

Please read "We Are Not Responsible" by Harryette Mullen and develop a reading of it through the lens of Langston Hughes's idea of social poetry. Take as a first assumption that the message presented by the speaker is not one that is supported by the author who wrote the poem. Characterize the speaker of the poem and discuss the speaker's voice and tone. What is the speaker's message, and what does the poem appear to be saying about the speaker's message by presenting it in this way?

"We Are Not Responsible"  
by Harryette Mullen

We are not responsible for your lost or stolen relatives.  
We cannot guarantee your safety if you disobey our instructions.  
We do not endorse the causes or claims of people begging for handouts.  
We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone.

Your ticket does not guarantee that we will honor your reservations.  
In order to facilitate our procedures, please limit your carrying on.  
Before taking off, please extinguish all smoldering resentments.

If you cannot understand English, you will be moved out of the way.  
In the event of a loss, you'd better look out for yourself.  
Your insurance was cancelled because we can no longer handle  
your frightful claims. Our handlers lost your luggage and we  
are unable to find the key to your legal case.

You were detained for interrogation because you fit the profile.  
You are not presumed to be innocent if the police  
have reason to suspect you are carrying a concealed wallet.  
It's not our fault you were born wearing a gang color.  
It is not our obligation to inform you of your rights.

Step aside, please, while our officer inspects your bad attitude.  
You have no rights we are bound to respect.  
Please remain calm, or we can't be held responsible  
for what happens to you.

Read the following poem, "Blackbird Spring" by William Heyen, and consider the situation it portrays. What are the physical, emotional, and psychological circumstances experienced by the speaker in this poem? Look closely at the poem's conclusion--how does the situation explored by this poem inform the end of the poem?

"Blackbird Spring"  
by William Heyen

Mid-morning, walking ocean shoreline,  
I found a hundred blackbirds  
frozen in ice,  
only their heads protruding,  
their black eyes open,  
gleaming, most of their sharp beaks still  
scissoring in mid-whistle.

Feeding, they'd been caught  
in sea-spray, must be—  
all males, up north early,  
their scarlet epaulettes aflame  
a few inches under. I chipped  
one bird loose with a stone,  
held it in gloved hands

under the rising sun until,  
until I realized, until I realized  
nothing I hadn't known.  
The tide retreated & would return.  
Within the austere territories  
these would have filled with belligerence  
& song, spring had begun.