

Name:

Date:

Before Reading Activities
Part 1: Using all of the following words, write a brief short story.

shoes	wash	milk	hotel
jail	money	trust	learn

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

PREVIEW
NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

PREVIEW
NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Part 2: Define the following vocabulary words.

Word	Part of Speech	Defintion
frail	adjective	
kitchenette	noun	
mistrust	noun	
presentable	adjective	
barren	adjective	

Name:

Date:

“Thank You Ma’am” by Langston Hughes
Reading Questions

1. What is the opening external conflict in this story? Who prevails?

PREVIEW

2. Do you think the boy's apology is sincere? Why or why not?

3. What is the woman's full name?

PREVIEW

4. What does Roger want to buy?

5. What did the woman give Roger to eat? What does this tell you about her financial situation?

6. What does Luella give to Roger? How does he respond?

PREVIEW

7. What message about forgiveness is apparent in this story?

8. Do you believe Roger learned his lesson? Why or why not?

PREVIEW

9. In what ways does this story have a serious mood?

10. In what ways does this story have a humorous tone?

Name:

Class:

Characterization in Thank You Ma'am

Characterization: the process that an author uses to reveal the personality of a character.

Direct characterization: when the author explicitly describes a character's qualities. Direct characterization can come straightforwardly from a narrator, from another character, or through self-description by the character himself/herself.

Part I: Find a quote from the story (for each character) that exemplifies direct characterization.

Roger:

Mrs. Jones:

Indirect characterization: when the reader has to infer a character's qualities from implicit information given about the character.

Indirect characterization can be analyzed through five different methods: the character's thoughts, the character's actions, what the character says, the character's physical appearance, and how other characters feel about a character.

Part II: Make inferences about the characters from the text. Explain what each line from the story says about the character whose name is underlined.

1. The large woman [Mrs. Jones] simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jeaned sitter.
2. After that the woman [Mrs. Jones] said, "Pick up my pocketbook, boy, and give it here."
3. Firmly gripped by his shirt front, the boy said, "Yes'm." "If I turn you loose, will you run?" asked the woman. "Yes'm," said the boy [Roger].
4. "Your face is dirty. I got a great mind to wash your face for you. Ain't you [Roger] got nobody home to tell you to wash your face?"
5. Sweat popped out on the boy's [Roger] face and he began to struggle.

6. "Let the water run until it gets warm," she [Mrs. Jones] said. "Here's a clean towel."

7. "There's nobody home at my house," said the boy [Roger].

8. "I believe you're hungry—or been hungry—to try to snatch my pocketbook." "I wanted a pair of blue suede shoes," said the boy [Roger].

9. "I [Mrs. Jones] have done things, too, which I would not tell you, son—neither tell God, if He didn't already know."

10. The woman [Mrs. Jones] 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.

11. But the boy [Roger] 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.

12. "Do you need somebody to go to the store," asked the boy [Roger], "maybe to get some milk or something?"

13. The woman [Mrs. Jones] did not ask the boy anything about where he lived, or his folks, or anything else that would embarrass him.

14. "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 [Mrs. Jones] pocketbook nor nobody else's—because shoes come by devilish like that will burn your feet."

15. The boy [Roger] 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.

Dynamic character: A character who grows, changes, or develops throughout the story. The change may be positive or negative.

Static character: Characters who do not grow or change by the end of the story, even though the plot moves and changes around them.

Part III: Determine if Roger and Mrs. Jones are static or dynamic characters. Explain your answers.

Roger:

Mrs. Jones:

After Reading Questions

1. How would this story be different if it were told from first person point of view (either the perspective of Roger or Mrs. Jones)?
2. Why can't Roger say more when he finally leaves Mrs. Jones' apartment? What else do you think he wanted to say?
3. Do you agree with how Mrs. Jones handled the situation? Do you think Roger will change his actions in the future, why or why not?
4. What theme about kindness is portrayed throughout the story?
5. Name a time someone has done something surprisingly kind for you or vice versa. If you can't think of anything, what is something you can do in the future to "pay it forward"?

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Part 1: Using all of the following words, write a brief short story.

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jail	money	trust	learn

Answers will vary.

Part 2: Define the following vocabulary words.

Word	Part of Speech	Defintion
frail	adjective	Someone who is weak and delicate
kitchenette	noun	A very small, compact kitchen
mistrust	noun	lack of trust; suspicion
presentable	adjective	clean, well dressed, or decent enough to be seen in public
barren	adjective	empty and bleak looking

Name:

Date:

“Thank You Ma’am” by Langston Hughes
Reading Questions

1. What is the opening external conflict in this story? Who prevails?

A boy tries to steal a woman's purse. The woman kicks the boy and then grabs him; she won't let him go until she teaches him some manners, hence she wins the physical confrontation.

2. Do you think the boy's apology is sincere? Why or why not?

Answers may vary. Probably, yes. He shows her respect and is eventually honest with her.

3. What is the woman's full name?

Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones

4. What does Roger want to buy?

He wants to buy a pair of blue suede shoes, but he has no money.

5. What did the woman give Roger to eat? What does this tell you about her financial situation?

The woman gives Roger lima beans, ham, a cocoa made out of canned milk, and a piece of ten-cent cake. The type of food tells readers that she was not earning much money.

6. What does Luella give to Roger? How does he respond?

She gives him ten dollars. He says, “Thank you Ma’am.”

7. What message about forgiveness is apparent in this story?

The power of forgiveness can be more effective than the threat of punishment.

8. Do you believe Roger learned his lesson? Why or why not?

Answers may vary. Probably, yes. Roger has the opportunity to escape but chooses to stay at Ms. Jones' home. He also wanted to say more to her than just “thank you.” He realizes she did not have a lot of money herself, and yet she chose to give him ten dollars. He was very grateful and surprised by her behavior.

9. In what ways does this story have a serious mood?

Roger's life at home is not ideal. He is unclean and hungry. Luella works hard to maintain the finances she has. These details demonstrate struggle and sadness. At the end of the story, Roger wants to do something more for Luella, but he can't... he doesn't have the means to, and he's just a kid, so he doesn't really know what else he can do for her.

10. In what ways does this story have a humorous tone?

This story is humorous because a young boy tried to rob an older woman (seemingly easy target) and failed miserably. She actually kicked him “right square in his blue-jeaned sitter” which was unexpected. She is a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but “hammer and nails,” which tells you that she is prepared. Another humorous moment is when she joked with Roger that she would not take him to jail with the face he had before it was washed. She was joking with him because she never intended to turn him over to the police, but he was awfully dirty.

Characterization in Thank You Ma'am Answer Key

Characterization: the process that an author uses to reveal the personality of a character.

Direct characterization: when the author explicitly describes a character's qualities. Direct characterization can come straightforwardly from a narrator, from another character, or through self-description by the character himself/herself.

Part I: Find a quote from the story (for each character) that exemplifies direct characterization.

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

Mrs. Jones: "She was a large woman with a large purse."

Indirect characterization: when the reader has to infer a character's qualities from implicit information given about the character.

Indirect characterization can be analyzed through five different methods: The character's thoughts, the character's actions, what the character says, the character's physical appearance, and how other characters feel about a character.

Part II: Make inferences about the characters from the text. Explain what each line from the story says about the character whose name is underlined.

1. The large woman [Mrs. Jones] simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jeaned sitter.

Mrs. Jones is courageous and stands up for herself, even if it is against a boy much younger than her.

2. After that the woman [Mrs. Jones] said, "Pick up my pocketbook, boy, and give it here."

Mrs. Jones is strong-willed and fierce. She doesn't just want her purse back, she wants to teach the boy manners.

3. Firmly gripped by his shirt front, the boy said, "Yes'm."

"If I turn you loose, will you run?" asked the woman. "Yes'm," said the boy [Roger].

Roger is polite and respects his elders. He could talk back or yell at the woman; he could even spit on her or try to fight back; but instead he shows her respect by saying "Yes'm." (He's also honest.)

4. "Your face is dirty. I got a great mind to wash your face for you. Ain't you [Roger] got nobody home to tell you to wash your face?"

Roger is probably ignored or neglected at home because he is dirty and there's no one to tell him to clean up.

5. Sweat popped out on the boy's [Roger] face and he began to struggle.

Roger is nervous about what Mrs. Jones is going to do with him. He is initially intimidated by her.

6. "Let the water run until it gets warm," she [Mrs. Jones] said. "Here's a clean towel."

Mrs. Jones is caring and thoughtful. She wants Roger to clean his face and feel good about it.

7. "There's nobody home at my house," said the boy [Roger].

Roger's parents either work a lot to make ends meet or Roger is disregarded by his family. If no one is home and he's out causing trouble, you can infer there are some problems at home.

8. "I believe you're hungry—or been hungry—to try to snatch my pocketbook." "I wanted a pair of blue suede shoes," said the boy [Roger].

Roger is honest. He could lie here and pretend he was stealing her purse for a more sympathetic reason (to buy food), but he tells her what he really would have done with the money. This could also be another sign of respect toward Mrs. Jones (not to lie).

9. "I [Mrs. Jones] have done things, too, which I would not tell you, son—neither tell God, if He didn't already know."

Mrs. Jones is forgiving and sympathetic (and empathetic) to Roger. She understands that kids make mistakes when they're young.

10. The woman [Mrs. Jones] 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.

Mrs. Jones is trusting. She trusts Roger that he will not try to steal from her again. She has faith that her kindness is enough to teach Roger a lesson.

11. But the boy [Roger] 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.

Roger doesn't want Mrs. Jones to doubt him for a minute which shows he wants to be a moral and virtuous young man. He wants to meet Mrs. Jones' positive expectations and has a good heart.

12. "Do you need somebody to go to the store," asked the boy [Roger], "maybe to get some milk or something?"

Roger is trying to make up for what he did. He is apologetic and remorseful, so he tries to be helpful to show Mrs. Jones he is sorry.

13. The woman [Mrs. Jones] did not ask the boy anything about where he lived, or his folks, or anything else that would embarrass him.

Mrs. Jones is considerate and wise. She is smart enough to realize the boy might be embarrassed about his home life, so she chooses not to mention it. It also shows she is mindful of others' feelings.

14. "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 [Mrs. Jones] pocketbook nor nobody else's—because shoes come by devilish like that will burn your feet."

Mrs. Jones is generous, kind, and thoughtful. She could have just let Roger go after giving him a lecture. She did him several favors already: fed him, didn't call the cops, let him wash his face; but she wanted to do one more nice thing for him (and get him the shoes).

15. The boy [Roger] 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.

Roger was caught off guard by the whole evening, but he was very grateful and appreciative of Mrs. Jones.

Dynamic character: A character who grows, changes, or develops throughout the story.

Static character: Characters who do not grow or change by the end of the story, even though the plot moves and changes around them.

Part III: Determine if Roger and Mrs. Jones are static or dynamic characters. Explain your answers.

Roger: Roger is a dynamic character because he grows and changes throughout the story. He begins as a cowardly, young juvenile who is looking to steal a woman's purse for selfish reasons. By the middle of the story, he tries to redeem himself by showing Mrs. Jones he is trustworthy and won't take her money even when she's not looking. At the end of the story, he wants to do so much more for Mrs. Jones than a simple thank you. The act of kindness from a stranger has shown him that people can surprise you.

Mrs. Jones: Mrs. Jones is a static character. She is a strong woman with high morals and she remains this way throughout the story. She does not need anything in return from Roger, just the hope that he will stay away from mischief and be kind to others.

After Reading Questions

1. How would this story be different if it were told from first person point of view (either Roger or Mrs. Jones)?

If the story were told from Mrs. Jones' perspective, readers would know why Mrs. Jones chose to let Roger go. Maybe she has kids or maybe someone helped her get out of trouble when she was young. We would also know if this was Mrs. Jones first time trying something like this or if she often performs tremendous acts of kindness.

If the story were told from Roger's perspective, we would know what his family life was really like. We would know if he's neglected at home or if he is acting out for a different reason. Readers would also know why the blue suede shoes were so important to him.

2. Why can't Roger say more when he finally leaves Mrs. Jones' apartment? What else do you think he wanted to say?

Roger can't respond quick enough to Mrs. Jones because he is stunned by the entire evening and is still processing how/why a stranger would be so kind to him. He probably wanted to say thank you and make it a point to repay her in the future.

3. Do you agree with how Mrs. Jones handled the situation? Do you think Roger will change his actions in the future, why or why not?

Answers will vary.

4. What theme about kindness is portrayed throughout the story?

If you treat people with kindness, you will receive kindness in return.

5. Name a time someone has done something extremely kind for you or vice versa. If you can't think of anything, what is something you can do to pay it forward?

Answers will vary.