



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1991 Volume III: Afro-American Autobiography

Langston Hughes: Voice Among Voices

Curriculum Unit 91.03.01
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I. Introduction

Over the past two years, while participating in the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, I have written extensive units detailing the lives and creations of the Wright Brothers and Edward Hopper. When I set out to research these folks, I decided to read as much as possible about them from their childhood to their formative years, and then to accompany them through their great achievements. With this pattern in mind, I decided to read Langston Hughes, never realizing the monumental literary portfolio that this gentleman produced. His literary accomplishments are well represented through his poetry, his fiction, and his drama. His short stories were written utilizing a character named Jesse B. Simple, a universal, charming figure within whom we all can see a little bit of ourselves, usually in a humorous and honest capacity. His poetry often conveyed serious messages. Although his story was seldom pleasant, he told it with understanding and with hope. His novels, especially *Not Without Laughter*, created a warm human picture of Negro life in Black America. The family was very important to Langston Hughes, but so were the forces that surrounded the family—the racial discrimination, the violence of society, the unfairness of educational opportunities, and the right to share in the American dream of opportunity and freedom. It's to these high ideals of opportunity and freedom that my research and efforts will be devoted this year as my curriculum unit develops.

Originally I became interested in the Afro-American literature seminar because I wanted to learn more about the ethnic and cultural diversity of the black student population that I've worked with for more than twenty years. For most of this time, I've identified myself with these kids because of the similar poverty conditions in the neighborhoods in which we grew as young children. Mistakenly, our poverty was only a small part of the equation. Dr. Comer, in *Maggie's Dream*, states that the average immigrant family undergoes three generations of development in this country—from unskilled to moderately skilled to highly educated and highly skilled. As I am third generation Irish, my family fits very nicely into this pattern. My great grandparents sailed to this country in the late 1860's and had sons who worked in local factories. My father worked in a government factory (late in life, at the age of 42, he returned to college and graduated) and my sisters and I went to college. "Blacks, on the other hand, experienced severe cultural discontinuity and the social and psychologically damaging effects of slavery." ¹ Many families experienced the effects of three generations of exclusion and dislocation—South to North, and rural to urban. Educational opportunities which increasingly became the ticket to living-wage jobs were severely limited in proportion to the opportunities afforded to the Caucasian population. Mildred Taylor, in *Role of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, described the "Separate but Equal" theory of education in Mississippi as anything but equal. As she describes the second-hand textbooks, the

mixed-grade levels in the antiquated school house, and the curriculum that teachers were instructed to follow, the reader begins to understand the situation in a much clearer perspective.

The black child in America has had a very difficult road to success growing up in poverty, with racist social policies and attitudes, and massive disparities in educational opportunities. He continues to cry out for fairness and Langston Hughes has heard him and it's through the voice of Langston Hughes that we can all hear just how difficult it has been to grow up in Black America.

II. Overview

Langston Hughes has been accepted by people all over the world as one of the most eloquent spokesmen for the American Negro. He has written several volumes of poetry, six novels, nine books for young people, two autobiographies, many short stories and sketches, plays, photo essays, translations, lyrics for musicals and operas, radio and television scripts, recordings, and numerous articles on a variety of topics. He often writes on controversial, racial themes, portraying his people with realism. He created a Negro literature which became part of the Harlem Renaissance Movement. Because of the general interest in all facets of Negro life in the 1920's and 30's, he was able to please large elements of both the white and Negro audience.

My curriculum unit this year will focus on a varied sampling of Langston Hughes' poetry, his short stories starring his "ace-boy" Jesse B. Simple, and vignettes from *The Big Sea*, his first autobiography. Within these selections, many universal themes will be explored, especially as they relate directly to my students and myself. Growing up and living in America, racial violence and prejudice, impedes on social progress, and hope for a brighter future while "climbing a crystal staircase" will become some of our concerns.

Within the poetry section, I have chosen fourteen selections, some of which are "The Negro Mother", "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", and "Poem". Each of these poems traces Negro history through time and civilizations. Other pieces such as "Mulatto" and "Cross" approach the issues of miscegenation and the offspring of these relationships. "Merry-Go-Round" addresses Jim Crow laws, asking the question of which horse is meant for the black kid. "The South" speaks of love and hate, "Share-Croppers" of the futility of daily work in the fields, and "One-Way Ticket" of the desire to go anywhere—anywhere but the South. I have chosen other poems as well all of which will be developed later.

As for the short stories, I have fallen "in love" with Jesse B. Simple. Similarly, these short stories will be developed with a particular theme in mind. I have chosen five selections such as "Who Is Simple?," "Last Whipping," "Banquet In Honor," "Puerto Ricans," and "Fancy Free." Most of these choices are rich in humor and classic situations, often carrying a most powerful, subtle underlying message.

The Big Sea was the first of Langston's two autobiographies. His story begins in New York as he sets sail on a steamer headed for Africa in search of his Negro motherland. His journey takes him to the Canary Islands, the Azores, Dakar, Holland, Paris, Italy, Spain, and finally back to America. While in Europe, he works as a cook, a doorman, and a waiter. In Genoa, he exists as a beach bum and on his excursions he has as many adventures as a fruit cake is full of raisins and nuts. It's these adventures that will be discussed in vignettes as the story progresses.

III. Goals, Objectives and Strategies

My unit objectives are to present an overview of Langston Hughes's poetry, short stories, and his first autobiography; to read and appreciate the candid, honest and powerful creative masterpieces of this black genius; and to discuss the numerous universal themes and their subtle, underlying meanings as they highlight

the tensions, the inequities, and the hope for greater opportunity as we climb the “crystal staircase” of life. Other objectives are to dramatically improve the reading and writing skills of our students; to improve their critical thinking and inferential skills; and to challenge them with oral speaking and communication opportunities. Hopefully, my students will be motivated to excel, to develop a greater appreciation for Langston Hughes and his literary achievements, and to enjoy themselves as well.

My strategies for teaching this unit will reflect a diversified literary approach. Students will be challenged with comprehensive silent and oral readings; summarizing, finding the main idea, and context skills; analytical and inferential skills; and writing and communication skills. The poetry selections will lend themselves nicely to oral presentations and classroom discussions of their interpreted meanings. The short stories and the vignettes from *The Big Sea* will encourage lively discussions and will provide opportunities to transform these situations into dynamic classroom plays or short sketches. Throughout these writings we will highlight the dialect of Langston’s characters, their rich and candid humor, and we will analyze the mechanics of his writing and his writing style. Listening to Langston himself on his records will be quite an experience. I’m sure that the children of the city of New Haven will have *ample opportunity* to open their ears and to listen to the sweet music of Langston Hughes.

IV. Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902, spending most of his early years with his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas due to the separation of his mother and father. Before his twelfth birthday he had lived in several major cities, following his mother as she was always on the move searching for a better job, and in Mexico as well, visiting his father. But shortly past his thirteenth birthday, his grandmother died and Langston moved in with James and Mary Reed for the next two years.

In 1915, Langston was summoned to Lincoln, Illinois to live with his mother Carrie and it was here, at Lincoln’s Central School, that Langston first began to write poetry and subsequently, later that year, he was elected eighth grade class poet. After graduation Langston and his mother moved to Cleveland, Ohio to join his stepfather Homer Clark who had found a lucrative job in a steel mill. During the next four years, Langston would attend Central High School, discovering Carl Sandburg’s poetry and creating poems like Paul Dunbar’s, developing a close relationship with a Polish boy named Sartur Andrzejewski, earning recognition for track, the Yearbook, and the military training corp. Over the summers, he worked in a department store running a dumb-waiter, and as a delivery boy for a millinery shop. During the summer following his junior year, he accompanied his father to Mexico to see what the country was like—and his father as well. That summer was the most miserable that Langston had ever known. He disliked his father immensely because he was only interested in making money and he openly admitted that he hated Negroes. Langston welcomed his return to Cleveland.

Following his graduation from Central High School, Langston returned to Mexico to seek funds from his father to attend college. It was on this train journey that Langston created one of his most famous poems, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” That summer in Mexico Langston wrote a great many poems because he was constantly unhappy. Langston readily admitted that he usually created his best work when he was most depressed or miserable. When Langston approached his father for funds for college, Jim Hughes agreed to send Langston to Switzerland to study mining engineering. However, after a year had passed, and the Crisis began to publish his poetry, his father gave in and agreed to send Langston to Columbia University. However, at the end of his first year, Langston quit, broke with his father, and went off on his own. His first job was working on a truck-garden farm on Staten Island. Later that summer, he delivered flowers for an expensive florist. Shortly thereafter, he hired on as a messboy on a ship anchored at Jones Point, New York. Isolated on

this vessel, Langston began to write in earnest. That winter he wrote a poem called “The Weary Blues” about a piano player he heard in Harlem. When spring came he signed onto a boat sailing for Africa—the Africa of his dreams.

On board the *West Hasseltine*, Langston visited the Canary Islands, the Azores, and the West Coast of Africa. Returning to New York with plenty of money and a monkey named Jocko (both of which were gone shortly), he set sail again bound for Rotterdam. Following a two month cruise to Holland and back, he returned to Rotterdam, jumped ship with twenty dollars to his name and headed for Paris. While in Paris he befriended a Russian emigre dancer, moved in with her, and eventually became a cook and then a waiter at *Le Grand Duc Cafe*. One month later he fell in love with Anne Marie Coussey, but this relationship was discouraged by Anne’s family and she was strongly persuaded to return to England.

In July, *Le Grand Duc* closed for renovations and Langston joined two other employees, Luigi and Romero, on their vacation to Italy. There Langston passed a month of celebrations as a celebrity guest because as long as anyone could remember there had never been a Negro in their villages. Later that month, Langston visited Venice, and on a train trip to Genoa he had his pocket picked, forcing him to live as a beach comber while waiting for a job opportunity on a vessel bound for America.

It was during this time period that Langston created “I, Too” because even in Italy, the American color line of prejudice reared its ugly head! Several American boats came into port but until a ship came along with an all-colored crew, Langston was detained. Finally Langston was hired to chip decks and wash paint in return for his steerage to America.

In November, 1924, Langston returned from Europe to live with his mother in Washington, D.C. To earn a living in Washington he hawked advertising space for the *Washington Sentinel*, worked in a wet-wash laundry, an oyster house, and as a clerical assistant to Dr. Carter G. Woodson. Because the clerical work hurt his eyes, Langston quit Dr. Woodson’s position and took a job as a busboy in the *Wardman Park Hotel* where he had the opportunity to meet Vachel Lindsay and to share three of his poems: “Jazzonia,” “Negro Dancers,” and “The Weary Blues.” Lindsay gave Langston careful advice and strong encouragement.

In 1925, *Opportunity Magazine* awarded Langston first prize for “The Weary Blues.” It was at this banquet in New York that he met Carl Van Vechten who would introduce his poetry to Alfred Knopf. Shortly thereafter, all sorts of good things began to happen. In 1926, Langston’s first book, *The Weary Blues*, was published. At Christmas in 1925, Langston received a scholarship to attend Lincoln University, from a sympathetic woman in New York—a woman who liked his poetry.

During the next four years, Langston would attend college, begin to publish his first short stories, and to “enjoy the gay and sparkling life of the so-called Negro Renaissance of the 20’s, especially the Saturday night house rent parties and those given by A’lelia Walker—the greatest Harlem party giver ever. In the summer of 1926, Langston wrote a poem called “Mulatto” that he worked harder on than any he had ever written. In 1927, *Fine Clothes to the Jew* was published and although it was well received by the literary magazines, the Negro critics attacked the book as a disgrace to the race. Ten years later, however, many of the poems contained in this book were being used in Negro schools and colleges.

Following his junior year at Lincoln, Langston wrote his first novel *Not Without Laughter*. He said that the ideas had been in his head for a long time and that it was amazing just how alive his characters became. In his senior year, he re-read and re-worked his novel and as summer approached, he still wasn’t happy. One year later it was published, although Langston felt that it still needed more work. In that same year, Langston won

the Harmon award for literature and later traveled to Haiti. He said that he “needed sun.”

Langston Hughes’s life was filled with a wide variety of rich experiences. His travels took him to Mexico, Harlem, Africa, Europe, the West Indies, Asia and all across America. He continued writing until he was hospitalized in March, 1967. On May 22, 1967, Langston Hughes died. His work and his spirit will live on forever!

V. Poetry Selection

Within the content of my curriculum unit, I have chosen fourteen poems which seek to develop various universal themes which became the platform for Langston to convey his messages. As he created his individual pieces, he sought to portray his people with a strong sense of realism. He often wrote on controversial, racial topics but he wrote in such a way as to please large elements of both the white and Negro audiences.

In “The Negro Mother,” Langston extols the black woman as the hope of the race. She was the one that they stole three hundred years ago from Africa’s land. She was the woman who worked in the fields, the one that they beat and mistreated, and sold her children as well. But she is nourishing “a dream that nothing could smother, deep in my breast—the Negro mother.” And it’s through her children that the Negro mother can finally realize her dream.

Langston tells us that “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” was written just outside of St. Louis on a train as he was headed to Mexico to visit his father. In this poem, Hughes emphasizes the dignity and the sensitivity of the Negro as he recounts the Negro life in ancient African civilizations and in America. “A man-child is born, soft-spoken, almost casual, yet noble and proud, and black as Africa. The muddy river is his race, the primal source out of which he is born anew; on that ‘muddy-bosom’ of the race as black mother, or grandmother, he rests secure forever.”² Three years later Langston would dedicate this poem to W.E. DuBois who was said to be quite touched by such a gesture.

“Proem,” later entitled “Negro,” was written in Mexico early in Langston’s career. In this poem, following the tradition of Walt Whitman, the “I” of the speaker refers not only to Hughes but to the whole Negro race. In “Poem,” Hughes describes four roles that the Negro has played throughout the history of civilization: a slave, a worker, a singer, and a victim. He stresses a strong sense of black history and dignity rooted in “the depths of my Africa.”

In his autobiography, *The Big Sea*, Langston remarks that he worked harder on a poem called “Mulatto” than on anything else that he had ever written. It was a poem that lodged a strong protest against the tragedy of mixed blood relations. “It was a poem about white fathers and Negro mothers in the South.”³

As a young man, Langston “had been intrigued with the problem of those so-called ‘Negroes’ of immediate white-and-black blood, whether they were white enough to pass for white or not. The problem of mixed blood in America is, to be sure, a minor problem, but a very dramatic one—one parent in the pale of the black ghetto and the other able to take advantage of all the opportunities of American democracy.”⁴ The provocative “Cross” deals with such a tragic mulatto theme, ultimately filling the author’s own fate with despair. This ballad was later developed into a major short story, a Broadway play, and an opera.

Through the voice of a small child, Langston expresses the heartbreak of racial discrimination. In “Merry-Go-Round”, he presents the baffling problem a little girl faces at the carnival as to her understanding of the

South's "Jim Crow" laws—"Where's the horse for a kid that's black?" On an adult level, Hughes continues his protest in a poem entitled "The South." It was this South that turned the Negro towards the North, especially to Chicago and to New York. Throughout the poem, Hughes attacks the evils of the "Jim Crow" system. In "Share-Croppers" and "One-Way Ticket," Langston discusses the futility of working the fields and the necessity of leaving Dixie to go anywhere—anywhere but the South.

For this writer, "Mother to Son" provided the impetus to address the research to develop this unit. In our basal reading textbooks, it was this poem that introduced me to Langston Hughes, truly a black genius. The dialect in the poem allows a humble black woman to speak nobly of her cause, her pride in her African heritage, and her personal pride to her family.

"One of Hughes's best poems 'Dream Variations' (in *Current Opinion*, September, 1924) excellently expresses the unnaturalness of prejudice." ⁵ In this work, he affirms his kinship with Africans while making subtle racial references to "white day" and "black like me." He also shares a longing for this dreamy place of love, relaxation and warmth.

"Brass Spittoons" is one of Hughes's most eloquent works involving the uneducated Negro. Having worked as a young boy at a white hotel in Lawrence cleaning and shining brass spittoons for fifty cents a week, Langston drew upon his personal experiences. Hughes has identified this poem as "one of the poems I like best." ⁶

In "I, Too," the author expresses hope that Americans will eventually accept the Negro not only for his strength but also for his beauty. Langston created this poem as he was waiting for working opportunities in Genoa as one white sailor after another found passage as he was left behind. "Even way over there, the American color line stretched out its inconvenient prejudices." ⁷

In the summer of 1920, Langston Hughes created one of his most powerful poems. "It was a poem about a working man who sang the blues all night and then went to bed and slept like a rock. That was all. And it included the first blues verse I'd ever heard way back in Lawrence, Kansas, when I was a kid." ⁸ Hughes worked to link the blues to formal poetry. The poem emphasized the roots of the African-American experience, the vaudeville blues and pride in one's creativity. "More than two years would pass before he offered it publicly; then 'The Weary Blues' would open the door to his entire adult career as a published writer." ⁹

VI. Short Story Selections

In the 1930's, Langston began to write a variety of short stories which were published in magazines such as *Esquire* and *Opportunity*, and in 1934 in a novel entitled *The Ways of the White Folks*. As he writes in his autobiography, *The Big Sea*, "Life is a big sea full of many fish. I let down my net and pulled." ¹⁰ As Langston's writing career began to flourish, he began to explore a wide venue of opportunities in which to spread his gospel. His short stories provided just that kind of platform. In these, he was able to discuss themes related to pride and prejudice, racial discrimination, lack of equal opportunity, and the ironies of black life to name just a few. These themes were developed, usually in a humorous and honest capacity. His underlying messages were subtle but powerful. Having read a great many of these stories, I found myself at many different emotional levels—sometimes laughing, sometimes moved to tears, almost always totally immersed in the author's realm of thought. Langston had the ability to make his characters come alive and his "ace-boy" Jesse B. Simple is just such a character. Simple is an average Negro who adores Jackie Robinson and respects Ralph Bunche. He has a strong distaste for white people who abuse him just because he is black. On the other hand, he pulls no punches with Negroes who are nasty to him such as his landlady. He is remembered more for his

“ordinariness” rather than for anything else. Simple was often referred to as the author’s mouthpiece “who once he got his hands on your lapels, never let go, a hilarious black Socrates of the neighborhood saloons who would at the drop of his hat discourse on anything from marital relations to international relations, lynching to lexicography, the foibles of mankind and the follies of womankind. Whatever it was, Simple had the shrewd and loony answer.” ¹¹ I loved these stories, and I hope that my students will too.

“Who is Simple?” introduces all of us to a charming, wonderful character who lives in Harlem and wonders and laughs “at the numerous problems of white folks, colored folks, and just folks—including himself.” ¹² He tells his tales in a humorous way, usually with a glass of beer nearby. In an amazing sort of way, we can all see a bit of ourselves or someone we know in Simple’s stories and we come away from these experiences understanding ourselves in a clearer light. Simple just tells it like it is.

“Banquet in Honor” highlights the theme of supporting the young and struggling artists as they seek to be creative, as they develop their crafts of writing, painting, singing and dancing. The author creates a situation in which Simple and his girlfriend Joyce attend a banquet designed to honor an elderly gentleman of the arts. However, when the guest of honor speaks from the dais, he lambasts the audience for their non-support of his work during his lifetime and tells them that if they really wish to honor him, then they should support the young beauties of the Negro race by buying the items that they are creating. Clearly this piece will move the reader to laughter but it will also leave the reader with a clear understanding of the necessity to help support one’s cause.

“Last Whipping” is a story about love of family, respect for your elders, and caring for the people who care for you. Simple tells us about his Aunt Lucy, who raised him after his mother died, who is forced to whip Jesse for stealing one of her prized pullet hens—a hen that Jesse gave to a girl for a Sunday School picnic. When Simple hears that he’s going to be whipped, he resists because he’s a man, going on seventeen and big as an ox. But when his Aunt begins to cry, saying things like she thinks she’s failed in raising Jesse to be good, Jesse submits to the whipping and promises to behave himself. He tells us that “from that day to this, I have tried to behave myself.” ¹³ That was his last whipping!

In the short story “Puerto Ricans,” Langston raises the issue of “Jim Crow” laws and the different attitudes of Americans in regards to men of color—blacks, Spanish and other foreign races. Simple remarks, “Why does a language, be it pig Latin or Spanish, make all that much difference?” ¹⁴ The author creates a hypothetical situation in a Virginia hotel that demonstrates the racial discrimination to a black man but not to the same man if he was perceived to be Spanish based on his language. Simple points out that if he was an artist and could draw, he would create a whole series of comic books that would show the funny way that white folks behave in America to Negroes. He says that he would make his books in both English and Spanish so that the Puerto Ricans could have a good laugh too.

“Fancy Free” discusses the themes of freedom and flight, and the need to escape the persecution of “Jim Crow” laws. The author delights in a discussion of good old-fashioned Southern cooking of collard greens and chitterlings, sweet watermelon with coal black seeds, buttermilk, cornbread and baby onions. While he’s indulging in this fancy wishing of delicacies, he also wishes that he could be a bird, an ugly one at that, who could fly anywhere he wished without fears of being caught or caged. He would fly right over towns and cities, paying no mind to “For White Only” signs and he would fly everywhere that Jackie Robinson went. He readily admits that he would probably get lonely without Joyce and he would miss his friends too. Maybe being as free as a bird is not all it’s cracked up to be.

VII. Vignettes of *The Big Sea*

The Big Sea opens with Langston throwing all the books that he had read at Columbia, and then some, over the rail of the S.S. Malone as far as he could as if he was shedding the shackles of conventional learning. This symbolic gesture represented everything that was unpleasant in his life—the memory of his father, the poverty of his mother, the fear of not finding work, and the problems of color prejudices. At that very moment on the open deck, just “Beyond Sandy Hook,” Langston became a man, ready to search for his true identity.

As the story continues, Langston arrives in Africa. “My Africa, Motherland of the Negro peoples! And me a Negro! Africa! The real thing to be touched and seen, not merely read about in a book.”¹⁵ But, ironically, the Africans looked at Langston and would not believe that he was a Negro. In fact, “they only laughed at me and shook their heads and said: You, white man! You, white man!”¹⁶ Langston readily admitted that that was the only place in the world that he was ever called a white man.

When Langston was going on thirteen, there was a big revival at his Auntie Reed’s church and his Aunt had determined that the time had come for young Langston to be saved. The preacher had preached a wonderful sermon and one by one each youngster jumped up and went to Jesus. Finally, Langston was the only one left waiting for the Lord to come; subsequently, to save his aunt from any further embarrassment, Langston rose amid thunderous Amens. That night Langston went to bed crying—crying because he had lied.

In the next twelve years, Langston would travel to Ohio, Mexico, New York, Africa and Europe and upon returning from Europe he would join his mother in Washington to live with the “high-class branch” of their family. It was at this juncture that he was introduced to the “better class” Washington colored people who drew rigid color lines between themselves and the Negro who was forced to work with his hands and did not have college degrees. “They were on the whole as unbearable and snobbish a group of people as I have ever come in contact with anywhere.”¹⁷ Later that same year, “The New Negro,” a literary club in Washington, invited Langston to read some of his poetry. They also invited his mother to see him honored. On the evening of the dinner, Langston came home to find his mother reduced to tears. It seems that a member of that prestigious club had called Mrs. Hughes and assumed that since she didn’t have a formal evening gown that she should stay home. Langston didn’t go either!

During his college years at Lincoln University, Langston created his novel, *Not Without Laughter*. For the purpose of his book, he created a typical Negro family in Kansas, dwelling upon some of his childhood experiences. He wrote most of the book during the summer of his junior year, rewriting chapters and sketches in the following two years. His characters would come alive for him as he was writing and creating. “That night when Harriett ran away to join the carnival was almost more than I could stand. I knew that I would miss her.”

VIII. Conclusion

As my curriculum unit is coming to a close, I will begin to miss the reading and writing experiences that I have immensely enjoyed over the past few months, just as Langston began to miss Harriett. However, as September approaches and each September following, Langston will come alive once again for my students and for me. It’s really something nice to look forward to.

IX. Lesson Plans

1. Reading poetry, short stories and vignettes of *The Big Sea* for comprehension, details main ideas, critical thinking and inferential skills, and drawing conclusions.

Students will be challenged with oral and silent readings to seek out the various universal themes within Langston Hughes's literature and to begin to understand their subtle, underlying messages. Within the context of each reading, students will be motivated to excel, to participate frequently in oral and written communication exercises, and to develop a greater appreciation for Langston Hughes and his literary accomplishments.

2. Oral Speaking

After having read a wide selection of Langston's poetry, students will have the opportunity to select an individual piece to memorize and subsequently to present to the class. Following these presentations, the class members will be encouraged to discuss their perceptions of the oral presentation, both in terms of context and the manner of oral presentation. These activities will encourage all students to take an active role in our classroom discussions.

3. Book Reports

Individual students, utilizing *The Big Sea*, *I Wonder As I Wander*, and *Not Without Laughter* will be encouraged to prepare chapter summaries each evening as they work through their assignments. Within the context of each chapter, students will be challenged with a variety of reading skills while maintaining a chronological sequence of events and the circumstances surrounding these events. The preparation of these chapter summaries will culminate with a comprehensive overview and a critique of their selection, both in oral and written format.

4. Recordings

As a culminating activity, students will have the opportunity to listen to the "sweet music" of Langston Hughes. An MGM L.P. record entitled "The Weary Blues and Other Poems" was created in 1958 with jazz background provided by Charles Mingus and other talented musicians. It shall be quite a treat for all of us.

Notes

1. Comer, James, *Maggie's American Dream* , 1989. pg. 213.
2. Rampersad, Arnold. *The Life of Langston Hughes* , 1986. pg. 40.
3. Hughes, Langston. *The Big Sea* , 1940. pg. 262.
4. Hughes, Langston. IBID. pg. 262-3.
5. Emmanuel, James. *Langston Hughes* , 1967. pg. 80.
6. Hughes, Langston. IBID. pg. 264.
7. Hughes, Langston. IBID. pg. 197.
8. Hughes, Langston. IBID. pg. 215.
9. Rampersad, Arnold. IBID. pg. 66.
10. Hughes, Langston. IBID. pg. 335.
11. O'Daniel, Therman. *Langston Hughes Black Genius* , 1968. pg. 15.
12. Hughes, Langston. *The Best of Simple* . 1961. pg.VIII.

13. Hughes, Langston. IBID. pg. 78.
14. Hughes, Langston. IBID. pg. 217.
15. Hughes, Langston. IBID. pg. 10.
16. Hughes, Langston. IBID. pg. 10.
17. Hughes, Langston. IBID. pg. 305.

X. B. Chronology of Important Events in The Life of Langston Hughes

1902 James Langston Hughes born February 1, in Joplin, Missouri, to Carrie Langston Hughes and James Nathaniel Hughes.

1902-1914 Lived in Mexico, Missouri, and Kansas for short periods with his mother and father, then, after they separated, with his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas.

1914 Moved from Lawrence to join his mother and stepfather in Lincoln, Illinois

1916 Elected class poet for grammar school graduation at Lincoln. Moved from Lincoln to Cleveland, Ohio.

1920 Chosen editor of Central High School Yearbook, Cleveland. Graduated from Central High School.

1921 Published juvenile poetry in *The Brownie's Book* . "A Negro Speaks of Rivers" published in *The Crisis*. Entered Columbia University in New York.

1922 Left Columbia to take assorted jobs in New York area.

1923 Employed as cook's helper on tramp steamer to Africa and Europe.

1924 Employed as cook in Paris night club. Returned from Europe to live with his mother in Washington, D.C.

1925 Won first prize for poetry in *Opportunity* contest. Won second prize for essay and third prize for poetry in *The Crisis* contest. Met Carl Van Vechten who introduced his poetry to Alfred Knopf.

1926 Entered Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. *Weary Blues* published.

1927 *Fine Clothes to the Jew* published.
1929 Graduated from Lincoln University.
1930 *Not Without Laughter* published. Won Harmon award for literature. Traveled to Haiti.
1931 Conducted poetry reading tour in the South and West.
1932 Traveled to Russia
1933 Returned to California from Russia by way of Japan. Spent year writing at Carmel by the Sea.
1934 *Ways of White Folks* published.
1935 Received Guggenheim Fellowship.
1937 Traveled to Spain as correspondent for *Baltimore Afro-American* .
1940 *The Big Sea* published.
1941 Received Rosenwald Fellowship.
1942 *Shakespeare in Harlem* published.
1943 Granted Hon. Litt. D. from Lincoln University.
1947 *Fields of Wonder* published.
1947-1948 Appointed Visiting Professor of Creative Writing at Atlanta University.
1949-1950 Appointed Poet in Residence at the Laboratory School, University of Chicago.
1950 *Simple Speaks His Mind* published.
1951 *Montage on a Dream Deferred* published.
1952 *Laughing to Keep From Crying* published. *First Book of Negroes* published.
1953 Received Ainsfeld-Wolfe Award (Best book of year on race relations. *Simple Takes a Wife* published.
1954 *Famous American Negroes* published.
1955 *Sweet Flypaper of Life* published.
1956 *I Wonder As I Wander* published.
1958 *Tambourines to Glory* published.
1959 *Selected Poems* published.
1960 Received Springarn Medal. *African Treasury* published.
1961 *Ask Your Mama* published.
1962 *Flight For Freedom* published.
1963 *Five Plays* published.
1964 Granted Hon. Litt. D. from Western Reserve.
1965 *Simple's Uncle Sam* published.
1967 *Black Magic: A Pictorial History of the Negro in American Entertainment* published.
1967 May 22, Langston Hughes dies.
1969 *Black Magic* published. *Don't You Turn Back* published.
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Poetry Selections of Langston Hughes

1. "The Negro Mother"
2. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"
3. "Poem" ("Negro")
4. "Mulatto"
5. "Cross"
6. "Merry-Go-Round"
7. "The South"
8. "Share-Croppers"
9. "One-Way Ticket"
10. "Mother To Son"
11. "Dream Variations"
12. "Brass Spittoons"
13. "I, Too"
14. "The Weary Blues"

Short Story Selections of Langston Hughes

1. "Who is Simple?"
2. "Banquet in Honor"
3. "Last Whipping"
4. "Puerto Ricans"
5. "Fancy Free"

Vignettes of The Big Sea

1. "Beyond Sandy Hook"
2. "Negro"
3. "Salvation"
4. "Washington Society"
5. "Not Without Laughter"

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