**I DO**

**Thematic Statement:**

Man learns what he is truly made of when faced with the prospect of his own survival.

**Open-Ended Response Focus: Analyze the setting’s contribution to theme.**

Text Choice: “Who Understands Me but Me” by Jimmy Santiago Baca

Jimmy Santiago Baca’s poem “Who Understands Me but Me” is a flashback to his time

spent in solitary confinement in prison; this stark setting contributes to the theme of his personal

growth that is uncovered by the end of the poem when the reader learns everything Baca

survives in the prison setting. For example, when the speaker is in confinement and “they build

the walls higher” and “lock his cage,” he does not let the circumstance get him down (Baca lines

2, 4). When the guards “give [him] hate” and “stop up each hope,” these circumstances, which

arise as a direct result of his prison setting, actually serve as a catalyst for his realization that he

“can live with [himself]” and is “amazed at [himself]” (Baca lines 9, 11, 19). His sentence in prison

affords him time to reflect on what is important in life and teaches him to find the

wisdom in his failures. This wisdom becomes his power to survive. It is the shift from the

“wreckage of life” to the “beautiful” (Baca lines 23, 38). The prison setting allows him to

“[follow] the signs like an old tracker” and therefore gives him the

empowerment to survive and learn what he is made of (Baca lines 29,30).