



Finding Langston

Lesa Cline-Ransome

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In a debut historical novel about the Great Migration a boy discovers Chicago's postwar South Side and the poetry of Langston Hughes.

When 11-year-old Langston's mother dies in 1946, he and his father leave rural Alabama for Chicago's brown belt as a part of what came to be known as the Great Migration. It's lonely in the small apartment with just the two of them, and at school Langston is bullied. But his new home has one fantastic thing. Unlike the whites-only library in Alabama, the local public library welcomes everyone. There, hiding out after school, Langston discovers another Langston, a poet whom he learns inspired his mother enough to name her only son after him.

Finding Langston Details

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Author : Lesa Cline-Ransome

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From Reader Review Finding Langston for online ebook

Kari says

So lovely! Short but packs a punch.

Amanda says

This is one of those rare children's books that are so much more than just a cute story for kids. On top of the historical aspect of it, it's also an enjoyable read for anyone who loves books and libraries in general. It deals with important subjects like bullying and grief, but does it in a way that doesn't feel overwhelming or too emotionally charged. The pace is a bit slow, but in my opinion that added to its charm. For a quick little read, I was very impressed with this book.

Mary Librarian says

The writing is top shelf. Langston is a character to love and he is three dimensional with supportive adults and a class full of realistic behaving kids.

Love the window to the world the library plays in the story.

Teresa Grabs says

Langston moved from Alabama to Chicago after his mother's death. As his father searches for a new meaning and to do the best he can for his son, Langston searches for meaning in his new world. His mother's secrets open doors that Langston never knew existed. Fantastic read!

Ms Threlkeld says

Beautiful story that you'll want to savor. I loved the main character and didn't want to say goodbye.

Stephanie Bange says

This is a story of a boy finding out who he is after the death of his mother.

Langston feels he was ripped from his home in Alabama and forced to move to Chicago with his father for a "fresh start". He feels alien in the city, it is so different from his country home in the South. While trying to avoid a bully at school, he stumbles upon the public library. Once Langston discovers the beauty of poetry

by his namesake, Langston Hughes, and other Black poets, he is able to turn his world around.

In a word, beautiful! Cline-Ransome's story set in 1940's Chicago is charming and on-target. Langston is moody and broody, just as tween boys are. He is two steps from manhood, yet two steps from still being a young boy. Growing up as a "mama's boy", he never really knew his father until they moved to Chicago. Langston grows immensely in both his sensibilities and self-confidence as the story unfolds. The conversations between Langston and others is just right. I found that my heart went out to this young man who was just trying to understand the world around him, but felt that it was against him. Once he started taking risks and extending himself, his world grew.

Highly Recommended for grades 4-8.

KC says

The Great Migration, where 7 million blacks relocated north between 1916 to 1970 with hope for a better life. After 11 year old Langston loses his mother, he and his father relocate to Chicago from Alabama. Having trouble making friends and adjusting to city life, Langston finds his way to the public library and the discovery of poetry, through the lens of Langston Hughes, who happened to be just one of many others, like Louis Armstrong and Muddy Waters, who contributed to Chicago's culture scene. A moving story with a great message and a brief bit of underrated history.

Laura Harrison says

One of my top favorite middle grade readers of the year. Beautifully written, warm and one children will enjoy. I hope it wins an award or two!

Susan Dove Lempke says

A historical fiction novel set in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago right after World War II. The main character (whose name we don't learn until part way through) deeply misses his late mother, and misses their Alabama home. Bullied at school and left alone a lot in the very bleak apartment he shares with his silent father, he finds comfort in the neighborhood library. For a librarian, this was a treat to read, and Cline-Ransome evokes the time, the place, and the poignant characters beautifully.

Leslie says

You know how, in the course of a read, a character becomes precious to you? Langston is one of those characters. He kind of reminds me of India Opal or Jess Aarons* in that way. It's 1946, and Langston is grieving the recent loss of his mother, as well as the loss of his home in Alabama.

He's had to leave his Grandma behind, the comforting familiarity of the land, food, people and its rhythms.

Langston's father is seeking a better life (and distance) in Bronzeville Chicago. And the differences between the Northern City and the Rural South is not only startling, but haunting. Langston is bullied for being too country and its in avoiding a tormenter that he stumbles across something crucially different between where he is from and where he has come.

The George Cleveland Hall Library is for all Chicago Residents—not just white people. Here, Langston discovers a safe haven and a soul-mate. It's a place Daddy would express concern over but his Mama would love. It becomes a secret that threatens a troubling distance with his father, but one that binds him closer to his mother. Langston's discovery of Hughes reveals his Mama to him in new ways.

The first book he pulls from the shelf shares his name. And is Langston Hughes his namesake like the Librarian wonders? The little mystery the question of naming inspires allows Langston to find a way to think about his mother in this new city.

Any of lover of poetry (or storytelling) will respond to how Cline-Ransome writes Langston's reaction to Hughes, "Feels like reading words from my heart" (22); "I have to stop. I can feel the choking in my throat that always starts right before the tears" (30); "This lady said the Langston who wrote these words is a poet. Seems more like a magician to me, pulling words from my heart I never knew I had" (32). There is more, and more poets.

You feel you learn more about both Langstons through the way Cline-Ransome writes their relationship. You are invited to imagine Hughes as a boy like Langston (possibly in Alabama, though we are reminded later that he is from Missouri and Kansas). Likewise, you can better understand some of Langston's longings, culture and context in the language of the poet. Langston begins to adopt Hughes words to express his feelings in a moment when the concrete/setting description of that moment seems inadequate: "Sometimes when I'm lonely,/Don't know why,/Keep thinkin' I won't be lonely/By and by."

Cline-Ransome realizes even the most distant characters for the reader. You mourn the loss of a mother and Grandma and their home because you've developed a second-hand fondness. You feel the struggle of Langston's father. You engage in the shift of perception of the neighbor Miss Fulton alongside (because of) our narrator's shift. Even the quick sketch (time-wise) of the setting, the teacher and librarians, are marvelously effective. All this in 104 pages of storytelling (smallish margins, long paragraphing).

Cline-Ransome also packs a lot of the historical into those 104 pages, and just as smoothly as her characterization. I do not pity any young person who would have to write a paper inspired by this book. Cline-Ransome includes an "Author's Note" to expand on the historical and cultural context and settings of the novel. I know she has written a number of picture books, but I hope Cline-Ransome writes more historical novels for young people, *Finding Langston* is so rich and compelling. The voices she writes and settings she describes are engaging.

His discovery of Langston Hughes and the George Cleveland Hall Library finds Langston (re)connecting with a number of people and places, learning new things about himself, his history, and a possible new future. This discovery, too, leads to an unexpected new turn for Langston and his father. Their distance was present from even before Chicago—Langston always shown to be closer to his mother in time-spent and interests—but their present circumstances create a greater strain. The question is whether Hughes or the Library will close the gap like it does for other relationships in the book. Because one of the most beautiful struggles in this book is the longing and effort both father and son bring to their relationship. You learn and

understand where each of them are coming from, so much informed by the culture of the time and their difference. You never doubt they love each other, and damn, but that scene to close the book. Maybe a poet and a library will bring them closer together.

*Opal is from DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie* and Jess Aarons is from Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*.

You know, there are decent film-versions of *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2005) and *Bridge to Terabithia* (2007)...I wouldn't mind seeing *Finding Langston* on screen. We need to talk to Oprah. In the meantime, you can find it in your library, and if you the young reader in your life cannot find it in their school library, I'd recommend its purchase (or just buy it for them).

Recommended for all the readers, not just the historical fiction reader; this is a good choice for the reluctant reader. Obviously this is a good one for April/National Poetry Month, and the classroom.

<https://contemplatrix.wordpress.com/2...>

Chris Coolman says

One of the perks of being in charge of the Children's area at my library branch is when new books come in, I get first choice. Sometimes I don't have time to read and I begrudgingly put them all out on the shelf, while others call to me. *Finding Langston* was just such a book. I was finishing the fall semester and stressed when it came across my desk, however I checked it out immediately and have been carrying it around in my bag for the last two weeks.

Continued at: <https://ccoolman.blogspot.com/>

MaryAnne says

A beautiful story.

In 1946, Langston and his Dad move to Chicago from rural Alabama. His mother recently passed away and he is feeling a little lost in this big city. The city is so noisy and everyone calls him "Country boy" because he has an accent and wears overalls. He hasn't made any friends and is experiencing bullying from a few kids in his class. In order to avoid the bullies, one day he goes a different way home from school and discovers the George Cleveland Hall Branch Library.

The library becomes his home away from home. He never imagined such a wonderful place and they allow colored folks! The first book he finds is by Langston Hughes and he wonders if he was named after him? He finds he has a lot in common with Mr. Hughes and soon discovers more poetry and writings by other Negro writers.

Langston's journey to discovering himself is beautifully written by Ms. Cline-Ransome. This is truly a lovely book. It's a love story for libraries and writers. And, it's a story about the Great Migration when many blacks from the South migrated to the North after World War II.

DaNae says

One more "important" book in a year of "important" books. Shines a light on the Great Migration through a displaced southern boy in post-war Chicago. Can't help but love the library scenes. Otherwise, the story felt bland and something to get through and check off the box.

Sherry Guice says

It has been a long time since I've read such a moving book--short and lyrical and filled with pain and longing. Langston and his father move to Chicago after the death of Langston's mother. He discovers Langston Hughes and poetry as he copes with the pain and loneliness of his new life, far from Alabama and without his mother.

Penny Peck says

In this brief but emotionally truthful novel for grades 4-8, Langston has moved to Chicago with his father from rural Alabama in post-WWII after the death of his mother. He has trouble adjusting to school but appreciates that in Chicago, African-Americans are allowed to use the public library. This is a great story about father-son, dealing with loss, making friends after a move, dealing with bullies, etc. It is a plus that some historical information is also included (but doesn't overwhelm), such as the Great Migration and the library system in Chicago. Great for a classroom read-aloud for 5th grade, and for tweens who need a 'skinny' book. But it is more than that; the honesty of Langston's feelings is so clear that this really resonates.
