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Voice in Poetry: Dream a World with Langston Hughes

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Introduction

Imagine hearing a voice on a page speak out to you and grab your attention. This really happens to you when the words on the page have voice. In Langston Hughes's poem, "Harlem," imagery and figurative language are used to express his poetic voice. The poetic devices used to describe a "dream deferred" capture the reader's attention. "What happens to a dream deferred? / Does it dry up / Like a raisin in the sun? / Or fester like a sore / And then run? / Does it stink like rotten meat?"¹ Hughes portrays several images to the reader that symbolize what will happen to a dream, if it is not pursued. Hughes leaves the dream up to the reader. The dream could be a goal in life or social equality. Hughes's poetic voice creates a lucid and descriptive picture of what can happen, if you don't achieve your dream.

What is voice? I developed several definitions of voice, while attending the seminar on "American Voices: Listening to Fiction, Prose, and Poetry." Voice is the person behind the words that speak out to the audience. Voice is imagery, tone, patterns of sound, rhythm, and diction. Voice is the powerful words on a page that form a relationship with you and the writer. Voice is your personality and resonance flowing in print. The selected readings, reading aloud, and class discussions helped me create my final definition of voice. Voice is the writer's lively, powerful words on the page, speaking to the reader to form a relationship.

You might think that this concept is too difficult for your students. However, you can arouse students' interest in reading and writing by teaching the concept of voice. I will not teach the definition of voice. I intend to give students a working definition of voice before I teach the unit. I know the activities in the unit will help students develop their own definitions of voice. Langston Hughes's poetry will be used to teach the concept of voice to students. Hughes expresses different voices through poetry, using language, experiences, and musical forms of the African American culture. Hughes's poetry will be meaningful and relevant to my students since they share life experiences similar to Hughes. When I read aloud a poem by Langston Hughes, my students will hear words on a page that illustrate the quality and power of language.

My curriculum unit, *Voice in Poetry: Dream a World with Langston Hughes*, is a curriculum unit designed to teach the concept of voice in poetry to 3rd - 5th grade students. The students, who are predominately African American, have diverse learning needs, experiences, and ways of learning. The poetry unit will provide students with multiple oral and written language activities that encourage them to develop their unique voices

in writing. I will implement this unit in a standard-based classroom during the two-hour literacy block. The three-part lesson framework will be used during Reader's and Writer's Workshop. The three-part lesson framework consists of a mini-lesson (before the learning), student work time (during the learning), and sharing (after the learning). My students will be engaged in a series of activities that will allow them to develop their voices in reading, writing, and speaking.

During Reader's Workshop, I will use multiple approaches to oral reading. I will make use of reading aloud, echo reading, choral reading, and paired reading. Oral reading is an effective way to help my students understand the text and create their unique voices in writing. When students hear lively and powerful words on the page, they will be encouraged to incorporate the elements of voice in their writing. During Writer's Workshop, I will implement several approaches that promote students to engage the reader's interest in writing. Freewriting, journal writing, response to literature, sentence starters, and rewriting, are the strategies for Writer's Workshop. Students will use the poems of Langston Hughes as models to write poetry. The writing process is utilized to guide students through the steps for writing their poems. They will brainstorm and make a jot list of ideas in groups. Graphic organizers will be used to arrange ideas. The people, places, and objects in their poems should be described using poetic devices. Reading and reciting their poetry occurs during sharing time.

Overview

Students use their unique voices outside the classroom in numerous ways. They dialogue with family and friends, talk on cell phones, rap to the rhythm of the beat, imitate voices on videos, and sing songs with a variety of language. I want students to incorporate lively, prolific voices in their writing. Oral and written language experiences in the classroom will help students develop voices that are expressive of themselves. When I read aloud Langston Hughes's poems, students will hear words, rhyme, and musical forms that are relevant to their oral language experiences. They will find their voices by reading aloud, analyzing, and listening to the powerful voices delivered in Hughes's poetry. I plan to take my students on a poetic journey, exploring the distinguished voice of Langston Hughes.

I teach at Fairington Elementary School, a Title I school, located in southeast DeKalb County in Georgia. The school's student population is predominantly African American. Some of the students come to school with life experiences similar to Langston Hughes's. The separation of their parents, moving around from one place to another, absence of a mother or father, and hardships has an emotional impact on their lives. I desire for my students to use their voices to express their feelings about the world around them as Langston Hughes did. I want their voices to grab the reader's attention as they write poems about their life experiences.

My students need multiple opportunities to explore their voices in order to use their unique voices in writing. The students in 3rd grade and 5th grade take state-mandated writing assessments. Their writing samples are scored using a scoring rubric with four domains. The four domains consist of *Ideas, Organization, Style, and Conventions*. The components of *Style* include: the concept of voice, along with word choice, audience awareness, sentence variety, and strategies appropriate to the genre. By teaching voice in poetry during Reader's and Writer's Workshop, my students will incorporate the components of style in their writing.

I feel that my students are struggling in writing because the rules for writing are different from how they speak. Peter Elbow contends that voice is what most people have in their speech but that is deficient in their writing.² My students' writing lacks voice because they don't transfer their oral language skills to their writing. They spend too much time thinking about their writing. They worry more about organization, spelling, and

grammar. This careful writing lacks resonance and quality. I believe that my students are more relaxed when they speak because they use an informal style to communicate with the listener. They express their personal thoughts and feelings without worrying how they say it. When they write their essays, they are focusing on a formulaic style of writing. I need to make my students as relaxed with writing as they are with speaking.

Elbow argues that you lose your voice in writing during the revising process. "The focus on clarifying your thinking and correcting your language takes the voice, breath, and rhythm away that made the first draft lively." ³ When you are in the drafting stage of writing, your voice comes through because you are freewriting. You are not worrying about spelling and usage. Sometimes when you are revising, you change a personal thought that expresses your voice. Steve Peha indicates that voice expresses original thoughts, personal feelings, and who we are inside. ⁴ I will focus on helping my students make their writing more personal, as they progress through the stages of the writing process.

Elements of Voice

In order for students to create their own voices in writing, they need to know the elements of voice. As they interact with the text and listen to the writer's voice, I will introduce the elements of voice including tone, diction, syntax, and audience. Tone refers to the writer's attitude toward the topic. Diction is the writer's word choice, which includes denotation or connotation of the word. The tone of the word, difficulty of the word, and formality of the word are also included in diction. The arrangement of the words and placement of the word in a phrase or sentence is considered syntax. The audience is the targeted reader or listener who will be reading the writing. My students will learn the elements of voice as they explore voice in poetry.

Voice in Poetry

Although the words on the page are silent, I can hear the voice of the poet when I read a poem because of the poetic devices that heighten my consciousness of words and their sounds. I will expose my students to rhyme, rhythm, imagery, poetic language, and the sounds of words by using poetry to teach the concept of voice. Poetry will not be difficult for struggling readers to read because the lines are shorter. Voices in poetry can be created in a variety of ways. A poet chooses voice or voices for a particular poem to engage the reader's interest or reveal his or her attitude toward the subject. The voice in the poem can be the voice of the poet, voice of an imaginary person, voice of a personified object, or voice of an abstraction. The voice of the speaker can be lively, inspiring, engaging, emotional, and interesting.

A poet chooses a voice for his particular poem and imagines some kind of audience for his or her voice. Frances Mayes describes different voices that poets use to connect to the reader: the personal "I" voice, the public voice, and the invisible voice. ⁵ The personal "I" voice allows the reader to respond to a direct personal expression or experience in the poem. The reader feels closer to the voice. The poet uses the public voice to represent a group of people involved in a common situation. The poet forms a relationship with the reader by using the word "we" to write about a situation that he feels is common to the reader. The public voice conveys the writer's attitude toward a subject that is political, religious, or controversial. It implies a community of shared interest and experiences.

The poet uses the invisible voice in a poem to act as an imaginary speaker. The poet acts as the narrator, as he speaks behind the voice of this imaginary person. This is an example of dramatic monologue. You hear the voice of the imaginary speaker, not the voice of the poet. In Langston Hughes's poem "Mother to Son," he uses an imaginary voice instead of his own voice to create the voice of a weary mother. This poem could be

used to teach the invisible voice. The speaker in the poem, a weary mother, is talking to her son about the hardships in her life.

Well son, I'll tell you:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair, It's had tacks in it, And splinters, And boards torn up, And places with no carpet on the floor Bare. But all the time I've been a-climbin' on, And reachin' landin's, And turnin' corners, And sometimes goin' in the dark Where there ain't been no light, So boy, don't you turn back. Don't you set down on the steps 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard, Don't you fall now, For I've still goin' honey, I've still climbin', And life for me ain't been no crystal stair. ⁶

When you read this poem aloud to your students and change your tone of voice at various lines of the poem, the students hear the mother's voice, describing her hardships. The use of dramatic monologue places the reader or the listener in the position of the son.

Elbow describes five different kinds of voices that writers use in their writing. These voices include: audible voice, dramatic voice, recognizable or distinctive voice, voice with authority, and resonant voice. ⁷ The audible voice has a variation of pitch, accent, and rhythm. The dramatic voice is the character or implied author in the text. It is like a stage voice because the characters are performing. The recognizable or distinctive voice is the writer's characteristic style in writing. This voice can sound different, depending on the audience. The voice with authority makes the voice heard on a page. This type of voice gets into strong speech. The resonant voice is the sound of more of the person behind the words. This voice resonates from the page to the reader.

Biographical Information for "Mother to Son"

Hughes's poetry stirred emotions and passions. The literary legacy he left will continue to inspire generations of African American people who experience life in much the same way as he did. A biography is included in the unit to provide an introduction for each poem. The biographical information will inspire students to explore the genius of Langston Hughes.

Langston Hughes was born on February 1, 1902 in Joplin, Missouri. He was raised by his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas after the separation of his parents. His mother moved from one city to another trying to find a better job and his father relocated to Mexico. Hughes was twelve years old when his grandmother died. After the death of his grandmother, Hughes lived with a couple named James and Mary Reed for two years. At the age of fourteen Hughes moved to Lincoln, Illinois to live with his mother. He wrote his first short poem and was named class poet of his eighth grade class. Later Hughes and his mother joined his stepfather in Cleveland, Ohio. Hughes began writing poems on a regular basis in high school. He was impressed with the works of Carl Sandburg, Walt Whitman, and Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Hughes had his first poem published in the *Central High Monthly*, a prominent school magazine.

Biographical Information for "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"

After graduating from high school, Hughes decided to visit his father in Mexico to convince him to pay for his college education. Hughes wrote one of his most famous poems, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," while he was on his way to Mexico on the train. The long ride from Illinois across the Mississippi and into Missouri, where Hughes was born, stimulated his imagination. Hughes thought about his past and future; beauty and death;

and hope and despair, while he composed this poem. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was published in *The Crisis* magazine in 1921.

Biographical Information for "I Too"

Hughes held various jobs in New York and traveled abroad, while working on a ship. He journeyed to Senegal, Nigeria, Belgium Congo, Angola, and Guinea in Africa. Hughes was disturbed by the African tribes' lack of political and economical freedom. The Africans considered Hughes white because of his skin color and straight dark hair. Later he traveled to France, Russia, Spain, and Italy. In Paris Hughes worked at a night club that featured jazz performers. When the club closed for renovations, Hughes joined two employees on their vacation to Italy. In Italy he was robbed and left stranded. Hughes was forced to live at the beach, while waiting for a job on a ship. Several American ships came to the harbor but only Caucasians were hired to work on the ship. Hughes had to wait on a ship that hired African Americans in order to travel to the United States. Hughes's depression stimulated him to compose the poem, "I Too Sing America."

Biographical Information for "The Weary Blues"

Hughes returned to Harlem, New York during the time period known as the Harlem Renaissance. He sat in clubs listening to blues, jazz, and writing poetry. He made friends with many important writers, such as Countee Cullen, Claude McCay, W.E.B. DuBois, Zora Neale Hurston, and James Weldon Johnson. Through these experiences a new rhythm emerged in Hughes's writing. Hughes delivered his powerful voice in jazz and blues themes. Hughes's poetry was frequently published and his writing flourished. Hughes met Vachel Lindsey, while working in the Wardman Park Hotel as a busboy. Hughes shared his poem, "The Weary Blues" and other poems with Lindsey. He gave Hughes advice and inspiration. In 1925, *Opportunity* magazine awarded Hughes first prize for "The Weary Blues." Later Hughes's first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, was published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1926.

Langston Hughes and Voice

Langston Hughes's poems reflect the history, hardships, and culture of the African American people. The poems Hughes wrote during the 1920's criticized the racism in society during that time period. Hughes connected his experiences to the common experiences of the African American people. In "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," Hughes indirectly uses his personal experiences in Africa to describe life in Africa. "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 pyramid above it." ⁸ In the poem, "I Too," Langston Hughes expresses his attitude toward his life and the world around him.

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 him

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Langston Hughes added a new voice to poetry. I believe that the different choices a writer makes about his rhymes, voice of the speaker, and figurative language have an effect on the reader. The voices in Langston Hughes's poems speak out to the audience with powerful words. "I Dream a World" is a poem about social justice. Langston Hughes wrote this poem to share his dream of a peaceful and just world. ¹⁰ I would use this poem to teach my students about the "I" voice. I would also teach rhyme and personification using this poem.

I dream a world where man No other man will scorn, Where love will bless the earth
And peace its paths adorn, I dream a world where all Will know sweet freedom's way,
Where greed no longer saps the soul Nor avarice blights our day. A world I dream
where black or white, Whatever race you be, Will share the bounties of the earth
And every man is free, Where wretchedness will hang its head And joy, like a pearl,
Attends the needs of all mankind Of such I dream, my world.

I would use Langston Hughes' poem, "Dreams" to teach the public voice and metaphors. I want students to dream and have ways to articulate their dreams. In this poem, Hughes is speaking to the people who believe in dreams. He is telling them to hold on to their dreams. Hughes writes that without dreams, life is meaningless and hopeless.

Hold fast to dreams For if dreams die Life is a broken-winged bird That cannot fly.
Hold fast to dreams For when dreams go Life is a barren field Frozen with snow. ¹¹

Objectives

My goal is to provide students with an array of experiences that will allow them to develop their unique voices in reading, writing, and speaking. I want my students to be able to form a relationship with the reader by creating a speaker's voice that is lively, engaging, and interesting. As the students immerse themselves in Langston Hughes's powerful masterpieces, they will understand voice in poetry. The objectives in this curriculum unit align with the Georgia Performance Standards.

By completing a series of engaging activities, the students will accomplish the objectives for this unit. They will read a familiar poem with expression by reading aloud with a partner or in a group. The students can enjoy reading a poem that they practiced or wrote during Writer's Workshop. The students will use oral language for different purposes by reading and reciting poems to an audience. They will identify the meaning of poetic devices and incorporate them in oral and written language. This objective can be accomplished when the students write the definition of poetic devices in their journals and highlight examples of poetic devices in other poems. The students will also incorporate poetic devices in their poems written during Writer's Workshop. The students should make judgments and inferences about characters and events. This objective can be accomplished by answering reflection questions and supporting answers with evidence from the poems. The students will summarize the content of a poem by responding to discussion questions and participating in class discussions. The students can identify the basic elements of poetry by analyzing an array of poems by Langston Hughes and engaging in text rendering.

My students will write poems that capture the reader's interest by using voice in writing. By engaging in reading aloud; choral reading, echo reading, and text rendering, my students will find their voices. These approaches will provide them with opportunities to develop their own voices. They will use poems by Langston Hughes as a model to write their own poems. Finally, my students will prewrite to generate ideas, develop a rough draft, reread to revise, and edit to correct. They will accomplish this objective by following the steps of the writing process to write their poems.

By completing the activities in this unit, the students will gain an appreciation for African American poetry and culture. The students will create their own voices in the poems that they write for their Poetry Portfolio. The students will also select several poems that they want published by Studenttreasures Publishing Company. Finally, they will choose their favorite poem to recite for the Black History Program in February.

Strategies

Reading Aloud

I feel the best way to teach voice in poetry is to select poems that have a strong sense of voice and read them aloud. Reading aloud a poem, placing special emphasis on sounds and words, is a strategy to use to teach voice in poetry. When I read an unfamiliar poem aloud to the students, I view the poem to make decisions on where I will use my voice to give special effects. Encourage the students to close their eyes, as you read aloud the poem. The students can discover the meaning of the poem just by listening to the voice of the poem and imagining the situation described in the poem. After reading the poem aloud to the students, give them an opportunity to share their feelings and thoughts. I would also give students an opportunity to read poems aloud without modeling where to place special emphasis on sounds and words. This will allow them an opportunity to express their own voices as they read the poems. When your students read familiar poems aloud, they will read and recite with expression.

Response to Questions

Responding to questions for class or group discussions is another strategy to use to engage students in identifying voice in poetry. Your students will make judgments and inferences about the characters or events in the poem. They will be able to summarize the poem. After reading the poem aloud, allow time for the students to read the poem silently. I feel the students need an opportunity to reflect on what was read aloud to them. You should write reflection questions on the board before the poems are read. This allows an opportunity for the students to preview the questions before you read the poem. After you read the poem, I would have the student respond to the questions individually or in groups. They should write their responses to the questions in their reading journals. The students can share their feelings and thoughts by responding to the following questions: Who is the speaker? Who is the speaker talking to? What is the situation? How does the speaker feel? What is the speaker saying to the one who's listening? What words or phrases did the poet use to make the poem interesting?

Choral Reading

Choral reading can be used to help your students read with expression. Your students will learn how to emphasize particular lines, words, and phrases in poems. They can use a range of voices as they read the poems. Your student will enjoy varying the pace, voice, and volume as they read. You should assign lines of the poems to different speakers or divide the class in groups to present poems.

Text Rendering

Text rendering is a strategy to use to help your students think critically about the poem. Your students will analyze the poem and find evidence to support their answers. Text rendering will also help your students

identify the elements of poetry and determine the meaning of unknown words. After reading the poem, ask your students to highlight an important word or phrase in the poem. Tell them to write the phrase or word in their reading journal. Suggest that your students describe what it means to them and why it is important.

Sentence Starters

Using first-person sentence starters is a good way to encourage your students to express their own voices in writing. They will be able to write poems about people, places, and objects. You should brainstorm ideas for an "I" poem during the prewriting process. The sentence starters could include: I am, I wonder, I see, I feel, I want, or I have. When students write "I" poems, they become the narrator, expressing their thoughts and feelings about a topic. They speak directly to the reader. Writing "I" poems provide opportunities for students to practice using rhythm, rhyme, and poetic devices.

Response to Literature

Response to literature will allow students to summarize the poem in their own words. They make connections between the poem and their personal experiences. You can use specific verbs to elicit a response that you want in their writing. You can use: define, express, describe, summarize, tell about, or analyze. The students will analyze the poem as they respond to the various writing prompts. Responding to literature will help students develop their ideas in writing.

Freewriting

Freewriting allows your students to write for a brief period in the classroom. I like freewriting because it is writing that helps the writer. Your students can write about a topic without worrying about making mistakes. This type of writing will help your students write for longer periods during the drafting stage of the writing process. It avoids the inhibitions, which normally influence writing. Freewriting is an opportunity for your students to express their voices in writing. They enjoy expressing their feelings in whatever voice they want to come out. Your students will develop voice and characters through action and dialogue, while engaged in freewriting.

Rewriting

Rewriting is an appropriate style strategy for teaching voice in poetry. Rewriting a phrase from a poem several ways will encourage your students to use their own voices in writing. You should stress that they make the phrase engaging to the reader. This will be an opportunity for your students to include poetic devices in their writing. Your students will express their personal feelings about a topic as they rewrite phrases.

Journal Writing

Journal writing is a strategy to use in Writer's workshop. I tell my students to use the journals to take notes on craft elements of writing and definitions of poetic devices. I encourage my students to give examples of the terminology or important points. When my students write notes from the lesson in their journals, they are expressing themselves freely. They are not worrying about complete sentences and punctuation. They refer to their journals when it is time to write in a variety of genres.

Classroom Activities

Before beginning the activities, I will assess the students' knowledge about the concept of voice by asking the question, "What is voice?" I will write a working definition of voice on chart paper. I will write: Voice is the person behind the words on the page that speaks to the reader. As students work through the activities, they will create a list of definitions below the working definition. The same poem will be used for Reader's workshop and Writer's workshop.

Activity One: "I Dream a World"

The students will read a familiar poem with expression.

The students will identify poetic devices and incorporate them in oral and written language.

The students will write a poem that captures the reader's interest.

Reader's Workshop

Before the Learning: Discuss the dream Martin Luther King Jr. had for the world. Tell the students that dreams can be wishes for family, children, the school or the world. Ask the students, "What is your dream for the world?" Model how to respond to the question by sharing your dream for the world. You could say, "I dream a world where powerful books capture children." Let students express their dreams for the world orally. Pass out copies of the poem, "I Dream a World" by Langston Hughes. Share background information about Hughes's experiences with segregation and racial injustice. Write these questions on the board, "What is the author's purpose? Who is the speaker in the poem? How does the speaker feel?" As you read the poem aloud, tell the students to close their eyes and listen to the speaker of the poem. Have the students read the poem aloud with you. Tell the students to think about the speaker of the poem and how he feels. The students will write their thoughts in their reading journals. Introduce the "I" voice. Explain that the "I" voice is the poet speaking directly to the reader.

During the Learning: Divide the class in groups. Assign each group four lines of the poem to practice choral reading. Tell them to highlight words or phrases that they will emphasize. Encourage the students to speak with feeling and emotion when they read aloud.

After the Learning: Each group will read their section of the poem to the class.

Writer's Workshop

Before the Learning: Tell the students to use their writing journals to take notes. Write the definition of personification on the board. Personification is a figure of speech which gives the qualities of a person to an animal, an object or an idea. Give examples of personification in "I Dream a World." Tell the students to highlight "Where wretchedness will hang its head" and "Where love will bless the earth." Have the students find another example of personification in the poem. Create a list of dreams for family, children, the school, or the world on chart paper. I will add my dream: I dream a world where powerful books capture children.

During the Learning: Give the students a sentence starter of "I dream a world where... or let them create their own words. Tell them to write two to four phrases to state their dream, using personification. Tell students to

write their own poem about their dream. Encourage them to use the poem, "I Dream a World" as a model.

After the Learning: The students will share their writing with the class.

Activity Two: "My People"

The students will use oral language for different purposes.

The students will summarize the content of a poem.

The students will identify the meaning of poetic devices and incorporate them in oral and written language.

The night is beautiful, So the faces of my people. The stars are beautiful, So the eyes of my people. Beautiful, also is the sun. Beautiful, also are the souls of my people. ¹²

Reader's Workshop

Before the Learning: Share background information about Langston Hughes's father. When Langston Hughes visited his father in Mexico, he didn't like his father's demeanor. His father was angry and bitter because of racism and poverty in America. Hughes's father, who was wealthy, blamed African Americans for the conditions that they lived in. Hughes was not pleased with his father's attitude or beliefs. Pass out copies of the poem, "My People." Read the first line of the poem aloud. Ask the students to read the next line. Continue this sequence until you have completed reading the poem aloud. Ask questions for discussion such as: Why did Hughes write this poem? What is the message Hughes is trying to express? What words grab your attention? How does this poem make African Americans feel? Why did Hughes use the night, the stars, and the sun to describe people?

During the Learning: Have students summarize the poem. Tell the students to highlight a phrase in the poem. Suggest that the students describe what it means to them and why it is important. Tell them to write a summary of the poem in their reading journal.

After the Learning: Have the students share their summary with the class.

Writer's Workshop

Before the Learning: Tell students to use their writing journals to take notes. Write the definition of a simile on the board. A simile is a figure of speech which involves a comparison between two unlike things. The words like or as are used in the comparison. Give examples of comparisons used in the poem, "My People." Tell the students to highlight "the night is beautiful and "the faces of my people." Explain the comparison of night and African American people. Write the simile: The night is like the faces of my people. Write more similes using phrases from the poem. Explain how the phrases express the beautiful elements of African American identity.

During the Learning: Have students write phrases from the poem several ways. Stress that they make the phrases engaging to the reader by using similes. Tell the students to write their own poem using Hughes's poem as a model.

After the Learning: The students will share the writing with the class.

Activity Three: "Mother to Son"

The students will use oral language for different purposes.

The students will make judgments and inferences about characters and events.

The students will prewrite to generate ideas, write a rough draft, reread to revise, and edit to correct.

Before the Learning: Explain the invisible voice (imaginary speaker). Tell the students that Hughes uses an imaginary voice instead of his own voice to create the voice of the speaker. Share background information about Hughes's childhood. Pass out the poem, "Mother to Son." Write on the board: Who is the speaker? Who is the speaker talking to? What is the speaker's message? Do you know someone like the speaker? Read the poem aloud, changing your tone of voice at various lines of the poem. Tell the students that Hughes uses words in unique ways to share his message and feelings. Discuss the phrase, "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair." Explain the use of nonstandard English (dialect) in this poem.

During the Learning: Have the students read the poem silently and with a partner. Tell the students to respond to the questions in their reading journal. Remind them to find evidence in the poem to support their answers.

After the Learning: The students will share their responses with the class.

Writer's Workshop

Before the Learning: Tell the students to use their writing journals to take notes. Have students select someone in their life that gives them advice. Create a list of advice given by a teacher, mother, grandmother, or other significant person. Create a list of titles for their poem: Mother to Daughter, Grandmother to Son, Father to Son, and Teacher to Student.

During the Learning: The students will follow the steps of the writing process to write their own poem using Hughes's poem as a model.

After the Learning: The students will share their writing with a partner.

Appendix A: Implementing District Standards

Reading

ELA3R1 The student demonstrates the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy, and expression.

ELA3R2 The student acquires and uses grade-level words to communicate effectively.

ELA3R3 The student uses a variety of strategies to gain meaning from grade-level text.

ELA4R1 and ELA5R1 The student demonstrates comprehension and shows evidence of a warranted and responsible explanation of a variety of literary and informational texts.

ELA4R3 and ELA5R3 The student understands and acquires new vocabulary and uses it correctly in reading and writing.

ELA4R4 and ELA5R4 The student reads aloud familiar material in a variety of genres, in a way that makes meaning clear to listeners.

Writing

ELA3W1 The student demonstrates competency in the writing process.

ELA4W2 and ELA5W2 The student demonstrates competence in a variety of genres.

Listening/Speaking/Viewing

ELA3LSV1 The student uses oral and visual strategies to communicate.

ELA4LSV1 and ELA5LSV1 The student participates in student-to-teacher, student-student, and group verbal interactions.

Annotated Teacher Bibliography

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Web English Teacher. "Langston Hughes: Lesson Plans and Teaching Ideas."

<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/hughes.html> (accessed May 1, 2008).

This website presents lesson plans, videos, biographical information, and classroom activities.

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The poems are written in the style of Langston Hughes. Each poem explores an important event or theme in Langston Hughes's life. There are also notes at the back of the book that elaborate on the poems and Hughes's life.

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Pinkney, Brian. *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

This book contains poems by Langston Hughes that express these themes: dreams, life, hardship, love, pride, and aspiration.

Roessel, David and Arnold Rampersad. *Poetry for Young People: Langston Hughes*. New York: Sterling Publishing, 2006.

This book contains illustrated collections of Hughes's poems, along with background information for each poem, and quotes from Hughes.

Notes

1. David Roessel and Arnold Rampersad, "Harlem," in *Poetry for Young People: Langston Hughes*, 44.
2. Peter Elbow, *Writing With Power*, 288.
3. *ibid*, *Writing With Power*, 289.
4. Steve Peha, "Looking for Quality in Student Writing" in *Teaching That Makes Sense*, <http://www.ttms.org>.
5. Frances Mayes, *The Discovery of Poetry*, 139.
6. David Roessel and Arnold Rampersad, "Mother to Son," in *Poetry for Young People: Langston Hughes*, 14.
7. Peter Elbow, *Landmark Essays on Voice and Writing*, Introduction.
8. David Roessel and Arnold Rampersad, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," in *Poetry for Young People: Langston Hughes*, 8.
9. David Roessel and Arnold Rampersad, "I Too," in *Poetry for Young People: Langston Hughes*, 22.
10. David Roessel and Arnold Rampersad, "I Dream a World" in *Poetry for Young People: Langston Hughes*, 40.
11. Langston Hughes, "Dreams," in *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*, 4.
12. David Roessel and Arnold Rampersad, "My People" in *Poetry for Young People: Langston Hughes*, 16.

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