A Library of Congress Primary Source Starter
Langston Hughes' Drafts of “Ballad of Booker T.”: Exploring the Creative Process

Quick and easy activity ideas to start using Library of Congress primary sources in the classroom

Teacher Instructions

Goal
Four typewritten, marked-up drafts and a final copy of Hughes’ poem “Ballad of Booker T.” are available on the Library of Congress Web site, and allow students to follow the creative process as the poet makes changes to his work over the course of three days.

Background
How can five typewritten pieces of paper provide a glimpse into the mind of a great writer?

In the 1940s, the poet Langston Hughes was a major author who worked in many different literary forms, from poems and short stories to newspaper columns, essays, and songs. He was also a prominent public figure who produced commentaries on culture and race relations in the United States—one publisher later called him “the unchallenged spokesman of the American Negro”.

With that in mind, you can see why a poem from Hughes on the subject of influential but controversial African American educator Booker T. Washington might be subject to scrutiny by the public. You can also speculate as to why Hughes might put such a poem through a thorough revision process.

Activities
Teachers can have students:
• Compare the drafts and the final copy to find some of the edits that Hughes made as he revised the poem.
• Speculate about the reasons for the author’s edits. Can students identify any possible shifts in the poem’s attitude towards Booker T. Washington?
• Read an early draft and the final copy out loud. How have Hughes’ edits changed the way the poem sounds?
• Speculate about why Hughes might have written this poem when he did, twenty-five years after Washington’s death.


For more classroom materials and other teacher resources from the Library of Congress, visit loc.gov/teachers

Primary Source
Drafts of Langston Hughes’s Poem ‘Ballad of Booker T’.
Hughes, Langston. “Drafts of Langston Hughes’s Poem ‘Ballad of Booker T.’ Poem in manuscript. May 30-June 1, 1941. From Library of Congress: Words and Deeds in American History: Selected Documents Celebrating the Manuscript Division’s First 100 Years. http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(mcc/024))
BALLAD OF BOOKER T.

Old Booker T.
Was a practical man.
He said, Till the soil,
Learn from the land.
Let down your buckets
Where you are:
In your own backyard.
Could there could
Might be a star.
Train you heart;
Your head, and your hand.
To help yourself
And your fellow
Thus Booker T.
Built a school,
With book-learning there
And the workman's tool.
He started out
In a simple way---

For Today
Was not today.

Sometimes he had
Compromise in his talk---
For a man must crawl
Before he can walk
And in Alabama in 1863
A joker was lucky
To stay alive.
But not Booker T.
Was nobody's fool;
You may serve a dream
From an humble tool---
And the tallest tower
Can tumble down
If it is not rooted
In solid ground.
He said, Train your
Your head, and your hand---
BALLAD OF BOOKER T.

By

Langston Hughes

Booker T. was a practical man.
He said, Till the soil
And learn from the land.
Let down your buckets
Where you are;
In your own backyard
There could be a star.
Train your head,
Your heart, and your hand,
To help yourself
And your fellow man;
For smartness alone
Is surely not meet—
If you haven't got
Something to eat.

Booker T. went and
Built a school,
Book-learning there
And the workman's tool;
He started out
In a simple way—
For yesterday
Was not today.
Sometimes he had
Promise in his talk—
For a man must crawl
Before he can walk—
And in Alabama in '85
A Jester was lucky
To be alive.
But Booker T.
Was nobody's fool;
You may carve a dream
With a humble tool,
But the tallest tower
May tumble down
If it be not rooted
In solid ground.

He said, Train your head,
Your heart, and your hand—
For Booker T.
Was a practical man.
BALLAD OF BOOKER T.

3rd draft

June 1, 1941.

Booker T. Was a practical man. 
He said, Till the soil 
And learn from the land. 
Let down your bucket, 
Where you are ... 
Your fate is here. 
And not afar. 
To help yourself 
And your fellow man; 
Train your head, 
Your heart, and your hand. 
For smartness alone's 
Surely not meet --- 
If you haven't kixx at the same time 
Got something to eat. 
Thus at Tuskegee 
He built a school 
With booklearning there 
And the workman's tool. 
He started out 
In a simple way --- 
For yesterday 
Was not today. 
Sometimes he had 
Compromise in his talk --- 
For a man must crawl 
Before he can walk --- 
And in Alabama in '85 
A Joker was lucky 
To be alive. 
But Booker T. 
Was nobody's fool: 
You may carve a dream 
With an humble tool, 
The tallest tower 
Can tumble down 
If it be not rooted 
In solid ground. 

So, being a far-seeing practical man, 
He said, Train your head, 
Your heart, and your hand. 
And not afar. 
Let down your bucket 
Where you are.
BALLAD OF BOOKER T.

by

Langston Hughes

Booker T. was a practical man. He said, till the soil And learn from the land. Let down your bucket Where you are. Your fate is here And not afar. To help yourself And your fellow man, Train your head, Your heart, and your hand. For meanness alone's Surely not meet— If you haven't at the same time Got something to eat. Thus at Tuskegee He built a school With book-learning there And the workman's tool. He started out In a simple way— For yesterday Was not today. Sometimes he had Compromise in his talk— For a man must crawl Before he can walk— And in Alabama in '65 A joker was lucky To be alive. But Booker T. Was nobody's fool; You may carve a dream With an humble tool, The tallest tower Can tumble down If it be not rooted In solid ground. So, being a far-seeing Practical man, He said, Train your head, Your heart, and your hand. Your fate is here And not afar, Let down your bucket Where you are.
BALLAD OF BOOKER T.
by
Langston Hughes

Booker T.
Was a practical man.
He said, Till the soil
And learn from the land.
Let down your bucket
Where you are,
Your fate is here
And not afar.
To help yourself
And your fellow man,
Train your head,
Your heart, and your hand.
For smartness alone's
Surely not meet—
If you haven't at the same time
Got something to eat.
Thus at Tuskegee
He built a school
With book-learning there
And the workman's tool.
He started out
In a simple way—
For yesterday
Was not today.
Sometimes he had
Compromise in his talk—
For a man must crawl
Before he can walk—
And in Alabama in '85
A joker was lucky
To be alive.
But Booker T.
Was nobody's fool;
You may carve a dream
With an humble tool.
The tallest tower
Can tumble down
If it be not rooted
In solid ground.
So, being a far-seeing
Practical man,
He said, Train your head,
Your heart, and your hand.
Your fate is here
And not afar,
So let down your bucket
Where you are.

Langston Hughes

Final draft
Monterey, California,
June 1, 1941.
# Primary Source Analysis Tool

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<th>Reflect</th>
<th>Question</th>
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**Further Investigation**

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf
**TEACHER’S GUIDE**

**Analyzing Primary Sources**

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**OBSERVE**

**Have students identify and note details.**

Sample Questions:

- What do you notice first?
- Find something small but interesting.
- What do you notice that you didn’t expect?
- What do you notice that you can’t explain?
- What do you notice now that you didn’t earlier?

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**REFLECT**

**Encourage students to generate and test hypotheses about the source.**

- Where do you think this came from?
- Why do you think somebody made this?
- What do you think was happening when this was made?
- Who do you think was the audience for this item?
- What tool was used to create this?
- Why do you think this item is important?
- If someone made this today, what would be different?
- What can you learn from examining this?

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**QUESTION**

**Have students ask questions to lead to more observations and reflections.**

- What do you wonder about...
- who? · what? · when? · where? · why? · how?

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**FURTHER INVESTIGATION**

Help students to identify questions appropriate for further investigation, and to develop a research strategy for finding answers.

Sample Question: What more do you want to know, and how can you find out?

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**A few follow-up activity ideas:**

**Beginning**

- Have students compare two related primary source items.

**Intermediate**

- Have students expand or alter textbook explanations of history based on primary sources they study.

**Advanced**

- Ask students to consider how a series of primary sources support or challenge information and understanding on a particular topic.
- Have students refine or revise conclusions based on their study of each subsequent primary source.

For more tips on using primary sources, go to [http://www.loc.gov/teachers](http://www.loc.gov/teachers)

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[http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Primary_Sources.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Analyzing_Primary_Sources.pdf)
TEACHER’S GUIDE
ANALYZING MANUSCRIPTS

OBSERVE
Have students identify and note details.
Sample Questions:
Describe what you see. · What do you notice first?
· How much of the text can you read? What does it say? · What do you see that looks strange or unfamiliar? · How are the words arranged? · What do you notice about the page the writing appears on? · What size is the page? · What do you see on the page besides writing? · What other details can you see?

REFLECT
Encourage students to generate and test hypotheses about the manuscript.
Why do you think this manuscript was made? · Who do you think created it? · Who do you think was intended to read it, if anyone? · What do you think was happening when it was created? · What tools and materials were used to create it? · What can you learn from examining this? · If someone created something like this today, what would be different? · What would be the same?

QUESTION
Have students ask questions to lead to more observations and reflections.
What do you wonder about... who? · what? · when? · where? · why? · how?

FURTHER INVESTIGATION
Help students to identify questions appropriate for further investigation, and to develop a research strategy for finding answers.
Sample Question: What more do you want to know, and how can you find out?

A few follow-up activity ideas:
Beginning
Have students choose a section of the manuscript and put it in their own words.

Intermediate
Select a section of a manuscript. Speculate about the purpose of the manuscript, and what the person, or people, who created it expected it to accomplish. Do you think it achieved their goals? Explain why you think so.

Advanced
Examine a section of the manuscript. Think about what you already know about this period in history. How does the manuscript support or contradict your current understanding of this period? Can you see any clues to the point of view of the person who created this manuscript?


Guide students with the sample questions as they respond to the primary source. Encourage them to go back and forth between the columns; there is no correct order.