



# News Release

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## NMCC to Host African American Read-In on February 12

**Aroostook County** - To help celebrate Black History Month in February as well as to promote literacy, Northern Maine Community College will be joining with schools, churches, libraries and other organizations across the country in hosting a Read-In. The public is invited to attend the NMCC's event, which will take place at noon on Friday, February 12, in the College library.

"Events such as these give students the opportunity to learn about culture, literature and history in a setting outside of the classroom," said Jennifer Graham, NMCC English instructor and coordinator of the Read-In. "Having students speak gives them a more 'hands-on' way to experience literature. Students can learn from each other rather than just from an instructor. It also demonstrates that opportunities for educational experiences that promote learning can happen in less formal, more accessible ways."

This marks the second year that NMCC faculty and students are taking part in an African American Read-In. Joining Graham in planning the event is Gail Roy, NMCC's assistant dean of learning resources. To keep things interesting for folks from the campus and local community who may have attended last year's event, the duo are taking a different direction with this year's Read-In.

"Last year, NMCC students presented more of a historical overview of African American literature by reading excerpts of authors' works from the beginning of the tradition (slave narratives) up through current black writers, ending with Barack Obama's recent autobiography to tie in his election," explained Graham. "This year, Gail and I opted to do a more focused approach, by selecting one of the most famous American writers, Langston Hughes."

Hughes is particularly known for his colorful, insightful portrayals of black life in America from the 1920s through the 1960s. He wrote poetry, novels, short stories and plays, and is also known for his engagement with the world of jazz and the influence it had on his writing. His works tell the story of his people in ways that reflected their actual culture, including both their suffering and their love of music, laughter and language itself.

“We chose Langston Hughes because he is fairly contemporary, is recognized as an essential part of the American Literary Canon, and his work is passionate, accessible to students, and is still both relatable and relevant,” said Graham.

During the NMCC Read-In, Graham will read a short bio on Hughes to kick things off. A number of NMCC students and employees will then be reading a Hughes poem of their choice. Members of the College and local community are invited to come and hear Hughes’ work.

The Read-In is sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and by its Black Caucus. It has been endorsed by the International Reading Association. Over a million readers of all ethnic groups from 49 states, the West Indies, and African countries have participated since the Read-In first began in 1990. The goal is to make the celebration of African American literacy a traditional part of Black History Month activities.

Graham and Roy will be submitting details of the NMCC event to NCTE after its conclusion, so that it will be included in national statistics regarding this year’s African American Read-In results.

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