

Literature Choice 1

- 1 **Your Culture** Are there any groups of people in your country which are discriminated against now or have suffered from discrimination in the past?

West Indian immigrants in the UK suffered discrimination in the 60s and still have problems.

- 2 **132 133** Listen to a talk and complete the notes.

Civil Rights Movement in the USA 1945-1970

Early 20th century: 'Jim Crow' laws in the South meant segregation in ¹ public transport, public places. Few Afro-Americans able to ² and had little protection from ³ extremist groups (e.g. Ku Klux Klan).

After World War II: Change of attitude when ⁴ GIs (soldiers) came home.

1955: Montgomery ⁵ Boycott led by Martin Luther King. Sit-ins, ⁶ and 'freedom rides' throughout the South.

⁷: March on Washington with ⁸ people. Luther King's famous 'I have a dream' speech.

⁹: Civil Rights Act ended segregation.

¹⁰: Voting Rights Act enabled blacks to vote.

1968: Luther King assassinated + race riots in major US. Summer Olympics: athletes made ¹² Power salute.

- 3 **132 133** Listen again. Answer the questions.

- 1 How were Afro-Americans second-class citizens?
- 2 How did Afro-American soldiers feel after the war?
- 3 What were the 'freedom rides'?
- 4 How did Martin Luther King see the USA's future?
- 5 How did many Afro-Americans feel in 1968?

- 4 Read about Langston Hughes on page 121. Which of these things do you think most influenced his work?

a his family c a style of music e his travels
b his race d his political views

- 5 **134** Read and listen to the poem *Will V-Day Be Me-Day Too?* Check your guesses from Exercise 4.

- 6 Read the poem again and answer the questions.

- 1 Who is the letter written by and who is it addressed to?
- 2 How have Afro-American soldiers helped the US war effort?
- 3 Who have they been fighting against?
- 4 What has the writer promised his dying friend?
- 5 What is he worried about when he gets home?
- 6 What is he asking his fellow white soldiers to do?

- 7 **Work in pairs. Discuss the questions about the language in the poem.**

- 1 Find words that rhyme in the first five verses.
Verse 1: letter/better; Yank/tank; through/too
- 2 What do 'V-Day' and 'Me-Day' mean?
- 3 Who is 'GI Joe'?
- 4 Who or what is 'Dixie'? What does Dixie do to black people?
- 5 Find the four references to 'Jim Crow' in the poem. In which of them are these images used?
a a train for carrying prisoners
b an authoritarian person
c a sinister animal
- 6 Why does the poet use capital letters to say 'WILL V-DAY BE ME-DAY TOO?'

My Project

- 8 **Work in pairs. Choose a period of your country's history. Use the Net to find information and write notes under headings like these:**

- the situation
- the issues
- the leaders
- the result

- 9 **Tell the class about the period in history.**

We chose the mind 19th century, when WW2 broke out ...

James Langston Hughes was born in Missouri in 1901. His parents soon divorced and he lived with his grandmother for a few years before going to Illinois to live with his mother and her new husband. He began writing poetry at school and, after leaving, did different jobs and travelled around the world as a seaman. He came back to the USA in 1924 and went to university. Langston Hughes lived in New York most of his life and wrote poems, plays, short stories and novels. He loved jazz and its rhythms can be seen in his poems about the lives of working class blacks. In his writing, he attacked racial stereotypes and fought for Afro-American rights. He died in 1967.



Glossary

antiquated: (adj) old-fashioned
buddy: (n) friend (US English informal)
cattle: (n) cows and bulls
comrade in arms: (n) someone who has fought with you
crow: (n) a black bird
defeat: (n) when you lose a war
Dixie: (n) south-eastern states of the USA that belonged to the slave-owning Confederacy and the white people living there
face: (v) deal with something difficult
folks: (n) people (colloquial)
glow: (n) soft, warm light
harm: (n) damage, injury or trouble
herd: (v) to move animals
ill-fated: (adj) unlucky
lap: (n) the upper part of your legs when you are sitting down
lay: (v) to put something somewhere
lynch: (v) to kill someone without trial because you think they have done something wrong
might: (n) power, strength
munitions: (n) military supplies, like bombs
native: (adj) your native town/country, etc. is the place you were born
stevedore: (v) load and unload ships and lorries
tan-skinned: (adj) with dark brown skin
Yank: (n) American (informal)

◀ 134

Will V-Day Be Me-Day Too?

Over There,
 World War II.

Dear Fellow Americans,
 I write this letter

5 Hoping times will be better
 When this war
 Is through.
 I'm a Tan-skinned Yank
 Driving a tank.

10 I ask, WILL V-DAY
 BE ME-DAY, TOO?

I wear a US uniform.
 I've done the enemy much harm,
 I've driven back

15 The Germans and the Japs,
 From Burma to the Rhine.
 On every battle line,
 I've dropped defeat
 Into the Fascists' laps.

20 I am a Negro American
 Out to defend my land
 Army, Navy, Air Corps –
 I am there.
 I take munitions through,

25 I fight – or stevedore, too.
 I face death the same as you do
 Everywhere.

I've seen my buddy lying
 Where he fell.

30 I've watched him dying
 I promised him that I would try
 To make our land a land
 Where his son could be a man –
 And there'd be no Jim Crow birds

35 Left in our sky.

So this is what I want to know:
 When we see Victory's glow,
 Will you still let old Jim Crow
 Hold me back?

40 When all those foreign folks who've waited –
 Italians, Chinese, Danes – are liberated.
 Will I still be ill-fated
 Because I'm black?

45 Here in my own, my native land,
 Will the Jim Crow laws still stand?
 Will Dixie lynch me still
 When I return?
 Or will you comrades in arms
 From the factories and the farms,

50 Have learned what this war
 Was fought for us to learn?

When I take off my uniform,
 Will I be safe from harm –
 Or will you do me

55 As the Germans did the Jews?
 When I've helped this world to save,
 Shall I still be colour's slave?
 Or will Victory change
 Your antiquated views?

60 You can't say I didn't fight
 To smash the Fascists' might.
 You can't say I wasn't with you
 in each battle.
 As a soldier, and a friend.

65 When this war comes to an end,
 Will you herd me in a Jim Crow car
 Like cattle?

Or will you stand up like a man
 At home and take your stand
 For Democracy?
 That's all I ask of you.
 When we lay the guns away
 To celebrate
 Our Victory Day

75 WILL V-DAY BE ME-DAY, TOO?
 That's what I want to know.

Sincerely, GI Joe.

