

Historical Heroes: Langston Hughes



James Mercer Langston Hughes was born in 1902. He spent most of his childhood in Kansas with his grandmother, Mary Langston. Mary looked after him while his mother traveled around looking for work. Mary raised Hughes on stories of her generation's civil rights activism. This gave Langston a deep pride in his racial heritage.

As a teen, Hughes attended high school in Cleveland, Ohio, where he lived with his mother and new stepfather. He wrote for his high school newspaper. He also began writing short stories, poetry, and dramatic plays. Striking a bargain with his father, Hughes agreed to study engineering in exchange for the payment of his tuition at Columbia University in New York.

Hindered by racial prejudices at Columbia, Hughes left to participate in the culture of the Harlem Renaissance. He supported himself with odd jobs while he continued to work on his writing. In 1929, Hughes graduated from Lincoln University, a historically African American college in Pennsylvania. He lived most of the rest of his life in New York, continuing to write and winning many awards and honors for his literary achievements.

Directions: Use the text to help you answer the questions below.

1. Langston Hughes was known best for his skill in _____ writing _____ short stories, poetry, and dramatic plays.

2. How did Langston Hughes develop a deep pride in his racial heritage?

Langston Hughes developed a deep pride in his racial heritage when he was exposed to his grandmother's stories of her generation's civil rights activism.

3. Why did Langston Hughes leave Columbia University?

Langston Hughes left Columbia University because of the racial prejudice he experienced.

4. What contribution did Langston Hughes make to the Harlem Renaissance? Make an inference using details from the text.

Student answers will vary, but may include: Langston Hughes contributed to the Harlem Renaissance by sharing his writing with others.