

***BC Reads: Adult Literacy Fundamental English -
Reader 2***

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Shantel Ivits

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About the Book

BC Reads: Adult Literacy Fundamental English – Reader 2 was created by Shantel Ivits. This creation is a part of the [B.C. Open Textbook project](#).

The B.C. Open Textbook project began in 2012 with the goal of making post-secondary education in British Columbia more accessible by reducing student cost through the use of openly licensed textbooks. The B.C. Open Textbook project is administered by BCcampus and funded by the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education.

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If you are an instructor who is using this book for a course, [please let us know](#).

Acknowledgments

These books were developed on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Huy tseep q'u! Chen kw'enmántumiyap! Kw'as hoy!

I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work on this project alongside a dedicated team of basic education instructors from across British Columbia. This series was shepherded by Leanne Caillier-Smith (College of the Rockies) and benefited enormously from the insight and encouragement of Julia Dodge (University of the Fraser Valley), Chandra McCann (Okanagan College), Jan Weiten (Vancouver Community College), and Melinda Worfolk (College of New Caledonia). The above five mentioned are representatives of the BC Adult Literacy Articulation Committee and were the advisory committee members for this project. It has been a pleasure to scaffold my own learning among such brilliant and passionate educators.

Huge thanks to Lauri Aesoph of BCcampus for introducing me to the exciting open textbook movement and managing all aspects of the publication of these books — from layout and image selection to copyediting and print —so adeptly.

I am incredibly lucky to work with and have the support of the Basic Education Department at Vancouver Community College: Rita Acton, Cynthia Bluman, Andrew Candela, Lynn Horvat, Alayna Kruger, Jo Lemay, Edie Mackenzie, Rene Merkel, Tara Mollel, Leah Rasmussen, Linda Rider, Mary Thompson-Boyd, Jan Weiten, and our Dean, David Wells. I am also deeply grateful to the basic education students at Vancouver Community College for all that you teach me about dreams, resilience, and perseverance.

A special thank you to my partner, Marria, for always lending my words an eager ear, and for keeping the world around me turning even though my head was perpetually stuck in these books.

Notes to the Instructor

The poetry of Langston Hughes has an appeal that reaches from the carpets of kindergarten classrooms to the lecture halls of universities. There is elegance in its simplicity. That is why I chose to make the life and poetry of Langston Hughes the central focus of this book.

This reader contains eight chapters written specifically for adults. The chapters take a journey through Langston Hughes' family history and personal life. I have included excerpts from many of Hughes' poems. I encourage you to locate full versions of these poems in books or on the web. [Some or all of this author's works](#) are in the [public domain](#). During this unit, I also recommend reading Hughes' excellent short story *Thank You, Ma'am* with your students.

This level 2 reader, one of a series of six readers, is roughly equivalent to Grades 1.5 to 3 in the K-12 system. It is designed to accompany the [BC Reads: Adult Literacy Fundamental English – Course Pack 2](#). For an overview of the contents, please refer to the Scope & Sequence in [Appendix 2](#).

The online version of the course pack contains audio recordings of each story in the reader. These recordings, combined with vocabulary and word pattern exercises, prepare the Level 2 student to read each chapter with greater independence.

Depending on a learner's readiness, you may wish to use the sentences in the Word Pattern sections as dictations.

I recommend using these books alongside a structured phonics program, such as the Wilson Reading System.

Font size and line spacing can be adjusted in the online view, and have been

enhanced for the print and PDF versions for easier reading. This reader has been reviewed by subject experts from colleges and universities.

I hope these pages help ignite in your students a lifelong love of poetry and prose.

-Shantel Ivits

Chapter 1



Reading a poem

Many people think that poems are not for them. They may not have read a poem by a good poet. A good poet can make us feel less cut off from the world. A good poet can make us see the world with new eyes. A good poet can make us feel alive.

Many people think Langston Hughes was a very good poet. Langston was black. He grew up in a time when white people did not treat black people well. So he wrote poems about the need to make a better world. Many people still do not

treat black people well. So we still need Langston's poems. His poems give us hope.

This is a book about the life and poems of Langston Hughes. You can find more of his poems in books or on the web.

See [Chapter 1](#) in *BC Reads: Adult Literacy Fundamental English – Course Pack*
2.

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Reading a poem

[Santa Cruz Legendary Collective Slam Poetry](#) by [Nopal Media](#) is used under a [CC BY 2.0](#) license.

Chapter 2



A slave woman

Langston Hughes is from the USA. Not long ago, black people in the USA were made to work for white people. They worked long days for no pay. They were slaves. This is part of a poem Langston wrote about being a slave.

I am the one who labored as a slave,
Beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave –
Children sold away from me, my husband sold, too.
No safety, no love, no respect was I due.

– from “[The Negro Mother](#)“

Langston was not a slave. But his great-grandmother was. Her name was Lucy Langston. The white man who owned her fell in love with her. So he set her free. He could not marry Lucy. The law said white people could not marry black people. But they did live together. They also had children together. One of the children was Charles Langston. He was the grandfather of our poet.

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A slave woman

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Chapter 3



Race to freedom

Charles Langston wanted all black people to be free. So he helped slaves run away from their owners. Charles helped slaves get to Canada, where they would be free. He was put in jail for this. But in 1865, the USA made a law that said no one could own a slave ever again. Black people still could not go to school with white people. Black people still could not eat in restaurants with white people. Black people still could not vote. So Charles set up schools for black people. He also helped black people win the right to vote. Langston may have been thinking of Charles when he wrote these words:

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I am dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

– from “[Democracy](#)“

Charles Langston fell in love with a woman named Mary. They had a daughter named Carrie. Carrie was the mother of our poet.

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Ride to freedom

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Chapter 4



Langston Hughes

Carrie married a man named James Hughes. They had a son, Langston, in 1902. James was a lawyer. But he was not allowed to work as a lawyer because he was black. James was fed up with racism. So he left the USA. He left Carrie and Langston behind. Carrie had to move away to find work. She left Langston with his grandmother, Mary. They did not have much money. They still had to live with racism. But Mary told Langston many stories. She told him about his grandfather, Charles. These stories made Langston feel proud of who he was.

When Mary died, Langston missed her stories. His mother was always at work. He was on his own a lot. He turned to books. He turned to poems. One day, he began to write his own poems. He turned his sad feelings into beautiful words. The poem “Mother to Son” is about a mother telling her son to keep going in hard times.

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor —
Bare.

– from “[Mother to Son](#)”

See [Chapter 4](#) in *BC Reads: Adult Literacy Fundamental English – Course Pack*
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Langston Hughes

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Chapter 5



Langston Hughes at university

Langston went to live with his dad when he was 17. His dad lived in Mexico. This was a sad time in his life. Langston and his dad did not get along. His dad did not want Langston to write poems. His dad had a lot of shame about being black. But Langston was proud. He wrote poems to tell other black people to feel proud, too. One example is a poem called “My People.”

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.

Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

– from “[My People](#)” in *The Crisis* (October 1923)



Langston Hughes in high school

After high school, Langston went to university to study science. His wish was to study English. But his dad would not let him. A lot of people at university treated him badly because he was black. So Langston dropped out after two years. Then he went to work. He was a cook. He washed clothes. He worked on a ship. He also worked as a busboy at a hotel. He cleaned tables and dishes. But he still dreamed of being a poet.

See [Chapter 5](#) in *BC Reads: Adult Literacy Fundamental English – Course Pack 2*.

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Langston Hughes at university

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Langston Hughes at high school

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Chapter 6



Art from Harlem

Harlem is a place in New York. Many black people in the USA moved to Harlem in the 1920s. A lot of art was being made by black artists in Harlem. They made books, poems, plays, paintings, and music. The art helped black people come together as one community.

Langston had moved around all his life. But he made a home in Harlem. More and more people read his poems. His poems were printed in books and magazines. People began to pay him to write more poems. Soon he did not need to work other jobs. His job was to write. Langston used his poems to fight racism. You can see this in his poem called "I, Too." It is about a slave or servant who cannot eat with the white people when company comes. Black people were kept apart from white people in most places outside the home, too.



Langston Hughes House

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

But I laugh,

And eat well,

And grow strong.

– from “I, Too”

See [Chapter 6](#) in *BC Reads: Adult Literacy Fundamental English – Course Pack*

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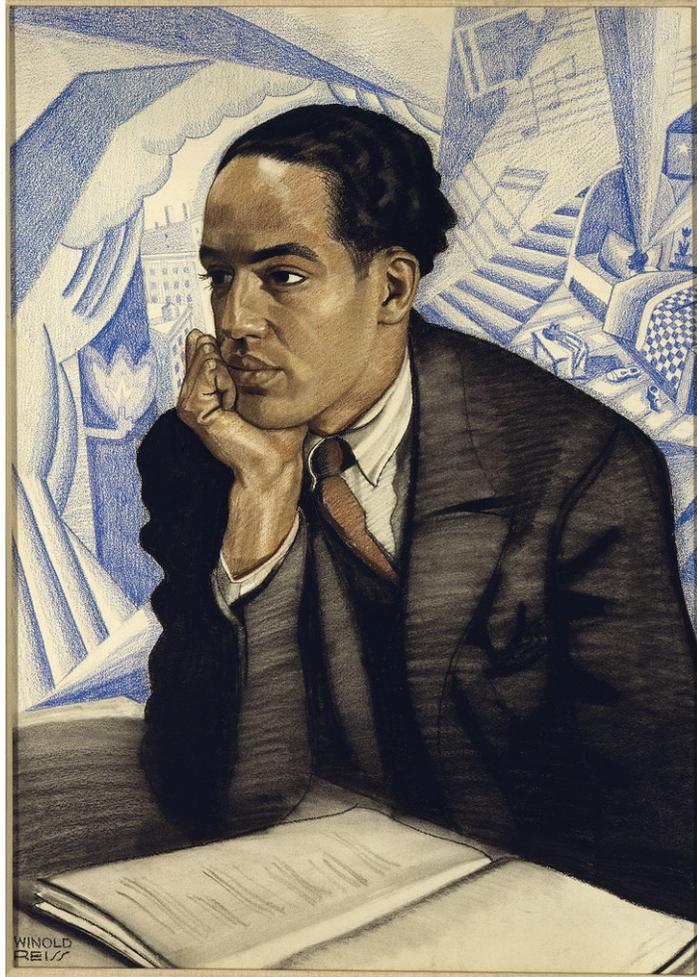
Art from Harlem

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Langston Hughes House

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Chapter 7



Langston Hughes

Did Langston ever fall in love? It is hard to say. Many people who have read his books and poems say that he was gay. He wrote some love poems to a man. These poems were never put in books or magazines. He also wrote a story that may tell of his own life. It is the story of a father who is mad because his son is “queer” and acts like a girl. At that time, it was harder to be open about being gay. What

would happen if Langston told people he was gay? Would people still pay him to write his poems? Would people still read his poems?

Langston may not have found love. But he won many prizes for his poems. He became a famous poet. He helped many young black writers. He helped them feel pride. He helped them not to worry about the racism of other people. He told them to hold on to their dreams. He wrote a poem about this called “Dreams.”

Hold fast to dreams

For if dreams die

Life is a broken-winged bird

That cannot fly.

– from “[Dreams](#)”

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Langston Hughes

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Chapter 8



Langston Hughes

One day, Langston was told he had cancer. On May 22, 1967, Langston Hughes died. He was 65 years old. His ashes are in Harlem. He is still remembered

today for his beautiful poems. He is also remembered for helping black people see themselves as a beautiful community. With Langston Hughes' help, the term "African-American" is used with pride.



Langston Hughes

The land wants me to come back
To a handful of dust in autumn,
To a raindrop
In the palm of my hand
In spring.

– from “[Dust Bowl](#)”

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Langston Hughes

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Langston Hughes

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About the Author



Shantel Ivits is an instructor in the Basic Education Department at Vancouver Community College, on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

Shantel has designed curricula for the National Film Board of Canada, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, and many community-based projects.

Over the past decade, they have taught in literacy programs, university bridging programs, an ESL academy, and K-12 public schools.

They hold a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Trent University, as well as a Bachelor of Education and a Master of Arts in Educational Studies from the University of British Columbia.

Shantel identifies as a queer and trans person with white settler privilege. Their goal as an educator is to help people build their capacity to reach their goals and create more socially just communities.

Shantel also enjoys raising awareness that “they” can be used as a singular pronoun!