

Author Profile of Langston Hughes 1902 - 1967



Langston Hughes was born in the state of Missouri in America in 1902. Several of his ancestors had been slaves and he himself suffered a lot of prejudice from people who felt black people were second-class citizens.

Many of his later stories and poems were about not only how cruel it is to treat other people badly just because of the colour of their skin, but also about how important it is to strive for a kinder, better life.

Whilst still a child he developed a love of poetry and dreamt of becoming a writer. On leaving school however he had to take a series of menial jobs, including working as a sailor on a merchant ship.

In the 1930s Hughes moved to a part of New York called Harlem where a lot of very creative African-Americans lived and worked. Here, as part of what people called the 'Harlem Renaissance' (the word means 'new start' or 'new beginning'), he became famous as a poet, playwright and novelist.

Read the paragraph about Langston Hughes. He is the author of the poem we will read today. Answer these questions:

1. Who is Langston Hughes?
2. When did he live?
3. Where was he born and where did he move to in the 1930s?
4. What did he write and write about?
5. Why do you think he moved to this new area?

Hold Fast to Dreams

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

Langston Hughes,
The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes,
Vintage, 1995

Task:

Draw a picture to support the meaning of this poem.

Then answer these questions:

- What does Langston Hughes compare a dream to?
- What do you think he is trying to tell the reader to do with dreams?
- How does this poem make you feel?
- What tool has Langston Hughes used in his poem?