

About the Performance

Fused with an underscore rhythm of jazz and blues, *Soul of Langston* is an original play that explores the life and contributions of American poet, playwright, author and civil-rights activist **Langston Hughes**. Going from “busboy poet” to becoming Harlem’s Wonder, helping establish the Civil Rights movement through the Harlem Renaissance, *Soul of Langston* takes the wit and wisdom of Langston’s poetry and translates it into an inspiring story of resilience and persistence.



About the Artist

Daron P. Stewart is an actor, writer, producer who has performed on stages across the United States and abroad. His credits include national and independent film work, television hosting, VOG at The Kennedy Center and numerous stage performances. His accolades include “Outstanding Performance” recognitions and a “Best Supporting Actor” award for his portrayal of Cory in Charlotte’s Theatre’s production of August Wilson’s stage play *Fences*. Daron is a proud member of SAG-AFTRA and ACTOR’S EQUITY ASSOCIATION (AEA) performers unions.

Program Learning Goals

1. To introduce the life, writing, and cultural significance of Langston Hughes.
2. To explore Langston Hughes’ contributions to the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, and influence on modern Hip-Hop culture.
3. To experience how drama and theatre enhances learning through conveying information in a lasting, memorable way.

Essential Questions

1. Why is a play about Langston Hughes important?
2. Why is it important to tell stories about the past and historical events?
3. How can we use our distinct voices to tell stories?

Vocabulary

- **Storytelling:** the art of telling a story about real or imagined events using gestures and words to bring the events and characters of the story to life in the minds of those listening
- **Storyteller:** a person who tells or writes stories
- **Author:** a person who writes a story, novel, poem, or other written work
- **Fiction:** a story that is created from the imagination
- **Non-fiction:** a piece of writing that consists of facts and information about actual events or topics
- **Segregation:** the policy of keeping one group of people apart from another and treating them differently, especially because of race, sex, or religion
- **Prejudice:** an unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge
- **Unconstitutional:** not allowed by the constitution of a country or organization.

Key Facts and Context for Students

More about *Soul of Langston*

What would be of Hip-Hop if Langston Hughes never took to poetry... or of Civil Rights if the Harlem Renaissance never flourished?

Soul of Langston reveals the bitter-sweet wit and wisdom of Langston's poetry; the tragedies and triumphs that constructed his life; and the worldwide impact of his literary accomplishments - going from busboy and poet to becoming "**Harlem's Wonder**" helping establish the **Civil Rights movement** through the **Harlem Renaissance**.



In this program, students will learn the significance of Langston Hughes' poetry in mainstream America, how to connect the Harlem Renaissance to the Civil Rights Movement, and themes and key figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Being a one-man show, *Soul of Langston* mounts well in any space, with or without set pieces and explores Langston's poetic statement: "**I too sing America... I too am America**" and also poses the question to all, "**What happens to a dream deferred?**" from Langston's famous poem.

See pages 3, 4, and 5 for more information about Langston Hughes' life, writing career, and related resources compiled by Norad Media.



Soul of Langston

KEY THEMES AND FIGURES IN THE PLAY



Learn about themes of the play and key figures of the Harlem Renaissance.

LANGSTON HUGHES



Langston Hughes, a trailblazing poet, writer, and pivotal figure in the Harlem Renaissance, led a life that left an indelible mark on American literature and culture. Born in 1902, Hughes used his unique voice to capture the essence of the African American experience, addressing themes of racial identity, social justice, and the complexities of human existence. His work, from the groundbreaking “The Weary Blues” to numerous essays, novels, and plays, resonated with a wide audience, fostering a deeper understanding of the African American narrative.

Hughes’ poetic style, characterized by its lyrical and accessible language, made his work relatable to people from all walks of life. His impact extended beyond his written words; he was a beacon of inspiration for future generations of Black artists and writers. Langston Hughes' legacy endures as a testament to the power of literature in driving social change, ensuring his place as a vital force in American culture and history.

HARLEM RENAISSANCE



Following the American Civil War, emancipated African Americans embarked on a quest to discover a nurturing environment in which to embrace their newfound freedom and identities. This haven emerged in the vibrant neighborhood of Harlem in New York City. Harlem, renowned as “The Black Mecca” and “The Capital of Black America,” became a sanctuary for some of the most brilliant minds of the 20th century, giving birth to a profound cultural renaissance.

Prominent writers who made indelible marks during this period included Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, Nella Larsen, Countee Cullen, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and the eminent Langston Hughes.

The Harlem Renaissance eventually yielded to the challenges of The Great Depression in the 1930s, but the creative and social movements it ignited persisted in American culture. They found new expressions in music, award-winning literature, and, most notably, in the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the American Black Arts Movement of the 1960's and 1970's, and the birth of Hip-Hop in 1973.



Soul of Langston

KEY THEMES AND FIGURES IN THE PLAY

EARLY CHILDHOOD



James Mercer Langston Hughes was born on February 1, 1902, in Joplin, Missouri. His parents, James Nathaniel Hughes, a lawyer, and Carrie Langston, a writer and actress, separated soon after his birth, and his father moved to Toluca, Mexico. Hughes' mother moved frequently during his youth, so Hughes was raised primarily by his maternal grandmother, Mary Langston, in Lawrence, Kansas.

Mary Langston died when Langston was 12 years old. Langston then went back to live with his mother, and they moved to several cities before settling in Cleveland, Ohio. It was during this time that Hughes first began to write poetry and one of his teachers introduced him to the poetry of Carl Sandburg and Walt Whitman, both of whom Hughes would cite as primary influences.

Hughes was an avid reader, delving into books to cure his frequent bouts with loneliness. He wrote: "I began to believe in nothing but books and the wonderful world in books—where if people suffered, they suffered in beautiful language, not in monosyllables, as we did in Kansas."

EDUCATION



Hughes graduated from Cleveland Central High School in 1920. In 1921, Hughes enrolled at Columbia University where he quickly became a part of Harlem's burgeoning cultural movement, commonly known as the Harlem Renaissance. Hughes left Columbia in 1922, eventually earning a scholarship to and graduating from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania in 1929. This pivotal period in Hughes' life marked the beginning of his remarkable journey as a prominent figure in American literature and a key contributor to the Harlem Renaissance, reflecting the power of education and cultural exploration in shaping his artistic identity.

BUSBOY TO POET



In 1925, Hughes was working as a busboy in a Washington, DC hotel restaurant when he met American poet Vachel Lindsay. Hughes slipped some of his poems to Lindsay, who was impressed enough to use his connections to promote Hughes' poetry and ultimately bring it to a wider audience. Hughes' first book of poetry, The Weary Blues, was published by Knopf in 1926.



Soul of Langston

KEY THEMES AND FIGURES IN THE PLAY

LIVING AS A WRITER



Langston Hughes was one of the first African American authors able to sustain himself through his writing. He went on to write numerous works of poetry, prose and plays, and was hired by the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper to serve as a war correspondent to cover the Spanish Civil War. Later, he began contributing to a newspaper column that would eventually gain popularity, featured in both the New York Post and the Chicago Defender. For the latter publication, he crafted a street-smart Harlem character named Jesse B. Semple, more widely recognized as “Simple.” Hughes used this character to delve into urban, working-class Black themes and address racial issues. These columns achieved remarkable success, and “Simple” would later become the focal point of several of Hughes' books and plays.

Hughes taught creative writing at Atlanta University and served as poet-in-residence at the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. He co-wrote a play called *Mule Bone* with Zora Neale Hurston and contributed the lyrics for a Broadway musical entitled *Street Scene*, featuring music by Kurt Weill. The success of the musical would earn Hughes enough money to buy a house in Harlem.

Langston Hughes penned a remarkable collection of sixteen volumes of poetry, twelve novels and short stories, as well as eight children's books. His accolades encompassed prestigious recognitions like the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1934, the Rosenwald Fellowship in 1941, the Ainsfield-Wolf Book Award in 1954, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Spingarn Award in 1960.



DEATH AND LEGACY

On May 22, 1967, Langston Hughes died from complications of prostate cancer. As a tribute to his poetry, his funeral contained little in the way of spoken eulogy, but was filled with jazz and blues music, as Hughes requested. His ashes were interred beneath the entrance of the Arthur Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. The inscription marking the spot features a line from Hughes's poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” It reads: “My soul has grown deep like the rivers.”

Hughes' Harlem home on East 127th Street received New York City Landmark status in 1981 and was added to the National Register of Places in 1982. It is called the Langston Hughes House.

Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What do you know about Langston Hughes? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?
- What might a story or play teach us about history that we might not get from a history book?
- What is your favorite type of music? When do you listen to music the most? Who is your favorite artist?

Pre-Performance Activity: Creative Timeline

Learning Goals:

- To understand major events in Langston Hughes' life.
- To create a unique way of portraying information.

Materials:

Soul of Langston Timeline by Norad Media (see pages 7-8),
vetted books and websites about Langston Hughes (see
pages 10-11)



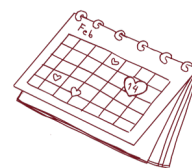
Directions:

1. Discuss Langston Hughes. What do students already know? What are they curious to learn from the upcoming *Soul of Langston* performance?
2. Review the *Soul of Langston* Timeline. Note what events interest students.
3. Divide the class into small groups and assign each a period of Langston Hughes' life from the timeline to research.
4. Have each group present their findings in a creative way, such as a report, illustration, short play or recording.
5. Share each group's project in timeline order to create an innovative and interactive representation of history.
6. Discuss how the presentations brought these historical events to life. What do students remember from each event? What were similarities and differences between these events? How did earlier events affect later events?
7. Ask students again what they are curious to learn and experience in the upcoming *Soul of Langston* performance after completing this activity. Have students write down questions to ask Daron after the performance.

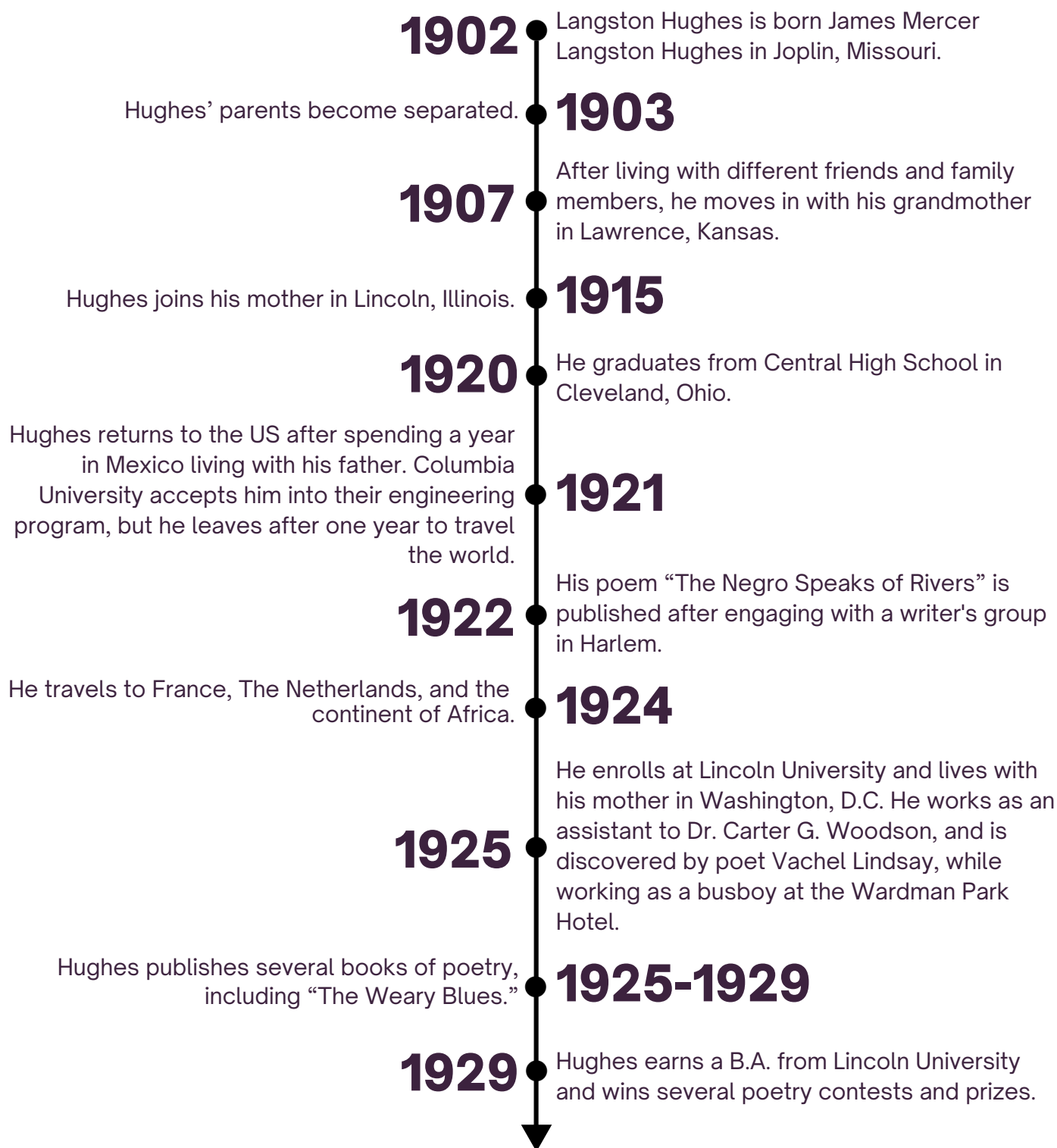


Soul of Langston

TIMELINE

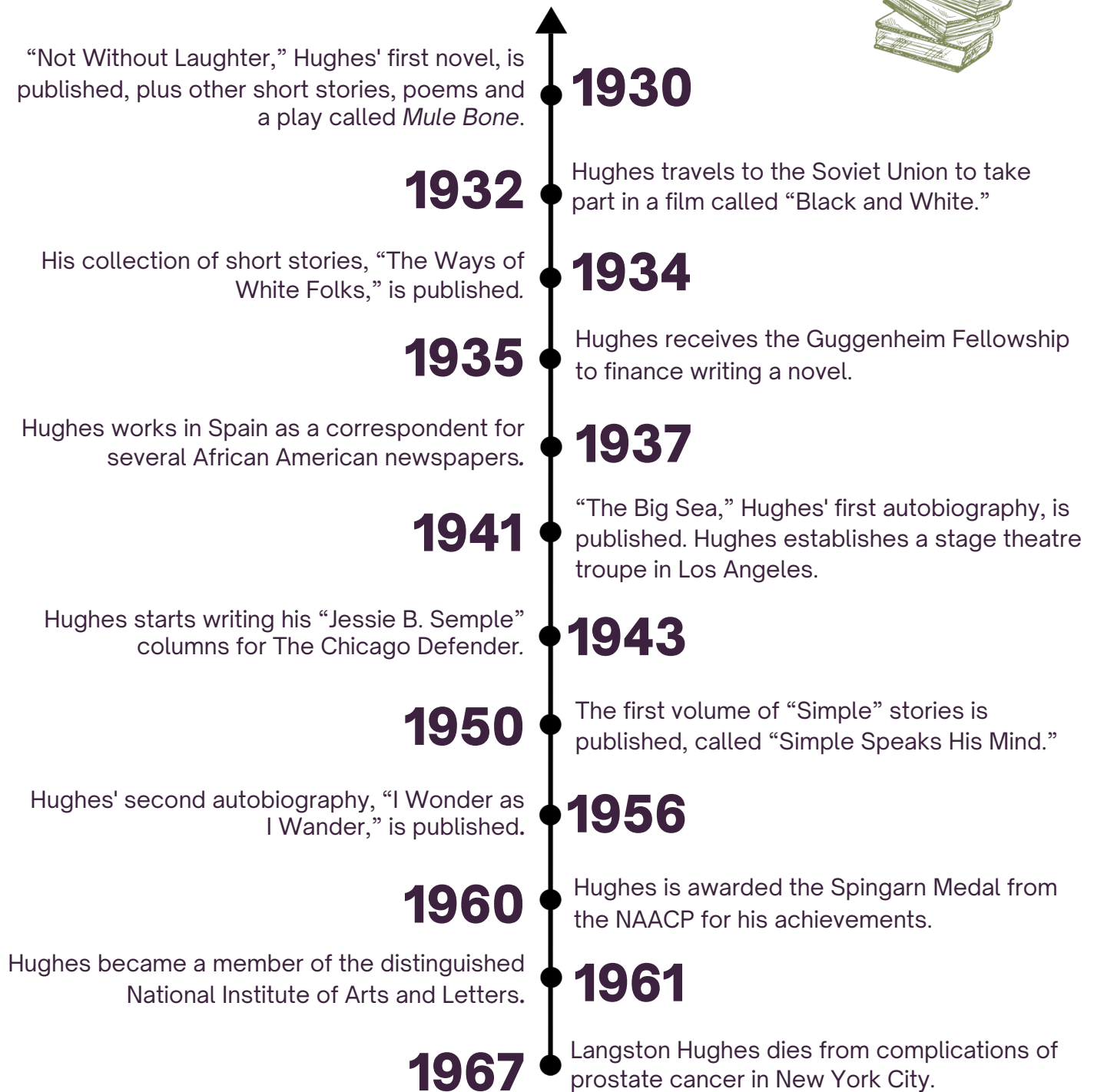
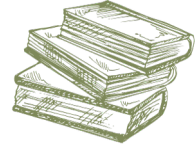


Use this timeline to explore the life of Langston Hughes. Observe the important milestones in Hughes' life and consider events that could be added to this timeline.



Soul of Langston

TIMELINE



Now that you've explored the life of Langston Hughes, consider conducting more research. What additional events and accomplishments you would add to this timeline?

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What did you learn about Langston Hughes? How did Daron bring him to life?
- What specific moments from the play stood out to you? Why?
- What emotions did the play evoke in you?
- What was the most significant poem in the play? Why?

Post-Performance Activity: A Good Read

Learning Goals:

- To thoughtfully respond to the *Soul of Langston* performance
- To engage in the writings of Langston Hughes
- To create an original artistic work inspired by a poem or book by Langston Hughes

Materials:

“A Good Read” booklist by Norad Media (see page 10),
books and poems by Langston Hughes



Directions:

1. Reflect on the *Soul of Langston* performance with students. What did they learn, notice, and remember?
2. Have students select a book or poem from “A Good Read” booklist. Read and reflect on the selection. Investigate when Langston Hughes wrote that particular work and what his life was like at the time.
3. Prepare a creative response to the chosen work. Artistic forms could include a poem, song, dance, rap, monologue, or speech.
4. Share presentations with the class. Be sure to emphasize being a positive and supportive audience.
5. Discuss the performances and Langston Hughes’ work. What did students resonate with the most about each other’s performances, the *Soul of Langston* performance, and with Langston Hughes’ writings? How can they bring what they learned into their own lives?





Soul of Langston

A GOOD READ

Embark on a literary journey through the diverse and compelling writings of Langston Hughes, exploring his poetry, travel narratives, and captivating storytelling.

THE BEST OF SIMPLE

Experience the funny and insightful world of Jesse B. Semple, known as "Simple," in this collection of stories. Simple's wit, wisdom, and humorous take on life offer a delightful exploration of the complexities of everyday existence.

THE BIG SEA

The Big Sea is an autobiographical work by Langston Hughes. In it, he tells his experience of being a writer of color in Paris, France, and his experiences living in New York, where he faced injustices surrounding systematic racism.

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF LANGSTON HUGHES

This comprehensive compilation showcases Hughes' poetic talent throughout his career, from the Harlem Renaissance to his later works, capturing the essence of his artistry and the broad range of his literary themes.

I WONDER AS I WANDER

In *I Wonder as I Wander*, Langston Hughes vividly recalls the most dramatic and intimate moments of his life in the turbulent 1930s.

NOT WITHOUT LAUGHTER

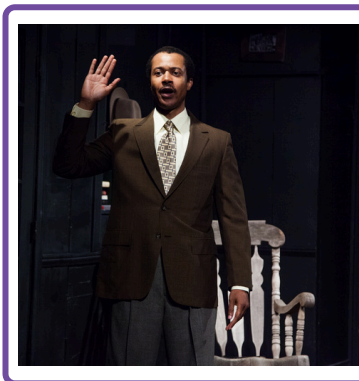
Langston Hughes' first novel vividly portrays the life and struggles of an African American family in the early 20th century. It's a classic coming-of-age story filled with rich characters and powerful themes.

THE WEARY BLUES

Hughes' first book of poetry resonates with the rhythms and imagery of Harlem's blues and jazz scene during the Harlem Renaissance, providing a vivid portrayal of the African American experience at that time.

Further Resources

- [Soul of Langston Website](#)
- [Norad Media Artist Website](#)
- [The Langston Hughes House](#)
- [The Quarry: A Social Justice Poetry Database](#)
- [Poems and educational resources from the Poetry Foundation](#)
- [“Poems for Kids” from poets.org](#)
- Alarcón, Francisco X. and Odilia Galván Rodríguez (editors): *Poetry of Resistance: Voices for Social Justice*, University of Arizona Press (2016)
- Alexander, Kwame: *This Is the Honey: An Anthology of Contemporary Black Poets*, Little Brown and Company (2024)
- Chang, Jeff: *Can't Stop Won't Stop (Young Adult Edition): A Hip-Hop History*, Wednesday Books (2021)
- Christensen, Linda and Dyan Watson (editors): *Rhythm and Resistance: Teaching Poetry for Social Justice*, Rethinking Schools (2015)
- Grimes, Nikki: *One Last Word: Wisdom from the Harlem Renaissance*, Bloomsbury USA Childrens (2017)
- Hopkins, Lee Bennett (editor): *I Remember: Poems and Pictures of Heritage*, Lee & Low Books (2019)
- Hughes, Langston and Charles R. Smith Jr. (photography): *My People*, Atheneum Books for Young Readers (2009)
- Martin, Erica: *And We Rise: The Civil Rights Movement in Poems*, Viking Books for Young Readers (2023)
- Medina, Tony: *Love to Langston*, Lee & Low Books (2005)
- Reynolds, Jason: *There Was a Party for Langston*, Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books (2023)



Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Theatre

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.02)

Performing

- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. (T.P.06)

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (T.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (T.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (T.Co.11)

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Reading

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (R.PK-12.2)
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. (R.PK-12.4)

Writing

- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences. (W.PK-12.3)

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)

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Curricular Connections, continued

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards, continued

Language, continued

- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings. (L.PK-12.5)

History and Social Science

Grade 4

- Topic 4: The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today (HSS.4.T4)

Grade 5

- Topic 5: Slavery, the legacy of the Civil War, and the struggle for civil rights for all (HSS.5.T5)

Grade 8

- Topic 4: Rights and responsibilities of citizens (HSS.8.T4)

Grades 9-12

- US History I Topic 4: Social, political, and religious change (HSS.USI.T4)
- US History I Topic 5: The Civil War and Reconstruction: causes and consequences (HSS.USI.T5)
- US History I Topic 6: Rebuilding the United States: industry and immigration (HSS.USI.T6)
- US History I Topic 7: Progressivism and World War I (HSS.USI.T7)
- US History II Topic 2: Modernity in the United States: ideologies and economies (HSS.USII.T2)
- US History II Topic 4: Defending Democracy: the Cold War and Civil Rights at Home (HSS.USII.T4)
- US History II Topic 5: United States and globalization (HSS.USII.T5)

