Thank You Ma’am
by Langston Hughes
BEFORE READING QUESTIONS

Have you ever gone through a time when it seemed like you couldn’t do anything right? If so, then you know how important it is to have someone have faith in you. When a friend, a family member, or a teacher believes you can do better, it can help you try harder instead of giving up.

Think of a time you did your best or reached your full potential because someone believed in you. Explain.

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Imagine that you are walking down the street. You have a backpack on, with all of your money in it. How would you feel if someone came up behind you, grabbed your backpack, and ran off with it?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

How do you think a thief should be treated if he/she gets caught?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

“Thank You Ma’am” is a story about a woman who see potential-or possibility-about a troubled boy, where others might see a problem.
VOCABULARY PRACTICE

barren      frail      mistrust      presentable

A. The following words helped Langston Hughes write a story about a boy facing a serious conflict. To see how many words you already know, use them to complete the sentences.

1. Don’t _______________ him; he will keep his promise.
2. Because he was _______________, the hard work tired him.
3. The _______________ room was a source of loneliness.
4. He wanted to look _______________ for the assembly.

B. Choose a word from the box that is a synonym for each underlined word in the following sentences. Write the word on the line.

1. A _______________ railing was all that separated us from the edge of the cliff. (unsubstantial, in poor health, delicate)

2. He tried to make his stained T-shirt _______________ by bleaching it. (respectable, fit to be seen, suitable)

3. _______________ of the water led the hiker to boil it before she put it in her canteen. (suspicion, doubt, wariness)

4. We saw only rocks as we looked across the _______________ desert landscape—not a single plant or animal. (infertile, unprofitable, desolate)

C. On each blank line, write the word from the box that the rhyme describes.

1. _______________ if they order coffee, but I bring them tea,
   My customers might feel this way about me.

2. This might describe a _______________ nest
   That a powerful hurricane puts to the test.
THANK YOU, M’AM

Question Support: Literary Analysis

Directions: Answer the questions.

1. Recall What happens when Roger tries to steal Mrs. Jones’s purse?

______________________________________________________________________________

2. Clarify What does Mrs. Jones say will happen to Roger if he gets the shoes through dishonest means?

______________________________________________________________________________

3. Summarize What details do you learn about Roger and his life?

______________________________________________________________________________

4. Identify Conflict Write E next to each example of an external conflict. Write I next to each example of an internal conflict.
   _____ a. Roger and Mrs. Jones struggle over the purse.
   _____ b. Mrs. Jones drags Roger back to her home even though he does not want to go.
   _____ c. Roger struggles over whether to run away.
   _____ d. Roger wants Mrs. Jones to trust him in spite of what he has done.

What conflict is the most important-the main conflict in the story?

______________________________________________________________________________

5. Make Inferences Review the chart you created as you read. Write an X next to all the words and phrases that describe how Mrs. Jones treats Roger.
   _____ a. angrily
   _____ b. with kindness
   _____ c. with understanding
   _____ e. rudely
   _____ d. violently
   _____ f. sympathetically

Mrs. Jones treats Roger this way because

______________________________________________________________________________

6. Analyze a Character After listening to Mrs. Jones, Roger asks her if she needs somebody to go to the store to get milk. How does Roger’s question show that he has changed?
What does this change suggest about how Roger might behave in the future?

______________________________________________________________________________

7. Compare Literary Works Reread the poem by Emily Dickinson on page 68. Which lines remind you of the way Mrs. Jones might think? Why? ________________________________

8. Critique The last line of the story states that Roger never meets Mrs. Jones again. Do you find this as a strength or a weakness in the story? Consider why Langston Hughes might have chosen to write this last line of the story?

______________________________________________________________________________

9. Evaluate Theme The theme of a story is a message about life. Write an X next to the sentence that describes the theme of the story.

_____ a. Some people act badly no matter how much you help them.

_____ b. People live up to the expectations that others have of them.

_____ c. Everyone acts badly sometimes, so it is best to ignore poor behavior the first time it happens.

Do you agree with this theme? Why or why not? ________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

EXTENSION AND CHALLENGE

10. Reader’s Circle There’s an African proverb that says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” With your group, discuss how this proverb applies to “Thank You, Ma’am.” Start by talking about whether the story supports or contradicts this statement. Write your thoughts and feelings below to support your response.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
THANK YOU, M’AM

Reading Skill

MAKE INFERENCES

Readers make **inferences** to understand what characters are feeling and thinking. To make an inference, you use your reason and experience to guess details the writer does not say directly. You combine clues in the story with your own knowledge to help you understand what characters feel and think. For example, the writer does not say exactly how Roger feels when Mrs. Jones drags him home. However, you can use what you know about how it feels to get caught doing something wrong to make an inference about Roger’s feelings.

**Directions:** Use this chart to make inferences as you read. One example has been done for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details about the Character</th>
<th>What I Infer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roger admits that he will run away if Mrs. Jones lets go of him.</td>
<td>Roger is being honest with Mrs. Jones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first thing Mrs. Jones does at home is insist that Roger wash his face.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger does not run away from her home when he has a chance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Jones feeds Roger even though he says he is not hungry.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Jones gives Roger ten dollars to buy the shoes he wants.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger just manages to say thank you before Mrs. Jones shuts the door.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THANK YOU, M’AM

Vocabulary Strategy

PREFIXES THAT MEAN “NOT”

A prefix is a word part that appears at the beginning of a base word to form a new word. Several prefixes mean “not,” including im- and ir-. For example, impassable combines the root word passable with the prefix im-. Impassable means “not able to be passed” or “blocked.”

Directions: One word in each sentence contains a prefix that can mean “not.” Circle the word and write its definition on the line.

1. My training schedule is irregular because I never know when I will have time to run.

2. My sister was too impatient to wait in the long line for the world’s fastest roller coaster.

3. After working for ten hours in a row, the accountant began to make decisions that were both irrational and foolish.

4. The letter had an impersonal tone that was not very appealing.

5. I was extra careful when I picked up the vase because I knew it was irreplaceable.

6. Our decision will be irreversible, so we need to take our time before deciding.