LANGUAGE ARTS LESSON PLAN
Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of the River"

Objective: To introduce students to writer Langston Hughes and his first published work "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and to encourage students to use the arts to express their beliefs and emotions.

Materials: Langston's Train Ride by Robert Burleigh, The Negro Speaks of Rivers illustrated by E. B. Lewis, optional supporting PowerPoint slideshow (free to download HERE).

Procedures:

1. **Connecting the Lines**
    - Project a picture of the Mississippi River and ask students "What kind of line is this?" Share that just as George Gershwin used a single melody line on a clarinet to compose Rhapsody in Blue, this line inspired Langston Hughes to write his first published poem.
2. **Introduce Langston Hughes: Langston's Train Ride**
    - Read aloud an excerpt from this book beginning on the "red" page which begins "*Clackety clack clack clack.*" and read through the next "red" page that ends "*The car sways gently on and on…*"
    - Ask students to tell you what they know about Langston Hughes' life from the story. Ask "What question was Langston asking himself near the end of the story?" and "Do you ever question who you are?"
3. **"The Negro Speaks of Rivers"**
    - Project the poem and allow students to first read it to themselves.
    - Play recording of Langston Hughes reading his poem.
    - Perform the poem as a choral reading.
    - (You might also listen to Langston Hughes himself explain how he wrote this poem HERE.)
4. **Create a Class Poem: "I Speak of …"**
    - As a class brainstorm a subject—could be serious or silly. Together write the A section and project as a reference for the next activity.
    - In small groups students create one sentence that supports the A statement. Regroup as a class and share lines determining the order in which they should be performed. Together write the different statement for the ending A statement. You might use the template included at the end of this lesson.
    - Perform this new poem as a choral reading.
    - (This strategy could also be completed as individuals rather than as a group project.)
5. **Illustrate This Poem or Your Own**
    - Share an illustrated adaptation of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by E.B. Lewis and encourage students to illustrate their own version of Langdon's poem or the one they have written.
6. **Making a Connection: George Gershwin and Langston Hughes**
    - Both Gershwin and Hughes created one of their most famous works while on a train!
    - As young men, both George and Langston inwardly struggled with trusting that they were good enough to do what they dreamed they could.
    - Langston Hughes wrote books about music for children! The First Book of Jazz and The First Book of Rhythms are two of them. He also recorded The Story of Jazz accompanied by historic recordings.

THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS

by Langston Hughes

ALL: I've known rivers:

GIRLS: I've known rivers ancient as the world

and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

ALL: My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

SOLO #1: I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

SOLO #2: I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

SOLO #3: I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

SOLO #4: I heard the singing of the Mississippi

when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans,

SOLO #5: and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

ALL: I've known rivers:

BOYS: Ancient, dusky rivers.

ALL: My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I Speak of _____

I've known _____

I've known _____

My soul _____

    I _____

    I _____

    I _____

    I _____

  and I _____

        I've known _____

        I've known _____

        I _____

Here is an example of what one of my classes created:

Room 203 Speaks of Hunger

I've known hunger.
I've known the incredible need for something I don't have.
My soul has longed hungrily.

    I have read <u>The Hunger Games</u>.

    I know the hunger when Katniss blew up Cato's food supply.

    I have felt that empty feeling inside.

    I've known the sweet sensation of food going down MY throat

    and I believe the death of hunger is coming.

I've known hunger.
I've known the incredible need for hunger to end.
I believe that day will come.