

Overview

Students will be encouraged to think of the value and meaning of landmarks by examining buildings and places in their own neighborhoods as well as thinking about the landmark as a concept. Each student will choose and present a place in their neighborhood that they find meaningful and would want to preserve. After reading and discussing Langston Hughes' poem "Juke Box Love Song," each student will write a poem to their own landmark using Hughes as a model.

Objectives

- Explore the idea of what a landmark is and how we identify our own landmarks in our communities.
- Explore the importance of preserving buildings and places for future generations.
- Discuss Langston Hughes' poem "Juke Box Love Song." How are the themes of love and place introduced?
- Use a celebrated poem as a model for thinking and writing about a particular place.

Instructions

1. Have students think of a place in the city that they find meaningful. It could be a park, a place of worship, a library, or a building they walk by every day. What makes that place special? Why should this particular place or building be preserved and celebrated by future generations?
2. Hand out "Juke Box Love Song" and ask a student to read the poem aloud; then read it aloud yourself.
3. Questions for discussion: What words are repeated in the poem? Why do you think these words are repeated? Besides the girl the speaker is addressing, could this also be seen as a love poem to Harlem? Which line is their favorite and why? Why do you think the author uses the word "juke box" in the title but not in the poem?
4. (1st-3rd grade) Have each student write a brief love poem modeled on the Hughes poem. As a class make a list of what makes a landmark a landmark. Then as a class, create a list of the details Hughes used to describe Harlem as a landmark. Each student will make a list of what they love about their chosen landmark (sounds, sights, smells, etc.). Ask them to write a love poem using these details. Like Hughes, encourage students to imagine that they could give human traits to their landmark.
5. (4th-12th grade) Have each student write a brief love poem modeled on the Hughes poem. Ask them to imagine that they could give beautiful things (both physical things and intangible things) from their chosen landmark to someone they love.

Juke Box Love Song

I could take the Harlem night
and wrap around you,
Take the neon lights and make a crown,
Take the Lenox Avenue busses,
Taxis, subways,
And for your love song tone their rumble down.
Take Harlem's heartbeat,
Make a drumbeat,
Put it on a record, let it whirl,
And while we listen to it play,
Dance with you till day--
Dance with you, my sweet brown Harlem girl.

-Langston Hughes