

Langston Hughes & Poetry as Lyrics - #3

Context:

Classroom lesson, 3-4 class periods

Audience level:

Middle School

Genre and Content Overview/Rationale:

(*American literature/poetry, U.S. History, Contemporary Music*) In this lesson, students will explore the poetry of Langston Hughes and determine how music captures the essence of his poetry. Students will also examine the theme, emotion, imagery, and sensory elements present in Hughes' poetry.

Pedagogy/Instructional Approaches and Plan:

- a. The teacher will provide students with a copy of *The Weary Blues* by Langston Hughes. (The teacher may also want to use the YouTube video of this poem as an example located at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyqwwC5s4n88>. Video is 4:22 long.)
- b. Teacher will lead the class in an analysis / discussion of the poem's theme, emotion, imagery, and sensory elements. Discuss how these elements are communicated through the YouTube video performance. Ask students which modern/contemporary song would reflect the essence of this particular poem and explain their thinking.
- c. After class has shared their thoughts, divide students into small groups of 4.
- d. Provide student groups with a choice of 3-4 Langston Hughes poems. Encourage each group to brainstorm which poem they want to select for their project.
- e. After selecting their poems, groups should read, analyze, and discuss the theme, emotion, imagery, and sensory elements present in Hughes' poetry.
- f. Groups should then brainstorm a modern/contemporary song that reflects or captures the message of their selected poem. Encourage students to analyze the song's lyrics and explain how it reflects Hughes' poetry.
- g. Have groups perform and video their poem set to the selected music (similar to the YouTube video of *The Weary Blues*).

Tools & Resources:

- a. YouTube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyqwwC5s4n88> of *The Weary Blues* by Langston Hughes
- b. Copies of 3-4 other poems by Langston Hughes
 - i. <http://www.poemhunter.com/langston-hughes/> has text of 93 of Hughes' poems available online. Click on the "Poems" tab.

- ii. <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/83> has text of 13 of Hughes' poems available online. Click on the title of poem from the right hand column.
- iii. <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/langston-hughes#poet> has text of 42 of Hughes' poems available online. Click on the "Poems, Articles, & More" tab to get to the listing of poems.
- c. Graphic organizer for poem analysis **(provided below)**
- d. Video camera to record student performances
- e. Access to contemporary music

Additional Possible Resources:

- a) Langston Hughes a biography by Milton Meltzer 1968
- b) *Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks: A Reference Guide* by R. Baxter Miller 1979
- c) *The World of Langston Hughes Music: A Bibliography of Musical Settings of Langston Hughes' Works with Recordings and Other Listings* by Kenneth Neilson, 1982
- d) *Langston Hughes: Before and Beyond Harlem* by Faith Berry, 1983
- e) *Langston Hughes and the Blues* by Steven C. Tracy, 1988
- f) *Langston Hughes: Black Genius, A Critical Evaluation* edited by Therman B. O'Daniel, 1977
- g) *The Life of Langston Hughes: Vol. I 1902-194, I Too, Sing America and Vol. II 1941-1967 Dream A World* by Arnold Rampersad, 1986

Possible Extension:

- a) Create an audio/musical timeline or video to illustrate different stages of Langston Hughes' life & poetry

Poetry Analysis Graphic Organizer

