

Langston Hughes

Author

James Mercer Langston Hughes was born in 1902 in Joplin, Missouri, and was raised by his grandmother, Mary Langston. He received his college education at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and also studied at Columbia University from 1921 to 1922. During his time at Columbia, his first poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” was published by *Crisis* magazine.

During the 1920s, Hughes continued to live in New York City and gained acclaim during the Harlem Renaissance, when he became known as the “Poet Laureate of Harlem.” His unique style of writing was a major influence on many other black writers.

After New York City, Hughes lived in Paris. He later returned to the United States and resided in Washington, D.C. While in Washington, Hughes worked as a busboy and once left three of his poems next to American poet Vachel Lindsay’s plate. Lindsay read the poems, quickly realized Hughes’s talent, and assisted in getting his work publicized.

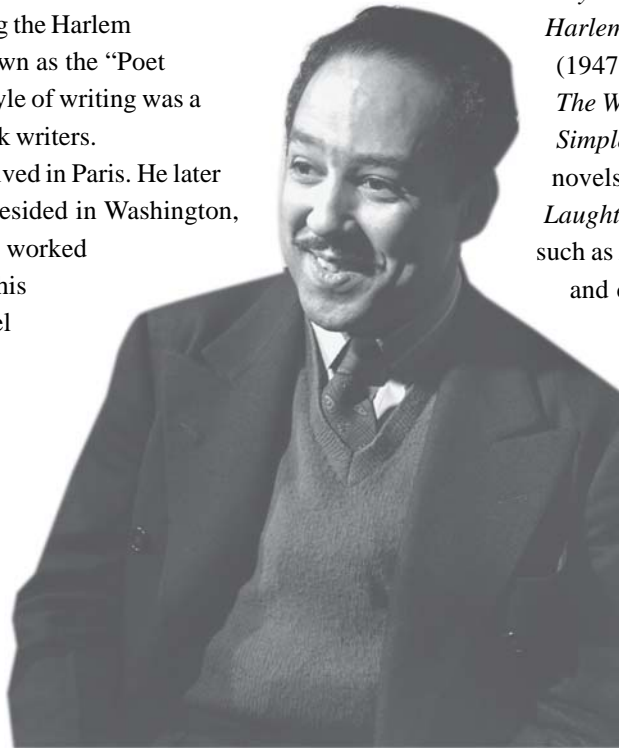
Hughes was a political and social activist. Starting in the 1930s, he began using his poetry to convey ideas of social protest. He also traveled to many places, such as the U.S.S.R., Haiti, and Japan. In

addition, during the Spanish Civil War from 1936-1939, he was employed as the Madrid correspondent for a Baltimore newspaper.

Hughes was a prolific writer. He wrote *Mulatto*, a drama that was performed on Broadway 373 times, and he also authored over 50 books. Some of his most notable writings include the following: poetry works *Weary Blues* (1926), *Shakespeare in Harlem* (1942), and *Fields of Wonder* (1947); collections of short stories *The Ways of White Folks* (1934) and *Simple Speaks His Mind* (1950); novels including *Not Without Laughter* (1930); autobiographies such as *I Wonder as I Wander* (1957); and children’s books such as

Black Misery (1969). One of the most comprehensive works of his poetry, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, was published in 1994.

Langston Hughes died in 1967, but his writing lives on today.



Activities

1. Find two poems by Langston Hughes. What is the message that is conveyed in most of his poems?
2. Write a poem to protest an injustice you think is going on in society.