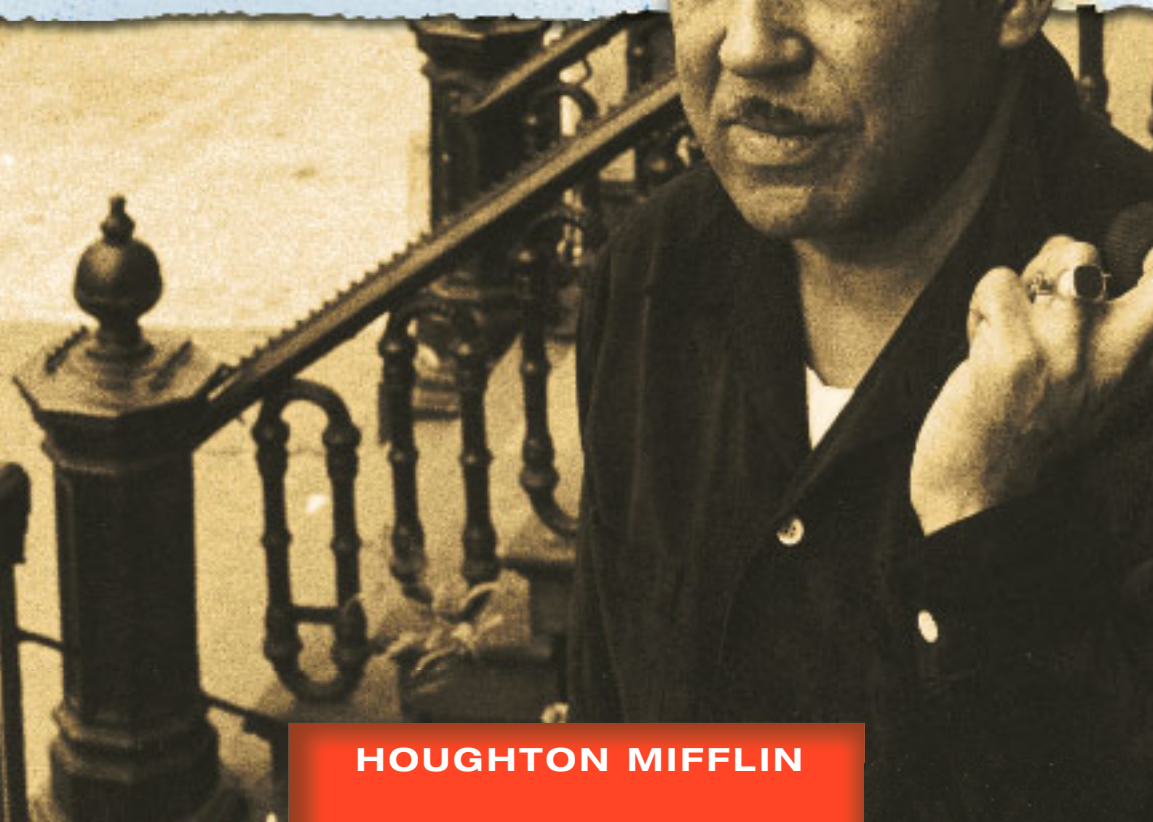


# The Life of LANGSTON HUGHES

by Elizabeth Jaffe



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

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**HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT**  
School Publishers

MAP CREDIT: Steve Toole

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Langston Hughes was one of the most important American poets of the twentieth century. He wrote poems, novels, short stories, plays, and children's books. He loved to write about the life and dreams of black people. Today, people all over the United States and all over the world read his books.

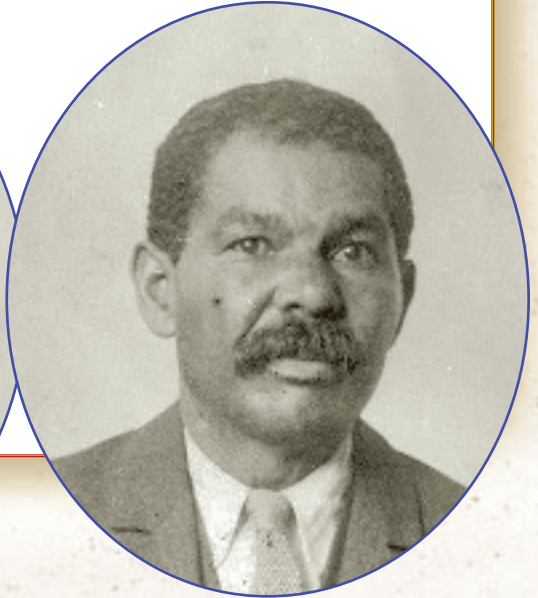
Langston Hughes got his own stamp!



## 🔊 Childhood

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, on February 1, 1902. Langston lived there with his mother. Langston's mother took him to see plays and other shows. They also went to the library, where he loved to be surrounded by books.

🔊 Langston's father lived in Mexico. He was a lawyer. He could not get a good job in the United States because he was black. In Mexico, he got a job that paid well.





🔊 Carolina Langston Hughes was Langston's mother.

🔊 James Nathaniel Hughes, Jr., was Langston's father.

## A Trip to Mexico

When Langston was 5, he went with his mother and grandmother to Mexico City. They were going to live with his father.

 But just after they got there, there was a big earthquake. Buildings fell down around them. Langston's heart was **fluttering** as his father carried him to safety.

 Langston's mother refused to live in a place where there were earthquakes. She took Langston and his grandmother back to the United States. The Hughes family never lived together again.

## Living with His Grandmother

After they returned to the United States, Langston's mother moved away to find work. She left Langston with his grandmother Mary, in Lawrence, Kansas.

Mary Langston was a woman with African, French, and Cherokee heritage. When Mary was younger, she helped slaves escape from the South to the northern United States and Canada. She taught Langston about great African Americans—including members of his own family! Mary Langston's brother-in-law, John Mercer, had been a United States congressman from Virginia.

Langston's grandmother loved to read to him from books, newspapers, and magazines. But when Langston came home from school, she made him stay inside. He had no one to play with, so books were his only friends.



Mary Langston was Langston's grandmother.

## 🔊 A Young Poet

When Langston's grandmother died, Langston moved to Cleveland, Ohio, to live with his mother again. He felt **accepted** at his new school. Langston began to write poems for the school magazine. In eighth grade, he was chosen to be class poet. His career as a writer had begun!






🔊 In 1919, when he was 17, Langston spent the summer with his father in Mexico. More and more, he wrote poetry to **express** his feelings. He wrote whenever he could.

🔊 Back in Cleveland, Langston was an excellent student, an actor, a writer, and he played sports too. In his last year at Central High School, he was named class poet—again!



## Back to Mexico

After Langston graduated from high school, in 1920, he wanted to go to college, but college was expensive. He needed his father's help to pay for it. So he went to Mexico again to ask him.

 On the train ride down, Langston stared out the window at the Mississippi River. He thought about black people in the United States and in Africa and how rivers were important to their lives. Sitting in the train, he wrote a poem called "The Negro Speaks of Rivers."

When he was in Mexico, he sent the poem to a magazine in New York. They wanted to print it! Langston was excited, even though the magazine did not pay for his poem.

Langston wanted to go to college to become a writer. But his father said that he would only pay for college if Langston studied something else. Langston **wondered** what to do. Finally, his father agreed to help.



### New York in the 1920s



## Living in Harlem

Langston went to Columbia University in New York City. Columbia was next to Harlem, and Langston loved living in Harlem. He met many important writers and artists. He listened to a lot of jazz music. He wrote poems that sounded like jazz.


But he didn't like Columbia because white people there treated him badly. After one year, Langston decided to leave and travel around the world.






## 🔊 A Trip to Africa!


Langston found a job on a boat going to Africa! The boat visited fifteen countries in West Africa, and Langston talked with many Africans. Most people in West Africa had dark brown skin. Langston had lighter skin than they did. Many African people thought he was a white man. But Langston did not **pretend** to be white. He was proud to be a black man.

 While he traveled, Langston wrote poems and articles. He sent them to magazines in the United States. Some magazines published his writing. And this time they paid him!

## **Grand-Prize Winner**

Langston returned to the United States in 1924. The next year, *Opportunity Magazine* gave him the grand prize for his poem “Weary Blues.”

 He found a job working at a hotel in Washington, D.C. A famous white poet, Vachel Lindsay, was sitting at one of his tables. Langston quickly wrote down three of his poems and put them next to Mr. Lindsay’s plate. Mr. Lindsay read them and liked them a lot. The next morning there was a story in the newspaper about Langston’s poems.

 In 1926, Langston’s first book of poems was published. It was all about the lives of people in Harlem. After that book, Langston was sometimes called “Harlem’s Poet.”

## 🔊 A World-Famous Poet

Langston finally was earning a living by writing. He also helped other black writers get stories and poems published.

🔊 Now that Langston had a little money, he traveled around the world again. He visited the Soviet Union, Japan, Haiti, and many other countries. Wherever he went, he wrote and read his poems aloud. Finally, back in the United States, he became a poetry teacher at different universities. He wanted to help younger poets and teach them all that he knew.

🔊 Langston Hughes died in 1967. Today people around the world read his poems.



🔊 Langston Hughes at age 56.

# Responding



## TARGET SKILL Understanding

**People** How would you describe people in this book? Copy the chart. Write the names of people from the book. Describe something about each person. List a detail from the story that supports your description.

| Character            | Description       | Detail                              |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Langston Hughes<br>? | hard-working<br>? | did not give up writing poetry<br>? |



## Write About It

**Text to World** Write a descriptive paragraph about a trip. Include where you went, who you went with, and what you saw.





### TARGET VOCABULARY

accepted  
expressed  
fluttering  
grand

pretend  
prize  
taught  
wonder

### EXPAND YOUR VOCABULARY

blues  
congressman  
earthquake

heritage  
jazz  
published



### TARGET SKILL **Understanding**

**Characters** Tell more about the characters.



### TARGET STRATEGY **Analyze/Evaluate** Tell

how you feel about the text, and why.



**GENRE** A **biography** tells about events in a person's life.

**Level:** P

**DRA:** 38

**Genre:**

Biography

**Strategy:**

Analyze/Evaluate

**Skill:**

Understanding Characters

**Word Count:** 1,003

2.4.18

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