



[Harlem \(Dream Deferred\)](#), by Langston Hughes

In A Nutshell

Langston Hughes knew how important dreams are. Commonly thought of as the poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance, Hughes was a prolific artist who wrote essays, short stories, operettas, children's books, and mountains of poems. He celebrated the spirit of the African-American community and wanted to capture the condition and the everyday life of black people through his art in a time when many black artists were afraid to do so, for fear of feeding racial stereotypes. Many of Hughes's poems carry the music, rhythm, and meter found in blues, jazz, and African-American spirituals. He advocated tirelessly for civil rights, and he was a powerful voice in the black community at a time of rampant racism and injustice.

In "Harlem," Hughes asks a very important question about dreams and about what happens when dreams are ignored or postponed. Hughes saw the dreams of many residents of Harlem, New York crumble in the wake of World War II. Some read this poem as a warning, believing that the speaker argues that deferred dreams will lead to social unrest. Notably, Lorraine Hansberry chose a line from this poem as the title of her famous play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, which explores the idea of delayed dreams in the world of a black family living in the South Side of Chicago during the 1950s. Both the play and Hughes's poem champion the power of pursuing dreams, and both comment on the state of civil rights in America.

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- [Harlem \(Dream Deferred\) Summary](#)

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 In your experience, what happens to a dream deferred?
- 2 Why do you think Langston Hughes structured this poem in the way he did?
- 3 Why do you think Lorraine Hansberry took the title of her play *A Raisin in the Sun* from this poem?

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