



**#3625**

## **LANGSTON HUGHES: THE DREAM KEEPER**

Grade Levels: 10-13+

58 minutes

ANNENBERG/CPB PROJECT

### **DESCRIPTION**

Biographers, friends, critics, and Hughes himself offer commentary on his life and work as a premier African-American poet and writer. Kansas-born Hughes was an influential voice for and about his race from the 1920s-1960s. Trips to Africa, Russia, and Spain enlarged his understanding of the universality of the beauty, dignity, and heritage of blacks in America. Performances of his work illustrate both his range and depth.

### **ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

#### **Subject Area: Language Arts**

- ◆ Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts
  - Benchmark: Applies reading skills and strategies to a variety of literary texts (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, supernatural tales, satires, parodies, plays, American literature, British literature, world and ancient literature) (See Instructional Goals #4, #6, #7)
  - Benchmark: Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works (See Instructional Goals #1, #3, #4, #5)

### **INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS**

1. To present a biography of Langston Hughes.
2. To dramatize selected excerpts from his poems and stories.
3. To examine his works from the perspective of critics, historians, friends, biographers and other poets.
4. To identify his style of writing and its impact on literature, poetry, journalism and the black experience.
5. To demonstrate dominant literary themes in his poetry.
6. To stimulate critical thinking in the analysis of his work in relation to his lifestyle and biographical information.
7. To motivate further reading of his work.

## VOCABULARY

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- |           |               |              |              |
|-----------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Negro  | 3. blues      | 5. benchmark | 7. patron    |
| 2. ghetto | 4. narcissism | 6. jazz      | 8. Socialist |

## BEFORE SHOWING

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1. Select a variety of Hughes's poems, plays, or writings to acquaint students with his style, subject matter and imagery.
2. Discuss briefly the history of African American people in the United States and their literary contributions.
3. Familiarize students with the works of other poets mentioned in this film including: Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Sterling Brown, James Weldon Johnson, Vachel Lindsay, and Carl Sandburg.
4. Discuss the following events in history.
  - a. The Harlem Renaissance
  - b. Harpers Ferry--John Brown
  - c. The McCarthy hearings
5. Locate a map of the world and find the following places that are discussed in this video:
  - a. Paris, France
  - b. Dakar, Senegal; Africa
  - c. Harlem, New York
  - d. Madrid, Spain
  - e. Russia



## AFTER SHOWING

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### Discussion Items and Questions

1. Describe how Langston Hughes' work changed over the course of his life and what historical occurrences affected it.
2. Describe his personality and how it is reflected in his work.
3. With what parts of the black experience did Langston concern himself?
4. Explain why he is called the "Dream Keeper."
5. Two "types" of black society are mentioned in this video: the narcissistic/escapist and the servant. Explain which group he belonged to.
6. With what subject matter did he concern himself?
  - a. How did the literary public react?
  - b. What did they prefer he write about?
7. Characterize his family life.
  - a. What were his family's views on his chosen profession?
  - b. How did the actions of his ancestors fuel his aspirations?
8. How did the making of the movie in Russia affect his career?
9. What was the impact of race on his poetry and writings?
10. Why was he considered to be greatest black American poet?

11. In the early 1950s he was called before the McCarthy hearings.
  - a. Why was he called before the committee?
  - b. What effect did the hearings have on his work?
12. The roles of the artist were described as a celebrant performer and seer. Describe Langston Hughes in these terms.
13. Describe how he used blues and jazz in his poems or how his poetry was influenced by these musical forms.
14. What duties does a writer have to the public?
15. What were the reasons that he started writing pieces other than poetry? Which was his preferred medium?
16. What kind of political "tightrope" did he walk?
17. What is a patron? What were his experiences with patrons?
18. How was Langston lucky? Who "discovered" him?
19. What effect does the image of rivers create in the black's history? Why are the rivers ancient and dusky?
20. Explain why he used so many references to Africa in his writings and poetry.



### Applications and Activities

1. Analyze the quote: "Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly."
2. Langston Hughes' central purpose in writing was, in his own words, "to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America." How do the poems in this video illustrate his attempt?
3. Discuss what his poetry tells a reader about his theory of poetry.
4. Traditional critics have not called his poetry "modernist," and yet his poetry reflects modernism in his themes, his use of the image, and style. Locate specific examples where modernism is evident in his writings.
5. Place his work in the context of black musical forms invented in Harlem in the early twentieth century.
  - a. The black poetry that he writes, can it be considered (like jazz) a new genre?
  - b. Would it be invented or derivative?
6. Characterize his poems and writings penned while he was in Madrid.
7. Research the Harlem Renaissance and the contribution that he made towards it.
8. Analyze his style and techniques.
9. Research the Civil Rights Movement.
  - a. How did this awakening of the American consciousness influence literature?
  - b. What impact did he have on the movement?
10. Construct a time line of his life to illustrate his longevity and staying power.
11. Discuss this comment: "In the case of the Negro, of course, although we've been freed for almost a hundred years, we are still not entirely by any means integrated into American democracy."

12. Obtain a copy of his literary manifesto "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." Discuss his views of race in America.
13. Many writers started out poor and unappreciated.
  - a. Why does society sometimes treat authors, artists, and actors differently than persons in other careers?
  - b. How is this evident in his life?
14. Relate how the "simple" stories gave a view of the black consciousness of the time period.
  - a. What was their original purpose?
  - b. Do those views still hold true today?
  - c. How are each man's views different yet similar?

## RELATED RESOURCES



### Captioned Media Program

- Edgar Allan Poe: Terror of the Soul #3236
- Emily Dickinson: A Certain Slant of Light #6200
- A Question of Color #3408
- Robert Frost #3651
- Sylvia Plath #3668
- We Shall Overcome: A History of the Civil Rights Movement #2695

### World Wide Web



The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and "kid-safe" sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

- **VOICES AND VISIONS SPOTLIGHT—LANGSTON HUGHES**

<http://www.learner.org/catalog/literature/vvseries/vvspot/Hughes.html>

A Web site sponsored by the publishers of this video. A short synopsis of the video, a video clip and many good links to other Internet sites.

- **LANGSTON HUGHES—THE ACADEMY OF AMERICAN POETS**

<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmID=84>

A site sponsored by the Academy of American Poets containing a short description, selected poems, bibliography and links.

- **LANGSTON HUGHES (1902 – 1967): TEACHER RESOURCE FILE**

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/hughes.htm>

A site by the Internet School Library Media Center including a bibliography, biography, criticisms, lesson plans, and e-texts.