



## Introduction

Langston Hughes was working as a busboy in Washington, D.C. when he showed some of his poems to famous poet Vachel Lindsay. Lindsay was so impressed that he read the poems that night to an audience. In time, Hughes became one of the first African Americans to make a living as a writer and lecturer, eventually moving back to New York and becoming a leader of the Harlem Renaissance. In Hughes's short story "Thank You, M'am," a teenage boy tries to snatch a woman's purse late one night and is surprised by what happens next.

## **Transcript**

00:00 0 (INTRODUCTION PLAYS)

00:03 3 Harlem, 1950s.

00:06 6 Late night on a dark New York street.

00:09 9 Mrs. Luella is walking home.

00:12 12 Out of the shadows, a figure surprises her, grabs her purse.

00:17 17 Frightened, she fights back.

00:19 19 What kind of person would do this?

00:22 22 She looks to find a teenage boy in her grip.

00:25 25 Second chances are hard to come by,

00:28 28 but Mrs. Luella is determined to give him one.

00:31 31 How will this encounter change young Rodger's life forever?

00:35 35 Find out.

00:36 36 Read the compelling short story "Thank You,

00:39 39 M'am" by the legendary writer Langston Hughes.

---

**IMAGINE (PREREAD):**

**Before reading** the excerpt from "Thank You, M'am," imagine you find yourself in a situation like Roger's.

If you got caught doing something wrong, what would your first reaction be? What would you think, feel, and do? Write down some thoughts:

*What I Imagine*

- Imagine Where I got caught:
  
- My first reaction:
  
- What I would think:
  
- What I would feel:
  
- What I would do:

---

**READ STORY: "Thank you, M'am"**

1 She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but hammer and nails. It had a long strap, and she carried it slung across her shoulder. It was about eleven o'clock at night, and she was walking alone, when a boy ran up behind her and tried to snatch her purse. The strap broke with the 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 so, 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 shirt front, and shook him until his teeth rattled.

2 After that the woman said, "Pick up my pocketbook, boy, and give it here." She still held him. 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?”

3 Firmly gripped by his shirt front, the boy said, “Yes’m.”

4 The woman said, “What did you want to do it for?”

5 The boy said, “I didn’t aim to.”

6 She said, “You a lie!”

7 By that time two or three people passed, stopped, turned to look, and some stood watching.

8 “If I turn you loose, will you run?” asked the woman.

9 “Yes’m,” said the boy.

10 “Then I won’t turn you loose,” said the woman. She did not release him.

11 “I’m very sorry, lady, I’m sorry,” whispered the boy.

12 “Um-hum! And your face is dirty. I got a great mind to wash your face for you. Ain’t you got nobody home to tell you to wash your face?”

13 “No’m,” said the boy.

14 “Then it will get washed this evening,” said the large woman starting up the street, dragging the frightened boy behind her.

15 He looked as if he were fourteen or fifteen, **frail** and willow-wild, in tennis shoes and blue jeans.

16 The woman said, “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?”

17 “No’m,” said the being dragged boy. “I just want you to turn me loose.”

18 “Was I bothering *you* when I turned that corner?” asked the woman.

19 “No’m.”

20 “But you put yourself in contact with *me*,” said the woman. “If you think that that contact is not going to last awhile, you got another thought coming. When I get through with you, sir, you are going to remember Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones.”

21 Sweat popped out on the boy's face and he began to struggle. Mrs. Jones stopped, jerked him around in front of her, put a half-nelson about his neck, and continued to drag him up the street. When she got to her door, she dragged the boy inside, down a hall, and into a large kitchenette furnished room at the rear of the house. 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.

22 She said, "What is your name?"

23 "Roger," answered the boy.

24 "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.*

25 Let the water run until it gets warm," she said. "Here's a clean towel."

26 "You gonna take me to jail?" asked the boy, bending over the sink.

27 "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?"

28 "There's nobody home at my house," said the boy.

29 "Then we'll eat," said the woman, "I believe you're hungry—or been hungry—to try to snatch my pocketbook."

30 "I wanted a pair of blue suede shoes," said the boy.

31 "Well, you didn't have to snatch *my* pocketbook to get some suede shoes," said Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones. "You could of asked me."

32 "M'am?"

33 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, *run!*

34 The woman was sitting on the **day-bed**. After a while she said, "I were young once and I wanted things I could not get."

- 35 There was another long pause. The boy's mouth opened. Then he frowned, but not knowing he frowned.
- 36 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. So you set down while I fix us something to eat. You might run that comb through your hair so you will look **presentable**."
- 37 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 day-bed. But the boy took care to sit on the far side of the room 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.
- 38 "Do you need somebody to go to the store," asked the boy, "maybe to get some milk or something?"
- 39 "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."
- 40 "That will be fine," said the boy.
- 41 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.
- 42 "Eat some more, son," she said.
- 43 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 come by devilish like that will burn your feet. I got to get my rest now. But I wish you would behave yourself, son, from here on in."
- 44 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.
- 45 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 as he turned at the barren stoop and looked back at the large woman in the door. He barely managed to say "Thank you" before she shut the door. And he never saw her again.

---

"Thank You, M'am" from SHORT STORIES by Langston Hughes. Copyright ©1996 by Ramona Bass and Arnold Rampersad. Reprinted by permission of Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC.

---

## **ANNOTATION ASSIGNMENT:**

Use the following annotation guidelines to help you annotate the excerpt of "Thank You, M'am." Be sure to make annotations **or highlights** to the text (above) to complete each line.

1. Highlight at least two sentences or passages that you have questions about. Enter your questions as annotations. You might use questions from the asking and answering reading comprehension strategy practice.
2. Highlight at least one passage that connects with something you already know and use the annotation tool to explain the connection.
3. Highlight the key characters in the excerpt and use the annotation tool to provide a brief description of what you know about them.
4. Highlight the key events and details in the passage and make annotations that explain the sequential order in which they occur. For example, "She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but hammer and nails." Annotation: First key detail tells that the woman was large and the purse was large and heavy.
5. Highlight vocabulary words and explain what you think the words mean based on how they are used in the text. Use context clues when possible to define the words.
6. Highlight any additional unfamiliar vocabulary. Use the annotation tool to make predictions about the meaning of these unfamiliar terms.
7. Highlight two examples that tell how Roger reacts to his situation. Use the annotation tool to explain your reaction to Roger is going through in these moments.

---

## **THINK QUESTIONS:**

### **Question 1**

What event brought Roger and Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones into contact? What was Mrs. Jones's immediate reaction to this event? **Cite specific evidence** from the text to support your response.

## Question 2

Rather than call the police, what does Mrs. Jones do to Roger? How does Roger initially respond? Cite specific evidence from the text to support your analysis.

## Question 3

What does Roger say when Mrs. Jones asks him why he tried to snatch her pocketbook? What does Mrs. Jones say in response? How do her words affect him? Cite specific evidence from the text to support your statements.

## Question 4

By recalling that the suffix “-er” means “a person who lives in,” use the base word “room” and the suffix “-er” to determine the meaning of **roomers**. Then use context clues to confirm the meaning of the word as it is used in paragraph 21 of “Thank You, M’am.” Write your definition of “roomers” here, and explain how you figured out the word’s meaning.

## Question 5

Use the context clues provided in paragraph 37 to determine the meaning of **mistrusted**. Write your definition of “mistrusted” and verify your meaning of the word in a print or digital dictionary.

---

# Vocabulary

Definition Word Bank:

- 1. a person who rents a room in a house
- 2. not physically strong; weak
- 3. to view as dishonest or unreliable
- 4. not too dirty or messy; neat enough to be seen by other people
- 5. a couch that can be turned into a bed

<u>Word</u>	<u>Parts of Speech</u>	<u>Definition #1-5</u>	<u>Sample Sentence</u>
day-bed	noun		
frail	adjective		
istrust	verb		
presentable	adjective		
roomers	noun		

## Skills Focus

1. What evidence is there in paragraphs 1 and 2 that Mrs. Jones is feeling no empathy or kindness toward Roger when they first meet? Highlight the evidence in the text and use the annotation tool to explain your choices. *(Write Answer Here)*





textual evidence and use the annotation tool to support your response. (*Write Answer Here*)

## **READING COMPREHENSION QUIZ**

### **Question 1**

#### **Instructions for Student**

Read the question carefully and select the best answer.

1. Which sentence from the story **best** demonstrates Roger’s decision to obey Mrs. Jones?

Answer choices for the above question

- A. “When I get through with you, sir, you are going to remember Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones.”
- B. “The boy could hear other roomers laughing and talking in the large house.”
- C. “The woman still had him by the neck in the middle of the room.”
- D. “Roger looked at the door—looked at the woman—looked at the door—*and went to the sink.*”

2. What can the reader **best** infer from the following passage (paragraphs 34-36)?

The woman was sitting on the day-bed. 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, but 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.

Answer choices for the above question

- A. Mrs. Jones would also like a pair of blue suede shoes.

- B. Mrs. Jones can empathize with Roger's situation.
- C. Mrs. Jones was also a thief.
- D. Mrs. Jones will turn Roger into the police.

3. What does the following passage **mainly** reveal about Mrs. Jones (paragraph 41)?

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.

Answer choices for the above question

- A. Cake is her favorite dessert.
- B. Mrs. Jones wants to dye her hair a different color.
- C. Mrs. Jones wants Roger to enjoy a good and filling meal.
- D. Popularity is important to Mrs. Jones.

4. What **mainly** can the reader infer about Roger from the following passage (paragraph 41)?

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.

Answer choices for the above question

- A. His favorite meal is lima beans.
- B. He comes from a troubled background.
- C. Roger is forced to keep his identity a secret.
- D. Roger was trying to steal money for his mother.

5. Which inference can be **best** made about Mrs. Jones?

Answer choices for the above question

- A. She is bossy.
- B. She is insecure.
- C. She is popular.
- D. She is nosy.

6. What is **most closely** a theme of the story?

Answer choices for the above question

- A. Holding on too strongly can ruin a friendship.
- B. Money is essential for happiness.
- C. Small gestures can have a meaningful impact.
- D. Criminals should be harshly punished.

7. Which sentence from the story **most strongly** supports the answer to Question 6?

Answer choices for the above question

- A. “‘Then I won’t turn you loose,’ said the woman.”
- B. “‘No’m,’ said the being dragged boy. ‘I just want you to turn me loose.’”
- C. “Mrs. Jones stopped, jerked him around in front of her, put a half-nelson about his neck, and continued to drag him up the street.”
- D. “‘Do you need somebody to go to the store,’ asked the boy, ‘maybe to get some milk or something?’”

### 8. Instructions for Student

Sort the words from the story that **best** show the difference between Roger and Mrs. Jones:

Options ( 8 of 8 )

- willow-wild
- dragged
- whispers
- large
- jerked
- kicked
- frightened
- frail

Some of the cells in this chart are editable.

Roger	Mrs. Jones

### 9. Instructions for Student

Sort the two sentences that **best** show exaggeration (hyperbole):

Options ( 4 of 4 )

- 1. “Then she reached down, picked the boy up by his shirt front, and shook him until his teeth rattled.”
- 2. “The large woman simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jean sitter.”
- 3. “It had a large strap, and she carried it slung across her shoulder.”
- 4. “She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but hammer and nails.”

Unused Sentences (1-4?)	Exaggeration (Hyperbole) (1-4?)

