Merry-Go-Round
Where is the Jim Crow section
On this merry-go-round,
Mister, cause I want to ride?
Down South where I come from
White and colored
Can't sit side by side.
Down South on the train
There's a Jim Crow car.
On the bus we're put in the back—
But there ain't no back
To a merry-go-round!
Where's the horse
For a kid that's black?

Langston Hughes

Questions

1. What is a merry-go-round?
2. Why do you suppose Hughes chose a merry-go-round?
3. What was “Jim Crow”?
4. Where does he mean by “down south”?
5. What is he referring to as “White” and “Colored”?
6. Hughes describes two modes of transportation with sections, name them.
7. Write your own poem in the same spirit, using another type of children’s play equipment.
Answers

1. A round carousel with horses that go up and down while spinning; it is an amusement ride for kids.
2. Answers will vary but might include: it is a symbolic choice since it is round with no obvious front and back; it is a universally fun ride that all kids would be excited to ride, etc.
3. A system of segregation that existed in the southern region of the United States after the Civil War through the mid-1900s.
4. “Down south” refers to the states south of the Mason-Dixon line, the dividing point during the Civil War.
5. People were classified by their ethnicity and referred to by those terms.
6. Trains and busses.
7. Answers will vary but might use swings, slides, see-saws, etc.