

Theme from English B

Objective: Using the Langston Hughes poem, *Theme for English B*, as a model, students write a one-page autobiography.

Pre-writing

1. Make a list of basic, pertinent facts about your life
2. Make a list of things you like
3. Make a list of conflicts you face; internal conflicts (your emotional struggles within yourself); as well as your external conflicts (your struggles with others or the world around you).
4. In what ways do you fit into the world around you? In what ways, if any, do you feel you are an outsider, not part of the mainstream?
5. Write about what it feels like to be American or to live in America.

Writing

Copy the first five lines of Langston Hughes' poem:

*The instructor said,
Go home and write,
a page tonight,
And let that page come out of you –
Then, it will be true.*

1. Write your page. In this first draft do not concern yourself with length. Your first draft may run more than one page. No big deal. Just listen to yourself and write your truth.
2. Then go back and edit. (Remember, this poem is not meant to rhyme)
3. Pay attention to the sound, beat and flow of your words. How can you make your writing sound more like the sound of your inner voice? Read your work aloud to yourself. To someone you trust. Have someone read your piece aloud to you. Does this sound like your voice? Does this sound like your story?
4. Now go back and rewrite what you think can become more precise. More you. So, you say exactly what you want to say. Feel free to play around. Think of this piece as a poem or a song.

Original poem and other student example on following pages

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—
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.
I am the only colored student in my class.
The steps from the hill lead down into 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
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

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?

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?
Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
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.
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.

This is my page for English B.

Langston Hughes, "Theme for English B" from *Collected Poems*. Copyright © 1994 by The Estate of Langston Hughes.

Theme from English B

by Anonymous

The instructor said,
Go home and write
a page tonight
And let that page come out of you
Then, it'll be true.

I am a shy girl
I wonder if I will ever become outgoing
But I don't want to be outgoing sometimes
I enjoy my own quiet atmosphere

I wonder if the people around me can relate to me
I wonder what people think of me
Do they like me?
I don't think so; otherwise they would talk to me.

I have a voice, but I'd rather not use it
I'm just too shy to speak first
So, I sit alone
Feeling like I have no one

Because most of the time I don't have anyone
I think, "Do I ever fit in?"
That's when I realize I don't fit, but that's okay.
There's only one person I can trust

Myself, because I'd never hurt myself
Besides, it's okay to be different, sometimes
Everyone's different
And being different is normal

At least I hope it is
Eventually people will like me
So, there's no need to worry or care
Hopefully, I can be myself someday, somewhere

Based on the poem, "Theme for English B" by Langston Hughes