



HSC English Prescriptions 2019-2023

English EAL/D Module B: Language, Identity and Culture

Langston Hughes poetry

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The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

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Aunt Sue's Stories

Aunt Sue has a head full of stories.
Aunt Sue has a whole heart full of stories.
Summer nights on the front porch
Aunt Sue cuddles a brown-faced child to her bosom
And tells him stories.

Black slaves
Working in the hot sun,
And black slaves
Walking in the dewy night,
And black slaves
Singing sorrow songs on the banks of a mighty river
Mingle themselves softly
In the flow of old Aunt Sue's voice,
Mingle themselves softly
In the dark shadows that cross and recross
Aunt Sue's stories.

And the dark-faced child, listening,
Knows that Aunt Sue's stories are real stories.
He knows that Aunt Sue never got her stories
Out of any book at all,
But that they came
Right out of her own life.

The dark-faced child is quiet
Of a summer night
Listening to Aunt Sue's stories.

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A Song to a Negro Wash-woman

Oh, wash-woman,
Arms elbow-deep in white suds,
Soul washed clean,
Clothes washed clean,—
I have many songs to sing you
Could I but find the words.

Was it four o'clock or six o'clock on a winter afternoon,
I saw you wringing out the last shirt in Miss White
Lady's kitchen? Was it four o'clock or six o'clock?
I don't remember.

But I know, at seven one spring morning you were on
Vermont Street with a bundle in your arms going to
wash clothes.
And I know I've seen you in a New York subway train in
the late afternoon coming home from washing clothes.

Yes, I know you, wash-woman.
I know how you send your children to school, and high-
school, and even college.
I know how you work and help your man when times are
hard.
I know how you build your house up from the wash-tub
and call it home.
And how you raise your churches from white suds for the
service of the Holy God.

And I've seen you singing, wash-woman. Out in the back-
yard garden under the apple trees, singing, hanging
white clothes on long lines in the sun-shine.
And I've seen you in church a Sunday morning singing,
praising your Jesus, because some day you're going to
sit on the right hand of the Son of God and forget
you ever were a wash-woman. And the aching back
and the bundle of clothes will be unremembered
then.
Yes, I've seen you singing.

And for you ,
O singing wash-woman,
For you, singing little brown woman,
Singing strong black woman,
Singing tall yellow woman,
Arms deep in white suds,
Soul clean,
Clothes clean,—
For you I have many songs to make
Could I but find the words.

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I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

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The Weary Blues

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,
 I heard a Negro play.
Down on Lenox Avenue the other night
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light
 He did a lazy sway....
 He did a lazy sway....
To the tune o' those Weary Blues.
With his ebony hands on each ivory key
He made that poor piano moan with melody.
 O Blues!
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.
 Sweet Blues!
Coming from a black man's soul.
 O Blues!
In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan—
 "Ain't got nobody in all this world,
 Ain't got nobody but ma self.
 I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
 And put ma troubles on the shelf."

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.
He played a few chords then he sang some more—
 "I got the Weary Blues
 And I can't be satisfied.
 Got the Weary Blues
 And can't be satisfied—
 I ain't happy no mo'
 And I wish that I had died."
And far into the night he crooned that tune.
The stars went out and so did the moon.
The singer stopped playing and went to bed
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.
He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

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Theme for English B

The instructor said,

*Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you—
Then, it will be true.*

I wonder if it's that simple?
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.
I am the only colored student in my class.
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:
hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.
(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach.
I guess being colored doesn't make me *not* like
the same things other folks like who are other races.
So will my page be colored that I write?
Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white—
yet a part of me, as I am part of you.
That's American.
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
But we are, that's true!
As I learn from you,
I guess you learn from me—
although you're older—and white—
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

Night Funeral in Harlem

Night funeral
In Harlem:

*Where did they get
Them two fine cars?*

Insurance man, he did not pay--
His insurance lapsed the other day--
Yet they got a satin box
For his head to lay.

Night funeral
In Harlem:

*Who was it sent
That wreath of flowers?*

Them flowers came
from that poor boy's friends--
They'll want flowers, too,
When they meet their ends.

Night funeral
In Harlem:

*Who preached that
Black boy to his grave?*

Old preacher man
Preached that boy away--
Charged Five Dollars
His girl friend had to pay.

Night funeral
In Harlem:

When it was all over
And the lid shut on his head
and the organ had done played
and the last prayers been said
and six pallbearers
Carried him out for dead
And off down Lenox Avenue
That long black hearse done sped,
 The street light
 At his corner
 Shined just like a tear--
That boy that they was mournin'
Was so dear, so dear
To them folks that brought the flowers,

To that girl who paid the preacher man--
It was all their tears that made
That poor boy's
Funeral grand.

Night funeral
In Harlem.

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