

THE BEST OF SIMPLE LANGSTON HUGHES

In school, it started with the poem *I, Too* and *the negro speaks of rivers*. That was the beginning and the end of the exposure I had to the poems from The Harlem Renaissance and Black poets. *Dreams*, *Harlem*, *Theme for English B*, and the sound of jazz in the poetry of Langston Hughes I discovered on my own.

Freshman-high-school-summer, I tried to read everything I could find by and about Hughes, which led me to the down-to-earth character Jesse B. Simple with his country cadence and barbershop wit. I felt like I had overheard him talking before. I knew him, and his concerns for, and jokes about Black folks and Black life. He is never laughing at -- but is always inviting the reader to laugh with him.

When I visit Simple, he jokes and jives truth, and I get to sit next to Langston Hughes, as he plays the straight man asking questions. Even now, as I revisit *The Best of Simple*, I am sitting at a piano bar, in the background, *The Weary Blues* is playing as Simple is telling us about *A Dog Named Trilby* and the poor confused owner.

Do you have a story or series you discovered on your own during summer reading? If so, when was the last time you visited those stories and do they still speak to you?