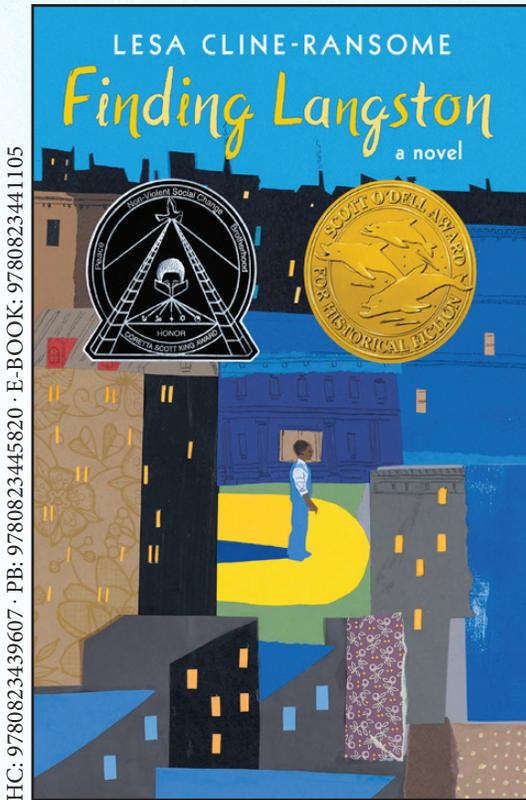


HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



Grades
3-7



Finding Langston

Lesa Cline-Ransome

Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book
Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction

- ★ *Booklist*, Starred Review
- ★ *The Horn Book*, Starred Review
- ★ *Kirkus Reviews*, Starred Review
- ★ *School Library Journal*, Starred Review
- ★ *Shelf Awareness*, Starred Review

ABOUT THE BOOK

In this award-winning debut novel about the Great Migration, a boy discovers Chicago's postwar South Side and the poetry of Langston Hughes.

Set in 1946 Chicago, eleven-year-old Langston is grieving the death of his mother, and missing rural Alabama where he and his father lived until his father decided there was no longer a reason to stay. They moved into a small one-room

apartment in a section of Chicago called the Brown Belt. Langston's father works in a nearby factory, and Langston walks to school. The problem with school is that there are bullies, including a young boy named Lymon, who call Langston "Country" and laugh at his overalls, his rundown shoes, and his Southern accent.

When Langston discovers the Hall Branch of the Chicago Public Library, he finds that, unlike the whites-only library in Alabama, he is welcome. He spends every afternoon in the library, and with the guidance of the children's librarian, he discovers the poetry of Langston Hughes. Until then, he didn't know where his name came from, but the poetry his mother quoted in secret letters she once wrote his dad reveal that she was so inspired by Langston Hughes that she named her son for him.

Read the companion novel, *Leaving Lymon*.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Have students read about the Great Migration on the following website: blackpast.org/aah/great-migration-1915-1960. Then read aloud "One-Way Ticket" by Langston Hughes: nationalhumanitiescenter.org/ows/seminars/tcentury/gmigration/Hughes_OneWayTicket.pdf. Ask students to write a one-page paper that states how this poem reflects the feelings of the people who left the South during the Great Migration.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 4-5.3



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#FindingLangston

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- After Langston's mother dies, he and his father move to Chicago. What does Langston miss most about Alabama? How are the people in Chicago different from those in Alabama? Why does Langston think that the folks in Alabama would call those in Chicago "uppity"? Langston describes his memory of Alabama as "a candle fighting to stay lit in the wind" (p. 5). Why is it important for him to keep his memories of Alabama "lit"?
- Langston says nothing in Chicago belongs to them, and no one knows his name. At what point does Langston begin to feel a sense of belonging? Who and what help him find his place in the vast city?
- Langston's father explains that Chicago is their home now. Discuss the difference between a house and a home. Contrast Langston and his family's house in Alabama with the apartment in Chicago. Explain how their house in Alabama was a home. Debate whether the apartment in Chicago ever feels like a home to Langston.
- Compare and contrast the way Langston and his father deal with grief. Why won't Langston cry in front of his father? Discuss how tears are often the best way to confront grief.
- Define *privacy*. What is the difference between *privacy* and *secrets*? Langston discovers a box of letters that his mother sent his father when they were young. How does Langston violate his father's privacy by reading the letters? Why is reading someone's mail like stealing?
- What does Langston learn about his parents from reading the letters? Discuss what his father would say if he knew that Langston had read the letters.
- How does Langston deal with loneliness? Parts of poems by Langston Hughes are used throughout the novel. Which poems speak of loneliness? How do the poems console Langston? In what other ways do Hughes's poems speak to Langston?
- Discuss Langston's encounter with bullies. Who is the ringleader? Describe Erroll's and Clem's roles in the bullying. Debate whether they are afraid of Lymon. What is the first hint that Clem is different from Lymon and Erroll? At what point does Langston stand up to Lymon? Describe his father's reaction to the fight. How does the schoolyard incident help Langston gain respect from the other boys? Debate whether such respect is worth the detention Langston must serve.
- Describe the friendship that develops between Langston and Clem. What do they have in common? Langston doesn't like being called "Country." What is symbolic about Langston telling Clem his name?
- Langston discovers the George Cleveland Hall Branch of the Chicago Public Library and goes there every afternoon after school. Why does he lie and tell his father that he is playing with boys his age after school? Explain his reaction when Miss Fullton asks him if he has been spending his afternoons at the library.
- Discuss Langston's thoughts when he discovers the poems of Langston Hughes. Why does he think the poet is like a magician? Discuss why he wants to keep the library and Mr. Langston Hughes to himself. Explain why he finally tells his father about the library. What is the significance of Langston and his father going to the library together at the end of the novel (p. 104)?
- How does Miss Fulton become more than just a neighbor to Langston and his father?
- What does Langston learn about his father during the short time they've been in Chicago?
- Debate whether Langston's attitude toward Chicago changes by the end of the novel.

Correlates to CCSS in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 3-5.1, RL.3-5.2, RL. 3-5.3; Craft & Structure RL. 4-5.4, RL. 3-5.5, RL. 3-5.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 3-5.1, SL. 3-5.2, SL. 3-5.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Writing—Langston and his father move from Alabama to Chicago in 1946. Most African Americans leaving the South were escaping Jim Crow laws, and searching for better work opportunities. Have students write a paper that reveals what Langston and his father are seeking, and what they leave behind.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.



Ask students to write a paper that explains the title of the book. Instruct them to cite direct quotes or specific scenes to support their opinion.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

Language Arts/Writing—Langston’s father likes blues songs. He later thinks that the poems of Langston Hughes are similar to the blues. Read about Langston Hughes and the blues on the following website: <http://bbkingmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/L.-Hughes-and-the-Blues.pdf>. Allow students to work with a partner to consider the main character of the novel and his sadness about living in Chicago. Then have them write a blues song or poem called “Langston’s Chicago Blues.”

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

Read aloud “Mother to Son” by Langston Hughes, and have the class analyze the message the mother is sending. (poetryfoundation.org/poems/47559/mother-to-son). Then have them write a poem titled “Father to Son” that reveals the relationship between Langston and his father.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.3; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

Social Studies/Writing—Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to research the Harlem Renaissance. The following sites are helpful: youtube.com/watch?v=nWMus4KHKx4 (for younger students) and poetryfoundation.org/collections/145704/an-introduction-to-the-harlem-renaissance (for older students). Then have them write a newspaper feature for Black History Month that discusses the importance of this cultural movement. Remember to include who, what, when, where, and how.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W.3-5.2; Production & Distribution of Writing W. 3-5.4, W. 3-5.6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 3-5.9; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2.

VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

The vocabulary in the novel isn’t difficult, but students should be encouraged to jot down unfamiliar words, then try to define them by taking clues from context. Such words may include: *esteemed* (p. 28), *residents* (p. 280), *selections* (p. 29), *surpassing* (p. 63), and *sashaying* (p. 91).

What is a jewel? Have students write a one-page paper that explains why the Hall Branch of the Chicago Public Library is called the “Black Jewel of the Midwest.”

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

Drama—Plan a program for the Hall Branch of the Chicago Public Library about the Chicago Black Renaissance. Have Langston and Clem as Masters of Ceremonies. Engage other classmates in the program by having them present some of the luminaries of this cultural movement. End the program with an interpretive dance to one of the poems of Langston Hughes. Information may be found on the following websites:

Visual Artists

Charles White (moma.org/artists/6339)
William Edouard Scott
(illinoisart.org/william-edouard-scott)

Musicians

Louis Armstrong
(npg.si.edu/exh/armstrong/index.htm)
Cab Calloway
(notablebiographies.com/Br-Ca/Calloway-Cab.html)
Muddy Waters (muddywatersofficial.com/)
Mahalia Jackson
(biography.com/people/mahalia-jackson-9351242)

Writers

Lorraine Hansberry
(chipublib.org/lorraine-hansberry-biography/)
Arna Bontemps
(poets.org/poetsorg/poet/arna-bontemps)
Gwendolyn Brooks
(poetryfoundation.org/poets/gwendolyn-brooks)
Richard Wright
(biography.com/people/richard-wright-9537751)
Langston Hughes
(poets.org/poetsorg/poet/langston-hughes)

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 3-5.7, W. 3-5.8, W. 3-5.9; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 3-5.4.



INTERNET RESOURCES

Encyclopedia of Chicago, Community of Bronzeville

encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/171.html

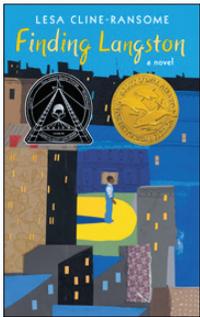
This is information about Bronzeville, where Langston and his father lived.

Chicago Public Library Hall Branch

chipublic.org/about-hall-branch/

This site offers information about the Hall Branch of the Chicago Public Library.

CONNECTING *FINDING LANGSTON* AND *LEAVING LYMON*



Compare and contrast Langston's and Lymon's relationships with their fathers. How do both fathers demonstrate love for their sons? Which boy has the longer journey in developing a relationship with his father?

Correlates to CCSS in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 3-5.1, RL. 3-5.3; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 5.9.

Write a paper that discusses the importance of the Hall Branch of the Chicago Public Library to Langston and the band room of the Arthur J. Audy Home to Lymon. What does each boy discover? How do these places change the course of each boy's life?

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 3-5.1; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-5.1, L. 3-5.2; Knowledge of Language L. 3-5.3.

Read about bullies and the bullied on the following website: stopbullying.gov/resources/kids/facts.

Which characteristics of the bullied best fit Langston? Which of the reasons for being a bully best apply to Lymon? Role-play a scene where Langston and Lymon sit down and talk about the things they have in common as well as their differences. Langston likes poetry, and Lymon likes music. Work in pairs to write a poem or song lyrics that Langston and Lymon might write together.

Correlates to CCSS in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 3-5.4, W. 3-5.5; Research to Build & Present Knowledge W. 3-5.7, W. 3-5.9

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo Credit: John Halpern

LESA CLINE-RANSOME is the author of almost twenty books for young readers. Her work has received NAACP Image Award nominations, Coretta Scott King Honors, dozens of starred reviews, and a Christopher Award and has been named to ALA Notable Books and Bank Street Best Children's Books lists.

Her debut middle-grade novel, *Finding Langston*, received a Coretta Scott King Honor, the Scott O'Dell Award, and five starred reviews. Its companion, *Leaving Lymon*, is the recipient of three stars to date. Lesa's picture books include *Before She Was Harriet* and *Overground Railroad*, both illustrated by her husband and collaborator James E. Ransome. They live in Rhinebeck, New York.

