

## LANGSTON HUGHES AND HIS POETRY

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**ANNOTATION:** This article is about Langston Hughes who is American famous poet, dramatist, novelist, essayist. It describes his the way of life, famous poems, the way which he entered poetry and career. L.Hughes's most well-known poems: "Let America be America again", "I, Too", "Harlem", "Dreams" and etc.

**KEYWORDS:** Langston Hughes, poet, poems, career, biography, life, novel, dramatist,

### INTRODUCTION:

The best leader of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes was born on February 1, 1901, in Joplin, Missouri. He is one of the earliest innovators of the literary art form called jazz poetry, social activist, poet. His first name is James Mercer Langston Hughes and he was nourished by maternal grandmother, Mary Sampson Patterson Leary Langston. Because his parents, James Nathaniel Hughes and Carrie Langston Hughes divorced when he was born. He moved to Lincoln, when he is 13 years old to live his mother and his step-father. They moved to Cleveland in 1916.

After high school, he spent a year in Mexico and then a year at Columbia University. During this period, he worked as a cook's assistant, a laundress, and a bus conductor. He also traveled to Africa and Europe as a sailor. He moved to Washington in November 1924. Hughes's first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, was published in 1926 by Alfred A. Knopf. After three years at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, he graduated from college. His first novel, "Not Without Laughter (Knopf, 1930)" won the Harmon Gold Medal for Literature in 1930,

Langston Hughes was one of the most outstanding African-American writers of the 20th century as a professional career that spanned from the 1920s to the 1960s. For reflecting the culture and experiences of black Americans, he used his poetry.

The critic Donald B. Gibson noted in the introduction to *Modern Black Poets: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Prentice Hall, 1973) that Hughes:

...differed from most of his predecessors among black poets... in that he addressed his poetry to the people, specifically to black people. During the twenties when most American poets were turning inward, writing obscure and esoteric poetry to an ever decreasing public of readers, Hughes was turning outward, using language and themes, attitudes and ideas familiar to anyone who had the ability simply to read... Until the time of his death, he spread his message humorously—though always seriously—to

audiences throughout the country, having read his poetry to more people (possibly) than any other American poet.

In Lincoln, Hughes began writing poetry. He studied for a year in Mexico and then for a year at Columbia University, after graduating from high school. During this period, he worked as a cook's assistant, a laundress and a bus conductor. He also traveled to Africa and Europe as a sailor.

He often went to jazz and blues clubs, where the music entered his soul and inspired him with poetry: "Thump, thump, thum, get his feet on the ground." He played a few chords and then sang again. He continued to write poetry as well as short stories, plays and screenplays.

With a professional career that spanned from the 1920s to the 1960s, Langston Hughes was one of the most prominent African-American writers of the 20th century. Hughes cited Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg, and Paul Laurence Dunbar as major influences.

Langston Hughes struggled with the loneliness that came with his parents' divorce. He enjoyed reading to make up for the little time his parents spent with him. His passion for reading grew into his passion for writing. He wanted to repeat the strong influence that other writers had on him.

The young poet left Columbia in 1922 and the following year worked various odd jobs in New York, including as a steward on a cargo ship that took him to Africa and Spain. He left the ship in 1924 and lived briefly in Paris, where he continued to develop and publish his poetry.

Langston Hughes's most famous collection is *The Weary Blues*, the 1926 poetry collection "The Ways of the White People", a collection of stories from 1934; *The Big Sea*, an autobiography of his early life, published in 1940; and the 1956 *Illustrated History of the Negro in America*.

His first book called "The Weary Blues" in 1926 but he wrote "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" after he graduation of his high school in 1921.

Langston Hughes died of cancer in his mid-60s in 1967, but his legacy lives on. His Brown House in Harlem became a historic landmark in 1982, schools are named after him, and most importantly, his poetry still resonates.

Here are some important poems by Langston Hughes that touched the heart of America.

### **THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS (1921)**

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it...

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans,  
and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

This poem shows the endless bond between African Americans and rivers, embodying the archaic roots and background of the African American people.

### **MOTHER TO SON (1922)**

Well, son, I'll tell you:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

It's had tacks in it,

And splinters,

And boards torn up,

And places with no carpet on the floor—

Bare.....

In this poem, a mother's advice to her son, the obstacles and hardness of life are reflected with the help of a ladder metaphor.

### **LET AMERICA BE AMERICA AGAIN (1936)**

Let America be America again.

Let it be the dream it used to be.

Let it be the pioneer on the plain

Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Hughes emulates on the American Dream and the promise of equivalent and liberty for all, while admitting the historical grievance faced by diminished communities.

### **HARLEM (1951)**

Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat

Or crust and sugar over— like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

This poem lift up questions about the outcome of dreams deferred and the impact of unfulfilled dreams on people and communities.

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