

Harlem renaissance poem analysis paper

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Lee-Michael Torcedo Prof. Quiroz English 1302 October 22, 2012 Dreams After the civil war, African Americans obtained their freedom. Still despised by many white Americans, African Americans continued to fight for justice. Around the early 1900's the Harlem Renaissance began across the nation they fought for their culture and expressed it through art, music, dance, and literature. One of the biggest names in the Harlem Renaissance is Langston Hughes (Harlem). The poems he wrote better expressed the feelings of the many African Americans during this era.

Langston Hughes published his poem, "As I Grew Older," which explains the difficulty many African Americans had with following their dreams during this time. On February 1, 1902, Carrie M. Langston and James N. Hughes gave birth to, arguably, the most famous Harlem Renaissance literary poet, Langston Hughes. He grew up attending school in Kansas and Illinois, and graduated from High School in Ohio where he began writing his poetry. Later, Hughes went on to college, but stopped shortly after.

He took many jobs in New York and a job working on a freighter that took him across the Atlantic Ocean to Africa, Spain, and France. He returned to Washington D. C. to live with his mother with hopes of returning to college. He had trouble making enough money and didn't go back to college until a year later where he graduated from Lincoln University in 1929. After college, he began publishing his works and started to become famous. On May 22, 1967, Langston Hughes died of cancer in New York (Langston). Langston Hughes' legend still lives to this day, and his poems are often mentioned in literature.

In his poem “As I Grew Older,” published in 1925, he begins by saying “It was a long time ago/ I have almost forgotten my dream/ But it was there then/ In front of me/ Bright like a sun—/ My dream” (1-4). Whether or not Langston Hughes wrote this about himself or not, it can go either way on who could be mentioning this and who is reflecting on the past that was a “long time ago”. Hughes gave the perspective that the main persona is talking about his past and about how even though his dream was right in front of him, he could not grasp it.

In the early ages of Langston Hughes life, many obstacles barricaded him from reaching his dreams and goals, losing sight of what he really wanted. He talks about a wall in the poem that rises slowly between him and this dream. It “rose until it touched the sky” (11). The wall symbolizes his obstacles or what blocked him from his dreams. The wall rising until it touched the sky showed the degree and emphasis of the difficulty for Hughes to see his dreams. On line thirteen he mentions the shadow that the wall covered him in. There was no more light to be seen.

All hope seemed to be lost until he “breaks” down the wall, “shatters” the darkness, and “smashes” the night. At the other side of this wall, is light, the sun, and his dream. Langston Hughes must have at one point in following his dream felt so overwhelmed with everything in his way and just “lie down in the shadow” (15). Just like in his poem, he takes down that wall and does not let it get in his way. He is successful in reaching his dream of becoming a well-known poet even through the worst of times. His poem reflects the situation many African Americans faced during this time.

Freedom is still new to most and following dreams is difficult because of prejudism. Many African Americans ran into this “ wall” and many did not break through as Langston Hughes did. Although some did, they went through the same difficulties as Hughes poetically explained in his poem. The beauty of this poem is the universality of it. It may have been written to explain the difficulties African Americans had, but it reflects the difficulty for anyone following their dreams should not be forgotten. They are not always easy to achieve, but that does not mean one should give up.

The poem is powerful in meaning and motivational as it speaks to anyone and illustrates that you should never surrender. Langston Hughes’ dream as a young boy was to be known as a poet. Much like the wall, he had to overcome many obstacles to achieve his dreams. He would vision his dream so clearly in front of him like the sun but as he got older and taller, so did this wall that blocked his way. Even though, Hughes smashed down that wall and become one of the most well-known founders of the Harlem Renaissance. Works Cited " Harlem Renaissance - Biography. com - Biography. com. " Famous Biographies & TV Shows - Biography. om. N. p. , n. d. Web. 22 Oct. 2012. . Hughes, Langston. " As I Grew Older by Langston Hughes. " PoemHunter. Com - Thousands of poems and poets. Poetry Search Engine. N. p. , 3 Jan. 2003. Web. 22 Oct. 2012. . " Langston Hughes Biography - life, children, parents, name, story, history, school, mother, book, information, born, college. " Encyclopedia of World Biography. N. p. , n. d. Web. 22 Oct. 2012. .