

One Giant Step: Study Guide



“I want to shake people up so bad that when they leave a nightclub where I performed, I just want them to be to pieces. I want to go in that den of those elegant people with their old ideas smugness and just drive them insane.”
— Nina Simone

To drive elegant people “to pieces:” this is a kind of recklessness that is a fragmenting—an undoing—a de-doing, a reversal, a retrograde or unwinding.

We dream of a radical retrograde, a radical reversal, a radical unwinding and we wonder how to get there. Can you unwind on purpose or do you have to let yourself fall out of it?

The distance between present and past is a rest.

The distance between present and past is arrest.

To arrest is to stop or stand still.

To arrest is to remain or continue.

To arrest is to detain or capture.

We are what’s left.

“It’s just a feeling. It’s just a feeling. It’s like how do you tell somebody how it feels to be in love? How are you going to tell anybody who has not been in love how it feels to be in love? You cannot do it to save your life. You can describe things, but you can’t tell them. But you know it when it happens. That’s what I mean by free. I’ve had a couple of times on stage when I really felt free. And that’s something else. That’s really something else.”
— Nina Simone



“I remember skinny little South side bodies by the fives and tens of us panting the delicious hours away:

“May I?”

And the voice of authority: “Yes, you may—you may take one giant step.”

One drew in all one’s breath and tightened one’s fist and pulled the small body against the heavens, stretching, straining all the muscles in the legs to make—one giant step.

It is a long time. One forgets the reason for the game. (For children’s games are always explicit in their reasons for being. To play is to win something. Or not to be “it.” Or to be high pointer, or outdoorer or, sometimes--just the winner. But after a time one forgets.)

Why was it important to take a small step, a teeny step, or the most desired of all--one GIANT step?

A giant step to where?”

— Lorraine Hansberry, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*

WHAT USE?

What use are flowers?

What use are songs?

What use are flowers?

What use are songs?

What use are flowers?

What use are songs?

What use is soft?

What use is louder?

What use are songs?

What use are flowers?

What use is yours?

What use is ours?

What use are flowers?

What use are flowers?

Are flowers food?

Do I need flowers?

Is pleasure a nutrient?

Can you be nourished by flowers?

What use are needs without pleasures?

Do flowers have what I need?

What use are leaves?

What use is water?

What use are flowers?

What use is naming our needs?

Can't a need be indescribable?

Can't a pleasure be unnameable?

Can't a desire be impossible?

What of desire?

What about flowers?

To nourish

To cherish

To comfort

To tend

To furnish

To suckle

To foster

To swim

To provide

To supply

To support

To let go

To feed

To flow

To sustain

To promote

To admire

To adore

To preserve

To cling

To defend

To embrace

To harvest

To seed

To ripen

To blossom

To mellow

To prime

To season

To cradle

To shoulder

To hold

Is nourishment something we do? Who?

Does nourishment flow through you? Too?

Who set you flowing? Why?

Should we be flowing? When?

Should I be watching? Now?

Should I be standing my ground?

Will you be standing your ground?

And what do you see when you look down?

What do you see now?

What if there's nothing to plow?

Should we be tending? When?

Am I my own nutrient?

Am I enough?

What use is singing?

What use are songs?

What if I'm tired?

What use?
What if?
What?
When?
Again?

To
Empty to
Vacate to
Narrow to
Taper to
Limit to
Lessen to
Lower to

Relax to
Decrease to
Unload to
Release to
Reduce to
Exhaust to
Consume to
Uncharge to
Unfill to
Deplete to
Unpack to

Sap to
Shrink to
Dry to
Drain to
Cut to
Bleed to
Clear to
Free to
Off to
Ease to

Draw away to
Unsaturnate to
Unoccupy to
Lose yourself

Sustain c. 1300, "give support to," from stem of Old French *sostenir* "hold up, bear; suffer, endure" (13c.), from Latin *sustinere* "hold up, hold upright; furnish with means of support; bear, undergo, endure," from assimilated form of *sub* "up from below" (see *sub-*) + *tenerē* "to hold," from PIE root **ten-* "to stretch." Meaning "continue, keep up" (an action, etc.) is from early 14c. Sense of "endure without failing or yielding" is from c. 1400. Related: *Sustained*; *sustaining*.



"We can't afford any more losses," Nina Simone said.

How is "sustain" an end of study? How is study a type of sustenance?