

English 200—Intro to Literature

Character Analysis Assignment

Using relevant “Methods of Characterization” we discussed and applied in class, analyze one of the major characters we have (or will have) read about to this point in the semester. They are the following:

Leroy Moffitt

Norma Jean Moffitt

“Bub”

Robert (“the blind man”)

Mama Johnson

Dee Johnson (Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo)

Maggie Johnson

Jig

“The American”

For this assignment, you will write an analysis of your chosen round character that is at least 1200 words in length. An analysis (of anything) is the act of inspecting specific details about something, so in this case, you will analyze the particular characteristics that reveals your assessment of that person’s personality (e.g., someone who is bossy, compassionate, deceitful, manipulative, etc.). To do this, as our textbook states, you should “focus on behavior, on [the character’s] development, on motivation, or on interactions with other characters,” or any combination thereof. And since your thesis statement will be argumentative by nature, you will have to quote specific parts of the story’s text to use as evidence supporting your interpretation of your chosen character; these quotations should be documented correctly using the MLA guidelines (which will be emailed to you separately).

This assignment is NOT a research assignment, so any clear correlation between what you have written and what is on the internet is plagiarism and will result in a grade of 0!

CAVEAT: What follows on the back is an example of how such a character analysis might be written, but however you choose to shape your essay, please note that you are NOT writing a summary of the plot. Yes, the following example summarizes parts of the plot a few short times, but clearly the writer did so to simply advance the essay’s thesis statement. Good writers summarize, paraphrase, and incorporate quotations coherently to advance and support a specific thesis statement (If you want an A, then do that!), meaning they do not simply summarize the story’s plot.

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Unexpected Lesson

When great teachers are mentioned, most people think of biology instructors, football coaches, Girl Scout Leaders, and others in similar positions. However, some of the greatest teachers may be individuals not normally classified as teachers. Roger, a character in the short story "Thank you, M'am" by Langston Hughes, encounters such an unusual teacher on a city sidewalk. Because she is a fearless, trustful, and generous woman, Mrs. Jones teaches Roger a lesson he will remember.

Roger is a would-be thief. At about eleven o'clock one night, he runs up behind Mrs. Jones and tries to snatch her purse. When he falls down on the sidewalk, Mrs. Jones "simply turned around and kick[s] him right square in his blue-jeaned sitter" (78), the "sitter," of course, being his buttocks. While some women would have avoided confrontation with a strange male so late at night under similar circumstances, Mrs. Jones does not. She shakes Robert "until his teeth [rattle]" and then makes a demand: "Pick up my pocketbook boy, and give it here" (78). In this example, Mrs. Jones shows not one iota of fear when average people normally would, a trait I argue most women would not have had back in her day.

Not only is Mrs. Jones courageous; she also proves to be a trusting person. She decides that Roger needs to wash and to eat and that she will take him to her home in order for him to do so. "I got a great mind to wash your face for you" (78), she tells Roger. "You ought to be my son. I would teach you right from wrong. Least I can do right now is to wash your face. Are

you hungry?" (78). In just a few words, she assumes the role of a compassionate teacher and a surrogate mother. She not only takes Roger home, but she also continues to display a trusting nature once they arrive. When she gets up to prepare supper, Mrs. Jones does "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 her daybed" (79). At some point afterward, Roger begins to respond to Mrs. Jones in a positive way. Hughes tells the readers that Roger "did not want to be mistrusted now" (79). Her trust in Roger is beginning to create a meaningful if not long-lasting relationship between them.

Mrs. Jones's unquestioning generosity to Roger extends beyond her sharing a meal with him. While they are eating together, Roger tells her that he tried to steal her purse in order to get money for a pair of blue suede shoes. Mrs. Jones then does a remarkable thing; she takes money from her purse and says, "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" (78). After stating this piece of wisdom, she bids him goodnight, and Roger wants to express his gratitude but cannot find words more eloquent than a simple "thank you." However, Hughes leaves the reader with the definite impression that Roger has been touched profoundly by the generosity and wisdom of Mrs. Jones.

Some teachers are brilliant instructors due to their superior education, others make excellent teachers because they are adept at as communicators, and others connect to their students in personal, humane way, thus making both teacher and student better human beings. Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones emerges not from a formal education background but rather from a hotel beauty shop to become one of the best teachers Roger has ever had, one like we have all had: one that is remembered forever. Her inner strengths (and perhaps her physical

strength, humorously speaking, of course) communicate more to Roger than mere words and presentations ever could, and I assume Roger, as well as the reader, is better off for it.

Works Cited

- Hughes, Langston. "Thank you, M'am." *Introduction to Literature: Pearson Custom Library*.
Ed. J. Rick Thompson. Boston, MA: Pearson Learning Solutions, 2014. 75 – 79. Print.