

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Dance Mama Dance

By Daniel Beaty  
2010

*Daniel Beaty is an award-winning actor, singer, writer, and poet. His productions are known for incorporating music, movement, and words. In this poem, the speaker discusses their mother and their wish to see her dance. As you read, consider what dancing is meant to represent in the poem.*

[1] Mama... I saw you raise five of us by  
yourself with a father nowhere in sight.  
I saw you inspire revolution with a chicken and  
two potatoes.

I saw you limp home late at night after  
[5] a long day's work with sores on your feet.  
I saw you gracefully remove groceries from  
the cart when the bill got too high.  
I saw you pray when brother stole the microwave  
to buy drugs.

I saw you make Christmas a ceremony and  
[10] I could've sworn we were royalty.  
I saw you hold our home together like a  
foundation



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that would never crumble.  
But Mama, I never saw you dance. I never saw you dance.  
And I wonder what happened to your music

[15] 'Cause I've got an instinct you still know how to groove,  
So like a soulful incantation<sup>1</sup> I write this dream for you:  
I see you stand in a celestial<sup>2</sup> ballroom lit by the moon.  
I see you wear a gown of rose petals woven with gold thread.  
I see you sparkle like the necklace of stars upon your neck.

[20] I see you comfortable in shoes cut from the clouds.  
I see you happy with a mate adoring every inch of your essence<sup>3</sup> —  
And mama, he looks like Denzel.<sup>4</sup>  
I see you laugh as Nina<sup>5</sup> and Luther<sup>6</sup> sing eternally for you  
And Mama I see you dance. Yes, Mama I see you dance.

[25] And I say Dance Mama Dance  
Break the floodgates of countless uncried tears  
And Dance Mama Dance  
For all the nights you slept alone with no warm arms  
to hold you

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1. **Incantation (noun):** a series of words said as a magic spell or charm
  2. positioned in or relating to the sky
  3. **Essence (noun):** the core nature or most important qualities of a person or thing
  4. Denzel Washington is an Academy Award-winning actor, director, and producer.
  5. Nina Simone was an American singer, songwriter, and activist in the Civil Rights Movement.
  6. Luther Vandross was an American singer, songwriter, and record producer.

- [30] Dance Mama Dance  
For all the dreams that you forgot so we could make it through the day  
Dance Mama Dance  
Like your nightmare is ending  
Like joy is beginning
- [35] Like life is not through with you yet  
Laugh, Cry, Swirl, Twirl,  
Dance Mama — Dance, Dance, Dance  
Dance Mama — Dance!

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## Text-Dependent Questions

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

1. PART A: Which of the following best identifies a theme of the poem? [RL.2]
  - A. Mothers often sacrifice a lot for their children's happiness.
  - B. Children take for granted the things that their mothers do for them.
  - C. Money is necessary to ensure happiness and security in families.
  - D. Children do not often understand what their parents sacrifice for them.
  
2. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
  - A. "I saw you inspire revolution with a chicken and two potatoes." (Line 3)
  - B. "I saw you gracefully remove groceries from / the cart when the bill got too high." (Lines 6-7)
  - C. "I see you wear a gown of rose petals woven with gold thread. / I see you sparkle like the necklace of stars upon your neck." (Lines 18-19)
  - D. "Dance Mama Dance / For all the dreams that you forgot so we could make it through the day" (Lines 30-31)
  
3. How do lines 13-16 contribute to the development of the poem's theme? [RL.5]
  - A. These lines discuss how his mother has succeeded in being the sole provider for her family.
  - B. These lines show the speaker wants to repay his mother after recognizing how her sacrifices have negatively affected her.
  - C. These lines focus on how the speaker specifically hopes to change and improve his mother's life moving forwards.
  - D. These lines reveal how guilty the speaker feels for being the reason his mother lost her ability to dance.
  
4. Using evidence from the text, explain what "dance" symbolizes in the poem and how this symbolism affects the tone of the poem. [RL.4]

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5. Using evidence from the text, compare the imagery the speaker uses to describe the mother's sacrifices (Lines 1-12) and the imagery in the speaker's dream (lines 17-24). How does the imagery in these two sections contribute to the development of ideas in the poem? [RL.5] [RL.3]

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