.

Alliteration

There is plenty of alliterative energy in this poem, almost from start to finish, which brings unexpected music here and there as well as adding interest for the reader.

Again, from the first verse paragraph:

late light....bars across the boulevard....mercy and murder....deep and debonair.

Meter (metre in British English)

There is no set, regular meter, no constant beat in the lines of this poem. Overall, there is a stop-start feel in almost all of the verse-paragraphs. Could this be a reflection of the hesitant ladies who seem to be a tad uncomfortable in their surroundings?

So, no definite pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, no definite number of feet per line. Occasionally there are pentameters, (with iambic feet dominant) but they are not part of a metric design.

Tone

There is a kind of muted sarcasm that runs throughout this poem, the speaker is dubious about these ladies from the Betterment League, suspicious of their motives.

Observing them at close quarters, the speaker's attitude is cynical - she isn't too impressed with these wealthy, self-important, scented visitors. This clash of cultures is difficult to handle, for both ladies and speaker - she has to resort to a rather opinionated if perceptive put down which gives rise to all manner of question, both moral and social.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Ask the author a question

Ask

 Prompt: Answer the following questions on "Lovers of the Poor" by Gwendolyn Brooks

1. Why does the poem have a double start – first, "The Lovers of the Poor arrive" and then "The Ladies from the Ladies Betterment League arrive." Why this double start?
2. How would you describe the narrator's tone toward the ladies?
3. What is the purpose of the Ladies Betterment League concerning poverty and uplift?
4. What do the ladies hope to accomplish, and why, in this case, do they seem to fail?
5. How do the Ladies define poverty?
6. What do they see as uplift?
7. Who is the "citizeness" the ladies encounter? Why does the narrator call her a "citizeness"?
8. Why does Brooks make a point of letting us know about the ladies' life of luxury in the midst of describing their visit to a slum?
9. What is your view of poverty and uplift based on your experiences within the context of the poem?
10. What solutions to poverty and uplift would you offer to the ladies of the Ladies Betterment League?