

UNIT 5 Progress & Conflict
Early Twentieth Century 1910–1929



AUTHOR FOCUS:
LANGSTON HUGHES

with Jim Soto

SPEAK YOUR MIND

Discrimination.

Not necessarily a bad thing...
until it touches you.

Have you been excluded from a group? How did it make you feel?

What, if anything, did you do about it? Why?

Take a minute to consider, answer and explain the question in your notebook.

THE JAZZY POET

Langston Hughes, a prominent poet, novelist, and playwright during the Harlem Renaissance, was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902, but was raised in Kansas. He began writing poetry at a young age and later attended Lincoln University, where he studied literature. He published his first book, "The Weary Blues," in 1926, that include the two poems that follow, "I, Too, Sing America" and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers."





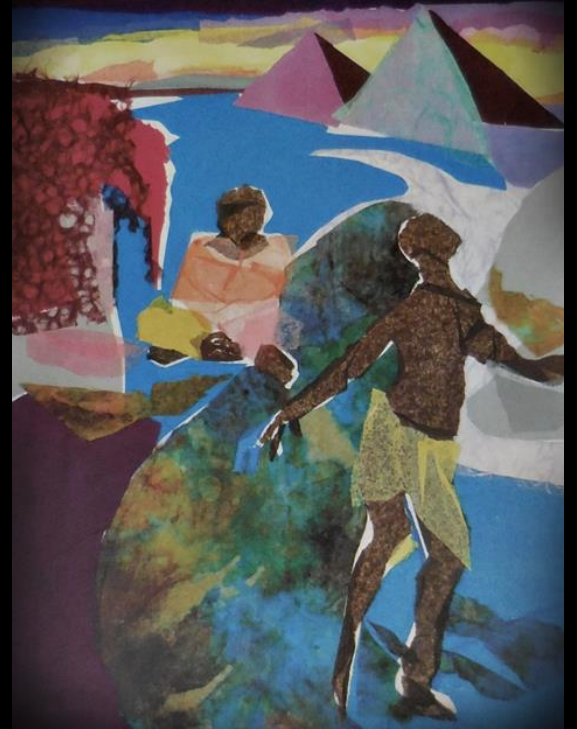
Hughes used jazz rhythms and Black vernacular in his poetry, which helped to redefine the parameters of modern poetry. He published several volumes of poetry, including: "The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations," and "Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz." His work dealt with themes of poverty, racism, and the struggles of working-class Blacks.



Hughes, a social activist, fought for civil rights. He used his craft to speak out against racism and injustice, and was often a vocal critic of the treatment of African Americans by the government. His legacy as a writer and activist is still felt today, with his work still widely studied. His contributions helped to pave the way for new generations of African American writers and poets.

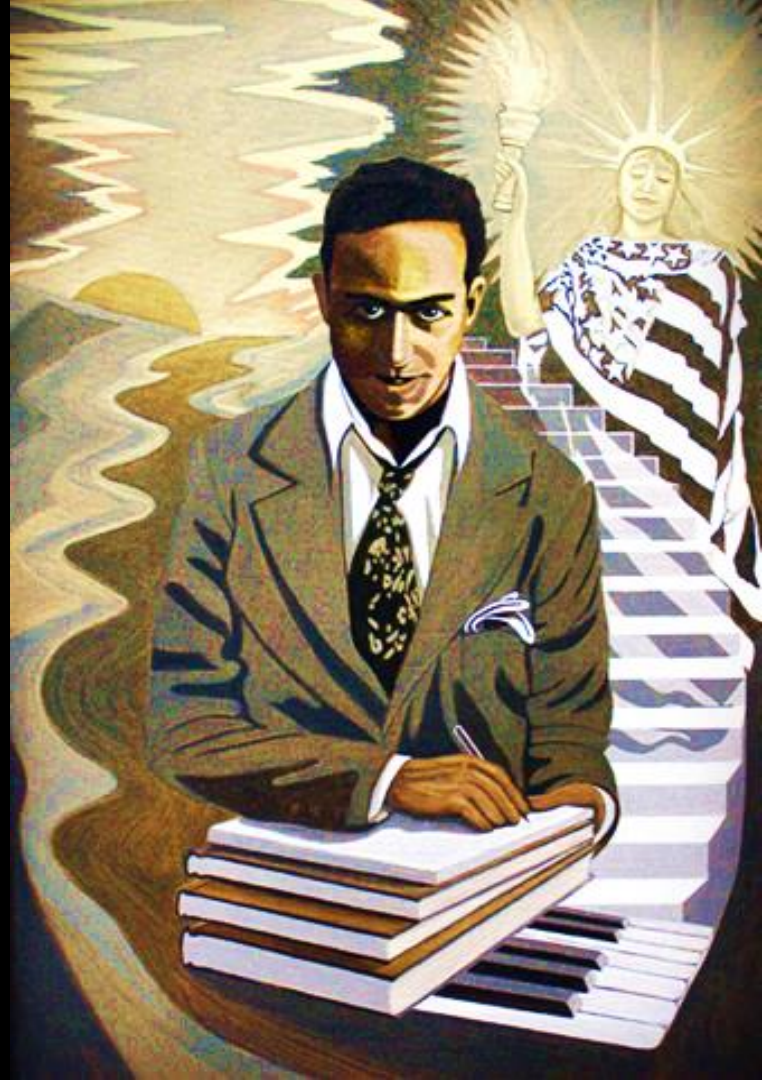
THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS

It was first published in 1921. This poem traces the historic journey of Blacks through the world's rivers, starting in the Middle East, the birthplace of civilization, and ending in the American South. Although written in the first person, the speaker in the poem is not presumed to be Hughes but rather an omniscient observer who describes the proud heritage and enduring strength of the African-American people.



I, TO, SING AMERICA

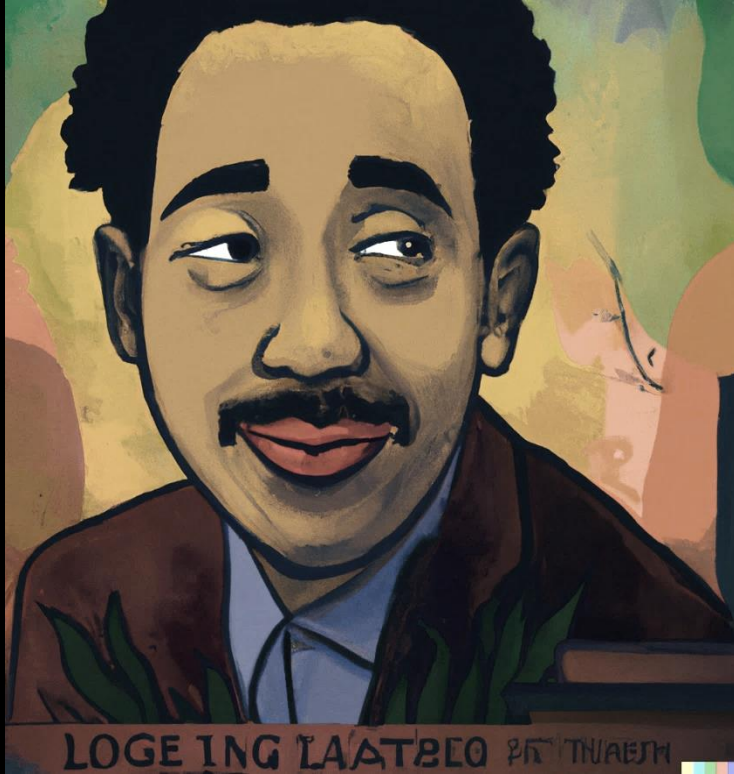
Hughes's admiration for Walt Whitman is reflected in "I, Too, Sing America," written as a response to Whitman's "I Hear America Singing". In Whitman's poem, the speaker praises the various voices of the ordinary people he meets, but in Hughes's poem, the speaker decries the bigotry Blacks suffer and looks to a future time when all Americans will be treated equally. Hughes wrote this poem after being denied passage on a ship. Guess what for...



Langston Hughes lent a voice to African Americans that still resonates today. In the following poems, he expresses both pride in African Americans' heritage and frustration over their history of discrimination. As you read, characterize the speaker in each poem. Think about how the speaker's perspective might differ from that of the author. Also compare and contrast the tones of the poems. Again, think about how the attitude conveyed by the poem relates to Hughes's experience and perspective.



LITERARY ELEMENTS



Speaker

Is the character who speaks in, or narrates, a poem—the voice assumed by the writer. The speaker and the writer of the poem are not necessarily the same person, however.

Tone

Refers to the emotional attitude toward the reader or toward the subject implied by a literary work.

ASSESSMENT

After reading pages 424-430 in your book, complete the activities:

1. REFER TO TEXT &
2. REASON WITH TEXT
3. & ANALYZE LITERATURE
 - **Speaker and Tone** - What qualities do you infer about the speaker in each poem? How are the speakers in the two poems alike and different? How is each speaker's perspective different from or similar to that of the author? Use the poems to support your analysis. What attitude is implied in each poem? How does the tone of each poem compare to that of Hughes's autobiography, "When the Negro Was in Vogue"? How does Hughes's own experience and perspective reflect in his writing?



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