



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

to strengthen teaching in public schools®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2021 Volume I: U. S. Social Movements through Biography

Literary and Historical Reading with Langston Hughes

Guide for Curriculum Unit 21.01.09, published September 2021
by Alca Flor Usan

Langston Hughes is an incredible poet and storyteller known for his participation in the Harlem Renaissance. His poetry is popularly taught in classrooms across the country and yet, the way it is presented in typical prescription curricula, simply does no justice to the wealth of historical knowledge lying beneath each poem. As English teachers, while we focus on close reading analysis, we miss out on the historical events crafting those words. Events such as the Great Migration and World War 1, create the conditions through which Hughes experiences a life different from African Americans who came before him. The Harlem Renaissance captures a culminating moment where the African American identity would shift from the “Old Negro” to the “New Negro:” from the legacy and stereotypes of slavery, to a crafted identity of independence, pride, and struggle, existing in a still prejudiced society. His own familiar relationships, educational tension, experiences abroad, and participation in the Harlem Renaissance, add a crucial layer of understanding to his many works. This unit uses inquisitive historical thinking to add onto close reading skills, as a way to teach students to dig deeper into texts and history, therefore reaching a greater understanding about society today.

(Developed for English Language Arts, grade 8; recommended for English Language Arts, grades 6-12)

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use