

ACTIVITY 1.8

Culture and Literature

Purpose:

- To analyze a poem for theme and author's craft
- To connect an essential question and a literary text
- To create a poetic emulation incorporating theme and style

Steps:

1 Tell students that Langston Hughes' poem, "Theme for English B," points out that although we may come from different backgrounds, often we are connected by our commonalities. Students will examine this text to interpret theme and stylistic technique.

2 Begin by asking students to **make a prediction** based on the poem's title. Students should suggest that the poem is about a writing assignment for an English class.

3 On the board, write the teacher's instructions from lines 2-5. Ask students to interpret this assignment. In pairs, they should discuss the assignment as if it were their own. What would they write about and why? Ask students to make a connection between the assignment and the title.

4 Ask students to **preview** the poem and share what they observe about its organization and structure.

5 **Chunk the text** as follows and ask three students to read aloud:

- Student A reads the speaker's thoughts (lines 6-15 and line 41) omitting the instructor's writing directions.
- Student B reads the instructor's italicized directions (lines 2-5).
- Student C reads the actual assignment submitted by Hughes (lines 16-40).

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SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: Close Reading, Marking the Text, TWIST, Previewing, Predicting, Rereading, Drafting

My Notes

While reading, examine how the text features of this poem (for example, indentation, stanzas, italics, and single lines) advance the author's theme and voice.

Poetry

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Langston Hughes (1902–1967) is one of the great African American poets of the twentieth century. While working as a busboy in a Washington, D.C., hotel, Hughes offered his writing to poet Vachel Lindsay, who was so impressed that he helped launch Hughes's career. Over the next fifty years, Hughes wrote poetry, plays, and translations, and edited anthologies that voiced the concerns and experiences of black Americans.

Theme for English B

by Langston Hughes

The instructor said,

Go home and write

a page tonight.

And let that page come out of you —

5 *Then, it will be true.*

I wonder if it's that simple?

I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.

I went to school there, then Durham, then here to this college on the hill above Harlem.

10 I am the only colored student in my class.

The steps from the hill lead down to Harlem,

through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,

Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,

the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator

15 up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

Teacher Notes

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
 at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
 I feel and see and hear. Harlem, I hear you:
 hear you, hear me — we two — you, me talk on this page.

(I hear New York, too.) Me — who?

20

Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
 I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
 I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
 or records — Bessie, bop, or Bach.

I guess being colored doesn't make me not like
 the same things other folks like who are other races.
 So will my page be colored that I write?

25

Being me, it will not be white.

But it will be

a part of you, instructor.

30

You are white —

yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.

That's American.

Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.

Nor do I often want to be a part of you.

35

But we are, that's true!

As I learn from you,

I guess you learn from me —

although you're older — and white —

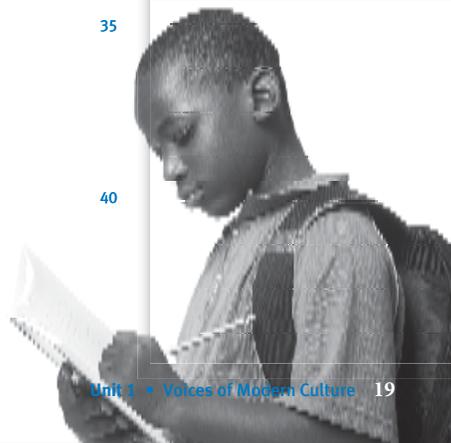
and somewhat more free.

40

This is my page for English B.

My Notes

Blank lined area for taking notes.



Steps:

6 Have students work in small groups to use the **TWIST** strategy to complete the graphic organizer. Tell students to review their group norms before they begin working together. Also, remind them to provide evidence—words or phrases from the poem to support their ideas. Debrief students on their analyses of the tone, word choice, imagery, and style in a class discussion.

7 Remind students that a theme states the writer’s larger ideas about life and human experience. Use **guided writing** to model the construction of a thematic statement. Begin by asking students to identify the subject of the text (a writing assignment).

8 Next, ask students to draw on their analyses to discuss what Hughes might believe about the subject. Model a sentence that both identifies the subject and expresses a larger idea about it; for example: *Despite their differences or because of their commonalities, the speaker and the teacher realize that they can learn from each other.*

9 Have students work in pairs to generate a statement of theme. Ask volunteers to share their theme statements with the class.

10 Ask students to identify the elements of TWIST that support their statements. They should include textual support followed with commentary that explains how Hughes’ style conveys this message. Review the elements of an analytical paragraph (topic sentence, textual support, commentary, and closing statement) and model constructing one with students.

11 Finally, help students connect to the text by having them **reread** the poem a final time while thinking about the **Essential Question**: How can cultural experiences shape, impact, or influence our perception of the world?

TWIST	Response	Textual Support
Tone: the attitude of the speaker toward the subject		
Word Choice: the specific words and their connotations, associations, or emotional impact		
Imagery: the sense impressions (sound, smell, sight, taste, and touch)		
Style: the author’s use of language, including figurative language and poetic devices such as repetition, rhyme, and rhythm		
Theme: the author’s insight about life		
Thesis Statement:		

12 Allow time for students to plan and **draft** their own version of “Theme for English B,” emulating the organizational structure and style of Hughes’s text. Ask students to **mark their drafts**, identifying organizational structure and the elements of TWIST. Students should use TWIST as a **revision** tool to refine or add elements.

13 In small groups, invite students to **share and respond** to one another’s drafts. They should solicit feedback and use it to revise their drafts for clarity of ideas, organization, and stylistic elements.