In the following poem, “Sympathy”, an African-American writer uses the image of a bird in a cage to communicate his thoughts on life and freedom.

**Sympathy**

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals--
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting--
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,--
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart’s deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings--
I know why the caged bird sings!

**Paul Laurence Dunbar**
Paul Laurence Dunbar, who was born in Ohio in 1872, started his own newspaper by age 17. He faced racial prejudice and discrimination in the job market and was only able to find work as an elevator operator. Long hours spent moving the elevator up and down between floors gave Dunbar ample time to compose poetry, which he later published in 1893 in a book called Oak and Ivy. Dunbar died of tuberculosis at age 33.

“Sympathy” Questions:

1. According to the speaker in “Sympathy,” how does the caged bird feel?
   A. bright, springing, perfumed
   B. alarmed, persecuted, fearful
   C. constrained, oppressed, imprisoned
   D. faint, clinging, ill

2. Which of the following BEST explains the title “Sympathy”?
   A. The speaker pities the caged bird because of its injuries.
   B. The speaker also shares the caged bird’s desire for freedom.
   C. The speaker is critical of the caged bird’s reasons for singing.
   D. The speaker admires the caged bird’s courage.

3. Which of the following BEST paraphrases lines 10-11?
   A. The bird stays in his cage because his injuries might cause him to faint.
   B. The bird stays on his perch because he is afraid of the wind.
   C. The bird must return to the perch when he would rather be on a swing.
   D. The bird has to stay in the cage when he would rather be perched on a tree branch somewhere.

4. Lines 12-14 suggest that
   A. the bird is so crippled it will never be able to enjoy freedom.
   B. the bird has not given up hope despite a lifetime of captivity.
   C. the bird could enjoy its captivity if only it would stop fighting.
   D. as the bird gets older, its desire for freedom increases.

5. The poet compares the caged bird’s song to a
   A. lullaby.
   B. symphony.
   C. carol of joy.
   D. prayer.

6. Look at the words underlined in the text (chalice, fain, and keener). Use context clues to determine each word’s meaning.

   Chalice _______________________________________________
   Fain _________________________________________________
   Keener _______________________________________________
7. Please fill out the figurative language matrix below. Find as many examples of figurative language as you can and analyze how they impact the poem. Remember to think about repetition, analogy (simile/metaphor), allusion, symbolism, and alliteration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figurative Language</th>
<th>Text from Poem</th>
<th>Figurative Meaning</th>
<th>Impact on Poem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

8. Please fill out this table to show the main idea and purpose of each stanza.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanza #</th>
<th>Main Idea</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
9. How do the stanzas fit together?

10. Why do you think Dunbar chose to break his poem into three stanzas?

11. What is the theme of this poem? How do you know? Use specific lines or words from the poem to support your conclusions.
# Scoring Rubrics

## I. Meaning (Figurative and Literal Word Meanings and Literacy Devices)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic (2-3/5)</th>
<th>Proficient (3.5/5)</th>
<th>Approaching Mastery (4/5)</th>
<th>Mastery (5/5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using context clues, the student is able to determine the literal meaning of words.</td>
<td>Using context clues, the student is able to determine both the literal and figurative meaning of words. The student is also able to determine the meaning of basic (simile and metaphor) figurative language.</td>
<td>Using context clues, the student is able to determine both the literal and figurative meaning of words. The student is also able to determine the meaning of most (50-80%) figurative language including simile, metaphor, alliteration, repetition, personification and hyperbole. The student is also able to demonstrate the impact of the language on the poem.</td>
<td>Using context clues, the student is able to determine both the literal and figurative meaning of words. The student is also able to determine the meaning of almost all (80+%) figurative language including simile, metaphor, alliteration, repetition, personification and hyperbole and symbolism. The student is also able to demonstrate the impact of the language on the poem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## II. Structure of Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic (2-3/5)</th>
<th>Proficient (3.5/5)</th>
<th>Approaching Mastery (4/5)</th>
<th>Mastery (5/5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student is able to discern the basic structure of the poem. The student can relate how many stanzas are in the poem. The student is able to identify the main idea of some of the stanzas.</td>
<td>The student is able to tell how many stanzas are in the poem. The student is also able to identify the main idea or purpose of each stanza.</td>
<td>The student is able to identify how many stanzas are in the poem. The student is also able to identify the main idea or purpose of each stanza. The student is able to tell how the stanzas fit together into one cohesive unit. The student is able to make an educated guess as to why the author might have chosen the structure he or she chose.</td>
<td>The student is able to identify how many stanzas are in the poem. The student is also able to identify the main idea and purpose of each stanza. The student is able to tell how all the stanzas fit together. The student is also able to identify the impact the structure has on the poetry. The student identifies how the poem might be different with a different structure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### III. Use of Evidence and Understanding of the Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic (2-3/5)</th>
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<th>Approaching Mastery (4/5)</th>
<th>Mastery (5/5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student has a basic literal understanding of the poetry. The student may not be able to correctly identify the theme of the poem. The student has used little evidence to support his or her conclusions.</td>
<td>The student has a literal understanding of the poetry and is beginning to understand the figurative meaning of the poetry. The student is able to identify the theme of the story, but may use an overly generalized or clichéd statement. The student used some evidence to support his or her conclusions.</td>
<td>The student has a literal understanding of the poetry and a figurative understanding of the poetry. The student is able to identify the theme of the poem and uses much evidence to support his or her conclusions.</td>
<td>The student has a literal and figurative understanding of the poetry. The student is able to describe how the techniques of the poet contribute to the meaning of the poem. The student is able to identify the theme of the poem and uses specific evidence to support each conclusion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>