

# LETTERS TO LANGSTON

**BY: Kristen**

## PROLOUGE

My name is Joe, and I'm happy that you've decided to read this spectacular story about one spectacular poet of a man.

I went from having a poor family as a child straight into having a poor family as an adult. I could never seem to earn enough money to support my wife and four kids.

Every trip to the store was depressing, all kinds of things you would love to have, but not nearly enough cash to buy them with. Except for that time when the cashier at the grocery store told me that I didn't have enough money to pay for all of my items, and a young man in line behind me offered to pay for me. Of course I was grateful, so I asked him his name, and he simply replied, "Langston Hughes." And from that day on we kept in touch through letters, this... is our story.

## PART ONE

November 6, 1925

Dear Langston,

Things around the household are taking a turn for the better. My wife has found a job at the nearby restaurant, and makes a fairly good wage. My 17 year old is applying for a scholarship, and even the kids are selling lemonade (they're using the lemons from the scraggly little tree in the yard) to make money! Anyways, how are things going where you are?

Your friend,  
Joe Brenson

November 27, 1925

Dear Joe,

It's wonderful to know that things are getting better! You already know that I work in a fancy hotel as a busboy. Well, about two weeks ago, Vichal Lindsay (the famous poet) came to stay at the hotel for a couple of days. Before dinner one evening I snuck some of my poems onto his dinner plate, and later that night Vichal claimed that he had discovered a new poet and introduced me to the crowd! Since then where newspaper and T.V reporters around soon everyone in the a wide amount of area knew my name. And thanks to the newspaper people even more people will know it in a day or two! Do you think that I might become famous like Carl Sandburg, or Lawrence Dunbar?

Sincerely,  
Langston Hughes

December 09, 1925

Dear Langston,

Of course! You write great poetry, and you know it!

Bad news over Here. There has been a drought for about a month, and our poor little lemon tree just couldn't take the heat any longer and died.

We haven't known each other for very long time now, and I would like to get to know you a little bit more. Is there anything that you're willing to tell me?

Your friend,  
Joe

December 17, 1925

Dear Joe,

I was born in Joplin, Missouri on 1902.

Both of my parents were booksellers until my father decided that he wanted to become a lawyer. The day I was born both of my parents were fuming because a new law had been issued that said that no black man could become a lawyer. Soon after that he moved to Mexico and started his business.

My grandmother raised me because my own mother was forced to leave me in her custody while she searched for a steady job.

My grandmother was a wonderful person, she told amazing stories. When I was a kid she used to sit me on her lap and tell me intriguing tales of when my grandfather was in the army, and the battles he fought.

I was fortunate enough to go to school, but since I was the only black kid in my class all of the other children teased and bullied me mercilessly.

I guess that the rest you can figure out on your own.

Your friend,  
Langston Hughes

December 20, 1925

Dear Langston,

Wow, that's a lot of information. I guess that it must've been a pretty rootless childhood huh? Since it's getting dangerously close to Christmas time a couple of days before I received your latest letter I went to the local used book store hoping to find a cheap but decent present for the family. I went to the poetry section and found the first book that was published that was written by the one and only you! The book is called The Weary Blues! I bought a copy that is at this very moment lying under the Christmas tree. My family will be so thrilled!!!

Your fan,  
Joe Brenson

December 25, 1925

Dear Joe,

That's fantastic news! By the time you get this letter it will probably be either Christmas Eve or Christmas itself. In your next letter I want you to tell me what your family thought of your gift.

Your friend,  
Langston, the writer

January 03, 1926

Dear Langston,

Well, when they saw the book their faces totally lit up. It took me a while to convince them to wait until they had finished opening the rest of the presents!

My 16 year old earned a scholarship in engineering. He is very excited and can't wait to start college in a couple of years.

Yours truly,  
Joe

January 11, 1926

Dear Joe,

As a teenager my dad didn't think that there was anything in my future in writing and wanted me to become an engineer instead. After a year or so of collage, I dropped out with a B+ average and never looked back. My dad was wrong about my writing and me.

Your former engineer,  
Langston Hughes

January 19, 1926

Dear Langston,

EEP! Wow, I had no clue! I guess you already know this, but I didn't go to college. If I could I would want to study as a doctor or as a police officer. But

considering what I could afford that's never going to happen. (I don't suppose that there's a college for bus drivers).

Your man,  
Joe

## PART TWO

After that Langston's fame flourished. He used his poems to express his feelings about racial injustice. In one of his poems he defended Booker T. Washington by focusing on his strategy to gain racial equality.

Langston spent most of his time writing poetry, musicals, operas, short stories, autobiographies, songs, essays, humor, and plays.

Even though he was wildly known around the world the fame never got to his head as he continued to write his letters to me.

May 03, 1967

Dear Langston,

I was wondering if you wanted to get together and go to a jazz club some time? I know you like to write your poetry while listening to music, and it would be a great opportunity to see each other again. What do you think?

Your Jazz fan,  
Joe

May 07, 1967

Dear Joe,

That sounds like a great idea! How'd you know that I love to write while listening to jazz! I've done a lot of different things in my short life. So far I've been to Senegal, Nigeria, the Cameroons, Belgium Congo, Angola, and Guinea in Africa, Italy and France, Russia and Spain, Mexico, Topeka, Kansas, Colorado, Indiana and Buffalo. I've written sixteen books of poems, two novels, three

collections of short stories, four volumes of "editorial" and "documentary" fiction, twenty plays, children's poetry, musicals and operas, three autobiographies, a dozen radio and television scripts and dozens of magazine articles. And in addition to that I also edited seven anthologies. Even though I've done all of this have I made a difference in the world? Does my life and death matter?

Your friend,  
Langston Hughes

Before he got my reply letter Langston was diagnosed with cancer. And in 1967 he died, he never lived to figure out how much of an impact his writing made on the world.

### HISTORICAL NOTE

The character "Joe" in the story is fictional and did not really exist. However the facts about Langston Hughes are true.

~ Kristen

#### Works Cited

11 DECEMBER 2003. <<<http://www.randomhouse.com/knopf/authors/hughes/>>>.

15 DECEMBER 2003. <<<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/lhughes.htm>>>.

15 DECEMBER 2003. <<<http://www.kyrene.k12.az.us/schools/brisas/sunda/poets/hughes.htm>>>.

09 DECEMBER 2003. <<[http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/aa/writers/hughes/youth\\_1](http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/aa/writers/hughes/youth_1)>>.

15 DECEMBER 2003. <http://www.linkstoliterature.com/hughesl.htm>

04 DECEMBER 2003. <<<http://myhero.com/hero.asp?hero=langstonHughes>>>.