

# *The Dream Flag Project*

## Creating Dream Flags

### CREATING DREAM FLAG POEMS

#### Elementary School Participants

Dream flags can be purely visual or combinations of text with visual elements. Younger children (elementary and middle school students) may find creating the visual element easier with some words to "hang on," so we suggest doing some writing first, but you will know you children best.

- There are two stages: 1) developing ideas and 2) writing them on paper

#### Stage 1:

- Talk about dreams as hopes. Talk about dreams for people--people you know, like your family and your friends, people you don't know, like all the children in your country or in the world.

#### Stage 2:

- Have students write (or dictate) sentences that tell about their dreams and hopes. You could give a starter of "My dream for the world is . . . " or let students create their own wording. You may want to make a limit of two or three sentences so there will be space for visual work on the cloth. You may also want students to simply list phrases or words that state their dreams.
- You may also want them to write poems. (See the suggestion for Middle School children.)

#### Follow-Up

- Have students (or parent helpers) transfer words onto cloth. This could be before or after children decorate the cloth--whatever works best. (See **Putting Words on Fabric.**)
- Have student decorate cloth flags. (See **Fabric Decoration.**)

#### **Suggested Readings List:** (in process)

*In the Space of the Sky* by Richard Lewis, Illustrated by Debra Frasier.

A picture book focusing on wonder about the natural world. Most pages have fewer than twenty words.

*The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* by Langston Hughes, Illustrated by Brian Pinkney.

A collection of poems which are very accessible to young readers. Poems are divided into sections by general theme. Each poem is illustrated with a black and white etching.

*Visiting Langston* by Willie Perdomo and illustrated by Bryn Collier.

A poetic text describing a girl's visit to the house where Langston Hughes lived.

*Love to Langston* by Tony Medina and illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

A series of poems written in the voice of Langston and based on experiences in his life.

Includes notes that explain biographical information related to each poem.

*Harlem* Poem by Walter Dean Myers and illustrations by Christopher Myers

A poetic description of what Harlem was and is. Rhythmic and jazzy in sound and illustration.

*Jump Back, Honey* Poems Paul Laurence Dunbar and illustrations by various artists

Illustrated poems from the one of the most well known African American poets before Langston Hughes.

CD's from Smithsonian Folkways at [www.folkways.si.edu](http://www.folkways.si.edu) :Langston Hughes reading his poetry. Selections include "The Voice of Langston Hughes" and "The Dreamkeeper and Other Poems".

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The Dream Flag concept was created by sixth grade teachers Jeff Harlan, Sandy Crow, Helen Holt and others at The Agnes Irwin School ([www.agnesirwin.org](http://www.agnesirwin.org)), Rosemont, Pennsylvania, U.S. The Dream Flag Project ([www.dreamflags.org](http://www.dreamflags.org)) is a collaborative project facilitated by Jeff Harlan and Sandy Crow. Contact [dreamflags@agnesirwin.org](mailto:dreamflags@agnesirwin.org) or Jeff Harlan, Dream Flags Project Director, The Agnes Irwin School, Ithan Ave. and Conestoga Road, Rosemont, PA 19010, U.S. A.

... for Helen

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#### Middle School Children

There are two stages: 1) brainstorming/discussion and 2) writing. These suggestions are intended for students who will be comfortable with some abstract questions, but there are many ways to approach dream flags. Teachers can simply following the steps for elementary students or take it in another direction.

#### Stage 1:

- Have students read the poetry of Langston Hughes—not just his poetry about dreams but also his poetry *that* dreams. You may want to choose another poet for your readers. His poetry is accessible, well-crafted, and focused.
- For discussion: What was his world like? What was he dreaming? What was he hoping? How does he use poetry to talk about his dreams? Discuss some of the differences between Langston Hughes' world and yours. What are the problems in our world? What are your dreams for the world today?

#### Stage 2:

- Have students compose poems on paper that respond to the question: "What are your dreams for people or for the world?" Students can write about any group of people—large or small, part of the world or all of it. You may want to limit length of the poem to about 12-15 lines, considering the space limit on dream flags.
- Have students create, revise and edit their poems before transferring them to cloth. Help them remember that poems can be just words and phrases, not full sentences and that poems often do not rhyme.

#### Follow-Up

- Have students (or parent helpers) transfer words onto cloth. This could be before or after children decorate the cloth—whatever works best. (See **Putting Words on Fabric.**)
- Have student decorate cloth flags. (See **Fabric Decoration.**)

#### **Suggested Readings List:** (in process)

*The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* by Langston Hughes, Illustrated by Brian Pinkney.  
A collection of poems which are very accessible to young readers. Poems are divided into

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#### High School Participants

Here, the participants may be comfortable enough with abstraction and images to work with words in a more sophisticated manner.

- Have participants find and bring in poems that dream.
- Have participants do some research to discover what some of the problems were in the time and place in which the poet lived. To what was the poet responding?
- For discussion: What are images that represent the problems in our own world? Have students bring in popular media sources. What kinds of words and images create a dialog or response to those images? What are your own dreams, your own images or words of poetry that dream for the world?
- Have students create draft poems and images that represent their dreams. Remind them of the limitations of space (8 ½"x 11".) and the expressive qualities (and limitations) of fabric.
- Have participants work in small groups to share their work and elicit responses. What words and images connect with other people?
- Allow possible revision and editing, then transfer the work to cloth, decorate, and attach to a line.

**Suggested Readings List:** (in process)  
*Animal Dreams* by Barbara Kingsolver

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... for Helen

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## Poetry Lesson Plan

### SERIES OF POETRY WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

#### Grades 4+

This is a series of dream poetry assignments. They are intended to go from easy (structured) to hard (unstructured), to help students think metaphorically, and to help students get away from the idea that rhyming defines poetry.

1. Write a dream poem of eight lines or more in which the first words of every line are "In my dream . . ."
2. Think of your dream and then think of five or more metaphors that describe it. Write a poem of five or more lines in which each line is "My dream is. . ." followed by the metaphor. For example, "My dream is an eagle."
3. Write a dream poem of eight lines or more in which every other line rhymes. (This is difficult and may emphasize the difficulty of writing meaningfully with rhyming.)
4. Write a dream poem of eight lines or more with no rhymes.
5. Write a dream poem that uses direct address, just as Langston Hughes does in "Dream Keeper." Think of who you address and why. (idea of Joanne Sutton-Smith)
6. Write a dream poem of any kind at all.

After the students write a couple of dream poems, they choose one for their Dream Flag. It's great to help them think about the audience for this poem by going to the web site and looking at all of the schools on the News page or by playing the poetry part of the video of last year's Dream Flag Celebration for them if you can.

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## **Classroom Ideas for Selected Poems from *The Dream Keeper***



Here are some classroom ideas for a few Langston Hughes poems found in the anthology *The Dream Keeper*. Most of these are geared for upper elementary or middle school students. The ideas are not necessarily about dream poems or writing them, but are aimed at helping students to understand and experience the way poems work. This may help them as poetry writers as well.

Many of the ideas listed here are ways to use activity or discussion to help students understand the wonderful uses of rhythm, patterns, and metaphor in the poetry of Langston Hughes. Most include related poetry writing assignments. The activities are not offered in any recommended order. They are just listed as they appear in the anthology.

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### **The Dream Keeper (page 2)**

This is a great poem to memorize since it's short and uses repetition. For discussion, it's a good one for looking at imagery and imagination. What is a *heart melody*? Can you really wrap dreams? Why did he say a *blue cloud-cloth*? Does the world have fingers? What would you consider things that you would put in the too-rough fingers of the world?

Joanne Sutton-Smith, a poet who worked with first graders at Swarthmore Rutledge School last year, used this poem as a metaphor for collecting and sharing dream pomes. She found a bolt of flannel cloth at a fabric store with a blue and white cloud pattern. She brought in some of this cloth, and her first graders placed poems on the cloth, reading them and explaining how they were putting something special away from the too-rough fingers of the world.

### **Dreams (page 4)**

This is a great pattern poem. It shows what you can do when you repeat a set of lines and then respond to them. It's also wonderful for discussion of metaphor. What is a broken wing? Why do birds need wings? What are birds meant to do? What are we meant to do? What is a barren field? What is its opposite? The poem also shows what you can say about something by talking about what it is *not*. What does Hughes say about people and dreams by describing life *without* dreams?

A writing extension of this poem could be to write a poem that describes something by telling what it *isn't*.

### **April Rain Song (page 6)**

This is a wonderful example of a very auditory poem. It's all full of sounds both in content and word choice. One third grade teacher at The Philadelphia School helped develop the following ideas for working with this poem.

Reading it out loud several times is essential to hear it well. Have different readers read it and then ask about what sounds you can hear in the poem. What sounds does he tell about? What kinds of sounds does he *show*?

To help students think about sounds and poetry, have them perform the poem using a sound background that they create. They can work in small groups--perhaps four or five students in each. Each group should have things that could make sounds--watery or soft sounds. For this poem, things like a jar with rice in it, a maraca or rhythm egg, chimes, sand paper, finger symbols, light drum, xylophone, hollow wood, maybe pencils to click together or wood blocks--whatever you can come up with for soft sounds. Let two students read the poem and the others create sounds that go with specific lines. The reading and the sounds go on at the same time or could go in alternation. The groups should work together on their performances, then do them for the other groups and explain their choice of sounds.

A writing extension is to then have students listen to sounds you provide and have them try to write poems that come from these sounds. Sounds could be recorded or created by instruments or objects.

### **Poem** (page 12) ~for older readers

This is a good poem to read for discussion of poem titles. It can be tricky. Why would Hughes name this poem "Poem?" No book is titled "book," and a newspaper article is never titled, "Article." What is the poem really about? If it's about his friend, then is he calling his friend a poem? Is that what the title means? Is a poem a metaphor for his friend? What would that mean coming from a man who is a poet?

### **Walkers With the Dawn** (page 56)

This poem works well for a discussion and activity focused on the pace in poetry. Reading the poem aloud several times, you can start to hear the pace of the poem. Emphasis seems to go on the words, *WALKers, DAWN, MORning, WALKers, SUN, MORning*, and so on. This poem has a walking pace. To feel that, have students stand and walk while reading the poem, keeping the pace of the steps. This can be done with individuals, or, better yet, with a whole group, walking in a line or circle around the classroom, reciting the poem, feeling it in their feet. This poem pairs well with "Youth" (page 65), which has a marching pace.

A writing extension of this is to have students write poems with different paces--a walking poem, a running poem, a poem that does jumping jacks, etc.

### **Dream Variation** (page 57)

This poem is a good one to look at the way a poet can create motion and rest with rhyming words. It's good to start by reading aloud several times. Where does the poem seem to move? Where does it seem to rest? Students could make up hand motions that go with the poem to reflect this movement, or better yet, whole body motion like dance. You can have students work in small groups to show the movement visually while reading with some readers and some movers. The final lines come to a resting spot in each stanza. Why?

A good follow up to this is to look at the rhyming words in each stanza. Have students just say the final words of the lines out loud in rhythm--*wide, sun, dance, done*, etc. Look at the patterns. See the way the final rest comes with all those *eee* sounds coming together.

For a more technical focus you can also look at patterns of syllables and how the meter is established and then syncopated. And Langston Hughes loved jazz and syncopation. (The web site *Drop Me Off In Harlem* is great for an extension of this jazz theme.)

A related poem for using movement is "Dream Dust" on page 76.

### **The Negro Speaks of Rivers** (page 62)

This poem has many references that younger students may not recognize, so it may be better for older students. It is good example of tone, however--reflective, meditative tone, "deep like the rivers" -- AND it's recorded by Langston Hughes himself. You can hear it on the web on the Academy of American Poets site. (Click [HERE](#) to go directly to the audio link.) It could be useful to read the poem out loud and ask if we can hear the poet's voice in this poem. What do we think his voice is like? (Responses can vary a great deal depending on understanding, but all are certainly valid.) This discussion can be followed by a playing of the recording. (It's a good idea to play it more than once and explain that it's an old recording, so it's not as clear a new one.)

As a follow-up writing exercise, students can write a poem in which they are trying to get across a specific voice--either their own or someone else's.

### **I, Too** (page 63) ~for older readers

This is a good poem for focusing on who we are as Americans and how poetry can speak to that. It follows a simple structure with the starting lines, *I am, Tomorrow, and Besides*. Hughes describes the way things are and then the way things should or will be, but then there's the stanza with, *Besides . . .* What is he doing in that stanza that's different? How do the first and last lines reflect each other? How are they different?

As a follow-up writing exercise, students can write a poem using the starting lines, *I am, Tomorrow, and Besides*, and "filling in" the rest with words that reflect what they see as a current problem in America. The poem could be written in their own voice or in another person's voice. You could also ask that they include some dialog (as in the *Tomorrow* stanza) to focus the poem even more.

### **Mother To Son** (64)

This poem has such a strong voice. Who is speaking? To whom? How do we know? Would we know without the title? Why is she speaking? It has to be read aloud and repeated enough so that the dialect Hughes writes is natural. Of course it's a great example of extended metaphor. It may be useful to look at the natural sections of the poem, even though it's written without stanza breaks. The first section starts out with the address (up to *Bare*.) Then it has a crescendo building up to the line, *Where there ain't been no light?* Look at the way he uses repeated phrases: *And reachin', And turnin', And sometimes . . .*

What are the tacks in this person's life? What are the splinters? What would a crystal stair be? An art extension would be to have students brainstorm the tacks and splinters in their own lives and to create a drawing of a stairs with representations of these things on different steps or with arrows pointing to the steps.

### **Youth** (page 65)

This poem is another good poem for showing how the pace supports the poem. The first stanza establishes a marching pace, and it's carried through the rest of the poem right to the last line with it syncopation in "We march!" See notes on "Walkers With The Dawn" (page 56). This poem pairs well with it.

### **As I Grew Older** (page 70-71)

The dramatic sequence of this poem is a great example of how a poem can "turn a corner." Ask students where this poem turns a corner. How does it do that? They may see that with the lines, "Shadow / I am black," the poem shifts dramatically from passive reception to action. There is also a shift in tense from past to present. How does the tense shift change the poem? How does that fit with what the poet is saying?

A writing extension would be to have students think of a real problem in their own lives, then write a poem that sets out the problem using past tense, then shifts dramatically to the present for a response. The response doesn't have to be based on reality. You could also ask that they use a metaphor for the problem in the first part (like "the wall").

### **African Dance** (page 72)

This is a great poem for performing with a drum. It works so well and shows the way the words make the beat, "Low. . .slow."

### **Dream Dust** (page 76)

This is a short poem that's great for memorization. It can go well with hand motions you make up. Ask students what it means for something to be "Not for sale."

### **Daybreak in Alabama** (page 77)

This poem is a wonderful embodiment of a dream and an extended metaphor. It is ideal for a choral performance poem because of its content and form. It is also a list poem. To have students perform it chorally, it is a good idea to number the lines first. Then, assign lines to individuals or groups of people. For example, if you want to move toward an emphasis on the third line, assign one person to line 1, two people to line 2 and three to line 3. It will get louder. Another example would be assign the listing lines like *And long red necks / And poppy colored faces / And big brown animals* to individuals standing in different parts of the room so the sound moves around and emphasizes the variety. You could also demonstrate the idea, then have students create their own choral arrangements in small groups, practice them, then do them for the whole group. Groups of at least 7 are good for this.

### **Merry-Go-Round** (page 79)

This poem works well to help students see how a poem can show your own unique view of something or how the poet's view can shift our own. Shanika Churchville at The Philadelphia School teaches third graders and had the idea of using an image first and then discussing point of view. First show students a picture of a merry-go-round and ask the question, "What do you see? What does it make you think of?" Let students talk about this, both what they see literally and what experiences or feelings it brings up. Follow this by a reading of the poem, and discuss what Langston Hughes saw and why. What was his point of view? How was it influenced by his life? Talk about the way poems can show our own ways of viewing things and can show others a different way of seeing things.

As a writing follow-up, students could think of an object or place they think they see differently or in a special way, then write a poem about it. To focus the poem you could ask the students to start with a question about the object or place, then go from there. Another option is to have students write a journal entry in order to simplify the writing and focus more on point of view.

### **In Time of Silver Rain** (page 80)

This poem is extremely visual and cries out for an artistic response. Focus on the metaphors like, "Lift silken wings / To catch a rainbow cry" and "New leaves to sing / In joy. . ." to emphasize the

<http://www.dreamflags.org/create/HughesPoemIdeas-PP.htm>

imaginative elements of the poem. How can you picture catching a rainbow cry or leaves that sing? How do you show the feeling from the repetition of the line, "Of life?" Discussion of the way colors create a feeling may work to get students going in the right direction.

Mixed media like water color and crayons may work well because of the subtlety and unexpected effects. You also may want to make copies of the poem, cut them out, and have students paste the poem in the middle of the page and create art around it.

This activity can be a good practice activity for creating Dream Flags where the idea is to create a visual element that supports the poem.

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### **Dream Flag Poem Directions**

(Please use a #2 pencil. Please follow all directions. Please remember that dreams need not follow directions, but they must be of value—and they must fly when you're not looking.)

**Think of a world you wish were true deep inside of you—and know that it will be. See.**

**Let it out in a poem—open the cage and let it run—watch where it goes; join in the fun.**

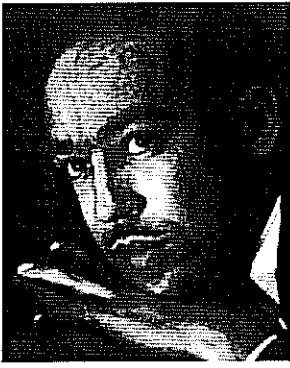
**Put a metaphor in it—a steel slab or cotton quilt to stand on.**

**Use alliteration somewhere—put it in there and *let it lie*.**

**Find a way to repeat what's right, what's right repeat, repeat, Pete. OK?**

**And say what you will and will what you say to fly your dream**

**To the world.**



## Langston Hughes

**Born, February 1, 1902**

### *The Dream Keeper*

*Bring me all of your dreams,*

*You dreamers,*

*Bring me all of your*

*Heart melodies*

*That I may wrap them*

*In a blue cloud-cloth*

*Away from the too-rough fingers*

*Of the world.*



## Happy 108<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Langston Hughes!!



108 years ago, Langston Hughes was born on February 1<sup>st</sup> in Joplin, Missouri. ([Map it!](#))

We will celebrate the birthday of one of America's greatest poets by giving him *gifts of words!*

Here's the assignment:

In your small group you must create a gift for Langston Hughes that interprets his words or uses your own words to describe him. This will be presented at our birthday party for Mr. Hughes. Your presentation needs to take three minutes or less so we have time for everyone to have a turn.

Here are some ideas:

- Choose a favorite poem by Langston Hughes. Prepare a dramatic reading of it, dividing it into parts and using sounds or music as a background. Try to use sounds that capture the feeling of the poem.
- Choose a favorite poem and present it with movement that makes the poem's meaning clear. Listen carefully to the rhythms in the words and use them to move in gestures or choreography.
- Create illustrated cards (big) that give words to Langston Hughes that describe him or that give words to Langston Hughes that he loves to use in his poems. Use colors and images to take the words off the page!
- Compose a poem about Langston Hughes. Try to do it in a way he would appreciate. Think about what he did with words and with his life. Present it as a choral reading (everyone involved) and/or with background sound or music.

or . . . Think up YOUR OWN idea, get an OK from your teacher, and DO IT!