

A Literary Study Guide

**Finding Langston
by Lesa Cline-Ransom**

Created by Andrea Thorpe
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Prereading Activities

Prereading activities help prepare students to read the book. Prereading activities also provide important background knowledge needed to better understand the people and events in the novel.

1. Help students get to know the author Lesa Cline-Ransome, by reading this interview.
 - <http://www.readingrockets.org/blogs/page-page/creative-couple-interview-lesa-cline-ransome-and-james-ransome>
2. Have students research The Great Migration to learn what it was, when it occurred, and why it happened.
3. Help students learn about Langston Hughes by watching these videos:
 - <https://youtu.be/inP76rkYUso> (3:33)
 - <https://youtu.be/ofcY-WesrvU> (2:30)
4. Read Langston Hughes' poem, *One-Way Ticket*, to students. Discuss the poem, taking care to note the poem's mood and tone. Discuss the significance of traveling with a one way versus a round trip ticket.
 - Read the One-Way Ticket here:
<https://bit.ly/2ddkX8c>
 - Listen and watch One-Way Ticket here:
<https://youtu.be/3egcumPoYao> (Poem ends at 1:15)
5. Jacob Lawrence was a talented African American artist known for his paintings of African American life. He created a series of paintings depicting The Great Migration. Watch these videos to learn more about his life and work:
 - https://youtu.be/WdXz_D8t_qs (23:40)
 - <https://youtu.be/-ac6OZkyYxg> (1:25)
 - <https://youtu.be/kfnYKbSQSVI> (4:17)

6. Show students the 60 paintings and accompanying captions that make up Jacob Lawrence's work, *The Migration Series*. Have students select a few paintings that appeal to them, describe what is happening in the picture, and tell why the picture appeals to them.

- <https://bit.ly/2mnLnsi>

Discussion Questions: Chapters 1-4

1. *Daddy ain't the best company, but ain't nothing worse than being alone.* Why does Langston think being alone is so bad? Do you agree or disagree with his statement?
2. Langston and his father live in one apartment and Miss Fulton lives in another apartment. Describe the similarities and differences of the dwellings.
3. Langston remarks that every day in Chicago makes it harder for him to remember Alabama. He compares the struggle to remember to that of a candle fighting in the wind. Why do you think Langston's memories of Alabama are beginning to fade?
4. Langston compares Miss Fulton to his mother. How are the two women alike? How are they different?
5. Why is Langston so fascinated by the water in his apartment building?

6. Why do the Langston's classmates call him "country boy"? How does that make Langston feel?

7. Langston's father tells him that if he keeps to himself, he'll stay out of trouble. Do you think this is good advice? Why or why not?

8. Langston believes that some of his classmates' families also come from the South. He notes that "*Some people forget where they came from soon as they step off the train at Union Station.*" What does this mean?

9. Describe Langston's train ride from Alabama to Chicago.

10. Why do the church women feel "sad" for Mama? How does Langston respond to this?

11. Langston cries over his mother but does not allow his father to see him doing so. Langston says, “*Only thing worse than crying in front of Daddy is hearing Daddy fuss when I do.*” Why might Langston’s father fuss over his son’s tears?

12. Why does Langston’s father get angry about the letter that comes in the mail?

13. How does Langston end up at the library?

14. How does Langston’s father feel about his son reading? How did his Langston’s mother feel about her son reading? Which parent do you agree with and why?

15. Langston opens up a book written by another Langston and reads part of the poem, *One-Way Ticket*. Why does Langston say this poem makes him feel like he’s reading words from his heart?

Discussion Questions: Chapters 5-8

1. Langston gets home late one day after school. Why doesn't he tell his father he has been at library?
2. As Langston and his father prepare to leave Alabama, Langston is told to only take what he needs. Based on what you know about Langston, what things might he have chosen to bring with him to Chicago?
3. Describe the walk Langston and his father take to the train depot.
4. Who is shown in the pictures displayed on the library's walls? Why is Langston so intrigued by the pictures?
5. Later on, while at the library, Langston reads part of Langston Hughes' poem, *Daybreak in Alabama*. Why does this poem cause him to choke up?
6. How did Langston get his name? What did Langston's father think about his son's name?

7. As Langston runs errands with his father on Saturday morning, he thinks of Alabama. What does Langston miss about living there?

8. While leaving the fish market, Langston's father tells him there is "no shame in being from the country." Why is Langston's father unashamed? How does Langston react to this statement? Why?

9. In the apartment building, Langston and his father run into Miss Fulton. What surprises Langston about his father's interaction with her?

10. Langston and his father attended church in Alabama and they attend church in Chicago. How do the church experiences differ and why?

Discussion Questions: Chapters 9-12

1. What does Langston learn when he opens the letter?
2. What causes the fight between Langston and Lymon?
3. How does Miss Fulton respond to Langston's injuries?
4. When Langston's father comes home on the day of the fight, he is stopped by Miss Fulton. The two have a long conversation but neither Langston nor the reader hears their conversation. What do you think Langston's father and Miss Fulton talk about?
5. The fight helps open an emotional conversation between Langston and his father. How did Langston and his father end up in Chicago?

6. Why is Langston concerned about his father's conversation with the school principal?

7. Why is Langston's father upset when Langston returns from the library?

8. Langston wants to go back to Alabama for his grandmother's funeral. Why won't Langston's father let him go?

9. Langston's grief triggers memories of the last day he saw his mother alive. Describe what happened that day.

10. Who cares for Langston while his father is away? What positive things does Langston note about her?

Discussion Questions: Chapters 13-16

1. What does Langston learn about his mother after reading some of the letters in the box? How does Langston feel about reading the letters?
2. After reading some of the letters, Langston wonders about how you could know someone so well, yet not know them at all. What does Langston mean?
3. Who does Langston see when he visits the library? Why is he surprised to see him?
4. As they spend time together, Langston's opinion of Miss Fulton begins change. Why?
5. What new things does Langston learn about Miss Fulton?

6. Miss Fulton talks to Langston about poetry. What does Langston learn?

7. Why doesn't Langston tell his father the truth about the library book?

8. Langston and Clem have a conversation in the library. What does Langston learn about Clem's family? What does he learn about Clem's relationship with Lymon?

9. What does Lymon do to Langston at recess?

10. How does Langston respond to Lymon's actions?

11. How can you tell Langston is no longer intimidated by Lymon?

Discussion Questions Chapters 17-20

1. When speaking to Langston about the fight, his father says, “*You’re responsible for you.*” Do you think this advice makes it harder or easier to handle conflict? Why or why not?
2. Langston tells his father, “*Library’s the only place in Chicago I want to be.*” What reasons does Langston give for wanting to be there?
3. Langston’s father listens to him to read a poem. How does Langston’s father respond to what he hears?
4. What information does Langston’s father share about Mama?
5. Langston notes that some secrets aren’t worth spilling. What does he mean?

6. Langston mentions that he and Lymon learned much about one another during the schoolyard fight. What does Langston learn about Lymon? What does Lymon learn about Langston?

7. When Langston returns to class, why do some of the boys smile at him?

8. Langston says he's not sure Miss Fulton is being nice because of him or because of his father. Why would Miss Fulton be kind to Langston? Why would she be kind to his father?

9. Langston decides not to tell his father about how Mama used Langston Hughes' words in her letters. How do you think Langston's father would have felt if he had known?

10. Langston is concerned about telling Miss Cook about what happened to the library book. He considers praying, but then notes he does not pray much. What reason does Langston give for not praying?

11. Clem shocks Langston by saying, "Lymon ain't my friend." Why doesn't Clem consider him a friend?

12. How does Miss Cook react to the news of the book's destruction? How does Langston feel about her reaction?

13. When Clem asks Langston what he likes about poetry, Langston struggles to explain his feelings. Why do you think it is so hard for Langston to explain his love of poetry?

14. Miss Fulton says she stopped by Langston's apartment to bring over a book. What does Langston think of her reason for stopping by?

15. How does Langston's father respond when he sees Langston reading a book? What does Langston think of his father's reaction?

16. Langston remarks that he now knows his father better than he had ever hoped to. What has changed? Why does Langston say this?

17. Why does Langston's father decide to visit the library with Langston? How does this make Langston feel?

Reading Activity #1

The author uses many sensory words to describe Chicago, Langston's new city. Think about the five senses and use them to describe what Langston experiences in Chicago.

Tastes	Touch	Sights	Smells	Sounds

Reading Activity #2

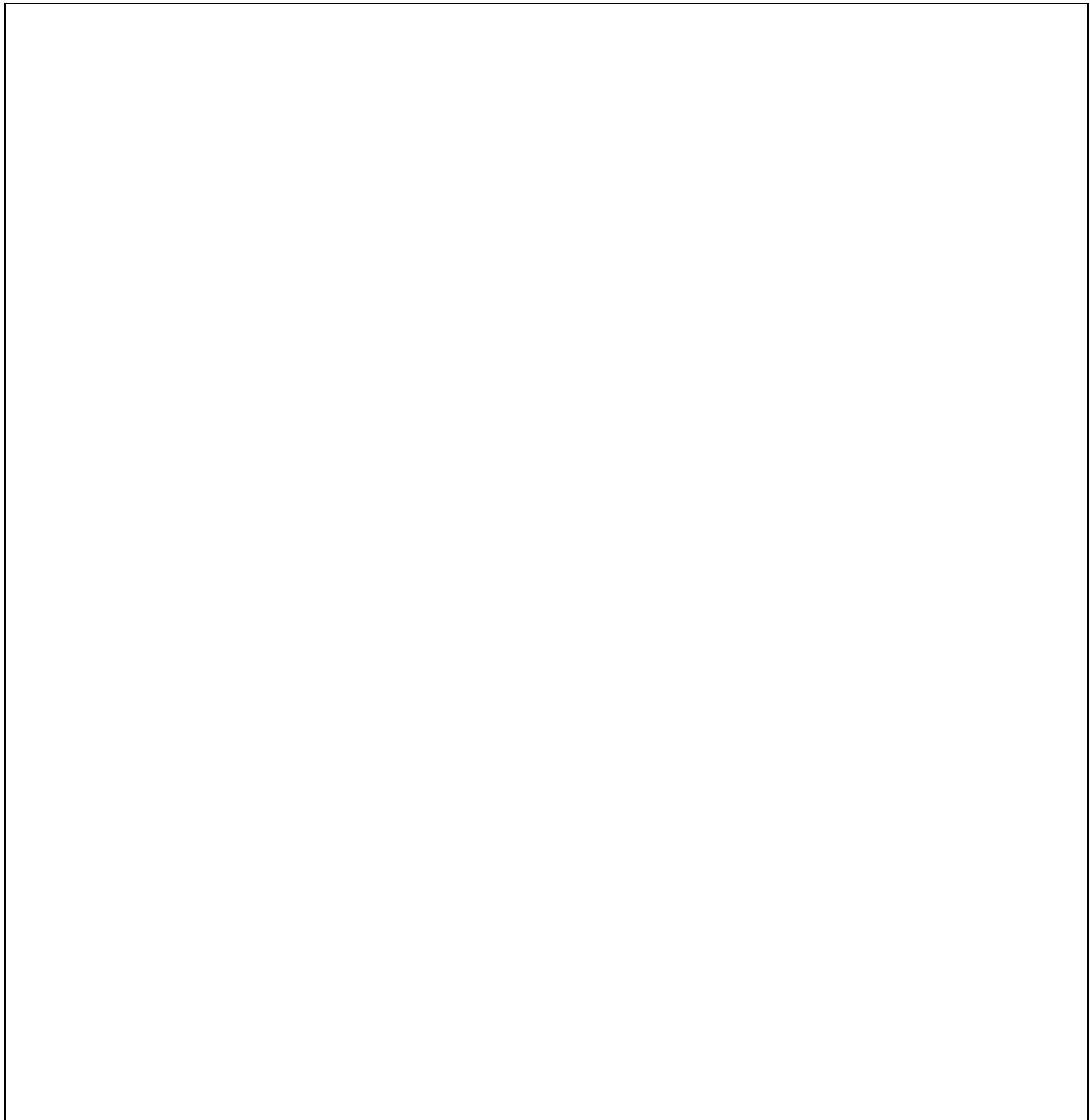
Think about the novel's characters. Complete the chart by describing each character's personality traits.

Name	Personality Traits
Langston	
Langston's father	
Mama	
Miss Fulton	
Lymon	
Clem	
Miss Cook	

Reading Activity #3

A free style poem is one that does not follow a specific pattern or display a consistent rhyme. Even though the freestyle poem doesn't adhere to any rules, it is still artistic and beautiful.

Alabama was a very important place to Langston. Write a free style poem about a city or town you love.



Reading Activity #4

One of the most vivid parts of the novel is when Langston and his father walk to the train depot to head to Chicago. Draw or paint a picture of that scene.