



Finding Langston

LESA CLINE RANSOME

Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book

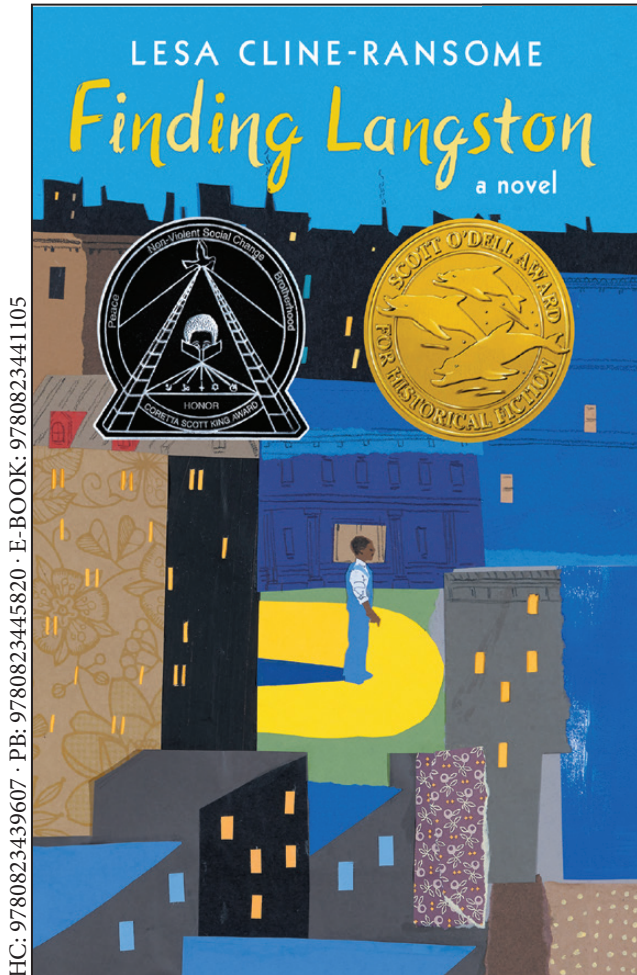
Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction

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

About the Book

When eleven-year-old Langston's father moves them from their home in Alabama to Chicago's Bronzeville district, it feels like he's giving up everything he loves.

It's 1946. Langston's mother has just died, and now they're leaving the rest of his family and friends. He misses everything—Grandma's Sunday suppers, the red dirt roads, and the magnolia trees his mother loved. In the city, they live in a small apartment surrounded by noise and chaos. It doesn't feel like a new start, or a better life. At school he's bullied for being a country boy.



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But Langston's new home has one fantastic thing: unlike the whites-only library in Alabama, the Chicago Public Library welcomes everyone. There, hiding out after school, Langston discovers another Langston—a poet whom he learns inspired his mother enough to name her only son after him.

Don't miss the companion novel, *Leaving Lymon*, which centers on one of Langston's classmates and explores grief, resilience, and the circumstances that can drive a boy to become a bully—and offer a chance at redemption.

Read the companion novel, *Leaving Lymon*.

Discussion Questions

1. 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"?
2. 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"?

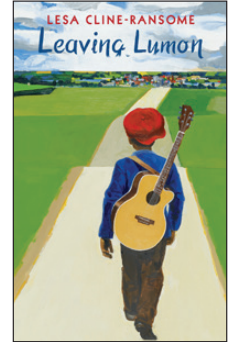
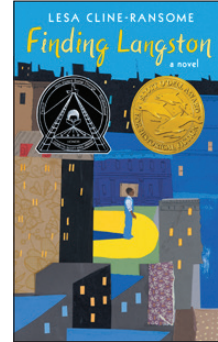
3. Langston says nothing in Chicago belongs to them, and no one knows his name. At what point does Langston begin to feel a sense of belonging? Who and what help him find his place in the vast city?
4. Langston's father explains that Chicago is their home now. What is the difference between a house and a home? What is the difference between Langston and his family's house in Alabama and the apartment in Chicago. Explore how their house in Alabama was a home. Do you think that the apartment in Chicago will ever feel like a home to Langston?
5. Explore the similar and different ways in which Langston and his father deal with grief. Why won't Langston cry in front of his father? Why are tears often the best way to confront grief?
6. 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?
7. What does Langston learn about his parents from reading the letters? What would his father say if he knew that Langston had read the letters?
8. How does Langston deal with the loneliness he feels? 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? To you?
9. Bullies play a part in this novel. How is Langston bullied? Who is the ringleader? Describe Erroll's and Clem's roles in the bullying. Are they 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?
10. Describe Langston's father's reaction to the fight. How does the schoolyard incident help Langston gain respect from the other boys? Do you think such respect is worth the detention Langston must serve?
11. 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?
12. 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.
13. Discuss Langston's thoughts when he discovers the poems of Langston Hughes. Why does he think the poet is like a magician? Why does he want 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)?
14. How does Miss Fulton become more than just a neighbor to Langston and his father?
15. What does Langston learn about his father during the short time they've been in Chicago?
16. Debate whether Langston's attitude toward Chicago changes by the end of the novel.

Bonus!

Connecting Companion Novels

Finding Langston and *Leaving Lymon*

- Describe 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?
- Explore 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?
- Visit the Internet to read about bullies and the bullied at 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?
- Describe a scene in which Langston and Lymon might sit down and talk about the things they have in common as well as their differences. Langston likes poetry, and Lymon likes music. Write a poem or song lyrics that Langston and Lymon might write together.



For an extensive guide with connections to music, writers, poetry, and more, visit HolidayHouse.com.



Photo Credit: John Halpern

About the Author

LESA CLINE-RANSOME is the award-winning author of almost twenty books for young readers.

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 lives with her husband and collaborator James E. Ransome in Rhinebeck, New York.