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There are a million acts of kindness each day. Some young man gives a stranger a compliment, or a teacher brightens a student's morning. But, in the world we live in today, these acts are rare to come by. In this short story Thank You, Ma'am, the boy, out of mysterious luck, gets taken in by the woman whom he was trying to steal a purse from. Her actions, following the incident towards the boy, may have seemed very kind and understanding, but the boy needs a more solid way of punishment. He requires discipline that will show him that as complicated as life is, there will not always be someone for you to lean and depend on. The first and most foremost thing that would come to mind when reading this story is how caring Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones was, that she took in the boy and nurtured him; she tried to teach him between right and wrong. She gave him food, a nice conversation, and even a chance of escape, which he chose not to take, but these methods are still an immoral way of handling the situation. If a boy were to come up to an everyday woman on the streets, that victim would not be as sensitive as Mrs. Jones was to the boy she caught. To teach a young man that if you steal and you are going to get special treatment is not an effective method of punishment. First of all, the boy told Mrs. Jones that he tried to steal her purse for one reason, to buy blue suede shoes for himself. She then replies, "Well you didn't have to snatch my pocketbook to get some blue suede shoes... You could have just asked me." There are many faulty choices of judgments made in this comment, mainly because the outcome of the situation would almost never happen in the real world. The boy will now, after being told he should just ask for the shoes, believe that anything he ever wants will come to his possession if he would just ask. To "trick" a child into being convinced that if you just ask a woman for money or anything that she will give it to you is morally wrong. In order to continue enjoying our site, we ask that you confirm your identity as a human. Thank you very much for your cooperation. In Thank You M'am, the chief external conflict is the one between Roger and Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones. Roger tries to steal her purse, which starts the clash. The conflict is extended when she takes him prisoner by gripping him by his shirt front. Who has an internal conflict in the story thank you ma'am? The main conflict in "Thank You, M'am" is Roger's internal conflict of whether or not to run away. The initial conflict in the story is a character vs. character conflict between Roger and Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones. What are the conflicts in thank you ma'am? The central conflict in Langston Hughes's short story "Thank You, M'am" is character vs. society. Like many of his other works, Hughes uses his short story to capture the demeaning effects of oppression due to racism. Due to racism, people like Roger and Mrs. Jones. Which conflicts are internal and which are external? What is the Difference Between Internal and External Conflict? Internal conflict is when a character struggles with their own opposing desires or beliefs. It happens within them, and it drives their development as a character. External conflict sets a character against something or someone beyond their control. What is the main conflict in Yes ma'am? Roger tries to steal a purse, committing a crime against Mrs. Jones. Roger has broken society's rules, and so the conflict of "Thank You, Ma'am" involves man vs. society. What is internal and external mean? Explanation: internal = what the character is feeling (motivation or feelings) external = how the character acts or looks like, kind of physical characteristic Ex. What was the main conflict in Thank you M'am? The initial conflict in the story is a character vs. character conflict between Roger and Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones. Roger tries to steal Mrs. Jones's purse, and Mrs. Jones not only prevents him, she basically kidnaps him. Mrs. Jones asks Roger if she was bothering him, and he confirms that she wasn't. How is internal conflict different from external conflict? This concern about what someone else thinks about him is internal conflict, because it is an issue he is dealing with within himself, and it is causing him some anxiety. It cannot be external conflict because it is not happening in the form of a disagreement, argument, or fight with something else outside of Roger's person. What is the conflict between Roger and Mrs Jones? The larger conflict and the one which propelled the conflict between Roger and Mrs. Jones initially is the conflict between Roger and his society. He lives on the fringes, largely invisible, unloved, and without respect. What happens to Roger in Thank You M'am? Roger is left behind and forgotten by the community and the system. With no parents at home to teach him right from wrong or take care of his needs, he resorts to stealing to get what he wants. In this way, he goes against the rules of society, and society is letting him down. "Thank You, M'am" by Langston Hughes was first published in 1958 in the collection "The Selected Short Stories of Langston Hughes".Introduction: "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesMain Events in "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesLiterary Devices in "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesCharacterization in "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesMajor Characters:Minor Characters:Major Themes in "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesWriting Style in "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesLiterary Theories and Interpretation of "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesTopics, Questions and Thesis Statements about "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesShort Questions/Answers about/on "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesLiterary Works Similar to "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesSuggested Readings about/on "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesPrimary Source:Related posts:"Thank You, M'am" by Langston Hughes was first published in 1958 in the collection "The Selected Short Stories of Langston Hughes". This story showcases the qualities of responsibility, morality, and kindness in the context of a young boy's encounter with a strong and compassionate woman, Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones. The story explores themes of crime, guilt, and redemption, set against the backdrop of an urban African American community. Through the protagonist's journey, Hughes highlights the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions and the transformative power of kindness and forgiveness.Main Events in "Thank You, M'am" by Langston HughesEncounter with Mrs. Jones: Roger, a young boy, attempts to snatch Mrs. Jones's purse but fails. She catches him and drags him home.Acts of Kindness: Rather than turning him over to the police, Mrs. Jones takes Roger to her home, providing him food and cleanliness.Revelations about Roger: Mrs. Jones learns about Roger's troubled home life and lack of guidance.Mrs. Jones's Moral Guidance: She shares her own experiences and imparts wisdom to Roger about making better choices in life.Roger's Guilt and Remorse: Roger starts to feel guilty for his actions and becomes remorseful for trying to steal from Mrs. Jones.Transformation through Responsibility: Mrs. Jones gives Roger the opportunity to wash his face and teaches him the importance of personal responsibility.Redemption through Kindness: Despite Roger's attempted theft, Mrs. Jones treats him with kindness, showing him that he is worthy of respect and care.Impact of Forgiveness: Roger experiences the transformative power of forgiveness as Mrs. Jones chooses to trust him and gives him the money he wanted for his blue suede shoes.Character Growth: Roger learns valuable lessons about accountability, empathy, and the importance of second chances.Symbolism of the Blue Suede Shoes: The story ends with Roger's decision not to buy the blue suede shoes he desired, symbolizing his newfound understanding of the value of hard work and earned rewards over easy gains through theft.Literary DeviceExample and Detail. Alliteration" She caught him by the blue suede of his pants" - The repetition of the "s" sound in "suede" and "pants" creates a sense of urgency in the scene.2. AllusionMrs. Jones's name itself could be an allusion to the biblical character of "Mother Jones," suggesting her nurturing and guiding role in Roger's life.3. CharacterizationMrs. Jones is characterized as strong and compassionate through her actions, such as dragging Roger home and offering him food and cleanliness instead of turning him over to the police.4. ConflictThe story presents both external conflict (Roger's attempted theft) and internal conflict (Roger's guilt and Mrs. Jones's decision on how to handle the situation).5. DialogueThe dialogue between Mrs. Jones and Roger reveals their personalities, motivations, and the evolving dynamics between them.6. FlashbackMrs. Jones's brief mention of her own experiences in the past provides a flashback that adds depth to her character and context to her actions.7. ForeshadowingRoger's desire for the blue suede shoes foreshadows his eventual decision not to buy them, indicating his growth and change by the end of the story.8. Imagery" He did not want to be mistrusted now. " - The image of Roger not wanting to be mistrusted creates a vivid picture of his internal struggle and desire for redemption.9. IronyThe irony lies in Roger attempting to steal from Mrs. Jones, who ultimately teaches him valuable lessons about responsibility and kindness instead of punishing him.10. Metaphor" Her voice had a tough love sound " - Mrs. Jones's voice is compared to "tough love," implying that she cares for Roger but is also firm in her guidance and discipline.11. MotifThe motif of redemption is prevalent throughout the story, as Roger seeks forgiveness and Mrs. Jones offers him a chance to make amends and change his ways.12. Onomatopoeia" The large woman simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jeaned siter" - The word "kicked" mimics the sound of the action, adding emphasis to the scene.13. Personification" The boy's face was dirty" - Giving human attributes to the boy's face enhances the imagery and creates a stronger visual impression.14. RepetitionThe repetition of "Thank you, ma'am" by Roger emphasizes his gratitude and respect towards Mrs. Jones, underscoring the theme of kindness and forgiveness.15. SettingThe urban African American community setting provides a backdrop for the story's themes of crime, poverty, and the importance of compassion and understanding.16. Simile" She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but hammer and nails" - Mrs. Jones is compared to her purse, highlighting her preparedness and resourcefulness.17. SymbolismThe blue suede shoes symbolize Roger's desire for material possessions and his eventual decision to prioritize honesty and hard work over them.18. ThemeThemes of responsibility, morality, kindness, and redemption are explored through the interactions between Mrs. Jones and Roger, illustrating the transformative power of kindness and forgiveness.19. ToneThe tone of the story shifts from tension and conflict at the beginning to warmth and understanding as Mrs. Jones and Roger connect and learn from each other.20. UnderstatementMrs. Jones's reaction to Roger's attempted theft is understated, as she simply takes him home rather than overreacting or involving the authorities, adding to her complexity as a character.Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones: Mrs. Jones is a strong, non-sensational woman who displays both toughness and kindness. She is portrayed as a maternal figure who takes responsibility for Roger's actions and offers him guidance and compassion instead of punishment. Mrs. Jones is resourceful, as seen when she drags Roger home and provides for his immediate needs, showcasing her practicality and empathy. She shares her own experiences with Roger, imparting valuable life lessons about responsibility and making better choices. Through her actions and words, Mrs. Jones becomes a catalyst for Roger's transformation, demonstrating the power of forgiveness and second chances.Roger: Roger is a young boy characterized by his desperation and lack of guidance. Initially, he attempts to steal Mrs. Jones's purse out of a desire for material possessions. However, as the story progresses, Roger's character undergoes significant development. Through his interaction with Mrs. Jones, he begins to feel guilt and remorse for his actions. Roger learns valuable lessons about accountability, empathy, and the importance of personal responsibility. By the end of the story, he experiences a transformation, choosing to forgo his desire for the blue suede shoes and instead embracing the principles of honesty and hard work.None specifically named: Other characters in the story, such as the people on the street who witness Mrs. Jones's encounter with Roger, serve to highlight the community context and the impact of Mrs. Jones's actions. Their reactions, though brief, contribute to the overall atmosphere and themes of the story.Compassion and Forgiveness: Even though Roger attempted to steal from Mrs. Jones, she chooses not to punish him harshly. Instead, she takes him home, feeds him, and even offers him money for the shoes he desired. This is evident in the passage: "'Then we'll eat,'" said the woman, "I believe you're hungry—or been hungry—to try to snatch my pocketbook." Here, Mrs. Jones recognizes Roger's need and prioritizes his well-being over her anger.Understanding and Empathy: Mrs. Jones seems to understand the root of Roger's actions. She shares her own past struggles, acknowledging, "'I were young once and I wanted things I could not get.'" This moment suggests she sees Roger's desperation and connects with him on a deeper level.Importance of Dignity and Respect: Despite Roger's mistake, Mrs. Jones treats him with respect. She doesn't belittle him and even offers guidance: "'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.'" Here, she avoids shaming him and instead offers him a chance to learn and grow.Hope and Second Chances: The story emphasizes the power of offering someone a second chance. Mrs. Jones' act of kindness gives Roger a chance to make better choices. This is shown in the ending: "'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 come by devilish like that will burn your feet.'" Here, she empowers Roger to improve his life and avoid future mistakes.Simple and direct language: Hughes uses straightforward and uncomplicated language, which suits the narrative's tone and themes.Conversational tone: The story is told in a conversational style, which creates a sense of intimacy and immediacy.Dialogue-driven narrative: The story is largely driven by dialogue, which reveals character traits, relationships, and themes.Use of dialect: Hughes employs African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to create an authentic and immersive experience.Symbolism: The story features symbolic elements like the purse, blue suede shoes, and food, which carry meaning beyond their literal interpretation.Realistic portrayal: Hughes presents a realistic depiction of urban African American life, exploring themes like poverty, desperation, and redemption.Emphasis on character development: The story focuses on the transformation of Roger and the kindness of Mrs. Jones, highlighting their emotional journeys.Use of humor: Hughes incorporates subtle humor, often through Mrs. Jones's witty remarks, to balance the narrative's tone.Themes and moral lessons: The story explores themes like responsibility, morality, and kindness, conveying moral lessons through the characters' experiences.Economic use of language: Hughes uses language efficiently, conveying much meaning and emotion through simple, well-chosen words and phrases.Literary TheoryInterpretationExample from the StoryFeminist TheoryMrs. Jones represents a strong, independent, and nurturing female figure who challenges traditional gender roles. "She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but hammer and nails."Marxist TheoryThe story highlights class struggle and economic inequality, as Roger's desire for blue suede shoes symbolizes the allure of consumerism and material wealth. "I wanted a pair of blue suede shoes... I wanted them more than anything I ever wanted anything."Psychoanalytic TheoryRoger's attempt to steal Mrs. Jones' purse can be seen as a symbolic attempt to gain control and power, revealing his feelings of inadequacy and desire for validation. "He looked as if he were fourteen or fifteen, frail and willow-wild, in tennis shoes and blue jeans."SymbolismThe purse represents security, stability, and maternal care, while the blue suede shoes symbolize desire, materialism, and the American Dream. "She had a long strap... and she carried it slung across her shoulder."RealismThe story presents a realistic portrayal of urban African American life, exploring themes of poverty, desperation, and redemption. "There was nobody home at my house... I was hungry."ExistentialismMrs. Jones' actions and words emphasize personal responsibility and the importance of making choices, illustrating the existentialist idea that individuals create their own meaning. "You could've asked me... You didn't have to snatch my pocketbook."Cultural CriticismThe story highlights the cultural significance of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and the importance of preserving cultural heritage. "What's your name, boy?..."Roger, answered the boy."Topic QuestionsThesis Statements. Theme of Redemption- How does Roger experience redemption throughout the story?"In "Thank You, M'am," Langston Hughes illustrates the theme of redemption through Roger's transformative journey, highlighting the power of forgiveness and second chances. What role does Mrs. Jones play in Roger's redemption?"Mrs. Jones serves as a catalyst for Roger's redemption in "Thank You, M'am," guiding him towards accountability and empathy, ultimately leading to his moral growth.2. Portrayal of Urban African American Community- How does the setting influence the characters and events in the story?"Langston Hughes uses the urban African American community setting in "Thank You, M'am" to underscore themes of poverty, compassion, and the importance of community support.- How do societal factors impact the characters' actions and interactions?"Through the portrayal of societal pressures and challenges, "Thank You, M'am" highlights the resilience and humanity of individuals within the urban African American community.3. The Power of Kindness and Forgiveness- How does Mrs. Jones's kindness affect Roger's behavior and mindset?"Thank You, M'am" emphasizes the transformative power of kindness and forgiveness as Mrs. Jones's compassionate actions lead to Roger's moral growth and redemption.- What broader message does the story convey about the importance of forgiveness?"Langston Hughes explores the profound impact of forgiveness on personal growth and redemption in "Thank You, M'am," illustrating its significance in fostering empathy and understanding.4. Symbolism of the Blue Suede Shoes- What do the blue suede shoes symbolize in the story?"The symbolism of the blue suede shoes in "Thank You, M'am" represents Roger's material desires and his eventual realization of the value of honesty and hard work.- How does Roger's decision regarding the shoes reflect his character development?"Through Roger's decision not to pursue the blue suede shoes, Langston Hughes highlights his growth and prioritization of integrity over material possessions in "Thank You, M'am."What does Roger want that leads him to confront Mrs. Jones?Roger desperately desires a pair of blue suede shoes. The story subtly reveals this through his confession after Mrs. Jones confronts him. While explaining his actions, the text mentions, "There's nobody home at my house," and then quickly follows with, "Then we'll eat," said the woman, "I believe you're hungry—or been hungry—to try to snatch my pocketbook" (pg 3). This suggests his hunger might be a symptom of a larger issue, hinting at a lack of basic necessities like food and nice clothes, which fuels his desire for the shoes.How does Mrs. Jones initially react to Roger's attempt to steal?While surprised, Mrs. Jones' initial reaction is a surprising display of strength. The text describes her immediate action: "The large woman simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jeaned siter" (pg 1). This swift response demonstrates her ability to defend herself and likely discourages Roger from further attempts. What does Mrs. Jones offer Roger besides money?Mrs. Jones offers Roger not just money, but a glimpse of stability, kindness, and a chance to be seen. She takes him home to a safe space, provides him with a hot meal and even cocoa, a treat typically associated with comfort and home. The story highlights this by saying, "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... Instead, as they ate, she told him about her job" (pg 3). This act of sharing a meal and conversation suggests a desire to connect with Roger on a human level.What is the significance of the title "Thank You, M'am"? "Thank You, M'am" goes beyond a polite expression. It signifies a shift in Roger's perspective. Throughout the story, he is unloved, highlighting his anonymity and potential lack of a positive role model. The act of thanking Mrs. Jones, with the respectful term "m'am," suggests a newfound respect for her and possibly a recognition of her kindness. The ending emphasizes this with, "He barely managed to say 'Thank you' before she shut the door. And he never saw her again" (pg 3). The brevity of his thanks underscores the weight of his gratitude and the impact Mrs. Jones has on him."The Lesson" by Toni Cade Bambara: This short story follows a group of underprivileged children who receive a life lesson from a woman named Miss Moore during a trip to a toy store in New York City. Like "Thank You, M'am," it explores themes of socioeconomic inequality, morality, and the transformative power of education and exposure to new experiences. "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker: In this short story, a mother and her two daughters, Dee and Maggie, clash over the ownership and meaning of cultural artifacts. Similar to "Thank You, M'am," it delves into themes of family dynamics, heritage, and the significance of personal integrity and identity. "Sonny's Blues" by James Baldwin: This short story revolves around the strained relationship between two brothers, Sonny and the unnamed narrator, as they navigate issues of addiction, redemption, and the search for identity in Harlem. Like "Thank You, M'am," it explores themes of empathy and understanding between her and Roger. By sharing her own experiences, she demonstrates vulnerability and encourages Roger to open up and connect with her on a deeper level.4. "Do you need somebody to go to the store, maybe to get some milk or something?" Roger's offer to help Mrs. Jones reflects his desire to make amends and to show gratitude for her kindness towards him. This gesture signifies his growing sense of responsibility and empathy, as he seeks to assist her in return for her generosity.5. "Here, take this ten dollars and buy yourself some blue suede shoes... I wish you would behave yourself, son, from here on in." Mrs. Jones's parting gift of money for the blue suede shoes symbolizes her belief in Roger's potential for positive change and her hope for his future. Her admonition to "behave yourself" reinforces her expectations of him and serves as a gentle reminder of the lessons he has learned under her guidance.6. "He did not trust the woman not to trust him... And he did not want to be mistrusted now." Roger's internal conflict reveals his fear of judgment and rejection, as well as his desire for acceptance and understanding from Mrs. Jones. This quote highlights the importance of trust and empathy in their relationship and underscores Roger's longing for redemption and validation.7. "The boy wanted to say something else other than 'Thank you, m'am' to Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, but he couldn't do so..." Roger's struggle to express his gratitude and admiration towards Mrs. Jones reflects his emotional growth and his realization of the impact she has had on his life. Despite his inability to articulate his feelings, his internal conflict underscores the depth of their connection and the significance of her influence on him.8. "Then she said, 'Now ain't you ashamed of yourself?' Firmly gripped by his shirt front, the boy said, 'Yes m'..." Mrs. Jones confronts Roger with his actions and prompts him to acknowledge his wrongdoing, fostering a sense of accountability and self-awareness in him. Roger's admission of shame signifies his recognition of the moral implications of his behavior and marks the beginning of his journey towards redemption under Mrs. Jones's guidance.9. "The water dripping from his face, the boy looked at her..." After he had dried his face and not knowing what else to do dried it again, the boy turned around, wondering what next." This moment encapsulates Roger's uncertainty and vulnerability as he navigates his interactions with Mrs. Jones. His actions convey a mixture of apprehension, gratitude, and curiosity about her intentions, reflecting his gradual acceptance of her guidance and his willingness to learn from her example.10. "You could run, run, run, run, run!" Roger's internal monologue reveals his temptation to escape from Mrs. Jones's influence and evade the consequences of his actions. This repetition of "run" emphasizes his inner turmoil and underscores the urgency of his decision regarding his future course of action. Ultimately, Roger's choice to stay signifies his willingness to confront his mistakes and embrace the opportunity for redemption offered by Mrs. Jones. By Dr Oliver Tearle (Loughborough University) "Thank You, Ma'am" is a 1958 short story by the African-American poet, novelist, and short-story writer Langston Hughes (1901-67). In the story, a teenage boy attempts to steal a woman's purse, but she catches him and takes him back to her home, showing him some kindness and attempting to teach him right from wrong. Plot summary The story begins by introducing a "large woman" who carries a "large purse" slung over her shoulder. Late one night, she is walking alone when a boy tries to steal her purse, but because it is so heavy, he ends up falling backwards. She kicks him in the backside before shaking him vigorously and ordering him to retrieve her purse from the ground. She then asks him if he is ashamed of himself for trying to rob her. The boy, who is dressed in tennis shoes and blue jeans, is around fourteen or fifteen years old and clearly intimidated by the large, imposing older woman. She comments on how dirty his face is and it emerges that the boy is not taken care of at home, so the woman takes him back to her home to wash his face. The boy just wants her to let him go, but she reminds him that he was the one who imposed himself upon her when she was minding her business. She reveals that her name is Mrs Luella Bates Washington Jones. She comments that if the boy were her son, she would teach him right from wrong. Once she has the boy inside the house she shares with other people, she asks his name, which he reveals to be Roger. She takes him into the kitchenette and finally lets go of him, ordering him to go to the sink and wash his face. Although Roger initially considers making a run for it, he does as he is bid and goes to the sink. As the two of them talk, Mrs Jones learns that Roger attempted to steal her pocketbook because he wants money to buy some blue suede shoes. She tells him he could've just asked her for the money: a response which confuses Roger. Again, he thinks of running for it, afraid that she will take him to jail, but instead, when she offers to cook him something to eat, he sits down and behaves himself. Indeed, he even resists the temptation to steal her purse, which she leaves on the table close to him while she goes behind the screen to prepare the food. He offers to go to the shop to get food for her if she needs it, and when she asks if he wants to get some sweet milk for the cocoa she's preparing, he says that canned milk will be fine. As they eat, she tells him about her job in a hotel beauty-shop, and offers him some cake. Then she gives Roger ten dollars and tells him to buy himself the blue suede shoes he wants, but not to try to steal from her or anybody else again, because shoes bought from ill-gotten gains would 'burn your feet'. As Roger leaves, he wants to thank her more fulsomely than simply saying "Thank you, ma'am", but finds he is unable to. The third-person narrator of the story tells us that he never saw her again. Analysis In this very short story, Langston Hughes suggests that all teenagers who have fallen into a life of petty crime need is someone to put them back on the straight and narrow, and Mrs Luella Jones is the person who does this for Roger in "Thank You, Ma'am". The story presents the details of the narrative in generally direct terms, with Langston Hughes' third-person narrator rarely passing comment or providing extra detail which can help to fill in the gaps to the two central characters' lives. This means that the story contains some tantalising lacunae, or missing details. Although Mrs' Luella Bates Washington Jones must have got married at some point, there is no sign of her husband in the story, and she appears to live in a rented room in a larger house which she shares with other people. Is she divorced? Did her husband die? Or is he in jail, and this explains why she takes such an interest in helping Roger set his life back on the right track: she doesn't want him to go the same way? Similarly, she appears not to have any children of her own, although at one point, she tells Roger that he 'ought to be' her son because she could give him the moral compass he so badly needs. Is this the yearning of a childless woman who tried to have a son or daughter of her own but never managed to conceive? Meanwhile, other women are able to have children but are either unable or unwilling to be proper mothers to them (she clearly isn't impressed with the indifference, or absence, of Roger's parents: he tells her that nobody is at home even though it is late at night by this stage). The end of "Thank You, Ma'am" also leaves things open to our interpretation and analysis. Roger is seemingly overwhelmed by the woman's kindness and clemency: he feared she was going to turn him over to the police, but instead she gave him the money to buy the shoes he wants (curiously, Elvis Presley's hit song "Blue Suede Shoes" had been released just two years before Langston Hughes published his story). This is presumably why he is unable to say more than 'thank you, ma'am' to his benefactress as he leaves her home. At the same time, the narrator tells us that he never saw her again after this chance encounter one night. This leads us to speculate: would Roger listen to her advice and learn from what had happened? Would he, from now on, decide against stealing things because she had been kind to him and he had had a narrow brush with justice? Of course, we can only speculate on this issue. On the one hand, Mrs Jones provides Roger with both understanding and guidance: she tells him that she had done some things which she is so ashamed of she would never tell him about them, implying that she has been in a similar position in her own life before, but now leads a moral, honest life. Although Hughes never specifies the ethnicities of the two characters, given Hughes' depictions of African-American life in Harlem, many readers will probably picture them both as black, so this arguably brings the two of them together. But on the other hand, Mrs Jones will disappear from Roger's life after this night. His chaotic home life will not. Whilst "Thank You, Ma'am" shows how kindness and understanding may help a youth who has fallen into bad ways recover his moral honesty and integrity, the ending of the story remains ambiguous concerning the long-term fate of its adolescent protagonist. Subscribe to get the latest posts sent to your email.