

Writings of Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes experienced racism first hand, growing up in Lawrence, KS. How can we understand the sting of racism if we ourselves have not felt it? Novels and poetry can help us to understand the emotions behind historical events. Langston Hughes fictionalized his real-life experiences. On August 19, 1910, an eight year old Hughes lived in Lawrence. The local newspaper, the Lawrence Daily Journal, held a “Children’s Day Party” at a local amusement park. The newspaper promised to pay the entrance fee for all children in town. Two days before the event the newspaper clarified its position. It would not pay for African American children to come to its party. They were unwelcome. The actual event found its way into Langston Hughes’ novel, *Not Without Laughter*.

Read the following passage from Hughes’ *Not Without Laughter*. As you are reading, write down words that characterize the emotions you are feeling as Langston Hughes puts the reader into the world of The African American children.

<p>There were crowds of children under the bright red and white wooden shelter at the park entrance. They were lining up at the gate – laughing, merry, clean little white children, pushing and yelling and giggling amiably. Sandy let Willie-Mae go first and he got in behind her. The band was playing happily inside... They were almost to the entrance now... There were just two boys in front of them... Willie-Mae held out her black little hand clutching the coupons. They moved forward. The man looked down.</p> <p>“Sorry”, he said. “This party’s for white kids.”</p> <p>Willie-Mae did not understand. She stood holding out the coupons, waiting for the tall white man to take them.</p> <p>“Stand back, you two,” he said, looking at Sandy as well. “I told you ... this wasn’t your party.”... “Come on, next little girl.” And the line of white children pushed past Willie-Mae</p>	<p>What words describe how this passage makes you feel?</p>
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and Sandy, going into the park. Stunned, the two dark ones drew aside. Then they noticed a group of a dozen or more other colored youngsters standing apart in the sun, just without the bright entrance pavilion, and among them was Sadie Butler, Sandy's classmate. Three or four of the colored children were crying, but most of them looked sullen and angry, and some of them had turned to go home.