

A theme of
compassion in thank
you, ma'am by
Langston Hughes



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Did an elder ever call you because of your behavior when you were younger?
Or did you make a mistake and someone gave you a second chance?

'Thank you, ma'am' by Langston Hughes illustrates an encounter between Roger, a teenage boy, and Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, an older woman walking home from work late one night. He attempts to steal her purse, but because it is so heavy, and Mrs. Jones is quite stout, he merely ends up breaking the strap instead. She kicks him and grabs him by the shirt, asking if he feels ashamed of himself. Roger admits yes. Mrs. Jones realizes that his face is dirty and his hair disheveled. She asks if anyone cares for him. If he answers 'no', she will bring him home with him and tell him that when he is done with him, he will never forget that he has met her. Afterwards, when Roger and Mrs. Jones arrive home, she asks him if he ate. She assumes that he must be hungry because he tried to steal his purse, but instead, he wanted his money to buy a pair of blue suede shoes. When Mrs. Jones tells Roger that he could have asked for the money, he does not believe it.

Mrs. Jones told Roger that he was young and could not afford what he wanted. She admits that she, like the teenager, does very embarrassing things. While eating, she refrains from embarrassing Roger by asking him nothing else about his life; Instead, he talks about her work in the beauty salon of a hotel where she meets women of all colors.

At the end of the story, Mrs. Jones gives ten dollars to Roger to buy blue suede shoes and tells him not to steal her purse or any other, because the shoes bought with stolen money pose more problems that aren't worth it.

When she takes him to the door and wishes him a good night, Roger wants to say more than 'thank you ma'am', but he does not think of anything that suits him. When he turns to Mrs. Jones at the door, he can barely get the words 'thank you' from his mouth before closing the door. Roger will never see her again.

The central theme of Langston Hughes's short story 'Thank you, Ma'am' is that you have to be compassionate because compassion can bring change. Hughes supports his theme through Ms. Jones' actions and Roger's reactions to her treatment. In the story, Ms. Jones shows compassion when Roger tries to steal her purse instead of calling the police then she drags him to her house and, lets him wash his face and eat dinner with her. One of her most insightful and compassionate moments is when he makes the following confession to Roger after stating that he tried to steal his bag so he could buy the suede shoes he wanted: 'I was young and I wanted things I couldn't get'. Her greatest and most merciful moment is when she gives him the ten-dollar bill from her purse so that he can buy his shoes and ask him to behave. She does all of these things even though she is evidently very poor, showing us how much she is willing to sacrifice just to show compassion to one equally in need. We will never know how Roger's life will unfold after this incident.