We Wear the Mask

Paul Laurence Dunbar | Grades 6 to 12

Complete poem and inquiry

First Name

Last Name

1 We wear the mask that grins and lies,
2 It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,
3 This debt we pay to human guile;
4 With torn and bleeding hearts we smile
5 And mouth with myriad subtleties,

6 Why should the world be over wise,
7 In counting all our tears and sighs?
8 Nay, let them only see us, while
9 We wear the mask.
10 We smile, but oh great Christ, our cries
11 To thee from tortured souls arise.
12 We sing, but oh the clay is vile
13 Beneath our feet, and long the mile,
14 But let the world dream otherwise,
15 We wear the mask!

Complete public domain poem. Numbered poetic lines support citation. Original poetic punctuation is retained. Source details appear in the teacher guide.

How does the contrast between public expression and private suffering develop the collective voice?