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### Mother To Son

Langston Hughes was one of the most famous writers to come out of the Harlem Renaissance, a time when black writers proved their intellect and advanced artistic skills. This era allowed them to express and create their own identity, and was known as the golden age for African American culture. The poem "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes depicts a mother teaching her son a lesson on perseverance, by using figurative language to get his point across to the readers. This poem remains important today because its timeless message still can impact readers and inspire them to stay motivated and not allow setbacks to stop them.

Hughes was raised by his mother, since his parents separated right after he was born. Since he had such a deep bond with his mother, this poem is personal to him and deeply resonates with him. "Mother to Son" is written in the voice of an imaginary character, the mother, and not from the point of view of the author, which makes this piece unique. Being a black single mom in America, Hughes' mom probably faced her fair share of struggles, and wants to pass on her knowledge to her young son. In an analysis written by Aidan Wasley, he states "The poem's use of the dramatic monologue places the reader in the position of the son, listening to his mother draw a lesson from her life that can be applied to his own. The reader is thus drawn into the poem, as the son's frustrations become our own, and the mother's advice becomes directed at us" Just as the author may have been if he had this conversation with his

mother, the readers are intended to be learning from this wise mother figure who struggled and learned throughout her life which makes this poem more personal and emotional to the reader. She leads on to her son that she herself has faced many struggles, and has learned from them, and wants her son to expect the same.

This poem was one of Langston Hughes' earlier poems which he wrote when he was 21, and just like many other poems, he focuses on the hardships many African Americans encounter in their lives. A quote by Hoyt W. Fueller explains that Hughes "chose to identify with plain black people ... precisely because he saw more truth and profound significance in doing so." Hughes wanted to reveal to the struggles to world of how normal black people lived in their lives. He wanted to reveal especially in African American culture, mothers need to have these types of conversations with their sons and warn them about the challenges they will face throughout their lives. His goal in all his writings, was to depict the suppression of blacks in America, and for him to do so was through a generalized view of African Americans. You can see the cultural influence due to the dialect he chooses to write in. Words like "goin'", "reachin'", and "turnin'" show the sing-songy vocabulary of people during the harlem renaissance. It makes the poem more accurate and helps readers imagine what this mother's accent sounded like. Now during the renaissance, Hughes could use his talents and creativity, to really express his views to the American people, about all the hardships and injustices African Americans faced, and are still dealing with.

This poem could be considered an extended metaphor since the stairs are the main focus of the work. The stairs symbolizes the son starting at the very bottom, and his hard work ethic is what is going to propel him higher and higher up the staircase. Being black in America during

these times, already gives you a disadvantage and they have to work twice as hard as another other person to be able to achieve their dreams. Despite starting at the bottom, there are many obstacles that are along the staircase. Hughes uses anaphora multiple times in his poem to describe the stairs, one example being,

It's had tacks in it,  
 And splinters,  
 And boards torn up,  
 And places with no carpet on the floor (3-6)

The lines that start with “and” shows the use of anaphora. Hughes does this to emphasize the importance of the mother’s message. Each line builds off the next, to highlight the hardships the mom knows her son will face. The line “and boards torn up” (5) could be referring to her lack of support in raising her son, since her husband left when Hughes was at such a young age and yet she was still able to persevere and keep climbing. The mother constantly reiterates the many difficulties her son will face, due to her own experiences in her life. The crystal stair is also an allusion to Jacob’s stairs in the Old Testament of the Bible.

Towards the end of the poem after the mother reflects on her own experiences, she returns to addressing her son and says, “So boy, don’t you turn back./Don’t you set down on the steps/’Cause you finds it’s kinder hard”(14-16). This emphasizes the theme of you know how to achieve the perseverance despite adversity. If one decides to not act against a problem and keep pushing, it is going to keep dragging them further from the top of the stairs and their ultimate goal. The mom wants her son to know he will not be helped by others, and he will need to persist through all future struggles, because that is the only way he will grow.

## Works Cited

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