

Character Changes

SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: *Graphic Organizer, Marking the Text, Metacognitive Markers, Quickwrite, Role-Playing, Skimming/ Scanning, Visualizing, Sketching, Think-Pair-Share*

Before Reading

1. **Quickwrite:** Write about a time when you changed your mind about someone. Maybe you had a wrong first impression. Or maybe the person did something that you did not expect, and it changed the way you thought about him or her.

2. Your teacher will read aloud the short story “Thank You, M’am” by Langston Hughes. As you read along with your teacher, place metacognitive markers in the My Notes column next to the story to remind you what you want to talk about at the end of the reading. Use these symbols:

- Write a question mark (?) next to anything in the story that you have a question about. For example, you might write a question mark next to an unfamiliar word or a part of the story that confuses you.
- Write an exclamation point (!) next to any part of the story that evokes a reaction from you. You might like or dislike a part of the story, for example, or you may find a part funny or sad. You might find yourself getting angry, or you might think that something is completely true-to-life.
- Write an asterisk (*) next to anything in the story that you want to comment on during a discussion of the story. For example, if a part of the story reminds you of something in your own life or something that you have seen in a movie or TV show, mark it with an asterisk so you will remember to comment in class.

GRAMMAR & USAGE

A **complete sentence** has three characteristics:

- It begins with a capital letter.
- It includes an end mark (period, question mark, exclamation point).
- Most important, it must contain a **subject** and a **predicate**.

The **subject** is the noun or pronoun that the sentence is about.

The **predicate** contains a verb that tells what the subject is or is doing or did.

A group of words with a subject and a predicate that contains a complete thought is a **simple sentence**.

My Notes

Short Story

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Langston Hughes (1902–1967) began his writing career early. By 8th grade, he was named the class poet, and he regularly wrote verse for his high school magazine. Hughes entered Columbia University in 1921 and discovered the arts scene in Harlem. He became a prominent figure in the Harlem Renaissance. His poetry, plays, and stories frequently focused on the African American experience, particularly on the struggles and feelings of individuals. His poetry especially was informed by the rhythms of the jazz and blues of African American music.

THANK YOU, M'AM

by Langston Hughes

She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but a hammer and nails. It had a long strap, and she carried it slung across her shoulder. It was about eleven o'clock at night, dark, and she was walking alone, when a boy ran up behind her and tried to snatch her purse. The strap broke with the sudden single tug the boy gave it from behind. But the boy's weight and the weight of the purse combined caused him to lose his balance. Instead of taking off full blast as he had hoped, the boy fell on his back on the sidewalk and his legs flew up. The large woman simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jeaned sitter. Then she reached down, picked the boy up by his shirtfront, and shook him until his teeth rattled.

Chunk
1

After that the woman said, "Pick up my pocketbook, boy, and give it here."

She still held him tightly. But she bent down enough to permit him to stoop and pick up her purse. Then she said, "Now ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

LITERARY TERMS

The **theme** of a story is its main idea or message. It is the author's comment on the conflict of the story.

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She switched on the light and left the door open. The boy could hear other roomers laughing and talking in the large house. Some of their doors were open, too, so he knew he and the woman were not alone. The woman still had him by the neck in the middle of her room.

Chunk 2

She said, “What is your name?”

“Roger,” answered the boy.

“Then, Roger, you go to that sink and wash your face,” said the woman, whereupon she turned him loose—at last. Roger looked at the door—looked at the woman—looked at the door—and *went to the sink*.

“Let the water run until it gets warm,” she said. “Here’s a clean towel.”

“You gonna take me to jail?” asked the boy, bending over the sink.

“Not with that face, I would not take you nowhere,” said the woman. “Here I am trying to get home to cook me a bite to eat, and you snatch my pocketbook! Maybe you ain’t been to your supper either, late as it be. Have you?”

“There’s nobody home at my house,” said the boy.

“Then we’ll eat,” said the woman. “I believe you’re hungry—or been hungry—to try to snatch my pocketbook!”

“I want a pair of blue suede shoes,” said the boy.

“Well, you didn’t have to snatch *my* pocketbook to get some suede shoes,” said Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones. “You could’ve asked me.”

The water dripping from his face, the boy looked at her. There was a long pause. A very long pause. After he had dried his face and not knowing what else to do, dried it again, the boy turned around, wondering what next. The door was open. He could make a dash for it down the hall. He could run, run, run, *run!*

Chunk 3

The woman was sitting on the daybed. After a while she said, “I were young once and I wanted things I could not get.”

There was another long pause. The boy’s mouth opened. Then he frowned, not knowing he frowned.

The woman said, “Um-hum! You thought I was going to say but, didn’t you? You thought I was going to say, *but I didn’t snatch people’s pocketbooks*. Well, I wasn’t going to say that.” Pause. Silence. “I have done things, too, which I would not tell you, son—neither tell God,

if He didn't already know. Everybody's got something in common. So you set down while I fix us something to eat. You might run that comb through your hair so you will look presentable."

In another corner of the room behind a screen was a gas plate and an icebox. Mrs. Jones got up and went behind the screen. The woman did not watch the boy to see if he was going to run now, nor did she watch her purse, which she left behind her on the daybed. But the boy took care to sit on the far side of the room, away from the purse, where he thought she could easily see him out of the corner of her eye if she wanted to. He did not trust the woman not to trust him. And he did not want to be mistrusted now.

"Do you need somebody to go to the store," asked the boy, "maybe to get some milk or something?"

"Don't believe I do," said the woman, "unless you just want sweet milk yourself. I was going to make cocoa out of this canned milk I got here."

"That will be fine," said the boy.

She heated some lima beans and ham she had in the icebox, made the cocoa, and set the table. The woman did not ask the boy anything about where he lived, or his folks, or anything else that would embarrass him. Instead, as they ate, she told him about her job in a hotel beauty shop that stayed open late, what the work was like, and how all kinds of women came in and out, blondes, red-heads, and Spanish. Then she cut him a half of her ten-cent cake.

"Eat some more, son," she said.

When they were finished eating, she got up and said, "Now here, take this ten dollars and buy yourself some blue suede shoes. And next time, do not make the mistake of latching onto *my* pocketbook *nor nobody else's*—because shoes got by devilish ways will burn your feet. I got to get my rest now. But from here on in, son, I hope you will behave yourself."

She led him down the hall to the front door and opened it. "Good night! Behave yourself, boy!" she said, looking out into the street as he went down the steps.

The boy wanted to say something other than, "Thank you, m'am," to Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, but although his lips moved, he couldn't even say that as he turned at the foot of the barren stoop and looked up at the large woman in the door. Then she shut the door.

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After Reading

- Although this story is very brief, Hughes creates two memorable characters. Scan the story and find the physical descriptions of the characters. Circle all the words and phrases that describe what the characters look like. Try to visualize the characters. You may want to quickly sketch the characters in the My Notes column if that helps you picture them. Copy the descriptions in the spaces below and tell what the characters' appearances indicate about them.

<p>Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones's Appearance</p>	<p>What Her Appearance Says About Her</p>
<p>Roger's Appearance</p>	<p>What His Appearance Says About Him</p>

2. List the actions of the characters, beginning with Roger. You may either copy the words from the story (putting them inside quotation marks), or you may paraphrase (put the action in your own words). Explain what each action tells about the character. Some parts have been completed for you as an example.

Roger's Actions	What the Actions Tell About the Character
He ran up behind a lady and tried to snatch her purse.	He is desperate enough to steal.
"Roger looked at the door — looked at the woman — looked at the door — <i>and went to the sink.</i> "	
Mrs. Jones's Actions	What the Actions Tell About the Character
She kicked the boy and shook him.	

Character Changes

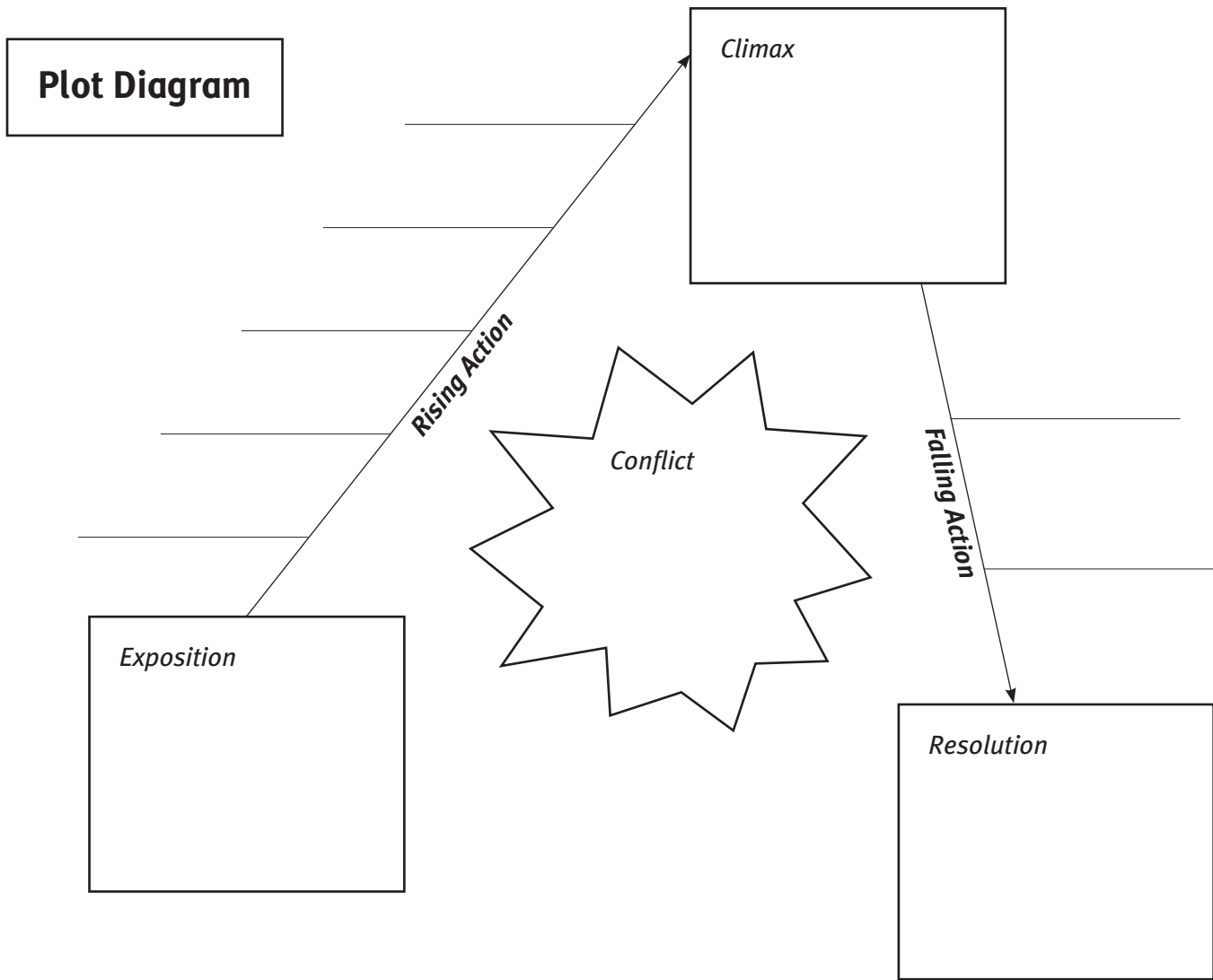
You have looked at two of the ways Hughes enables his readers to get to know his characters — by their appearance and by their actions. Another way authors let their readers get to know their characters is through the things they say. You are going to work with the dialogue (or conversations) in this story. Your teacher will ask you to label the speakers in one part of the story. The parts are numbered in the text.

- Part 1: Begins when Mrs. Jones says, “Pick up my pocketbook, boy, and give it here.”
- Part 2: Begins when Mrs. Jones says, “What is your name?”
- Part 3: Begins when Mrs. Jones says, “I were young once and I wanted things I could not get.”

You will need two different highlighters or colored pencils. In the My Notes space toward the beginning of the story, make a key or legend for the dialogue. Write “Mrs. Jones” in one color and “Roger” in another. Be consistent when you identify each speaker by underlining or highlighting his or her words in the color you have assigned.

3. With a partner, role-play the part of the story for which you just identified the speakers. Choose parts (do not worry about gender) and think about your character. You have studied his or her appearance and actions. What do those actions say about the kind of person this is? What do the person’s words reveal about him or her? When you read your lines, try to get “into” the role or *character* of the person.
4. After you role-play dialogue from the story, write on your own paper about how Roger is changed by the encounter. As you think about Roger’s change, write a sentence describing the theme or message of the story.

5. You have looked closely at the ways Langston Hughes creates the two characters in “Thank You, M’am.” Now you will examine the way Hughes tells their stories. Identify the parts of the plot by writing them on the diagram below (or on your own paper). If you forget what any of the parts mean, review the definitions in Activity 2.5, “Changes in Simba’s World.”



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