

# BILLIE HOLIDAY



DOMAINE 1 :

Comprendre, s'exprimer en utilisant une langue étrangère.

Écouter et comprendre

Comprendre une courte biographie.  
Retrouver les paroles manquantes d'une chanson. A2



## Strange Fruit (1939)

In 1937 Abel Meeropol, a Jewish schoolteacher from New York, saw a photograph of the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith. Meeropol later recalled how the photograph "haunted me for days" and inspired the writing of the poem, *Strange Fruit*. Meeropol, using the pseudonym, Lewis Allan, published the poem in the *New York Teacher* and later, the Marxist

journal, *New Masses*.

After seeing Billie Holiday perform at the club, *Café Society*, in New York, Meeropol showed her the poem. Holiday liked it and after working on it with Sonny White turned the poem into the song, *Strange Fruit*. The record made it to No. 16 on the charts in July 1939. However, the song was denounced by *Time Magazine* as "a prime piece of musical propaganda" for the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP).

Meeropol remained active in the American Communist Party and after the execution of Ethel Rosenberg and Julius Rosenberg he adopted their two sons. He taught at the De Witt Clinton High School in the Bronx for 27 years, but continued to write songs, including the Frank Sinatra hit, *The House I Live In*.

Who wrote the poem ?

Why did he write the poem ?

Who is Billie Holiday ?

Everybody loved the song

True  False

Later, Abel Meeropol became a professional song writer

True  False

In your opinion, why did he use a pseudonym ?

According to the text, what happened to Ethel and Julius Rosenberg and their children?

*Abel Meeropol, Strange Fruit (1939)*

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,  
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant South,  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,  
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,  
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

*Understanding words:*

*Pick out 4 words related to plants*

*Pick out 3 words related to the weather*

*Pick out words which have positive connotations*

*Pick out words which are related to violence*

**What is the recurrent word in the poem?**

**What do you think the words “strange fruit” refer to?**