

Langston Hughes

- poems -

Publication Date:

2012

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

Langston Hughes (February 1, 1902 – May 22, 1967)

an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist. He was one of the earliest innovators of the then-new literary art form jazz poetry. Hughes is best known for his work during the Harlem Renaissance. He famously wrote about the period that "Harlem was in vogue."

Biography

Ancestry and Childhood

Both of Hughes' paternal and maternal great-grandmothers were African-American, his maternal great-grandfather was white and of Scottish descent. A paternal great-grandfather was of European Jewish descent. Hughes's maternal grandmother Mary Patterson was of African-American, French, English and Native American descent. One of the first women to attend Oberlin College, she first married Lewis Sheridan Leary, also of mixed race. Lewis Sheridan Leary subsequently joined John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859 and died from his wounds.

In 1869 the widow Mary Patterson Leary married again, into the elite, politically active Langston family. Her second husband was Charles Henry Langston, of African American, Native American, and Euro-American ancestry. He and his younger brother John Mercer Langston worked for the abolitionist cause and helped lead the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society in 1858. Charles Langston later moved to Kansas, where he was active as an educator and activist for voting and rights for African Americans. Charles and Mary's daughter Caroline was the mother of Langston Hughes.

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, the second child of school teacher Carrie (Caroline) Mercer Langston and James Nathaniel Hughes (1871–1934). Langston Hughes grew up in a series of Midwestern small towns.

Hughes's father left his family and later divorced Carrie, going to Cuba, and then Mexico, seeking to escape the enduring racism in the United States. After the separation of his parents, while his mother travelled seeking employment, young Langston Hughes was raised mainly by his maternal grandmother, Mary Patterson Langston, in Lawrence, Kansas. Through the black American oral tradition and drawing from the activist experiences of her generation, Mary Langston instilled in the young Langston Hughes a lasting sense of racial pride. He spent most of his childhood in Lawrence, Kansas. After the death of his grandmother, he went to live with family friends, James and Mary Reed, for two years. Because of the unstable early life, his childhood was not an entirely happy one, but it strongly influenced

the poet he would become. Later, Hughes lived again with his mother Carrie in Lincoln, Illinois. She had remarried when he was still an adolescent, and eventually they lived in Cleveland, Ohio, where he attended high school. The Hughes' home in Cleveland was sold in foreclosure in 1918; the 2.5-story, wood-frame house on the city's east side was sold at a sheriff's auction in February for \$16,667.

While in grammar school in Lincoln, Hughes was elected class poet. Hughes stated that in retrospect he thought it was because of the stereotype that African Americans have rhythm. "I was a victim of a stereotype. There were only two of us Negro kids in the whole class and our English teacher was always stressing the importance of rhythm in poetry. Well, everyone knows, except us, that all Negroes have rhythm, so they elected me as class poet." During high school in Cleveland, Ohio, he wrote for the school newspaper, edited the yearbook, and began to write his first short stories, poetry, and dramatic plays. His first piece of jazz poetry, "When Sue Wears Red", was written while he was in high school. It was during this time that he discovered his love of books.

Relationship with Father

Hughes had a very poor relationship with his father. He lived with his father in Mexico for a brief period in 1919. Upon graduating from high school in June 1920, Hughes returned to Mexico to live with his father, hoping to convince him to support Langston's plan to attend Columbia University. Hughes later said that, prior to arriving in Mexico: "I had been thinking about my father and his strange dislike of his own people. I didn't understand it, because I was a Negro, and I liked Negroes very much." Initially, his father had hoped for Hughes to attend a university abroad, and to study for a career in engineering. On these grounds, he was willing to provide financial assistance to his son but did not support his desire to be a writer. Eventually, Hughes and his father came to a compromise: Hughes would study engineering, so long as he could attend Columbia. His tuition provided; Hughes left his father after more than a year. While at Columbia in 1921, Hughes managed to maintain a B+ grade average. He left in 1922 because of racial prejudice, and his interests revolved more around the neighbourhood of Harlem than his studies, though he continued writing poetry.

Adulthood

Hughes worked various odd jobs, before serving a brief tenure as a crewman aboard the S.S. Malone in 1923, spending six months traveling to West Africa and Europe. In Europe, Hughes left the S.S. Malone for a temporary stay in Paris.

During his time in England in the early 1920s, Hughes became part of the black expatriate community. In November 1924, Hughes returned to the U. S. to live with his mother in Washington, D.C. Hughes worked at various odd jobs before gaining a white-collar job in 1925 as a personal assistant to the historian Carter G. Woodson at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. As the work demands limited his time for writing, Hughes quit the position to work as a busboy at the Wardman Park Hotel. There he encountered the poet Vachel Lindsay, with whom he shared some poems. Impressed with the poems, Lindsay publicized his discovery of a new black poet. By this time, Hughes's earlier work had been published in magazines and was about to be collected into his first book of poetry.

The following year, Hughes enrolled in Lincoln University, a historically black university in Chester County, Pennsylvania. He joined the Omega Psi Phi fraternity. Thurgood Marshall, who later became an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, was an alumnus and classmate of Langston Hughes during his undergraduate studies at Lincoln University.

After Hughes earned a B.A. degree from Lincoln University in 1929, he returned to New York. Except for travels to the Soviet Union and parts of the Caribbean, Hughes lived in Harlem as his primary home for the remainder of his life. During the 1930s, Hughes became a resident of Westfield, New

Jersey.

Some academics and biographers today believe that Hughes was homosexual and included homosexual codes in many of his poems, similar in manner to Walt Whitman. Hughes has cited him as an influence on his poetry. Hughes's story "Blessed Assurance" deals with a father's anger over his son's effeminacy and "queerness". To retain the respect and support of black churches and organizations and avoid exacerbating his precarious financial situation, Hughes remained closeted.

Arnold Rampersad, the primary biographer of Hughes, determined that Hughes exhibited a preference for other African-American men in his work and life. However, Rampersad denies Hughes's homosexuality in his biography. Rampersad concludes that Hughes was probably asexual and passive in his sexual relationships. He did, however show a respect and love for his fellow black man (and woman). Other scholars argue for Hughes's homosexuality: his love of black men is evidenced in a number of reported unpublished poems to an alleged black male lover.

Death

On May 22, 1967, Hughes died from complications after abdominal surgery, related to prostate cancer, at the age of 65. His ashes are interred beneath a floor medallion in the middle of the foyer in the Arthur Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem. It is the entrance to an auditorium named for him. The design on the floor covering his ashes is an African cosmogram titled Rivers. The title is taken from his poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers". Within the center of the cosmogram, above his ashes, is the line: "My soul has grown deep like the rivers".

Career

First published in The Crisis in 1921, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", which became Hughes's signature poem, was collected in his first book of poetry The Weary Blues (1926). Hughes's life and work were enormously influential during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, alongside those of his contemporaries, Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Richard Bruce Nugent, and Aaron Douglas. Except for McKay, they worked together also to create the short-lived magazine Fire!! Devoted to Younger Negro Artists.

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Hughes and his contemporaries had different goals and aspirations than the black middle class. They criticized men who were known as the midwives of the Harlem Renaissance: W. E. B. Du Bois, Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Alain LeRoy Locke, as being overly accommodating and assimilating eurocentric values and culture for social equality. Hughes and his fellows tried to depict the "low-life" in their art, that is, the real lives of blacks in the lower social-economic strata. They criticized the divisions and prejudices based on skin color within the black community. Hughes wrote what would be considered the manifesto published in The Nation in 1926,

"The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain"

The younger Negro artists who create now intend to express
our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame.

If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not,

it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too.
The tom-tom cries, and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people
are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure
doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow,
strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain
free within ourselves

Hughes was unashamedly black at a time when blackness was *démodé*. He stressed the theme of "black is beautiful" as he explored the black human condition in a variety of depths. His main concern was the uplift of his people, whose strengths, resiliency, courage, and humor he wanted to record as part of the general American experience. His poetry and fiction portrayed the lives of the working class blacks in America, lives he portrayed as full of struggle, joy, laughter, and music. Permeating his work is pride in the African-American identity and its diverse culture. "My seeking has been to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America and obliquely that of all human kind," Hughes is quoted as saying. He confronted racial stereotypes, protested social conditions, and expanded African America's image of itself; a "people's poet" who sought to reeducate both audience and artist by lifting the theory of the black aesthetic into reality. An expression of this is the poem "My People":

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.
The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people
Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

Hughes stressed a racial consciousness and cultural nationalism devoid of self-hate that united people of African descent and Africa across the globe and encouraged pride in their diverse black folk culture and black aesthetic. Hughes was one of the few black writers of any consequence to champion racial consciousness as a source of inspiration for black artists. His African-American race consciousness and cultural nationalism would influence many foreign black writers, such as Jacques Roumain, Nicolás Guillén, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Aimé Césaire. Along with the works of Senghor, Césaire, and other French-speaking writers of Africa and of African descent from the Caribbean, such as René Maran from Martinique and Léon Damas from French Guiana in South America, the works of Hughes helped to inspire the *Négritude* movement in France. A radical black self-examination was emphasized in the face of European colonialism. In addition to his example in social attitudes, Hughes had an important technical influence by his emphasis on folk and jazz rhythms as the basis of his poetry of racial pride.

In 1930, his first novel, *Not Without Laughter*, won the Harmon Gold Medal for literature. The protagonist of the story is a boy named Sandy, whose family must deal with a variety of struggles due to their race and class, in addition to relating to one another. Maxim Lieber became his literary agent, 1933–1945 and 1949–1950. Hughes's first collection of short stories was published in 1934 with *The Ways of White Folks*. These stories are a series of vignettes revealing the humorous and tragic interactions between whites and blacks. Overall, they are marked by a general pessimism about race relations, as well as a sardonic realism. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1935.

The same year that Hughes established his theater troupe in Los Angeles, he realized an ambition related to films by co-writing the screenplay for *Way Down South*. Hughes believed his failure to gain more work in the lucrative movie trade was due to racial discrimination within the industry.

In 1943, Hughes began publishing stories about a character he called Jesse B. Semple, often referred to and spelled "Simple", the everyday black man in Harlem who offered musings on topical issues of the day. Hughes seldom responded to requests to teach at colleges. In 1947, Hughes taught at Atlanta University. Hughes, in 1949, spent three months at University of Chicago Laboratory Schools as a visiting lecturer. He wrote novels, short stories, plays, poetry, operas, essays, works for children, and, with the encouragement of his best friend and writer, Arna Bontemps, and patron and friend, Carl Van Vechten, two autobiographies, *The Big Sea* and *I Wonder as I Wander*, as well as translating several works of literature into English.

During the mid-1950s and 1960s, Hughes' popularity among the younger generation of black writers varied as his reputation increased worldwide. With the gradual advancement toward racial integration, many black writers considered his writings of black pride and its corresponding subject matter out of date. They considered him a racial chauvinist. He found such writers, for instance, James Baldwin, lacking in such pride, overintellectual in their work, and occasionally vulgar.

Hughes wanted young black writers to be objective about their race, but not to scorn it or flee it. He understood the main points of the Black Power movement of the 1960s, but believed that some of the younger black writers who supported it were too angry in their work. Hughes's work *Panther and the Lash*, posthumously published in 1967, was intended to show solidarity with these writers, but with more skill and devoid of the most virulent anger and terse racial chauvinism some showed toward whites. Hughes continued to have admirers among the larger younger generation of black writers, whom he often helped by offering advice and introducing them to other influential persons in the literature and publishing communities. This latter group, including Alice Walker, whom Hughes discovered, looked upon Hughes as a hero and an example to be emulated in degrees and tones within their own work. One of these young black writers observed of Hughes, "Langston set a tone, a standard of brotherhood and friendship and cooperation, for all of us to follow. You never got from him, 'I am the Negro writer,' but only 'I am a Negro writer.' He never stopped thinking about the rest of us."

Political Views

Hughes, like many black writers and artists of his time, was drawn to the promise of Communism as an alternative to a segregated America. Many of his lesser-known political writings have been collected in two volumes published by the University of Missouri Press and reflect his attraction to Communism. An example is the poem "A New Song".

In 1932, Hughes became part of a group of black people who went to the Soviet Union to make a film depicting the plight of African Americans in the United States. The film was never made, but Hughes was given the opportunity to travel extensively through the Soviet Union and to the Soviet-controlled regions in Central Asia, the latter parts usually closed to Westerners. While there, he met African-American Robert Robinson, living in Moscow and unable to leave. In Turkmenistan, Hughes met and befriended the Hungarian polymath Arthur Koestler. Hughes also managed to travel to China and Japan before returning to the States.

Hughes's poetry was frequently published in the CPUSA newspaper and he was involved in initiatives supported by Communist organizations, such as the drive to free the Scottsboro Boys. Partly as a show of support for the Republican faction during the Spanish Civil War, in 1937 Hughes traveled to Spain as a correspondent for the Baltimore Afro-American and other various African-American newspapers. Hughes was also involved in other

Communist-led organizations like the John Reed Clubs and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights. He was more of a sympathizer than an active participant. He signed a statement in 1938 supporting Joseph Stalin's purges and joined the American Peace Mobilization in 1940 working to keep the U.S. from participating in World War II.

Hughes initially did not favor black American involvement in the war because of the persistence of discriminatory U.S. Jim Crow laws existing while blacks were encouraged to fight against Fascism and the Axis powers. He came to support the war effort and black American involvement in it after deciding that blacks would also be contributing to their struggle for civil rights at home.

Hughes was accused of being a Communist by many on the political right, but he always denied it. When asked why he never joined the Communist Party, he wrote "it was based on strict discipline and the acceptance of directives that I, as a writer, did not wish to accept." In 1953, he was called before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations led by Senator Joseph McCarthy. Following his appearance, he distanced himself from Communism and was subsequently rebuked by some who had previously supported him on the Radical Left. Over time, Hughes would distance himself from his most radical poems. In 1959 his collection of Selected Poems was published. He excluded his most controversial work from this group of poems.

Stage and Film Depictions

Hughes's life has been depicted in many stage and film productions. Hannibal of the Alps by Michael Dinwiddie and Paper Armor by Eisa Davis are plays by African-American playwrights which deal with Hughes's sexuality. In the 1989 film, Looking for Langston, British filmmaker Isaac Julien claimed Hughes as a black gay icon — Julien thought that Hughes' sexuality had historically been ignored or downplayed. In the film Get on the Bus, directed by Spike Lee, a black gay character, played by Isaiah Washington, invokes the name of Hughes and punches a homophobic character while commenting, "This is for James Baldwin and Langston Hughes." Film portrayals of Hughes include Gary LeRoi Gray's role as a teenage Hughes in the 2003 short subject film Salvation (based on a portion of his autobiography The Big Sea) and Daniel Sunjata as Hughes in the 2004 film Brother to Brother. Hughes' Dream Harlem, a documentary by Jamal Joseph, examines Hughes' works and environment.

Literary Archives

The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University holds the Langston Hughes papers (1862–1980) and the Langston Hughes collection (1924–1969) containing letters, manuscripts, personal items, photographs, clippings, artworks, and objects that document the life of Hughes. The Langston Hughes Memorial Library on the campus of Lincoln University, as well as at the James Weldon Johnson Collection within the Yale University also hold archives of Hughes' work.

Honors and Awards

1943, Lincoln University awarded Hughes an honorary Litt.D.

1960, the NAACP awarded Hughes the Spingarn Medal for distinguished achievements by an African American.

1961 National Institute of Arts and Letters.

1963 Howard University awarded Hughes an honorary doctorate.

1973, the first Langston Hughes Medal was awarded by the City College of New York.

1979, Langston Hughes Middle School was created in Reston, Virginia.

1981, New York City Landmark status was given to the Harlem home of Langston Hughes at 20 East 127th Street by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission and 127th St. was renamed Langston Hughes Place. The Langston Hughes House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

2002 The United States Postal Service added the image of Langston Hughes to its Black Heritage series of postage stamps.

2002, scholar Molefi Kete Asante listed Langston Hughes on his list of 100 Greatest African Americans.

Eserleri:

Poetry Collections

The Weary Blues, Knopf, 1926
Fine Clothes to the Jew, Knopf, 1927
The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations, 1931
Dear Lovely Death, 1931
The Dream Keeper and Other Poems, Knopf, 1932
Scottsboro Limited: Four Poems and a Play, Golden Stair Press, N.Y., 1932
Let America Be America Again, 1938
Shakespeare in Harlem, Knopf, 1942
Freedom's Plow, 1943
Fields of Wonder, Knopf, 1947
One-Way Ticket, 1949
Montage of a Dream Deferred, Holt, 1951
Selected Poems of Langston Hughes, 1958
Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz, Hill & Wang, 1961
The Panther and the Lash: Poems of Our Times, 1967
The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes, Knopf, 1994

Novels and Short Story Collections

Not Without Laughter. Knopf, 1930
The Ways of White Folks. Knopf, 1934
Simple Speaks His Mind. 1950
Laughing to Keep from Crying, Holt, 1952
Simple Takes a Wife. 1953
Sweet Flypaper of Life, photographs by Roy DeCarava. 1955
Tambourines to Glory 1958
The Best of Simple. 1961
Simple's Uncle Sam. 1965
Something in Common and Other Stories. Hill & Wang, 1963
Short Stories of Langston Hughes. Hill & Wang, 1996

Non-fiction Books

The Big Sea. New York: Knopf, 1940
Famous American Negroes. 1954
I Wonder as I Wander. New York: Rinehart & Co., 1956
A Pictorial History of the Negro in America, with Milton Meltzer. 1956
Famous Negro Heroes of America. 1958
Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP. 1962

Major Plays by Hughes

Mule Bone, with Zora Neale Hurston. 1931
Mulatto. 1935 (renamed The Barrier, an opera, in 1950)
Troubled Island, with William Grant Still. 1936
Little Ham. 1936
Emperor of Haiti. 1936
Don't You Want to be Free? 1938
Street Scene, contributed lyrics. 1947
Tambourines to glory. 1956

Simply Heavenly. 1957
Black Nativity. 1961
Five Plays by Langston Hughes. Bloomington: Indiana University Press,
1963.
Jericho-Jim Crow. 1964

Works for Children

Popo and Fifina, with Arna Bontemps. 1932
The First Book of the Negroes. 1952
The First Book of Jazz. 1954
Marian Anderson: Famous Concert Singer. with Steven C. Tracy 1954
The First Book of Rhythms. 1954
The First Book of the West Indies. 1956
First Book of Africa. 1964
Black Misery. Illustrated by Arouni. 1969, reprinted by Oxford University
Press, 1994.

50-50

I'm all alone in this world, she said,
Ain't got nobody to share my bed,
Ain't got nobody to hold my hand—
The truth of the matter's
I ain't got no man.

Big Boy opened his mouth and said,
Trouble with you is
You ain't got no head!
If you had a head and used your mind
You could have me with you
All the time.

She answered, Babe, what must I do?

He said, Share your bed—
And your money, too.

Langston Hughes

Acceptance

God in His infinite wisdom
Did not make me very wise-
So when my actions are stupid
They hardly take God by surprise

Langston Hughes

Advertisement For The Waldorf-Astoria

Fine living . . . a la carte?
Come to the Waldorf-Astoria!

LISTEN HUNGRY ONES!
Look! See what Vanity Fair says about the
new Waldorf-Astoria:

"All the luxuries of private home. . . ."
Now, won't that be charming when the last flop-house
has turned you down this winter?
Furthermore:

"It is far beyond anything hitherto attempted in the hotel
world. . . ." It cost twenty-eight million dollars. The fa-
mous Oscar Tschirky is in charge of banqueting.

Alexandre Gastaud is chef. It will be a distinguished
background for society.

So when you've no place else to go, homeless and hungry
ones, choose the Waldorf as a background for your rags--
(Or do you still consider the subway after midnight good
enough?)

ROOMERS

Take a room at the new Waldorf, you down-and-outers--
sleepers in charity's flop-houses where God pulls a
long face, and you have to pray to get a bed.

They serve swell board at the Waldorf-Astoria. Look at the menu, will
you:

GUMBO CREOLE
CRABMEAT IN CASSOLETTE
BOILED BRISKET OF BEEF
SMALL ONIONS IN CREAM
WATERCRESS SALAD
PEACH MELBA

Have luncheon there this afternoon, all you jobless.
Why not?

Dine with some of the men and women who got rich off of
your labor, who clip coupons with clean white fingers
because your hands dug coal, drilled stone, sewed gar-
ments, poured steel to let other people draw dividends
and live easy.

(Or haven't you had enough yet of the soup-lines and the bit-
ter bread of charity?)

Walk through Peacock Alley tonight before dinner, and get
warm, anyway. You've got nothing else to do.

Langston Hughes

April Rain Song

Let the rain kiss you
Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops
Let the rain sing you a lullaby
The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk
The rain makes running pools in the gutter
The rain plays a little sleep song on our roof at night
And I love the rain.

Langston Hughes

Ardella

I would liken you
To a night without stars
Were it not for your eyes.
I would liken you
To a sleep without dreams
Were it not for your songs.

Langston Hughes

As I Grew Older

It was a long time ago.
I have almost forgotten my dream.
But it was there then,
In front of me,
Bright like a sun--
My dream.
And then the wall rose,
Rose slowly,
Slowly,
Between me and my dream.
Rose until it touched the sky--
The wall.
Shadow.
I am black.
I lie down in the shadow.
No longer the light of my dream before me,
Above me.
Only the thick wall.
Only the shadow.
My hands!
My dark hands!
Break through the wall!
Find my dream!
Help me to shatter this darkness,
To smash this night,
To break this shadow
Into a thousand lights of sun,
Into a thousand whirling dreams
Of sun!

Langston Hughes

Bad Morning

Here I sit
With my shoes mismated.
Lawdy-mercy!
I's frustrated!

Langston Hughes

Bound No'th Blues

Goin' down the road, Lawd,
Goin' down the road.
Down the road, Lawd,
Way, way down the road.
Got to find somebody
To help me carry this load.

Road's in front o' me,
Nothin' to do but walk.
Road's in front of me,
Walk...an' walk...an' walk.
I'd like to meet a good friend
To come along an' talk.

Hates to be lonely,
Lawd, I hates to be sad.
Says I hates to be lonely,
Hates to be lonely an' sad,
But ever friend you finds seems
Like they try to do you bad.

Road, road, road, O!
Road, road...road...road, road!
Road, road, road, O!
On the no'thern road.
These Mississippi towns ain't
Fit fer a hoppin' toad.

Langston Hughes

Bouquet

Gather quickly
Out of darkness
All the songs you know
And throw them at the sun
Before they melt
Like snow

Langston Hughes

Brass Spittoons

Clean the spittoons, boy.
Detroit,
Chicago,
Atlantic City,
Palm Beach.
Clean the spittoons.
The steam in hotel kitchens,
And the smoke in hotel lobbies,
And the slime in hotel spittoons:
Part of my life.
Hey, boy!
A nickel,
A dime,
A dollar,
Two dollars a day.
Hey, boy!
A nickel,
A dime,
A dollar,
Two dollars
Buy shoes for the baby.
House rent to pay.
Gin on Saturday,
Church on Sunday.
My God!
Babies and gin and church
And women and Sunday
All mixed with dimes and
Dollars and clean spittoons
And house rent to pay.
Hey, boy!
A bright bowl of brass is beautiful to the Lord.
Bright polished brass like the cymbals
Of King David's dancers,
Like the wine cups of Solomon.
Hey, boy!
A clean spittoon on the altar of the Lord.
A clean bright spittoon all newly polished—
At least I can offer that.
Com'mere, boy!

Langston Hughes

Catch

Big Boy came
Carrying a mermaid
On his shoulders
And the mermaid
Had her tail
Curved
Beneath his arm.

Being a fisher boy,
He'd found a fish
To carry—
Half fish,
Half girl
To marry.

Langston Hughes

Children's Rhymes

By what sends
the white kids
I ain't sent:
I know I can't
be President.
What don't bug
them white kids
sure bugs me:
We know everybody
ain't free.

Lies written down
for white folks
ain't for us a-tall:
<i>Liberty And Justice--</i>
Huh!--<i>For All?</i>

Langston Hughes

Cross

My old man's a white old man
And my old mother's black.
If ever I cursed my white old man
I take my curses back.
If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I'm sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well
My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder were I'm going to die,
Being neither white nor black?

Langston Hughes

Cultural Exchange

In the Quarter of the Negroes
Where the doors are doors of paper
Dust of dingy atoms
Blows a scratchy sound.
Amorphous jack-o'-Lanterns caper
And the wind won't wait for midnight
For fun to blow doors down.
By the river and the railroad
With fluid far-off goind
Boundaries bind unbinding
A whirl of whistles blowing.
No trains or steamboats going--
Yet Leontyne's unpacking.

In the Quarter of the Negroes
Where the doorknob lets in Lieder
More than German ever bore,
Her yesterday past grandpa--
Not of her own doing--
In a pot of collard greens
Is gently stewing.

Pushcarts fold and unfold
In a supermarket sea.
And we better find out, mama,
Where is the colored laundromat
Since we move dup to Mount Vernon.

In the pot behind the paper doors
on the old iron stove what's cooking?
What's smelling, Leontyne?
Lieder, lovely Lieder
And a leaf of collard green.
Lovely Lieder, Leontyne.

You know, right at Christmas
They asked me if my blackness,
Would it rub off?
I said, Ask your mama.

Dreams and nightmares!
Nightmares, dreams, oh!
Dreaming that the Negroes
Of the South have taken over--
Voted all the Dixiecrats
Right out of power--

Comes the COLORED HOUR:
Martin Luther King is Governor of Georgia,
Dr. Rufus Clement his Chief Adviser,
A. Philip Randolph the High Grand Worthy.
In white pillared mansions

Sitting on their wide verandas,
Wealthy Negroes have white servants,
White sharecroppers work the black plantations,
And colored children have white mammies:
Mammy Faubus
Mammy Eastland
Mammy Wallace
Dear, dear darling old white mammies--
Sometimes even buried with our family.
Dear old
Mammy Faubus!

<i>Culture, they say, is a two-way street:</i>
Hand me my mint julep, mammny.
Hurry up!
Make haste!

Langston Hughes

Daybreak in Alabama

When I get to be a composer
I'm gonna write me some music about
Daybreak in Alabama
And I'm gonna put the purtiest songs in it
Rising out of the ground like a swamp mist
And falling out of heaven like soft dew.
I'm gonna put some tall tall trees in it
And the scent of pine needles
And the smell of red clay after rain
And long red necks
And poppy colored faces
And big brown arms
And the field daisy eyes
Of black and white black white black people
And I'm gonna put white hands
And black hands and brown and yellow hands
And red clay earth hands in it
Touching everybody with kind fingers
And touching each other natural as dew
In that dawn of music when I
Get to be a composer
And write about daybreak
In Alabama.

Langston Hughes

Deceased

Harlem
Sent him home
in a long box-
Too dead
To know why:

The lick
Was lye.

Langston Hughes

Demand

Listen!
Dear dream of utter aliveness-
Touching my body of utter death-
Tell me, O quickly! dream of aliveness,
The flaming source of your bright breath.
Tell me, O dream of utter aliveness-
Knowing so well the wind and the sun-
Where is this light
Your eyes see forever?
And what is the wind
You touch when you run?

Langston Hughes

Democracy

Democracy will not come
Today, this year
Nor ever
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right
As the other fellow has
To stand
On my two feet
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom
Is a strong seed
Planted
In a great need.

I live here, too.
I want freedom
Just as you.

Langston Hughes

Dinner Guest: Me

I know I am
The Negro Problem
Being wined and dined,
Answering the usual questions
That come to white mind
Which seeks demurely
To Probe in polite way
The why and wherewithal
Of darkness U.S.A.--
Wondering how things got this way
In current democratic night,
Murmuring gently
Over fraises du bois,
"I'm so ashamed of being white."

The lobster is delicious,
The wine divine,
And center of attention
At the damask table, mine.
To be a Problem on
Park Avenue at eight
Is not so bad.
Solutions to the Problem,
Of course, wait.

Langston Hughes

Dream Boogie

Good morning, daddy!
Ain't you heard
The boogie-woogie rumble
Of a dream deferred?

Listen closely:
You'll hear their feet
Beating out and beating out a -

You think
It's a happy beat?

Listen to it closely:
Ain't you heard
something underneath
like a -

What did I say?

Sure,
I'm happy!
Take it away!

Hey, pop!
Re-bop!
Mop!

Y-e-a-h!

Langston Hughes

Dream Variations

To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun,
To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes on gently,
Dark like me-
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide
In the face of the sun,
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!
Till the quick day is done.
Rest at pale evening...
A tall, slim tree...
Night coming tenderly
Black like me.

Langston Hughes

Dreams

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.
Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

Langston Hughes

Easy Boogie

Down in the bass
That steady beat
Walking walking walking
Like marching feet.

Down in the bass
They easy roll,
Rolling like I like it
In my soul.

Riffs, smears, breaks.

Hey, Lawdy Mama!
Do you hear what I said?
Easy like I rock it
In my bed!

Langston Hughes

Enemy

It would be nice
In any case,
To someday meet you
Face to face
Walking down
The road to hell...
As I come up
Feeling swell.

Langston Hughes

Ennui

It's such a
Bore
Being always
Poor.

Langston Hughes

Final Curve

When you turn the corner
And you run into yourself
Then you know that you have turned
All the corners that are left

Langston Hughes

Fire-Caught

The gold moth did not love him
So, gorgeous, she flew away.
But the gray moth circled the flame
Until the break of day.
And then, with wings like a dead desire,
She fell, fire-caught, into the flame.

Langston Hughes

For Selma

In places like
Selma, Alabama,
Kids say,
In places like
Chicago and New York...
In places like
Chicago and New York
Kids say,
In places like
London and Paris...
In places like
London and Paris
Kids say,
In places like
Chicago and New York...

Langston Hughes

Freedom's Plow

When a man starts out with nothing,
When a man starts out with his hands
Empty, but clean,
When a man starts to build a world,
He starts first with himself
And the faith that is in his heart-
The strength there,
The will there to build.

First in the heart is the dream-
Then the mind starts seeking a way.
His eyes look out on the world,
On the great wooded world,
On the rich soil of the world,
On the rivers of the world.

The eyes see there materials for building,
See the difficulties, too, and the obstacles.
The mind seeks a way to overcome these obstacles.
The hand seeks tools to cut the wood,
To till the soil, and harness the power of the waters.
Then the hand seeks other hands to help,
A community of hands to help-
Thus the dream becomes not one man's dream alone,
But a community dream.
Not my dream alone, but our dream.
Not my world alone,
But your world and my world,
Belonging to all the hands who build.

A long time ago, but not too long ago,
Ships came from across the sea
Bringing the Pilgrims and prayer-makers,
Adventurers and booty seekers,
Free men and indentured servants,
Slave men and slave masters, all new-
To a new world, America!

With billowing sails the galleons came
Bringing men and dreams, women and dreams.
In little bands together,
Heart reaching out to heart,
Hand reaching out to hand,
They began to build our land.
Some were free hands
Seeking a greater freedom,
Some were indentured hands
Hoping to find their freedom,
Some were slave hands
Guarding in their hearts the seed of freedom,
But the word was there always:
Freedom.

Down into the earth went the plow
In the free hands and the slave hands,
In indentured hands and adventurous hands,
Turning the rich soil went the plow in many hands
That planted and harvested the food that fed
And the cotton that clothed America.
Clang against the trees went the ax into many hands
That hewed and shaped the rooftops of America.
Splash into the rivers and the seas went the boat-hulls
That moved and transported America.
Crack went the whips that drove the horses
Across the plains of America.
Free hands and slave hands,
Indentured hands, adventurous hands,
White hands and black hands
Held the plow handles,
Ax handles, hammer handles,
Launched the boats and whipped the horses
That fed and housed and moved America.
Thus together through labor,
All these hands made America.

Labor! Out of labor came villages
And the towns that grew cities.
Labor! Out of labor came the rowboats
And the sailboats and the steamboats,
Came the wagons, and the coaches,
Covered wagons, stage coaches,
Out of labor came the factories,
Came the foundries, came the railroads.
Came the marts and markets, shops and stores,
Came the mighty products moulded, manufactured,
Sold in shops, piled in warehouses,
Shipped the wide world over:
Out of labor-white hands and black hands-
Came the dream, the strength, the will,
And the way to build America.
Now it is Me here, and You there.
Now it's Manhattan, Chicago,
Seattle, New Orleans,
Boston and El Paso-
Now it's the U.S.A.

A long time ago, but not too long ago, a man said:
ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL--
ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR
WITH CERTAIN UNALIENABLE RIGHTS--
AMONG THESE LIFE, LIBERTY
AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.
His name was Jefferson. There were slaves then,
But in their hearts the slaves believed him, too,

And silently too for granted
That what he said was also meant for them.
It was a long time ago,
But not so long ago at that, Lincoln said:
NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH
TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN
WITHOUT THAT OTHER'S CONSENT.
There were slaves then, too,
But in their hearts the slaves knew
What he said must be meant for every human being-
Else it had no meaning for anyone.
Then a man said:
BETTER TO DIE FREE
THAN TO LIVE SLAVES
He was a colored man who had been a slave
But had run away to freedom.
And the slaves knew
What Frederick Douglass said was true.

With John Brown at Harper's Ferry, Negroes died.
John Brown was hung.
Before the Civil War, days were dark,
And nobody knew for sure
When freedom would triumph
"Or if it would," thought some.
But others new it had to triumph.
In those dark days of slavery,
Guarding in their hearts the seed of freedom,
The slaves made up a song:
Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!
That song meant just what it said: Hold On!
Freedom will come!
Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!
Out of war it came, bloody and terrible!
But it came!
Some there were, as always,
Who doubted that the war would end right,
That the slaves would be free,
Or that the union would stand,
But now we know how it all came out.
Out of the darkest days for people and a nation,
We know now how it came out.
There was light when the battle clouds rolled away.
There was a great wooded land,
And men united as a nation.

America is a dream.
The poet says it was promises.
The people say it is promises-that will come true.
The people do not always say things out loud,
Nor write them down on paper.
The people often hold

Great thoughts in their deepest hearts
And sometimes only blunderingly express them,
Haltingly and stumblingly say them,
And faultily put them into practice.
The people do not always understand each other.
But there is, somewhere there,
Always the trying to understand,
And the trying to say,
"You are a man. Together we are building our land."

America!
Land created in common,
Dream nourished in common,
Keep your hand on the plow! Hold on!
If the house is not yet finished,
Don't be discouraged, builder!
If the fight is not yet won,
Don't be weary, soldier!
The plan and the pattern is here,
Woven from the beginning
Into the warp and woof of America:
ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.
NO MAN IS GOOD ENOUGH
TO GOVERN ANOTHER MAN
WITHOUT HIS CONSENT.
BETTER DIE FREE,
THAN TO LIVE SLAVES.
Who said those things? Americans!
Who owns those words? America!
Who is America? You, me!
We are America!
To the enemy who would conquer us from without,
We say, NO!
To the enemy who would divide
And conquer us from within,
We say, NO!
FREEDOM!
BROTHERHOOD!
DEMOCRACY!
To all the enemies of these great words:
We say, NO!

A long time ago,
An enslaved people heading toward freedom
Made up a song:
Keep Your Hand On The Plow! Hold On!
The plow plowed a new furrow
Across the field of history.
Into that furrow the freedom seed was dropped.
From that seed a tree grew, is growing, will ever grow.
That tree is for everybody,
For all America, for all the world.

May its branches spread and shelter grow
Until all races and all peoples know its shade.
KEEP YOUR HAND ON THE PLOW! HOLD ON!

Langston Hughes

Gods

The ivory gods,
And the ebony gods,
And the gods of diamond and jade,
Sit silently on their temple shelves
While the people
Are afraid.
Yet the ivory gods,
And the ebony gods,
And the gods of diamond-jade,
Are only silly puppet gods
That the people themselves
Have made.

Langston Hughes

Harlem [Dream Deferred]

What happens to a dream deferred?

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?

Langston Hughes

Helen Keller

She,
In the dark,
Found light
Brighter than many ever see.
She,
Within herself,
Found loveliness,
Through the soul's own mastery.
And now the world receives
From her dower:
The message of the strength
Of inner power.

Langston Hughes

I Continue To Dream

I take my dreams and make of them a bronze vase
and a round fountain with a beautiful statue in its center.
And a song with a broken heart and I ask you:
Do you understand my dreams?
Sometimes you say you do,
And sometimes you say you don't.
Either way it doesn't matter.
I continue to dream.

Langston Hughes

I Dream A World

I dream a world where man
No other man will scorn,
Where love will bless the earth
And peace its paths adorn
I dream a world where all
Will know sweet freedom's way,
Where greed no longer saps the soul
Nor avarice blights our day.
A world I dream where black or white,
Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth
And every man is free,
Where wretchedness will hang its head
And joy, like a pearl,
Attends the needs of all mankind-
Of such I dream, my world!

Langston Hughes

I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed--

I, too, am America.

Langston Hughes

In Time Of Silver Rain

In time of silver rain
The earth puts forth new life again,
Green grasses grow
And flowers lift their heads,
And over all the plain
The wonder spreads

Of Life,
Of Life,
Of life!

In time of silver rain
The butterflies lift silken wings
To catch a rainbow cry,
And trees put forth new leaves to sing
In joy beneath the sky
As down the roadway
Passing boys and girls
Go singing, too,

In time of silver rain When spring
And life
Are new.

Langston Hughes

Jazzonia

Oh, silver tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

In a Harlem cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.
A dancing girl whose eyes are bold
Lifts high a dress of silken gold.

Oh, singing tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

Were Eve's eyes
In the first garden
Just a bit too bold?
Was Cleopatra gorgeous
In a gown of gold?

Oh, shining tree!
Oh, silver rivers of the soul!

In a whirling cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.

Langston Hughes

Juke Box Love Song

I could take the Harlem night
and wrap around you,
Take the neon lights and make a crown,
Take the Lenox Avenue busses,
Taxis, subways,
And for your love song tone their rumble down.
Take Harlem's heartbeat,
Make a drumbeat,
Put it on a record, let it whirl,
And while we listen to it play,
Dance with you till day--
Dance with you, my sweet brown Harlem girl.

Langston Hughes

Justice

That Justice is a blind goddess
Is a thing to which we black are wise:
Her bandage hides two festering sores
That once perhaps were eyes.

Langston Hughes

Let America be America Again

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.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed--
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek--
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,
Tangled in that ancient endless chain
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!
Of work the men! Of take the pay!
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.
I am the worker sold to the machine.
I am the Negro, servant to you all.
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean--
Hungry yet today despite the dream.
Beaten yet today--O, Pioneers!
I am the man who never got ahead,
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,
That even yet its mighty daring sings

In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned
That's made America the land it has become.
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas
In search of what I meant to be my home--
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay--
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again--
The land that never has been yet--
And yet must be--the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine--the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME--
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose--
The steel of freedom does not stain.
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,
We must take back our land again,
America!

O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath--
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
We, the people, must redeem
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
The mountains and the endless plain--
All, all the stretch of these great green states--
And make America again!

Langston Hughes

Life Is Fine

I went down to the river,
I set down on the bank.
I tried to think but couldn't,
So I jumped in and sank.

I came up once and hollered!
I came up twice and cried!
If that water hadn't a-been so cold
I might've sunk and died.

But it was Cold in that water! It was cold!

I took the elevator
Sixteen floors above the ground.
I thought about my baby
And thought I would jump down.

I stood there and I hollered!
I stood there and I cried!
If it hadn't a-been so high
I might've jumped and died.

But it was High up there! It was high!

So since I'm still here livin',
I guess I will live on.
I could've died for love--
But for livin' I was born

Though you may hear me holler,
And you may see me cry--
I'll be dogged, sweet baby,
If you gonna see me die.

Life is fine! Fine as wine! Life is fine!

Langston Hughes

Lincoln Monument: Washington

Let's go see Old Abe
Sitting in the marble and the moonlight,
Sitting lonely in the marble and the moonlight,
Quiet for ten thousand centuries, old Abe.
Quiet for a million, million years.

Quiet-

And yet a voice forever
Against the
Timeless walls
Of time-
Old Abe.

Langston Hughes

Lonesome Place

I got to leave this town.
It's a lonesome place.
Got to leave this town cause
It's a lonesome place.
A po', po' boy can't
Find a friendly face.

Goin' down to de river
Flowin' deep an' slow.
Goin' down to de river
Deep an' slow-
Cause there ain't no worries
Where de waters go.

I'm weary, weary,
Weary, as I can be.
Weary, weary,
Weary as can be.
This life's so weary,
'S' bout to overcome me.

Langston Hughes

Love Song for Lucinda

Love
Is a ripe plum
Growing on a purple tree.
Taste it once
And the spell of its enchantment
Will never let you be.

Love
Is a bright star
Glowing in far Southern skies.
Look too hard
And its burning flame
Will always hurt your eyes.

Love
Is a high mountain
Stark in a windy sky.
If you
Would never lose your breath
Do not climb too high.

Langston Hughes

Madam and Her Madam

I worked for a woman,
She wasn't mean--
But she had a twelve-room
House to clean.

Had to get breakfast,
Dinner, and supper, too--
Then take care of her children
When I got through.

Wash, iron, and scrub,
Walk the dog around--
It was too much,
Nearly broke me down.

I said, Madam,
Can it be
You trying to make a
Pack-horse out of me?

She opened her mouth.
She cried, Oh, no!
You know, Alberta,
I love you so!

I said, Madam,
That may be true--
But I'll be dogged
If I love you!

Langston Hughes

Madam and the Census Man

The census man,
The day he came round,
Wanted my name
To put it down.

I said, Johnson,
Alberta K.
But he hated to write
The K that way.

He said, What
Does K stand for?
I said, K--
And nothing more.

He said, I'm gonna put it
KÐADY.
I said, If you do,
You lie.

My mother christened me
Alberta K.
You leave my name
Just that way!

He said, Mrs.,
(With a snort)
Just a K
Makes your name too short.

I said, I don't
Give a damn!
Leave me and my name
Just like I am!

Furthermore, rub out
That MRS., too--
I'll have you know
I'm Madam to you!

Langston Hughes

Madam and the Phone Bill

You say I O.K.ed
LONG DISTANCE?
O.K.ed it when?
My goodness, Central
That was then!

I'm mad and disgusted
With that Negro now.
I don't pay no REVERSED
CHARGES nohow.

You say, I will pay it--
Else you'll take out my phone?
You better let
My phone alone.

I didn't ask him
To telephone me.
Roscoe knows darn well
LONG DISTANCE
Ain't free.

If I ever catch him,
Lawd, have pity!
Calling me up
From Kansas City.

Just to say he loves me!
I knowed that was so.
Why didn't he tell me some'n
I don't know?

For instance, what can
Them other girls do
That Alberta K. Johnson
Can't do--and more, too?

What's that, Central?
You say you don't care
Nothing about my
Private affair?

Well, even less about your
PHONE BILL, does I care!

Un-humm-m! . . . Yes!
You say I gave my O.K.?
Well, that O.K. you may keep--

But I sure ain't gonna pay!

Langston Hughes

Madam and The Rent Man

The rent man knocked.
He said, Howdy-do?
I said, What
Can I do for you?
He said, You know
Your rent is due.

I said, Listen,
Before I'd pay
I'd go to Hades
And rot away!

The sink is broke,
The water don't run,
And you ain't done a thing
You promised to've done.

Back window's cracked,
Kitchen floor squeaks,
There's rats in the cellar,
And the attic leaks.

He said, Madam,
It's not up to me.
I'm just the agent,
Don't you see?

I said, Naturally,
You pass the buck.
If it's money you want
You're out of luck.

He said, Madam,
I ain't pleased!
I said, Neither am I.
So we agrees!

Langston Hughes

Madam's Past History

My name is Johnson--
Madam Alberta K.
The Madam stands for business.
I'm smart that way.

I had a
HAIR-DRESSING PARLOR
Before
The depression put
The prices lower.

Then I had a
BARBECUE STAND
Till I got mixed up
With a no-good man.

Cause I had a insurance
The WPA
Said, We can't use you
Wealthy that way.

I said,
DON'T WORRY 'BOUT ME!
Just like the song,
You WPA folks take care of yourself--
And I'll get along.

I do cooking,
Day's work, too!
Alberta K. Johnson--
Madam to you.

Langston Hughes

Me And The Mule

My old mule,
He's got a grin on his face.
He's been a mule so long
He's forgotten about his race.

I'm like that old mule --
Black -- and don't give a damn!
You got to take me
Like I am.

Langston Hughes

Merry-Go-Round

Where is the Jim Crow section
On this merry-go-round,
Mister, cause I want to ride?
Down South where I come from
White and colored
Can't sit side by side.
Down South on the train
There's a Jim Crow car.
On the bus we're put in the back—
But there ain't no back
To a merry-go-round!
Where's the horse
For a kid that's black?

Langston Hughes

Minstrel Man

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
And my throat
Is deep with song,
You do not think
I suffer after
I have held my pain
So long?

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
You do not hear
My inner cry?
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing,
You do not know
I die?

Langston Hughes

Morning After

I was so sick last night I
Didn't hardly know my mind.
So sick last night I
Didn't know my mind.
I drunk some bad licker that
Almost made me blind.

Had a dream last night I
Thought I was in hell.
I dremp't last night I
Thought I was in hell.
Woke up and looked around me—
Babe, your mouth was open like a well.

I said, Baby! Baby!
Please don't snore so loud.
Baby! Please!
Please don't snore so loud.
You jest a little bit o' woman but you
Sound like a great big crowd.

Langston Hughes

Mother to Son

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.
But all the time
I've been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So, boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps.
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I've still goin', honey,
I've still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Langston Hughes

Motto

I play it cool
I dig all jive
That's the reason
I stay alive
My motto
As I live and learn
Is dig and be dug in return

Langston Hughes

My People

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

Langston Hughes

Negro Dancers

'Me an' ma baby's
Got two mo' ways,
Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!
Da, da,
Da, da, da!
Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!
Soft light on the tables,
Music gay,
Brown-skin steppers
In a cabaret.
White folks, laugh!
White folks, pray!
'Me an' ma baby's
Got two mo' ways,
Two mo' ways to do de
Charleston!'

Langston Hughes

Negro Speaks of Rivers

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.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Langston Hughes

Night Funeral in Harlem

Night funeral
In Harlem:

Where did they get
Them two fine cars?

Insurance man, he did not pay--
His insurance lapsed the other day--
Yet they got a satin box
for his head to lay.

Night funeral
In Harlem:

Who was it sent
That wreath of flowers?

Them flowers came
from that poor boy's friends--
They'll want flowers, too,
When they meet their ends.

Night funeral
in Harlem:

Who preached that
Black boy to his grave?

Old preacher man
Preached that boy away--
Charged Five Dollars
His girl friend had to pay.

Night funeral
In Harlem:

When it was all over
And the lid shut on his head
and the organ had done played
and the last prayers been said
and six pallbearers
Carried him out for dead
And off down Lenox Avenue
That long black hearse done sped,
The street light
At his corner
Shined just like a tear--
That boy that they was mournin'
Was so dear, so dear
To them folks that brought the flowers,
To that girl who paid the preacher man--
It was all their tears that made

That poor boy's
Funeral grand.

Night funeral
In Harlem.

Langston Hughes

Oppression

Now dreams
Are not available
To the dreamers,
Nor songs
To the singers.

In some lands
Dark night
And cold steel
Prevail
But the dream
Will come back,
And the song
Break
Its jail.

Langston Hughes

Peace

We passed their graves:
The dead men there,
Winners or losers,
Did not care.
In the dark
They could not see
Who had gained
The victory.

Langston Hughes

Personal

In an envelope marked:
PERSONAL
God addressed me a letter.
In an envelope marked:
PERSONAL
I have given my answer.

Langston Hughes

Pierrot

I work all day,
Said Simple John,
Myself a house to buy.
I work all day,
Said Simple John,
But Pierrot wondered why.
For Pierrot loved the long white road,
And Pierrot loved the moon,
And Pierrot loved a star-filled sky,
And the breath of a rose in June.
I have one wife,
Said Simple John,
And, faith, I love her yet.
I have one wife,
Said Simple John,
But Pierrot left Pierrette.

For Pierrot saw a world of girls,
And Pierrot loved each one,
And Pierrot thought all maidens fair
As flowers in the sun.
Oh, I am good,
Said Simple John,
The Lord will take me in.
Yes, I am good,
Said Simple John,
But Pierrot's steeped in sin.
For Pierrot played on a slim guitar,
And Pierrot loved the moon,
And Pierrot ran down the long white road
With the burgher's wife one June.

Langston Hughes

Po' Boy Blues

When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
When I was home de
Sunshine seemed like gold.
Since I come up North de
Whole damn world's turned cold.

I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong.
Yes, I was a good boy,
Never done no wrong,
But this world is weary
An' de road is hard an' long.

I fell in love with
A gal I thought was kind.
Fell in love with
A gal I thought was kind.
She made me lose ma money
An' almost lose ma mind.

Weary, weary,
Weary early in de morn.
Weary, weary,
Early, early in de morn.
I's so weary
I wish I'd never been born.

Langston Hughes

Prize Fighter

Only dumb guys fight.
If I wasn't dumb
I wouldn't be fightin'.
I could make six dollars a day
On the docks
And I'd save more than I do now.
Only dumb guys fight.

Langston Hughes

Problems

2 and 2 are 4.
4 and 4 are 8.

But what would happen
If the last 4 was late?

And how would it be
If one 2 was me?

Or if the first 4 was you
Divided by 2?

Langston Hughes

Question [1]

When the old junk man Death
Comes to gather up our bodies
And toss them into the sack of oblivion,
I wonder if he will find
The corpse of a white multi-millionaire
Worth more pennies of eternity,
Than the black torso of
A Negro cotton-picker.

Langston Hughes

Quiet Girl

I would liken you
To a night without stars
Were it not for your eyes.
I would liken you
To a sleep without dreams
Were it not for your songs.

Langston Hughes

Sea Calm

How still,
How strangely still
The water is today,
It is not good
For water
To be so still that way.

Langston Hughes

Sick Room

How quiet
It is in this sick room
Where on the bed
A silent woman lies between two lovers-
Life and Death,
And all three covered with a sheet of pain.

Langston Hughes

Silence

I catch the pattern
Of your silence
Before you speak

I do not need
To hear a word.

In your silence
Every tone I seek
Is heard.

Langston Hughes

Snake

He glides so swiftly
Back into the grass-
Gives me the courtesy of road
To let me pass,
That I am half ashamed
To seek a stone
To kill him.

Langston Hughes

Songs

I sat there singing her
Songs in the dark.

She said;
'I do not understand
The words'.

I said;
'There are
No words'.

Langston Hughes

Still Here

been scared and battered.
My hopes the wind done scattered.
Snow has friz me,
Sun has baked me,

Looks like between 'em they done
Tried to make me

Stop laughin', stop lovin', stop livin'--
But I don't care!
I'm still here!

Langston Hughes

Suicide's Note

The calm,
Cool face of the river
Asked me for a kiss.

Langston Hughes

Sylvester's Dying Bed

I woke up this mornin'
'Bout half-past three.
All the womens in town
Was gathered round me.

Sweet gals was a-moanin',
"Sylvester's gonna die!"
And a hundred pretty mamas
Bowed their heads to cry.

I woke up little later
'Bout half-past fo',
The doctor 'n' undertaker's
Both at ma do'.

Black gals was a-beggin',
"You can't leave us here!"
Brown-skins cryin', "Daddy!
Honey! Baby! Don't go, dear!"

But I felt ma time's a-comin',
And I know'd I's dyin' fast.
I seed the River Jerden
A-creepin' muddy past—
But I's still Sweet Papa 'Vester,
Yes, sir! Long as life do last!

So I hollers, "Com'ere, babies,
Fo' to love yo' daddy right!"
And I reaches up to hug 'em—
When the Lawd put out the light.

Then everything was darkness
In a great ... big ... night.

Langston Hughes

The Ballad Of The Landlord

Landlord, landlord,
My roof has sprung a leak.
Don't you 'member I told you about it
Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,
These steps is broken down.
When you come up yourself
It's a wonder you don't fall down.

Ten Bucks you say I owe you?
Ten Bucks you say is due?
Well, that's Ten Bucks more'n I'll pay you
Till you fix this house up new.

What? You gonna get eviction orders?
You gonna cut off my heat?
You gonna take my furniture and
Throw it in the street?

Um-huh! You talking high and mighty.
Talk on-till you get through.
You ain't gonna be able to say a word
If I land my fist on you.

Police! Police!
Come and get this man!
He's trying to ruin the government
And overturn the land!

Copper's whistle!
Patrol bell!
Arrest.
Precinct Station.
Iron cell.
Headlines in press:
Man Threatens landlord
Tenant Held Bail
Judge Gives Negro 90 Days In County Jail!

Langston Hughes

The Blues

When the shoe strings break
On both your shoes
And you're in a hurry-
That's the blues.

When you go to buy a candy bar
And you've lost the dime you had-
Slipped through a hole in your pocket somewhere-
That's the blues, too, and bad!

Submitted by Denice Jackson

Langston Hughes

The Dream Keeper

Bring me all of your dreams,
You dreamer,
Bring me all your
Heart melodies
That I may wrap them
In a blue cloud-cloth
Away from the too-rough fingers
Of the world.

Langston Hughes

The Negro Mother

Children, I come back today
To tell you a story of the long dark way
That I had to climb, that I had to know
In order that the race might live and grow.
Look at my face -- dark as the night --
Yet shining like the sun with love's true light.
I am the dark girl who crossed the red sea
Carrying in my body the seed of the free.
I am the woman who worked in the field
Bringing the cotton and the corn to yield.
I am the one who labored as a slave,
Beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave --
Children sold away from me, I'm husband sold, too.
No safety , no love, no respect was I due.

Three hundred years in the deepest South:
But God put a song and a prayer in my mouth .
God put a dream like steel in my soul.
Now, through my children, I'm reaching the goal.

Now, through my children, young and free,
I realized the blessing deed to me.
I couldn't read then. I couldn't write.
I had nothing, back there in the night.
Sometimes, the valley was filled with tears,
But I kept trudging on through the lonely years.
Sometimes, the road was hot with the sun,
But I had to keep on till my work was done:
I had to keep on! No stopping for me --
I was the seed of the coming Free.
I nourished the dream that nothing could smother
Deep in my breast -- the Negro mother.
I had only hope then , but now through you,
Dark ones of today, my dreams must come true:
All you dark children in the world out there,
Remember my sweat, my pain, my despair.
Remember my years, heavy with sorrow --
And make of those years a torch for tomorrow.
Make of my pass a road to the light
Out of the darkness, the ignorance, the night.
Lift high my banner out of the dust.
Stand like free men supporting my trust.
Believe in the right, let none push you back.
Remember the whip and the slaver's track.
Remember how the strong in struggle and strife
Still bar you the way, and deny you life --
But march ever forward, breaking down bars.
Look ever upward at the sun and the stars.
Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers
Impel you forever up the great stairs --
For I will be with you till no white brother
Dares keep down the children of the Negro Mother.

Langston Hughes

The Negro Speaks Of Rivers

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.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Langston Hughes

The Weary Blues

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
I heard a Negro play.
Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
He did a lazy sway
He did a lazy sway
To the tune o' those Weary Blues.
With his ebony hands on each ivory key
He made that poor piano moan with melody.
O Blues!
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.
Sweet Blues!
Coming from a black man's soul.
O Blues!
In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan--
"Ain't got nobody in all this world,
Ain't got nobody but ma self.
I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
And put ma troubles on the shelf."

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.
He played a few chords then he sang some more--
"I got the Weary Blues
And I can't be satisfied.
Got the Weary Blues
And can't be satisfied--
I ain't happy no mo'
And I wish that I had died."
And far into the night he crooned that tune.
The stars went out and so did the moon.
The singer stopped playing and went to bed
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.
He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

Langston Hughes

Theme for English B

The instructor said,

Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you--
Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple?
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.
I am the only colored student in my class.
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:
hear you, hear me--we two--you, me, talk on this page.
(I hear New York, too.) Me--who?
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records--Bessie, bop, or Bach.
I guess being colored doesn't make me not like
the same things other folks like who are other races.
So will my page be colored that I write?

Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white--
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American.
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
But we are, that's true!
As I learn from you,
I guess you learn from me--
although you're older--and white--
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

Langston Hughes

To Artina

I will take you heart.
I will take your soul out of your body
As though I were God.
I will not be satisfied
With the touch of your hand
Nor the sweet of your lips alone.
I will take your heart for mine.
I will take your soul.
I will be God when it comes to you.

Langston Hughes

To Certain

You sicken me with lies,
With truthful lies.
And with your pious faces.
And your wide, out-stretched,
mock-welcome, Christian hands.
While underneath
Is dirt and ugliness,
And rotting hearts,
And wild hyenas howling
In you soul's wasteland.

Langston Hughes

Trumpet Player

The Negro
With the trumpet at his lips
Has dark moons of weariness
Beneath his eyes
where the smoldering memory
of slave ships
Blazed to the crack of whips
about thighs

The negro
with the trumpet at his lips
has a head of vibrant hair
tamed down,
patent-leathered now
until it gleams
like jet-
were jet a crown

the music
from the trumpet at his lips
is honey
mixed with liquid fire
the rhythm
from the trumpet at his lips
is ecstasy
distilled from old desire-

Desire
that is longing for the moon
where the moonlight's but a spotlight
in his eyes,
desire
that is longing for the sea
where the sea's a bar-glass
sucker size

The Negro
with the trumpet at his lips
whose jacket
Has a fine one-button roll,
does not know
upon what riff the music slips

It's hypodermic needle
to his soul
but softly
as the tune comes from his throat
trouble
mellows to a golden note

Langston Hughes

Wake

Tell all my mourners
To mourn in red --
Cause there ain't no sense
In my bein' dead.

Langston Hughes

Walkers with the Dawn

Being walkers with the dawn and morning,
Walkers with the sun and morning,
We are not afraid of night,
Nor days of gloom,
Nor darkness--
Being walkers with the sun and morning.

Langston Hughes

Wealth

From Christ to Ghandi
Appears this truth-
St. Francis of Assisi
Proves it, too:
Goodness becomes grandeur
Surpassing might of kings.
Halos of kindness
Brighter shine
Than crowns of gold,
And brighter
Than rich diamonds
Sparkles
The simple dew
Of love.

Langston Hughes

When Sue Wears Red

When Susanna Jones wears red
her face is like an ancient cameo
Turned brown by the ages.
Come with a blast of triumphets, Jesus!

When Susanna Jones wears red
A queen from some time-dead Egyptian night
Walks once again.
Blow triumphets, Jesus!

And the beauty of Susanna Jones in red
Burns in my heart a love-fire sharp like a pain.
Sweet silver triumphets, Jesus!

Langston Hughes

Will V-Day Be Me-Day Too?

Over There,
World War II.

Dear Fellow Americans,
I write this letter
Hoping times will be better
When this war
Is through.
I'm a Tan-skinned Yank
Driving a tank.
I ask, WILL V-DAY
BE ME-DAY, TOO?

I wear a U. S. uniform.
I've done the enemy much harm,
I've driven back
The Germans and the Japs,
From Burma to the Rhine.
On every battle line,
I've dropped defeat
Into the Fascists' laps.

I am a Negro American
Out to defend my land
Army, Navy, Air Corps--
I am there.
I take munitions through,
I fight--or stevedore, too.
I face death the same as you do
Everywhere.

I've seen my buddy lying
Where he fell.
I've watched him dying
I promised him that I would try
To make our land a land
Where his son could be a man--
And there'd be no Jim Crow birds
Left in our sky.

So this is what I want to know:
When we see Victory's glow,
Will you still let old Jim Crow
Hold me back?
When all those foreign folks who've waited--
Italians, Chinese, Danes--are liberated.
Will I still be ill-fated
Because I'm black?

Here in my own, my native land,
Will the Jim Crow laws still stand?
Will Dixie lynch me still

When I return?
Or will you comrades in arms
From the factories and the farms,
Have learned what this war
Was fought for us to learn?

When I take off my uniform,
Will I be safe from harm--
Or will you do me
As the Germans did the Jews?
When I've helped this world to save,
Shall I still be color's slave?
Or will Victory change
Your antiquated views?

You can't say I didn't fight
To smash the Fascists' might.
You can't say I wasn't with you
in each battle.
As a soldier, and a friend.
When this war comes to an end,
Will you herd me in a Jim Crow car
Like cattle?

Or will you stand up like a man
At home and take your stand
For Democracy?
That's all I ask of you.
When we lay the guns away
To celebrate
Our Victory Day
WILL V-DAY BE ME-DAY, TOO?
That's what I want to know.

Sincerely,
GI Joe.

Langston Hughes

Wisdom and War

We do not care-
That much is clear.
Not enough
Of us care
Anywhere.
We are not wise-
For that reason,
Mankind dies.
To think
Is much against
The will.
Better-
And easier-
To kill.

Langston Hughes