



LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

MY FATHER'S FARM

NIGERIA, with over 123 million people, has the largest population of any country in Africa. More than half of all Nigerians live in rural villages. In this selection, the Nigerian writer Isaac Olaleye vividly describes his father's farm in a small village called Erin in western Nigeria. In the language of the Yoruba people, *erin* means "laughter."

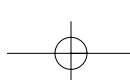
In the heart of a great tropical forest
In space and solitude
Lies my father's farm.
In the acres of solitude
Grow rows of yams,¹
White like sugar,
Their vines, mounting stakes,
Are clothed in pea green.

*

In the acres of solitude grow:
Rows of yams
The color of vanilla ice cream,
Rows of yams
Smooth as eggshells,
Rows of yams,
Gray like blueberries,
Rows of yams,
Yellow like lemons, and
Rows of yams,
Smooth and creamy as butter.

1. Throughout southern Nigeria, roots—especially yams, taro, and cassava—are the main crops grown on small farms.

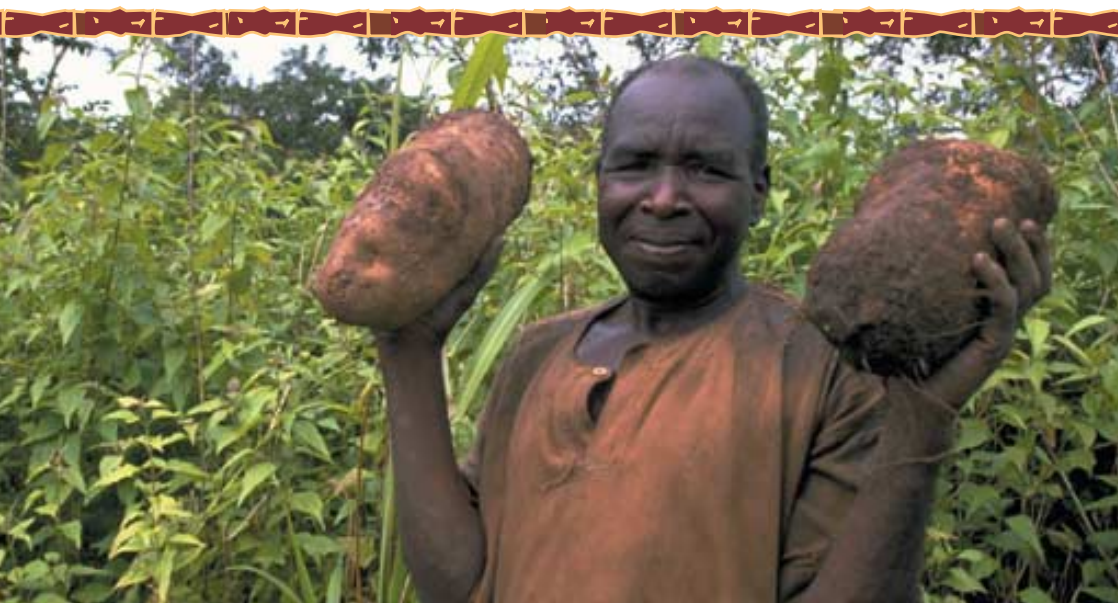




Their vines, all mounting stakes,
 And their leaves glowing green—
 Yellowish green to emerald.
 All the colorful rows delight me.
 On my father's farm,
 Where it is quiet enough to hear
 Bees and flies as they buzz and hum
 Through another busy day.



In the acres of solitude
 Maize waves in the gentle wind.
 Popondo beans hug one another.
 Tomatoes sit on pumpkins.
 The black-eyed peas climb the maize.
 Sweet peas smother the okra
 And while peppers flash
 The color of danger,
 White cotton balls
 Laugh at them all.



Reading

THE LITERATURE

What techniques does the poet use to describe the variety and texture of the yams growing in the fields of his father's farm? How does the poet use language, particularly verbs, to give the vegetables human traits?

Thinking About

THE LITERATURE

At what time of year is this poem set? How can you tell? How might the images differ if the poem described the farm during another season of the year? during a drought?

Writing About

THE LITERATURE

In the second stanza of "My Father's Farm," the poet uses repetition and similes. Do these devices enhance the poem? In what ways?

About the Author

Isaac Olaleye (b. 1941) was born and grew up in Nigeria. In addition to the poetry collection in which this poem appears, he has written several books for young people about Nigeria. As an adult he lived for several years in England before settling in the United States.

Further Reading "My Father's Farm" is one of 15 poems by Isaac Olaleye in the book *The Distant Talking Drum*. These poems capture daily life in a Nigerian village by treating such topics as a market day, a tropical rainstorm, and village weavers.