

Famous Writers and Artists

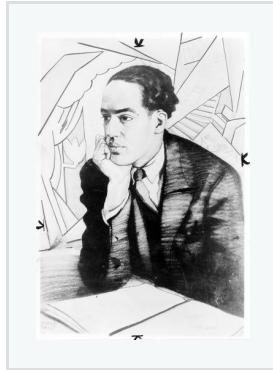
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Langston Hughes, Man of the People

The text and image are from "America's Story from America's Library" by the Library of Congress.



drawing of Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes is one of America's greatest poets. Like so many writers, he wrote about what he knew -- the people, places, and events around him. Although Hughes was friendly with people from all walks of life, the rich, the middle class, and the poor, it was the people he called the "low-down folks" who had the greatest influence on his poetry. Hughes used this expression as a form of praise. He admired these people because "they accept what beauty is their own without question." . .

Perhaps the phrase means that the low-down folks appreciated the beauty that existed in their lives. Hughes loved the music of his people, especially the blues, songs that express sad themes. He heard this music in clubs in Chicago, New York, Kansas City, and Washington, D.C. The songs he heard were about people who were determined to overcome hardships. In "Songs Called the Blues" (1941), Hughes said this music was sung by "black, beaten but unbeatable throats." In 1958, Hughes recorded his poetry to the accompaniment of the music of jazz and blues artists such as Charles Mingus. . . .

Langston Hughes believed in using his art to get across his feelings about politics and injustice. He traveled to other countries to learn how they dealt with racial issues. Despite his own very liberal beliefs, Hughes defended African American activists who held more conservative views. For example, in the 1941 poem "Ballad of Booker T.," Hughes defends Booker T. Washington, a former slave and more conservative advocate for equality. Rather than criticize him, the poet focused on Washington's strategy to gain racial equality:

"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."

Hughes explained Washington's position by saying he had to "compromise." ...

Langston Hughes, a Renaissance Man

The text and image are from "America's Story from America's Library" by the Library of Congress.

Langston Hughes was an artist who used words to express himself, but other forms of art influenced him, and his work crossed over into other mediums. Hughes was considered a Renaissance man, someone who has wide interests and is talented in many areas. Jazz and blues were key elements of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, a time when African Americans in a section of New York City started a movement to celebrate their culture. Hughes said that jazz and blues expressed the wide range of black America's experience, from grief and sadness to hope and determination. The famous Henry "Red" Allen Band accompanied Hughes in a 1958 poetry recording. The rhythms of jazz also influenced his 1951 *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. This was a book-length poem in five sections depicting the African American urban experience using music, poetry, and history.



Henry "Red" Allen and his band played jazz to Langston Hughes's poetry.

Music and poetry worked together -- just like they do today in songs you listen to. But Langston Hughes spread his creative wings even further. He loved drama and plays, and founded theater companies in both New York and Los Angeles. Hughes wrote his first play, *Mule Bone*, with Zora Neale Hurston in 1930 and kept writing for the stage the rest of his life. In order to make his plays sound realistic, Hughes mixed the lyrical nature of his poetry with the sounds of people in conversation. In 1957 he wrote a play called *Simply Heavenly*, which played on Broadway (in New York City) and in London.

Langston Hughes influenced many other people with his art -- young writers and artists looked up to him. African Americans found in him a voice for their own experiences and culture -- a voice that hadn't been widely heard until then. He inspired many other artists of all races to write, draw, play, and sing. Some even dedicated their work to Hughes

How does art touch your life? Have you ever read, watched, or listened to something that reminded you of the way you live or of something that has happened to you?

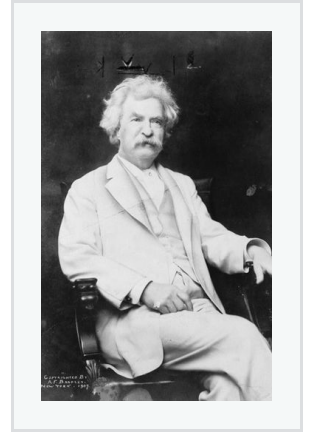
Mark Twain

The text and image are from “America’s Story from America’s Library” by the Library of Congress.

Born: November 30, 1835

Died: April 1910

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in Florida, Missouri, and later moved with his family to Hannibal, Missouri, where he grew up. Although he had a number of odd jobs early in his life, Clemens is best known as a writer who took the pen name of Mark Twain about five years after he published his first major work. Twain was a traveling journalist, humorist, writer, and lecturer whose most famous novels are *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. His childhood in Hannibal along the Mississippi River inspired colorful tales of adventures on the waterway. Twain traveled around the world and he dazzled audiences far and wide with lectures filled with the same humor and spirit found in his writings.

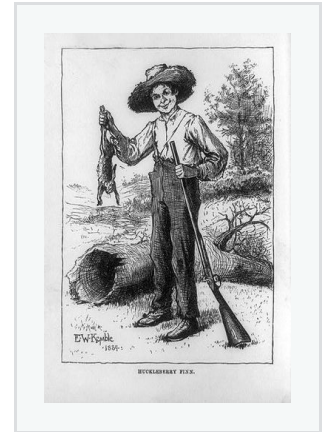


Mark Twain

Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn

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In every generation writers joke about writing the "great American novel." But Mark Twain really did. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in 1884, is considered by most to be Twain's masterpiece. The story follows Huck Finn as he helps Jim, a runaway slave, to escape along the Mississippi River. The novel is filled with rich descriptions of the river and the colorful people who lived along it. He also employed humor to involve his readers in issues of justice and morality. What else helped make this book so well loved?



an illustration of Huckleberry Finn by Edward Windsor Kemble

Twain used accents and slang words to bring his characters to life. *Huckleberry Finn* was different from anything most Americans had ever read. Twain wrote dialogue for his characters that made them sound like real people. He didn't make all his characters sound the same; instead they each had a unique voice.

Here is how Chapter One of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* begins:

"You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. ..."

Can you see how this captures the way someone speaks? This style of writing greatly influenced American literature, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is now considered a classic novel, a work of excellence that is read long after it is written. . . .

Dorothea Lange

The text and image are from “America’s Story from America’s Library” by the Library of Congress.

Born: May 26, 1895

Died: October 11, 1965

Photographer Dorothea Lange was born in Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1895. Lange is best known for her work documenting poor conditions of the migrant workers who traveled in large numbers to California during the Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s. Her photographs brought much-needed attention to their plight. Lange used photography to document the difficult period of the Depression and to motivate agencies and individuals to take action to improve the situation. With her photographs Lange was able to capture the emotional and physical toll that the Depression and other events took on human beings across the country.



photographer Dorothea Lange with her camera in California

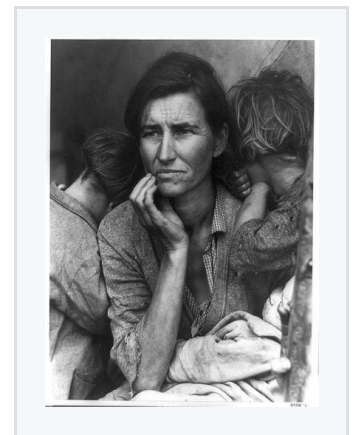
The Power of Dorothea Lange's Pictures

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In order to take striking and moving photographs, Dorothea Lange had to earn the trust of her subjects. Lange's friend, Ron Partridge, recalled how she worked in the fields of California, photographing the workers.

"She would walk through the field and talk to people, asking simple questions – 'What are you picking? ... How long have you been here? When do you eat lunch? ... I'd like to photograph you,' she'd say, and by now it would be 'Sure, why not,' and they would pose a little, but she would sort of ignore it, walk around until they forgot us and were back at work." Then she would begin to take her pictures.

Dorothea Lange's most famous photograph is commonly known as the "Migrant Mother." In 1936, Lange photographed a woman from Oklahoma who worked in the pea fields of Nipomo, California, near Santa Barbara. The woman was a widow with seven children, who survived by eating frozen peas from the fields and birds her children caught. This image became a symbol for the suffering caused by the Depression. It was published in the *San Francisco News* and led to relief for the camp where the woman lived. . . .



Dorothea Lange's famous photograph, "Migrant Mother"

Although she looked much older because she lived such a hard life, much of it spent in the scorching sun of the fields, the woman in the photo was only in her 30s. Lange recalled the circumstances of taking the photo:

I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it. (Popular Photography, Feb. 1960)

Have you ever seen a picture or read a story that made you want to help another person? What was it, and did you do anything?

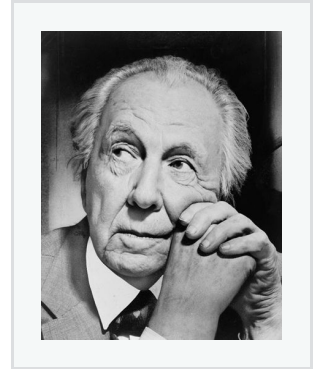
Frank Lloyd Wright

The text and image are from "America's Story from America's Library" by the Library of Congress.

Born: June 8, 1867

Died: April 9, 1959

Frank Lloyd Wright was one of the most original American architects of the 20th century. His buildings and ideas have affected the way offices and homes are designed and organized today. Wright's willingness to look to various cultures for inspiration allowed him to develop a unique style. During the early decades of the 1900s, other American architects were merely imitating European styles. Wright believed in the power that good design has to make people more aware and respectful of their surroundings and of nature. Wright designed office buildings, houses, neighborhoods, public buildings, churches, and museums. He designed about 800 buildings. Of the 380 that were built, about 280 are still standing. The influence of his "Prairie style" of architecture is in evidence in homes across the country.



architect Frank Lloyd Wright

The Houses of Frank Lloyd Wright

The text and images are from "America's Story from America's Library" by the Library of Congress.

Many of Frank Lloyd Wright's most famous buildings are houses. Wright wanted to design houses that could be built cheaply using inexpensive materials. In the 1920s, he began to design a new system to build affordable homes using concrete blocks. He called these modular parts "textile blocks." They were somewhat similar to the idea of Lego blocks. Several of his textile block houses were constructed in the Los Angeles area in the early 1920s. Among these is La Miniatura, built for Alice Millard in Pasadena, California.

Many of Wright's masterpieces derive their unique look from his belief that architecture must fit into its natural surroundings. Wright felt that individuals -- and the buildings they occupy -- must exist in harmony with nature. As a Midwesterner, he was familiar with the flatlands of the Great Plains. . . .



1910 illustration by the architect of a "prairie house"

Wright's houses are known for being long, horizontal, and usually one story tall -- in other words, fairly flat. They are called "prairie" houses, after the flat expanses of land between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains.

Perhaps Wright's most striking and successful attempt to combine

structure and nature is Fallingwater, a home in Mill Run, Pennsylvania. The rectangular sections that make up the house are built over a running stream and waterfall. More than 60 years after the building was completed, it still appears modern. . . .



Fallingwater was built over a stream.