

Theme Development Analysis

Text: “Thank You, Ma’am” by Langston Hughes (text is readily available online)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Directions: Read “Thank You, Ma’am.” As you work, do not decide on a theme based on one detail. Track what the author reveals at different points in the story and use those details to explain how the theme develops.

Part 1 — Track the Story

Choose four important moments from the story. For each one, record what happens and what it reveals about a character, conflict, or larger idea.

Where? Important Detail or Event	What does this reveal?
Beginning	
Middle	
Later	
Ending	

Part 2 — Watch the Theme Develop

1. At the beginning: What idea about people, choices, or relationships begins to emerge?

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2. In the middle: What detail or event develops, changes, or complicates that idea?

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3. Near the end: What does the reader understand more clearly because of what happens?

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4. At the ending: How does the ending refine or deepen the idea?

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Part 3 — Build the Theme

Now use the details you collected to move from individual events to the author's larger message.

Step 1: What does the story show about the characters or situation?

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Step 2: What larger idea about life or people can a reader take from this?

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Step 3: Write the theme as a complete message—not one word.

The text develops the idea that ...

Part 4 — Prove How the Theme Develops

Choose **two details from different parts of the story**. Explain how each contributes to the theme. Your goal is to show development, not simply list evidence.

Detail from the story	How does this detail develop the theme?

Part 5 — Objective Summary

Write a concise summary of “Thank You, Ma’am.” Focus on the central events and character changes that are necessary to understand the story. Do **not** include your opinion or explain whether you agree with the characters.

Final Check

■ I identified a theme as a complete message or insight.
■ I used details from different parts of the story.
■ I explained how the theme develops—not just what the theme is.
■ I explained how the ending adds to or refines the theme.
■ My summary includes only the most important information.
■ My summary is objective and does not include my opinion.