**Telephone Conversation**

Wole Soyinka

The price seemed reasonable, location

Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived

Off premises. Nothing remained

But self-confession. “Madam,” I warned,

5 “I hate a wasted journey—I am African.”

Silence. Silenced transmission of

Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,

Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled

Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.

10 “HOW DARK?” . . . I had not misheard . . . “ARE YOU LIGHT

OR VERY DARK?” Button B. Button A. Stench

Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.

Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered

Omnibus squelching tar. It was real! Shamed

15 By ill-mannered silence, surrender

Pushed dumbfoundment to beg simplification.

Considerate she was, varying the emphasis—

“ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?” Revelation came.

“You mean—like plain or milk chocolate?”

20 Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light

Impersonality. Rapidly, wavelength adjusted,

I chose. “West African sepia”—and as an afterthought,

“Down in my passport.” Silence for spectroscopic

Flight of fancy, till truthfulness clanged her accent

25 Hard on the mouthpiece. “WHAT’S THAT?” conceding,

“DON’T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.” “Like brunette.”

“THAT’S DARK, ISN’T IT?” “Not altogether.

Facially, I am brunette, but madam, you should see

The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet

30 Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, caused—

Foolishly, madam—by sitting down, has turned

My bottom raven black—One moment madam!”—sensing

Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap

About my ears—“Madam,” I pleaded, “wouldn’t you rather

35 See for yourself?”

Answer the questions below.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. When the voice on the phone asks “ARE YOU LIGHT / OR VERY DARK?” in lines 10-11, the primary concern is:

a. if the narrator is white or black

b. how dark skinned is the narrator (with the assumption that he is black)

c. if the narrator is African or not

d. it is symbolic of the narrator’s moral mindset\

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. In line 5, the narrator says, “I hate a wasted journey.” This implies:

a. the narrator is an impatient person

b. the narrator has more important things to do than to meet with the landlord personally

c. the narrator has experienced discrimination previously

d. the narrator wishes to make the most out of life

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. The tone set by the narrator in line 19 is:

a. facetious

b. inquisitive

c. incredulous

d. jaded

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. What is the effect of using all capitals for the landlady’s words?

a. it gives more importance to the landlady’s meaning

b. it points out the theme of the poem

c. it is ironic since the landlady is being fair

d. it reinforces that the landlady is being unreasonable

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. What is most likely to happen next?

a. the narrator will get the apartment

b. the narrator will make the trip to see the apartment, but will not be allowed to rent it

c. the narrator will turn down the chance to rent the apartment

d. the landlady will not allow the narrator a chance to look at the apartment

Constructed Response:

In lines 28-32, the narrator describes himself in many shades of black and brown. Use at least one example from the text to show how this exemplifies the theme of this poem. Confine your answer to the bottom of this page only.

Constructed Response:

The author characterizes the teller in a certain way in lines 7 - 14. In what ways does the characterization show her ignorance? Use at least one line from the passage to support your answer.