
Telephone Conversation

[Full Line by Line Explanation and Poetic Devices - Click Here](#)

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A. Most Likely High-Probability Questions

1. How does Wole Soyinka expose racial prejudice in Telephone Conversation?

Wole Soyinka exposes racial prejudice in Telephone Conversation through a simple phone call in which a Black man trying to rent a room is reduced to his skin colour. Although the landlady claims there is “no problem with race,” her attitude changes the moment he reveals he is African. Her repeated questions about how dark he is show that she judges him not by character or suitability, but by race. The poem reveals how deeply rooted and irrational such prejudice is, especially when it hides behind social respectability.

2. Discuss the use of humour and irony in the poem. How do they strengthen its message?

Soyinka uses humour and irony to make racism appear absurd and ridiculous. The speaker sarcastically describes himself as “West African sepia,” “brunette by face,” and jokes about his palms and soles being “peroxide blonde.” These exaggerated descriptions mock the landlady’s obsession with skin tone. The humour strengthens the message by exposing the illogical nature of racial categorisation and forcing readers to recognise how degrading and meaningless such prejudice is.

3. How does the conversation reveal the hypocrisy of the landlady?

The conversation reveals the landlady's hypocrisy because she pretends to be fair and civilised, yet her behaviour contradicts her claim of having "no problem with race." Her silence, hesitation, and intrusive questions expose her hidden bias. She speaks politely and maintains a controlled tone, but her fixation on skin colour shows that her refinement is superficial. Her final act of hanging up the phone confirms that her prejudice overrides her manners.

4. Show how the poem highlights the struggle for dignity and equality.

The poem highlights the struggle for dignity and equality through the speaker's calm yet sarcastic responses. Despite being insulted and reduced to a colour category, he maintains composure and asserts his identity. His final plea, asking the landlady to see him in person, shows his desire to be treated as a human being rather than as a stereotype. The poem reflects the larger struggle of marginalised individuals seeking fairness and respect in a prejudiced society.

5. Examine the significance of satire in the poem.

Satire is significant in the poem because it allows Soyinka to criticise racism indirectly yet powerfully. Instead of openly condemning the landlady, he makes her questions appear foolish through the speaker's witty replies. The exaggeration of skin shades and chocolate comparisons ridicules the landlady's thinking. This satirical tone makes the poem sharp and effective, as it exposes prejudice by making it look absurd.

6. How does Soyinka use imagery and symbolism to convey racism?

Soyinka uses imagery and symbolism to deepen the theme of racism. The red booth, red bus, and red pillar box contrast with the black tar, symbolising racial tension and social hierarchy. The “gold-rolled cigarette holder” represents privilege and elitism. Even the telephone, a device meant to connect people, becomes a symbol of division. These images reinforce how racism is embedded in everyday life and social structures.

7. Comment on the contrast between the speaker and the landlady.

The contrast between the speaker and the landlady is central to the poem. The speaker appears educated, articulate, and witty, while the landlady is narrow-minded and obsessed with skin colour. He responds intelligently and sarcastically, showing awareness and dignity, whereas she clings to stereotypes and superficial judgments. This contrast highlights the irrationality of prejudice and the moral superiority of the speaker.

8. How does the poet show that prejudice can exist beneath politeness?

The poet shows that prejudice can exist beneath politeness through the landlady’s refined tone and so-called “good breeding.” She does not openly insult the speaker but instead asks seemingly calm, controlled questions about his skin colour. Her clinical and detached manner hides her racism behind etiquette. The poem suggests that discrimination is not always loud or violent; sometimes it is concealed within polite language and social manners.