Mini Page
Heroes:
Langston
Hughes

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-American students. Hughes wrote and read poetry that spoke of the struggles of being black in a segregated society and offered a voice to a better life for black Americans. His audiences were mostly African-American college students. They welcomed his words, which moved them, and made them proud.

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.”

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 chance to put it down.” Hughes wrote.

Hughes 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 poetry

“Poetry is a thing of the heart. It is the art of direct expression, it is the way of the instant.” Hughes wrote.

Hugo’s poetry

Langston Hughes’ poem “Dream Variations” was published in 1926. We’re sharing it here:

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

Try ‘n’ Find

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

AFRICA, AUDIENCE, BLACK, BOOKS, EUROPE, HARLEM, HUGHES, LANGSTON, LYRICS, NEW YORK, PLAYS, POET, POSTER, READING, SEGREGATED, STRUGGLE, TROUBADOUR, WORDS.

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

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. Serve hot.

Puzzling

Unscramble the words below that remind us of poetry.

mehry rewtri esvre azsnat

Mini Jokes

Lance: How does a poet sneeze?
Lewis: “Hallucinate”

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: climatelds.nasa.gov/shirtbag.

Thank You

The Mini Page thanks Dennis Dennenberg, 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/MPHughes. And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!

Resources

This issue of Mini Page Heroes is based on a chapter from “50 American Heroes Everyone Kid Should Meet” by Dennis Dennenberg and Lorraine Roscoe. To order the book, go to heroes4us.com and click on “50 American Heroes Book” and “Order a Book.”

On the web:
• “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

Mini Spy Booklets

Volumes 1, 2, and 3: find the clues and use the mini puzzle to uncover clues in the next booklet from The Mini Page.

The Mini Spy Booklets contains a list of clues, a reference guide, and a mini puzzle for a total of 96 clues.


Mini Quote:

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

Langston Hughes at Lincoln University in 1928.

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