



## Mini Page Heroes: Langston Hughes



photo by Gordon Parks, courtesy Library of Congress

You never know when someone else's words may change your life. That's what happened to a young poet, Langston Hughes.

During the Great Depression, Hughes and a friend went to Daytona, Florida, to meet the famous African-American educator Mary McLeod Bethune. (The Mini Page featured Bethune in a July issue.) Bethune suggested that Hughes travel throughout the South, reading his poetry to earn a living.

The idea seemed kind of crazy to him, but Bethune said: "People need poetry, especially our people."

### Spreading his words

Weeks later, Langston Hughes decided to make poetry his career. A friend from his college days served as his driver and manager. They traveled through the South, holding poetry readings at colleges attended by African-Americans.

Langston Hughes wrote and read poetry that spoke of the experience of being black, that taught of the struggles of being black in a segregated United States and that gave a voice to a better life for black Americans.



His audiences were mostly African-American college students. They welcomed his words, which moved them, made them angry and made them proud.

### Mini Quote:

"Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly."

Hughes joined other writers who led an African-American cultural movement centered in New York. That movement was called the **Harlem Renaissance**, and Hughes became one of its most well-known **troubadours**. (A troubadour is a wandering artist or entertainer.)

### Young life

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902. He started writing poetry as a teenager, when he lived with his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas. He was lonely living there and found "the wonderful world in books."



Langston Hughes at Lincoln University in 1928.

Hughes studied at Columbia University in New York City and then traveled to Africa and Europe as a crewman on ships. Eventually he earned a degree from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, then returned to New York, where he lived for most of the rest of his life.

### Hughes on writing

"Generally, the first two or three lines come to me from something I'm thinking about, or looking at, or doing, and the rest of the poem ... flows from those first few lines. If there is a chance to put the poem down then, I write it down. If not, I try to remember it until I get to a pencil and paper; for poems are like rainbows: they escape you quickly," Hughes wrote.

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### Hughes' poetry

Langston Hughes' poem "Dream Variations" was published in 1926. We're sharing it here:

*To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes on gently,  
Dark like me—  
That is my dream!*

*To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun,  
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening . . .  
A tall, slim tree . . .  
Night coming tenderly  
Black like me.*

(© 1994 The Estate of Langston Hughes)

### Resources



This issue of Mini Page Heroes is based on a chapter from "50 American Heroes Every Kid Should Meet" by Dennis Denenberg and Lorraine Roscoe. To order the book, go to [heroes4us.com](http://heroes4us.com) and click on "50 American Heroes Book" and "Order a Book."

### On the web:

- [bit.ly/MPHughes](http://bit.ly/MPHughes)

### At the library:

- "Coming Home: From the Life of Langston Hughes" by Floyd Cooper
- "The Sweet and Sour Animal Book" by Langston Hughes, illustrated by students from the Harlem School of the Arts

## Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of Langston Hughes are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



- AFRICA, AUDIENCE,
- BLACK, BOOKS,
- EUROPE, HARLEM,
- HUGHES, LANGSTON,
- LYRICS, NEW YORK,
- PLAYS, POET, PUBLISH,
- READ, SEGREGATED,
- STRUGGLE,
- TROUBADOUR, WORDS.

I D O S A U D I E N C E E N T  
S E H G U H O L G Y H T P L E  
P L A Y S E R E A D A W O T S  
I N O T S G N A L W R N R S T  
K C A L B O B H S I L B U P R  
F R D E T A G E R G E S E S U  
T R O U B A D O U R M O C K G  
N J C L Y R I C S B A S R O G  
P O E T M E K R O Y W E N O L  
S D R O W O T A F R I C A B E

## Cook's Corner Root Beer Braised Ribs

### You'll need:

- cooking spray
- 2 pounds pork loin back ribs or pork spareribs
- salt and ground black pepper
- water

- 1 cup root beer
- 1/2 cup barbecue sauce of your choice
- 2 tablespoons sun-dried tomato paste



### What to do:

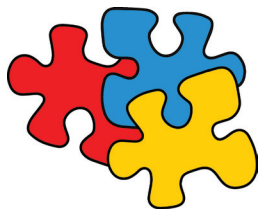
1. Spray bottom of a slow cooker with cooking spray. Season ribs all over with salt and pepper. Cut ribs into 2- or 3-rib portions and place them in bottom of slow cooker. Pour over 1/2 cup of water.
2. Cover and cook on low for 8 to 9 hours, until ribs are tender.
3. Remove ribs from cooker and drain away liquid, then return ribs to cooker.
4. Whisk together root beer, barbecue sauce and tomato paste. Pour mixture over ribs. Cover and cook on low for 1 more hour. Serves 4.

Adapted from "The Robin Takes 5 Cookbook for Busy Families" with permission from Andrews McMeel Publishing ([andrewsmcmeel.com](http://andrewsmcmeel.com)).

\* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

## Puzzling

Unscramble the words below that remind us of poetry.



- mehry \_\_\_\_\_
- rewtri \_\_\_\_\_
- esvre \_\_\_\_\_
- azsnat \_\_\_\_\_

Answers: rhyme, writer, verse, stanza.

## Mini Jokes



**Lance:** How does a poet sneeze?  
**Lewis:** "Haiku!"

## Eco Note



"Paper or plastic?" We hear this question at the grocery store. But the answer is: Neither. The best way to take your groceries home is in your own bag. You can use it as many times as you like. You never have to throw it away! Learn to make your own reusable grocery bag here: [climatekids.nasa.gov/tshirt-bag/](http://climatekids.nasa.gov/tshirt-bag/)

courtesy climatekids.nasa.gov

## Thank You



The Mini Page thanks Dennis Denenberg, former teacher, principal, superintendent and university professor, and Lorraine Roscoe, a champion of heroes of every kind, for help with this issue.

**Teachers:** For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: [bit.ly/MPstandards](http://bit.ly/MPstandards). And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!



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