



James Langston Hughes [1902-1967] was born in Joplin, Missouri, USA. He attended Central High School in Cleveland, Ohio, where he began writing poetry in the eighth grade. His father would discourage him

from pursuing writing as a career, in favor of something 'more practical'. Langston's tuition fees to Columbia University were paid on the grounds that he study engineering.

Mother to Son

Langston Hughes

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.

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.

Into a thousand lights of sun,
Into a thousand whirling dreams
Of sun!

Dream Deferred

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?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes Poetry Analysis

Answer these questions on a separate sheet of paper.

Mother to Son

1. In the poem “Mother to Son”, what is the tone of the mother’s voice? Does it change throughout the poem? Explain.
2. Provide evidence from the poem to show that the mother’s life was difficult and offer some elaboration to show how that evidence demonstrates it.

I, Too.

3. What does the speaker in this poem feel is the future for black men in America? Provide evidence from the poem to support your answer and offer elaboration for that evidence.

Dream Deferred

4. What is the message of this poem? Provide evidence from the poem to support your answer.
5. What does the last line of this poem mean?