

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

Langston Hughes

How does Hughes use rivers to turn one speakers voice into a voice spanning Black history?

TOTAL TIME	TUMBLETA PASSAGE LOCATION
30 minutes	Poem - complete poem

TEACHER SETUP

Open the work in the Enhanced Reader and cue the span using the START and END anchors below.

START	I've known rivers:
END	My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
PASSAGE ID	sec-hughes-rivers-01

THE MOVE

Analyze how a repeated image can connect individual identity to historical continuity

WHY THIS PASSAGE

The speaker uses first-person verbs with rivers tied to several civilizations and historical moments. The "I" therefore expands beyond one biography, while the repeated claim that the soul has grown deep makes accumulated history part of the speakers identity.

MARK

Underline every first-person verb. Circle each named river. Box the repeated statement about the soul. Draw arrows showing the movement from ancient rivers toward the Mississippi.

NOTICE

- How can one speaker claim experiences separated by thousands of years?
- What changes when the poem reaches the Mississippi and Lincoln?
- Why does the poem return to the same statement about the soul at the end?

THINK

Answer provisionally: How does Hughes use rivers to turn one speakers voice into a voice spanning Black history? Choose the strongest interpretation you can defend from this passage alone.

WRITE

Write a short evidence-based response. Use at least two details from the assigned passage and explain how they support your interpretation.

CLOSE

Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and say why.

STRONG ANSWER

Hughes makes the speaker larger than one individual by attaching the first-person voice to rivers across ancient and modern history. The repeated image of depth turns those accumulated experiences into a continuing Black historical consciousness carried within the speakers soul.

EVIDENCE

Use two different river references and the repeated line about the speakers soul.

WATCH FOR

Do not treat the rivers as scenery. Explain what their historical sequence allows the first-person voice to represent.

SOLO

Read independently.

SUPPORTED

Narration + highlighting.

LISTENING

Listen; same evidence task.

STUDENT PAGE · GRADE 11 · LESSON 318

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WORK	The Negro Speaks of Rivers
TUMBLETA PASSAGE LOCATION	Poem - complete poem

PASSAGE ID	sec-hughes-rivers-01
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Your teacher will open or cue the work in the Enhanced Reader. Use the location and verbatim anchors below to confirm the assigned span.

START

I've known rivers:

END

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

READ / LISTEN TO THE ASSIGNED PASSAGE SOLO: read independently. SUPPORTED: use narration and highlighting. LISTENING: listen to the assigned passage. The question and evidence task stay the same.

1. MARK Underline every first-person verb. Circle each named river. Box the repeated statement about the soul. Draw arrows showing the movement from ancient rivers toward the Mississippi.
2. NOTICE How can one speaker claim experiences separated by thousands of years? What changes when the poem reaches the Mississippi and Lincoln? Why does the poem return to the same statement about the soul at the end?
3. THINK Answer provisionally: How does Hughes use rivers to turn one speakers voice into a voice spanning Black history?
4. WRITE Write a short response using at least two pieces of evidence from this passage.
5. CLOSE Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and say why.