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ABSTRACT

Designed in a flexible format for use by college instructors, high school teachers, and community education workers, this curriculum packet serves as an introduction to the life and works of black poet Langston Hughes. The major component of the packet is a critical essay that explores the thematic highlights of Hughes's career. The remaining components are (1) a list of definitions corresponding to terms, events, or persons mentioned in the essay; (2) suggestions for group projects designed for classes in communication, journalism, or social studies; and (3) a list of important dates in black American history and in the career of Langston Hughes. (FL)

Susan Danielson

LANGSTON HUGHES CURRICULUM PACKET

DIG AND BE DUG IN RETURN

The "Langston Hughes Curriculum Packet" is designed in a flexible format for college instructors, secondary school teachers and community groups. Primarily an overview exploring chronological and thematic highlights of Langston Hughes's career, the "Langston Hughes Curriculum Packet" is divided into several components:

1) a critical essay with notes and assignments:
2) definitions corresponding to terms, events, or persons highlighted in the essay:
3) suggestions for Group Projects designed for classes in communications, journalism, or social studies (projects are expected to take several class periods):
4) a selected list of important dates in black American history and Hughes's publishing career.

"When you see me laughing, I'm laughing to keep from crying"
Traditional Blues

A survey of the literary contribution of Langston Hughes is a journey through the dominant moods and themes that have shaped the black experience in America in the twentieth century. Born during the years **JIM CROW** laws were institutionalized in the South, Hughes's youth paralleled the developement of movements for social, economic and racial equality. As early as 1917 he articulated the commitment of young Negro poets to a distinctly black aesthetic, laying the foundation of what was to become known in the 1960's as the **BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT** and throughout the western hemisphere as **NEGRITUDE.** At the time of his death in 1967, Hughes had contributed to the Afro-American literary tradition for some forty-five years, well-earning the title bestowed on him early in his career, Poet Laureate of the Negro People.

"Sweet Blues! Coming from a Black Man's Soul"

From his earliest published poems, Langston Hughes identified himself as a black American writer, speaking through the voice of an entire race ("The Negro Speaks of Rivers," Crisis, June 1921, p. 71), or through the voices of those striving for freedom despite the hardships of racism and poverty, as in his much anthologized "Mother to Son." By 1925 his idealized vision of an African past was replaced by an exploration of contemporary urban folk life in America through the themes, mood, and structure of the Blues.(1)

Hard Daddy

I went to ma daddy
Says Daddy I have got the blues.
Went to ma daddy,
Says Daddy I have got the blues.
Ma Daddy says, Honey,
Can't you bring no better news?...

from Fine Clothes to the Jew, 1927, p. 86

Set in Harlem, these poems are "understated, laced with irony and visual imagery . . . the blues singer looks to no strength outside himself; he projects only bald determination; I shall endure and I shall overcome" (Onwuchekwa, Jemie, Langston Hughes; An Introduction to the Poetry, p. 52). With the publication of The Weary Blues, in 1926, Hughes took his place among the **NEW NEGRO POETS**, a group of young writers self-consciously shaping themselves into what we remember today as the **HARLEM RENAISSANCE.**

The Weary Blues, and his next collection, Fine Clothes to the Jew, were not universally acclaimed, particularly among black writers.(2) Hughes had committed the double crime of using the structure of the blues while celebrating the lives of those who sang them. His response to these attacks appeared in his essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain."

> We younger negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too . . .If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.
>
> from The Nation, June 23, 1926, pp. 692-94

Far from a desire to portray Afro Americans as just darker versions of their white counterparts, Hughes argued that blacks had retained an ethnic distinctiveness. He urged black artists to write from their own experience and to use the material of their own culture. It was "the duty of the younger Negro artist . . . to change through the force of his art that old whispering 'I want to be white' . . . to 'I am a Negro - and beautiful!'" For Hughes, the world of black America was filled with untapped literary resources. Early on, he decided to make his living as a black writer.

I wanted to write seriously and as well
as I knew how about the negro people,
and make <u>that</u> kind of writing make me a
living . . .

from The Big Sea, p. 335

<u>The Dream Deferred</u>

At the instigation of the well-known educator, Mary McLoed Bethune, Hughes began the 1930's with the first of what were to become numerous poetry reading tours.(3) As he toured the South, he was exposed to the full force of a world dominated by Jim Crow laws and white violence. In Harlem, whites had been merely shopkeepers and nighttime intruders in a world predominantly black; but in the South, there seemed only one road of escape from white violence, and that road led North.

Bound No'th Blues

Goin' down the road, Lawd,
Goin' down the road.
Down the road, Lawd,
Way, way down the road.
Got to find somebody
To help me carry this load . . .

These Mississippi towns ain't
Fit for a hoppin' toad . . .

from <u>Opportunity</u>, Oct. 1926, p. 315

In his poems of this period, particularly those in defense of the **SCOTTSBORO BOYS** , his gaze at the South was unrelentingly harsh.

His first full-length play, "Mulatto" was also set in the South, employing a plot anticipated in an early poem "Cross," and further developed in his short story, "Father and Son."

Cross

My old man's a white old man
And my old mother's black.
If ever I cursed my white old man
I take my curses back.

If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I'm sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well.

My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I'm gonna die,
Being neither white nor black?

from Crisis, December, 1925, p. 66

"Mulatto" was so controversial in its time that it was not available in its original form in English until 1968.(4) In the play, Hughes's explored the confrontation between a white plantation owner, Colonel Norwood, and his mulatto son, Bert Lewis, that leads to a tragedy of unintentioned murder and the hysteria of the lynch mob.

Inspired by the stories of D. H. Lawrence, Hughes began writing his own short stories while on a movie-making tour of the Soviet Union. They were collected into The Ways of White Folks in 1934. In these stories Hughes left Harlem to explore the black condition throughout the fabric of American life. From Georgia to Boston, from Iowa to New York, he followed black folks out of their homes and communities to enter the world of white folks. The characters who survived this daily transformation were those who didn't stay too long, who remained grounded in the values and dreams of the black community. Hughes located the source of their strength in their commitment to each other rather than to the outward forms of respectability ("Cora Unashamed"), in their recognition that the source of their indignity lay outside themselves ("Red-Headed Baby") while their dignity lay in the preservation of their heritage, especially music ("The Blues I'm Playing"), and in their belief in a better tomorrow ("One Christmas Eve").

. . . And her fingers began to wander slowly
up and down the keyboard, flowing into the
soft and lazy syncopation of a Negro blues . . .

> The girl at the piano heard the white woman saying, "Is this what I spent thousands of dollars to teach you?"
> "No," said Oceola simply. "This is mine . . ."
> from "The Blues I'm Playing," in The Ways of White Folks, p. 120

"Life is a Big Sea. . ."

Hughes opened the 1940's with the publication of his autobiography, The Big Sea. In it he offers an account of the world from which he came: of the lasting strength of his grandmother, his unhappy relationship with his father, his trips to Mexico, his year at Columbia, and his adventures as a seaman. He details his involvement with the Harlem Renaissance, giving glimpses of some of its most notable stars (**COUNTEE CULLEN, ZORA NEALE HURSTON, ARNA BONTEMPS**, etc.) and the cabaret life "when Harlem was in vogue."(5) Primarily it is a book that documents his emergence as writer. From the time he was six, "when books began to happen to me," Hughes read voraciously and then began to write. Through his teachers he discovered Vachael Lindsay and Amy Lowell, and his first poems, he tells us, were imitations of the dialect poems of **PAUL L. DUNBAR** and the free verse of Carl Sandburg.(6)

Hughes's style in his autobiography is conversational. He allows himself time to recall anecdotes, to remember encounters. When he writes of the most painful times of those early years, the antagonism for his father or the break with his patron, his tone is even, humorous, and distanced, representative of the "cool" attitude characteristic of his later works.

Hughes's most well-known prose character, Jesse B. Simple was introduced to the public through a column in the Chicago Defender in 1943.(7) A defense plant worker, this Negro Everyman was to become a central figure in five volumes of collected prose and the main character in Hughes's **FOLK COMEDY**, Simply Heavenly.

> I felt that by writing honestly enough and truthfully enough and beautifully enough about one man in one place on one

> corner, 125th and Lenox, people and the world might recognize him as being one of them.
>
> from Langston Hughes: A Biography, p. 246

In the twenty-five years that he produced these slice-of-life vignettes, Hughes managed to distill several already well-developed elements of his style. The anecdotes are almost totally dialogue - narrative is used to position the characters, as in a play. The focus is on the quick reparte, usually between Simple and his educated friend and straight-man, Boyd.

The juxtaposition of these two characters is reminiscent of a structural technique found in the organization of Hughes's poetry and short stories, the use of contrasting pairs to lend complexity and emphasis to central themes and ideas. Through the contrast of Simple's non-standard English with Boyd's standard dialect, Hughes demonstrates the power, versatility, and vividness of Simple's language as he explores the absurdities faced by living black in America.

> ". . .I have been in this country speaking English all my life, daddy-o, yet and still if I walk in some of them rich restaurants downtown, they look at me like I was a varmint. But let somebody darker than me come in there speaking Spanish or French or Afangulo and the head waiter will bow plumb down to the ground. I wonder why my mama did not bear me in Cuba instead of Virginia?"
>
> from The Best of Simple, p. 217

Unlike the "heat" Boyd can work up on almost any topic, Simple's most consistent posture is humorous detachment; he is at all times "cool." Simple is a "race" man; nothing in his life would be as it is were it not that he was black. His dream is simple enough, a good job, a good woman, and money for a nightly beer. But in the context of America, it is a dream constantly deferred, both by the limitations imposed by the larger society and by Simple's own insistence on deferring it.

If Simple is a "race" man, then Zarita, his occasional girlfriend, is a "race" woman. She works during the day just so she can play at night. Zarita is a recreation of the blues women in the poems of the 1920's, individualized and deepened by the years of the Great Depression and World War II. We meet her again as Alberta K. Johnson in what critics have judged as Hughes's most successful series of dramatic monologues, and as Laura, in Tambourines to Glory. Boyd finds his female counterpart in Joyce, Simple's second wife. She is also a working woman, but she is intent on staking her claim on the future. Joyce is a prototype drawn from characters like Oceola in "The Blues I'm Playing." We meet her again as Nancy Lee in the short story "One Friday Morning," and as Essie in "Tambourines to Glory."

Laughing to Keep from Crying

Amost twenty years after The Ways of White Folks, Hughes published his second collection of short stories, Laughing to Keep from Crying.. The contents reflect the light detachment suggested by the title. In these stories no subject is safe from his irony, few characters are worthy of his disdain. This time Hughes's focus remains in the black community. The whites we meet are either harmless ("Who's Passing for Who"), ignorant ("Tain't So"), or allies ("One Friday Morning"). Black folks are often caught laughing at themselves ("Rouge High"). Violence, so central to earlier stories, is not physical any longer, but psychological ("Professor").

In both "Why, You Reckon" and "Slice Him Down" our expectation of violence is relieved by a humorous denouement. In the first story, the white boy held up in Harlem is not eager for revenge. "This is the first time in my life I've ever had a good time in Harlem," he asserts. Hughes manages to underscore white exploitation of Harlem while indicating the common humanity between the thieves and the victim. Who, we must ask, is robbing who? In the second story, when two black hobos confront each other with razor and switchblade in "Slice Him Down," the stage is set for

violence. But in the end neither man is seriously wounded, and Terry can now proudly display the scar on his chin.

Hughes's ability to offer contradictory approaches to similar dilemmas is repeated in the contrasting pair of stories "One Friday Morning" and "Professor." In "One Friday Morning," Nancy Lee won the Artist Club scholarship, a fulfillment of a lifelong dream. Minutes before the ceremony, the vice-principal calls her in to tell her that the committee will not award the scholarship to a black girl. As Nancy hangs her head in despair, it is this white vice-principal who provides the spark to rekindle Nancy's dream. Her dream of ". . . one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all" is juxtaposed to the dream of Dr. T. Walton Brown (a play on the name Booker T. Washington), the central figure in the following story, "Professor."

> As the car sped him back toward town, Dr. Brown sat under its soft fur rug among the deep cushions and thought how with six thousand dollars a year earned by dancing properly to the tune of Jim Crow education, he could carry his whole family to South America for a summer where they wouldn't need to feel like Negroes.
>
> from "Professor" in Laughing to Keep From Crying, p. 105

Other interpretations of this dream deferred are offered in Hughes's experimental poetry of the 1950's. Earlier his poetry had transcribed both the structure and the mood of the blues. These newer poems turned more to the world of jazz for their inspiration; they have no fixed form and are more dramatic in presentation, often alternating speakers or a speaker with a line of riffs ("Take it away!/Hey, pop!/Re-bop!/Mop"). As in much of his work, poems are often arranged in contrasting pairs, or placed in groups around a theme. The mood has changed. Unlike the mellow acceptance of the weariness of life "coming from a black man's soul" ("The Weary Blues"), the mood of "Montage of a Dream Deferred" is more insistent and impatient.(8)

> In terms of current Afro-American popular music and the sources from which it has progressed . . . this poem on contemporary Harlem like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjection, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of the jam session, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and disc-tortions of the music of a community in transition.
>
> from Montage of a Dream Deferred, 19, p. 1 (note)

Even children are no longer content with yesterday's nursery rhymes and promises.

> Children's Rhymes
>
> When I was a chile we used to play,
> "One-two-buckle my shoe"
> and things like that. But now, Lord,
> listen at them little varmints:
>
> By what sends
> the white kids
> I ain't sent:
> I know I can't
> be President . . .
>
> from Selected Poems, p. 223

Perhaps the dream has been deferred too long. And, these poems continually ask, "What happens to a dream deferred?" It may explode outwardly ("Harlem"); it may turn upon itself ("Same in Blues"); it may produce indifference to the particular needs of the black community ("Comment on Curb"); or the dream may be sustained by a new generation whose values are still close to home ("Letter"). Hughes ends his montage on a hopeful, if ambiguous note.

"Ambiguous" is an apt word to describe the black community's situation in American in the 1950's. Massive black participation as soldiers and defense plant workers in World War II held few rewards. There was a growing disparity in wages between black and white workers and for the first time in ten years, lynching was an

issue in the South. The lack of educational opportunity for black children symbolized the immense racial inequality. During these same years, however, the NAACP launched a full-scale attack on educational segregation (culminating in Brown v. Board of Education decision of May 17, 1954) and black men and women received national and international recognition for their accomplishments. Ralph Bunche was the first black man to receive the Nobel Peace Prize; the American Medical Association admitted its first black delegate; Gwendolyn Brooks was the first black poet to win the Pulitzer Prize for her Annie Allen; the National Basketball Association hired the first black man to play professional basketball; the first national park honoring a black man, Carver National Monument, was opened in Joplin, MO. (Hughes's birthplace).

Although his stance in his poetry and fiction was often biting and ironic, Hughes's non-fiction works in these years insisted on claiming these advances for the whole black community, particularly for the young. He wrote eight children's books. From his First Book of Negroes to his First Book of Africa, Hughes explores America's black cultural heritage, embracing its many strains, from Bert Williams to Lena Horne, from the Fisk Jubilee Singers to Louis Armstrong and Roland Hayes.

Also in the 1950's Hughes began his work as archivist and anthologist of the black oral and written traditions. Writers of the 1920's had seen themselves as a new voice of an emerging people. Hughes's work of the 1950's enlarged this view of literature to include folk tales and blues songs, gospels and spirituals. Aware that few Americans had access to African and Latin writers, he collected a volume of original African works (An African Treasury) and translated the poetry of notable Latin authors, including Gypsy Ballads by Federico Garcia Lorca (1951), Cuba Libre by Nicolas Guillen (1948), Selected Poems by Gabriela Mistral, and Masters of the Dew by Jacques Roumain (1957). By publishing three anthologies of his own works, The Langston Hughes Reader, Selected Poems, and The Best of Simple, Hughes made his own poetry and prose more accessible.(9)

Something in Common

His final book of poetry, The Panther and the Lash (published posthumously), and his third collection of short stories, Something in Common, also contain much previously published material. Both books are tightly structured interpretations of and responses to the movements for social change in the sixties. Both conclude with works that share a common theme. The last two poems, "Warning," and "Daybreak in Alabama," are built upon contrasting visions within the dream deferred. In both, imagery is from nature; but in "Warning" a gentle wind unexpectedly turns into a furious storm, while in "Daybreak in Alabama" nature's harmonious calm produces a richness of flowers and trees.

"Daybreak in Alabama" is set in the future, "When I get to be a Composer;" the short story, "Something in Common," is set in the present, but in Hong Kong, not the United States. The images reflect a different type of earthiness-of dirty bars and homeless, unkept people. From the context of the story we know there is no love lost between the two central characters. They are strangers: the white man continually forgets the black man's name, and the black man has sunk so low that he is willing to take insults just to get a free drink. Neither one, Hughes is saying, is very beautiful after centuries of racism and oppression. But it is from this legacy that the future dream for America must be born. The closing message of the poems and stories is the same - only together can blacks and whites claim America.

Langston Hughes died on May 22, 1967. His legacy to the black community was rich in content and varied in form. As the first black American writer to make his living from his own writing. Hughes proved there was an audience, both black and white, willing to share in the struggles and concerns of black America. He remained true to his own early dictum, "to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame." Although the theme of the dream deferred permeated all his writing, his primary commitment was to the inherent beauty and strength of life as it is

lived and ended in the present. For Hughes, the motto always remained -

I play it cool
and dig all jive -
That's the reason
I stay alive.

My motto,
As I live and learn
IS
Dig and be dug
in return.

from Montage of a Dream Deferred, 1951, p.19.

I. NOTES AND ASSIGNMENT SUGGESTIONS

1. "Blues are mostly very sad songs about being without love, without money or without a home. And yet, almost always in the blues, there is some humorous twist of thought in words that make people laugh. They have a very definite lyric pattern, one long line which is repeated, then a third line to rhyme with the first two. Sometimes the second line is omitted. The music is slow, often mournful, yet syncopated, with the kind of marching bass behind it that seems to say 'In spite of fate, bad luck, these blues themselves, I'm going on, on!'. . .That's the way the blues are, about trouble, yet looking for the sun."

   In what ways do the two poems, "Hard Daddy" and "Bound No'th Blues" fit the definition of the blues quoted above?

2. Have you ever been ashamed of someone close to you? Why? Try to discover ways in which the very things you are ashamed of could be considered positive traits.

3. Hughes recounts his manner of presentation during these early tours in I Wonder as I Wander, chapter 1.

4. Hughes's first play was actually published in the Crisis in 1919. He continued to write and produce plays throughout his life, particularly folk comedies and musicals. His aim was "to present plays of Negro life . . . at prices no higher than neighborhood movies." He is credited with keeping black theater alive in the 1930's and 40's.

5. Hughes's discussion of the Harlem Renaissance is lengthy and humorous. See The Big Sea, pp. 223-272.

   After reading his description of "house rent" parties, make up some of your own invitations to "house rent parties" that might be given in your neighborhood.

6. Compare Hughes's poem "Freedom's Plow," to Carl Sandburg's poem, "The People Yes."

7. Compare Jesse B. Simple with the central character in other black novelists' work of this time, e.g. Bigger Thomas in Native Son.

8. Collect the words from the neon signs located on the main "drag" in your town - using these words create a poem that reflects some aspect of your community (see Hughes's "Neon Signs," in Montage of a Dream Deferred).

9. Hughes was the first black poet to collect his own poetry into a representative book, Selected Poems, 1959.

II. DEFINITIONS

JIM CROW - name applied to state laws (beginning 1898 in Tennessee) that established "separate but equal" accommodations for blacks and whites.

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT - primarily a black literary movement of the 1960's rooted in black oral traditions, whose function was to arouse blacks to work for social change. "The Black Artist's role . . . is to reflect so precisely the nature of the society . . . that . . . men will be moved . . . and grow strong . . ." Amiri Barraka (LeRoi Jones) in "State/Meant," Social Essays, p. 251.

NEGRITUDE - black pride. Assumes uniquely black African cultural heritage that transcends national and social class origins.

NEW NEGREO POETS - name used by Alain Locke to define those young black poets writing in the early 1920's.

HARLEM RENAISSANCE - urban cultural movement (1920-1930) among black intelligentsia "celebrating gaity and rhythm of black life."

SCOTTSBORO BOYS - eight black male youths condemned to death in 1932 whose case was the focus of an international protest movement - the last of the Scottsboro boys was freed June 9, 1950.

COUNTEE CULLEN - Harlem Renaissance poet (1903-1946) best known for poetry collection, Color.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON - Harlem Renaissance writer (1903-1960) who drew much of her inspiration from black folk material she collected; her works include Jonah's Gourd Vine, Mules and Men, Their Eyes were Watching God, Tell My Horse, and Moses: Man of the Mountain.

ARNA BONTEMPS - Harlem Renaissance writer and lifelong friend and collaborator with Langston Hughes. His works include novels, poetry, plays and an extensive list of children's books.

PAUL L. DUNBAR - black writer (1872-1906) of late 19th century; first American poet to explore black culture and employ black dialect; works include Majors and Minors, Lyrics of a Lowly Life, Red Rock, and The Clansman.

FOLK COMEDY - form of three of Hughes's plays: ". . . a folk ballad in stage form, told in broad and very simple terms - if you will, a comic strip, a cartoon - about problems which can only convincingly be reduced to a comicstrip, if presented very cleanly, clearly, sharply, precisely, and with humor." from Langston Hughes, in Smalley, Five Plays, p. XV.

III. GROUP PROJECTS

1. Hughes's Jesse B. Simple has been called the Everyman of his people. As a group try to define the characteristics of an Everyman or woman from your neighborhood. What would s/he look like? On what corner might s/he be found? Have each member of the group collect anecdotes in which this character comments on major community events and compile them into a booklet.

2. Hughes was the first black poet to go on extensive reading tours throughout the country. Usually his readings were accompanied by recorder or live music. Choose several of Hughes's poems and try to find contemporary music for background. Have one half of the class present these poems with the musical accompaniment to the other half of the class.

3. Since the 1930's Hughes has been considered primarily a social poet. In his autobiography, I Wonder as I Wander, and in his essay, "My Life as a Social Poet" (Phylon, 1947) he recounts several incidents in which his poetry led to harassment, interrogation and near arrest. As recently as 1965 a teacher was fired for reading "Ballad of a Landlord" to a junior high school class. After reading several of his poems, discuss why Hughes is considered such a controversial poet. Can an artist create works that are socially engaged or must s/he be removed from contemporary issues to be considered a "great" artist?

4. Hughes first published much of his work in black newspapers throughout the United States. The "Tales of Simple" first appeared in the Chicago Defender. Is there a black newspaper in your area? (If not, order one from a major city nearby.) After reading several issues, compare the black newspaper coverage to the coverage by the major newspaper in your town or city: In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different (pay particular attention to lead articles, the editorial page, entertainment section and advertisements)? What general conclusions can you draw about the relationship of the press to the community?

5. The dream deferred is one of Hughes's major themes. After reading several works by Hughes, try to define his dream. Is his dream the same as the "American Dream"? Why does Hughes insist that his dream is deferred?

IV. DATES

1898: Supreme Court rules that "separate but equal" accommodations acceptable; led to enactment of **JIM CROW** laws throughout the South

1902: James Mercer Langston Hughes born in Joplin, MO.

1905: Founding of Niagara Movement

1907-14: Hughes lived with grandmother

1911: Founding convention of NAACP

1915: Great Migration (thousands of Southern blacks migrate North, especially to cities)

1920: Hughes lived with father in Mexico; wrote "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"

1926: Hughes began Lincoln University; The Weary Blues published

1928: Mrs. Mason becomes Hughes's patron while he wrote Not Without Laughter

1930: Not Without Laughter published; Hughes broke with patron

1931: Hughes received Hammond Gold Award for literature for Not Without Laughter; travelled to Haiti and Cuba

1932: Scottsboro Limited published (Poems written in defense of Scottsboro boys who went on trial in 1931); Hughes joined other black artists on movie making trip to Soviet Union

1934: The Ways of White Folks published

1935: Mulatto produced on Broadway without Hughes's knowledge; it ran successfully for one year (a record for a play by a black writer)

1937: Hughes worked as Spanish Civil War correspondent for Baltimore Afro-American

1938: Hughes founded Harlem Suitcase Theater; A New Song published

1939: Hughes founded New Negro Theater in Los Angeles

1940: Hughes received Rosenwald Fellowship to write historical plays; The Big Sea published

1941: Hughes founded Skyloft Players in Chicago; musical The Sun Do Move produced

1942: Hughes returned to Harlem; wrote slogans to help sell U. S. Defense bonds; Shakespeare in Harlem published

1942: Congress of Racial Equality founded (CORE)

1943: Hughes received honorary Doctor of Letters from Lincoln University; began to write weekly "Tales of Simple"

1944: End of racial segregation in Army recreation and transportation facilities; United Negro College Fund established

1946: Hughes elected to National Institute of Arts and Letters

1947: Fields of Wonder published

1948: President Truman barred racial discrimination in Armed Forces by Executive Order

1949: Hughes appointed Poet in Residence at Laboratory School, University of Chicago; One Way Ticket and Simple Speaks His Mind published; Troubled Island produced in New York; The Barrier produced

1949: Federal law prohibiting racial discrimination in Federal Civil Service enacted

1950: NAACP launched campaign against educational segregation; Council on Harlem Theater founded to encourage black dramatists and actors

1951: Montage of a Dream Deferred published

1952: First Book of Negroes and Laughing to Keep from Crying published

1953: Hughes received Saturday Review's Anisfield-Wolf Award for First Book of Negroes; Hughes interrogated by Senator Joseph McCarthy's Senate Permanent Subcomittee on investigation of the Committee on government Operations; Simple Takes a Wife published

1954: Famous American Negroes and First Book of Rhythms published; Supreme Court rules in Brown v. The Board of Education that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal;" ended legal sanction for Jim Crow segregation

1955: First Book of Jazz, Famous Negro Music Makers, and Sweet Flypaper of Life (with photographs by Roy de Carava) published

1956: I Wonder as I Wander, First Book of the West Indies and A Pictorial History of Negroes in America (with Milton Meltzer) published

1957: Simple Stakes a Claim published; Simply Heavenly produced on Broadway

1958: The Langston Hughes Reader, Tambourines to Glory (novel) and Famous Negro Heroes of America published

1959: Selected Poems published

1960: Hughes awarded NAACP's Singarn Medal; First Book of Africa and An African Treasury published

1961: Best of Simple and Ask Your Mama published; Black Nativity produced in New York

1962: Hughes attended literary conference in Uganda and Nigeria; read at first National Poetry Festival at the Library of Congress; Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP published

1963: Hughes received Honorary Doctor of Letters from Howard University; Something In Common and Tambourines to Glory (play) published

1964: Hughes received Honorary Doctor of Letters from Western Reserve University

1964: Civil Rights Act passed; riots in Jacksonville, Harlem, Rochester, Jersey City, Paterson, Cleveland, Philadelphia

1965: Simple's Uncle Sam published; The Prodigal Son staged

1965: Watts riot; Voting Rights Bill enacted

1966: Beginning of Black Power Movement; riots in Atlanta, Chicago, Waukegan, Lansing, Omaha, New York City, Cleveland, Dayton

1967: On May 22 Hughes died in New York's Polyclinic Hospital

1967: The Panther and the Lash, Black Magic: A Pictorial History of the Negro in American Entertainment (with Milton Meltzer), Best Short Stories of Negro Writers, and The Poetry of the Negro (with Arna Bontemps) published posthumously