Sample Response for “Thank You M’am”

**Topics:** Kindness, good + evil behavior, mistakes, second chances

**Theme:** Repaying goodness for evil can help turn a person around for the better.

**Features to focus on:**

1. Character development (Roger + Mrs. Jones)

* Dialogue (things said and not said)
* Actions
* Thoughts of Roger (3rd person limited narration focuses on Roger, giving critical insights to his thinking)

1. Character interaction (especially Roger’s change as a result of his experience with Mrs. Jones, and the ironic way that Mrs. Jones takes care of Roger and gives him money for the shoes after he tries to steal from her)

Theme statement develops my topic into a theme, then includes mention of the author and text.

**My Response:**

Theme Statement: Langston Hughes’ short story *Thank You M’am* demonstrates that repaying goodness for evil can help turn a person around for the better.

Hughes does an excellent job of developing Roger and Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones as “round characters” who defy being classified as either purely good or bad, which enables Hughes to demonstrate change and growth – especially in Roger. The third-person narrator develops the character of Roger in the reader’s initial impression via his action of trying, and failing, to steal Mrs. Jones’ purse. This combined with his physical description of wearing ragged clothes, being dirty and “willow-wild” leads the reader to believe that Roger is clearly a “bad” young man – a troublemaker of the streets. But Hughes does not stop there, going on to confound the reader by demonstrating that Roger can be polite, given his speech toward Mrs. Jones, and desires to be trusted, which is seen when Roger thinks that he doesn't “trust her to not trust him, and he couldn’t afford to not have her trust him now” (243). These aspects of Roger’s character reveal that someone – in this case Roger – who is so easy to classify as “bad” can actually be someone who just needs some help and guidance, which Mrs. Jones provides. It is also interesting to see that Mrs. Jones also hints at a troubled youth of her own, thus deepening her character, who appears so flawless otherwise. Seeing as both Roger and Mrs. Jones have the potential to be “bad” people, but actually are demonstrated as good, indicates that people in general may also have the potential for evil, but instead choose goodness.

All quotes or paraphrases are followed up by analysis that connects to topic + theme.

I briefly summarize (paraphrase) the plot only to make a point, not for the sake of summary.

TOPIC sentence focuses on aspect 1 of 2 that I want to talk about in this paragraph, keeping it clearly connected to the theme.

With both Roger and Mrs. Jones so developed, Hughes goes on to use the interaction of these highly complex individuals to enable the significant change that is witnessed in Roger. Mrs. Jones’ treatment of Roger in the story, especially after the opening scene, is ironic in that the reader expects Mrs. Jones to be angry and to turn him in to the police, but instead she feeds him, cleans him up, talks to him kindly, and even gives him the money he needs to buy the shoes that he so desperately wanted. What is most important, though, is that the result of these decisions by Mrs. Jones is that Roger is enabled to temporarily escape from the world of the streets of New York and to feel like he is someone who has value, can be trusted, and should be cared for. The effect on Roger is that he seeks to become the person that Mrs. Jones expects him to be. He rises to the occasion by, in response, not stealing the purse when she gives him the chance in her apartment, and by sitting down and having an honest, open conversation with her. In the end, the fact that the narrator indicates that Roger wishes he had something he could say to her, better than “thank you, m’am,” indicates that he has truly acknowledged what Mrs. Jones has done for him and wants to repay her. Finally, because he cannot even open his mouth to thank her, and we learn that he will never see her again, this indicates that Roger – like Mrs. Jones – will have to find a way to pay this kindness forward, since he cannot pay it back. The effect of this interaction between the characters, and the implied interaction between the youth-version of Luella Jones and the implied mentor that she had underscores the significance of the impact that someone can have on another person whereby returning good for evil, as Mrs. Jones did for Roger, can turn such a person around, for the better.

* Overall, I have used class discussion and terminology (e.g. “round characters,” “third person limited narrator,” “irony,” “characterization methods,” “character interaction”) in the essay accurately and effectively.
* I have used the strategies for finding theme to extract a theme and justify it, using the texts for support.
* I minimized summarizing, using VERY BRIEF paraphrases or quotes to establish what I needed from the story in order to support my position.
* I organized my paragraphs to focus on one aspect each, with good development of ideas, connection to the theme, and complete with accurate grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

This is a “10”-level paper.

As in paragraph 1, I again seek to make sure that I have explicitly connected the topic of this paragraph to the theme that it is intended to support.

Second Paragraph transitions from idea 1 to idea 2, giving a TRANSITIONAL TOPIC SENTENCE

Again, the paragraph is focused on analyzing the textual features to support the theme. I am not trying to summarize the story, though I certainly draw from the story to make my point.