



ELA Virtual Learning

11th/Analyzing Langston Hughes' Poetry

May 18, 2020



11th/English III
Lesson: May 18, 2020

Objective/Learning Target:

Students can connect diction to the meaning of a poem.
Students can analyze how the structure of a poem impacts the meaning.

Lesson/Activity

This lesson is going to focus on some poetry from Langston Hughes, a prominent poet during the Harlem Renaissance.

- Here is a video that focuses on Langston Hughes.
 - [This one focuses more on his life](#)

Hughes was one of the first black poets who was able to make a living off his writing. He wrote about the things he experienced and saw as the world around him evolved.

Lesson/Activity

Hughes sought to write in the vernacular, or in everyday language, to convey the emotions in his poems.

When analyzing his poems, it is important to pay attention to the words he opts to use.

As you read the poem *Harlem*, [follow along](#) with John Green as he explains the importance of language in the poem. (Poem starts at 8:23)

Harlem

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Lesson/Activity

Things to note about the analysis:

- The use of verbs made up a bulk of the analysis. The actions that are described play an integral part in visualizing the poem
- The juxtaposition of two things that don't necessarily match. Green uses the description of something sweet crusting over as an example.
- The overall presentation of the poem is a factor too.
 - Ask yourself “why are these lines broken up this way?” or “why is each line so short/long?” and “what kind of rhythm is the poem read in?”

Practice

Using the techniques outlined in the lesson and by John Green, analyze Hughes' "[Theme for English B](#)" in a Google Doc. Use the following questions as a guide in your analysis:

1. What do you notice about the structure of the poem?
2. What do you notice about the style of this poem? Where does Hughes use rhythm and rhyme, and how do they affect the poem?
3. What unique word choices (diction) does Hughes make in order to characterize the speaker?

Example of a Proficient Answer

(answers will vary)

1. The poem is broken up into different stanzas as if each part represents a different aspect of his life that he is writing about. For example, after he is given the assignment, Hughes begins by describing how he ended up in the classroom.
2. The third stanza is where the rhythm shines the most. Lines 21-22 begins the quicker paced reading as he begins to list different items that reflect things that he likes that make up who Hughes is.
3. The fourth stanza contains the line “That’s American” which summarizes how, despite being different races, it doesn’t matter what one’s interests are as those interests makeup who they are are. In addition, the interactions with people play a part of defining one’s self.

Additional Resources

A similar concept can be done when watching slam poetry/poetry that is performed. What are things that we can learn about the poet based on the way the poem is performed?

Bianca Phipps - "[Almosts](#)"

Here is the poet's poem in [text form](#).