Words Like Freedom
Dreams
Poems by Langston Hughes

How do POSSESSIONS become realities?

You’ve probably heard the saying “The sky’s the limit.” It means that anything is possible if we try hard enough. Even if we have unlimited possibilities, though, achieving our goals may require more than hard work. We may also need a strong desire to succeed and the help of people around us. In his poems “Words Like Freedom” and “Dreams,” Langston Hughes describes some of the difficulties involved in living up to our potential.

WEB IT Think of a person who, in your opinion, is very successful. It could be a celebrity or someone you know. What helps this person to achieve his or her goals? Record your thoughts in an idea web like the one shown.
Meet the Author

Langston Hughes
1902–1967

Writer from Harlem
In 1925, Langston Hughes left three of his poems with a famous author who was eating in the restaurant where Hughes worked. Sharing those poems led to his first book, The Weary Blues. Much of Hughes’s writing focuses on the experiences of the people who lived around him in Harlem. “I knew only the people I had grown up with,” he once said, “and they weren’t people whose shoes were always shined…. But they seemed to me good people, too.”

The Music of Poetry
Growing up, Hughes fell in love with jazz and the blues. He expressed this love by using blues themes, images, and rhythms in his poetry. In the 1950s, Hughes made a recording of his poems set to jazz.

Renaissance Man
Langston Hughes was one of the strongest voices of a cultural movement called the Harlem Renaissance, which took its name from the Harlem neighborhood in New York City and the time period called the Renaissance, which means “rebirth.” During this period, which lasted for most of the 1920s, African-American artists, writers, and musicians worked to establish a proud and vibrant cultural identity.

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
There are words like Freedom
Sweet and wonderful to say.
On my heartstrings freedom sings
All day everyday.

5 There are words like Liberty
That almost make me cry.
If you had known what I know
You would know why.

**THEME**

Why does the speaker choose to repeat the words in lines 1 and 5?
Hold fast\(^1\) to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.  

**VISUALIZE**
How does the mental picture of “a barren field frozen with snow” add to your understanding of the poem?

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1. **Hold fast**: grasp tightly; stick firmly.
After Reading

Comprehension

1. **Identify**  In “Words Like Freedom”, what do words like *liberty* make the speaker do?

2. **Recall**  What line is repeated in “Dreams”?

Text Analysis

3. **Make Inferences**  Reread the last two lines of “Words Like Freedom.” What can you infer about the people the speaker is addressing?

4. **Visualize**  Review the chart you filled in as you read. Then underline the words and phrases that had the strongest effect on you. Which poem was more effective at helping you visualize?

5. **Analyze Theme in Poetry**  As you read, you looked for ways in which titles, images, and repeated words hinted at a poem’s theme. Use a diagram like the one shown to write theme statements for Hughes’s poems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Poem</th>
<th>Images and Repeated Words</th>
<th>Theme Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Words Like Freedom”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Dreams”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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6. **Compare Theme**  Compare the themes in “Words Like Freedom” and “Dreams.” What message do you think Hughes is trying to convey?

Extension and Challenge

7. **Creative Project: Art**  Like a piece of literature, a piece of visual art can mean different things to different people. Choose either “Words Like Freedom” or “Dreams” and create an original work of art to go with the poem. For inspiration, think about the poem’s subject, details, and most of all, how the poem made you feel.

8. **Inquiry and Research**  Research the civil rights movement to create a timeline of the important civil rights rulings and events that happened during Langston Hughes’s lifetime (1902–1967). How might these events have affected Hughes’s view of his possibilities?

How do POSSIBILITIES become realities?

What possibilities lie ahead for you in the future? What steps can you take to turn them into realities?