

LANGSTON HUGHES

MELODIES OF THE WEARY BLUES

Classic Poems Illustrated for Young People



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

HARPER

An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

HARPER STACKS
HarperCollins Children's School & Library

HarperStacks.com



ABOUT THE BOOK

Melodies of The Weary Blues: Classic Poems Illustrated for Young People is a gorgeous picture book centennial of **Langston Hughes'** first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*. With each poem lovingly illustrated by a different artist, careful readers will experience new life infused into these classic poems that capture the Black American and overall human experience. **Shamar Knight-Justice** perhaps said it best in the Letter from the Editor: "Good poetry makes you feel something whether you want to or not." In this case, both the illustrations and the words are sure to stir your spirit and settle in your soul.

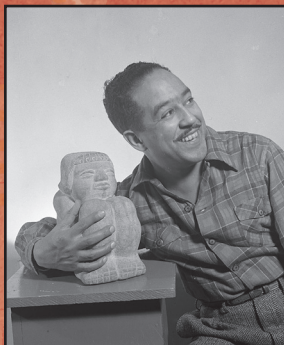


Photo by Gordon Parks

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Langston Hughes (1901-1967) ranks as one of the greatest American poets of the twentieth century. He was a landmark figure in the Harlem Renaissance, and his work profoundly captures and celebrates the trials and triumphs of his exquisitely drawn characters. In addition to his poetry, he was also the author of the novels *Not Without Laughter* and *Something in Common*, the play *Mulatto*, and two volumes of autobiography.

FEATURING ART BY



Charis Jackson Barrios



Reggie Brown



Toni D. Chambers



Chioma Ebinama



Lance Evans



Daniel Fishel



Lynn Gaines



Hayden Goodman



Angela Marise Johnson



Shamar Knight-Justice



Aaron Marin



Monica Mikai



Islenia Mil



Jenin Mohammed



Oge Mora



Frank Morrison



Charly Palmer



Andrea Pippins



Dominique Ramsey



Kenesha Sneed



Briana Mukodiri Uchendu



Janelle Washington



Matt Williams



PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. What elements of poetry and language are you familiar with? Review and research alliteration, metaphor, imagery, figurative language, and African American vernacular English to prepare to read and understand.
2. What do you know about the Harlem Renaissance and Langston Hughes? Review and research some information about the literary figures behind the Harlem Renaissance (1918–mid 1930s) so that you can connect the poems to the time period during which they were written. Examine the backmatter

biography of Langston Hughes and Timeline for additional information.

3. Being familiar with the artists featured in this book will help you further appreciate their contributions. Look for patterns as well as unique elements of style. What are some traits and common experiences they share? What kinds of art do they do? What other books have they illustrated that you've read or heard about? Review the "Illustrators of *Melodies of The Weary Blues*" section for more information.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. The title of a poem gives us clues about what a poem teaches the reader. What do you think each poem is about?
2. Colors give us clues about the feelings that might be connected to the words and ideas in each poem. What colors do you see in each poem and what feelings do you connect with each color?
3. Authors choose words that rhyme (words that sound the same) to give a poem a rhythm or beat. Some people call this musicality. Read a poem aloud. What words can you find that rhyme?
4. What do you notice about the faces and body language of the people in each poem? How do the faces and body language connect to each poem's title or main idea?
5. Which poems have illustrations with scenes that look like they happened a long time ago?
6. Which poems have illustrations that look like they could happen in your neighborhood or school today?

7. Some poems tell a story of the world around us. Some poems tell a story of the world inside (your mind). Which poems are which and how do the illustrations give clues about this to the reader?
8. Langston Hughes wrote many of these poems to express what he loved about Black America and to help people from different communities understand his world. What do you see in the art or hear in the poems that is similar to or different from your community?
9. Music was a big part of the Harlem Renaissance. Which poems are about music? Can you find words in the poems that sound musical? *Example: "white violins whir thin and slow."*
10. Nature is another theme connected to many of these poems and illustrations. Which poems are about nature? What do the words and phrases in these poems teach you about the connection between humans and nature? *Example: "My soul has grown deep like the rivers."*

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Creating Your Own Melody

Langston Hughes wrote the poetry in this book. Over 20 different artists created the art to match each poem. Write a poem about one of your personal experiences, such as a time when you saw a really beautiful scene in nature or a time when you heard music you really loved. Illustrate your poem.

**Bonus: Use colors in the illustration to capture the feelings that you want readers to feel when they read your poem and see your art.*

What It Means to Be American

It isn't easy to capture what it means to be American because it means something different to each person who accepts that identity. Think about what being American means to you. Consider your family, the places you learn or visit, your neighborhood, city, or state, the foods you eat, music you love, or the environment around you. Then, use what you have learned about poetry to write three poems, each one about a different aspect of what it means to be American. Make a gallery walk with your poems and invite adults to come and read them. What do they notice? What do they wonder?

Art in Many Forms

Choose one poem. Create a dance or short one-act play so that you can perform each of the scenes in the poem. See if you can tell the story of the poem without words and whether your friends, classmates, or family members can tell which poem you're performing.

Connections

Sometimes poems are connected in ways that only one person sees. Choose two poems that you see as being connected. Select words, phrases, or stanzas (paragraphs of poetry) from each one and make a new poem, then record yourself reading your new poem. How is your new poem similar to the original poems? How is it different?

Julia E. Torres is a librarian, educator, and author in Denver, Colorado. Connect with Julia at juliatorreswrites.com



Art © 2026 by Shanar Knight-Justice