

8th Grade Writing Samples

The Personal Narrative Paper and three Literary Analysis Papers below are from *Stack the Deck Writing Program*, Chicago, IL, and can be found at <http://www.stackthedeck.com/s-cut.html>.

Personal Narrative Paper

The following is an example of an 8th grade paper that asked students to write a personal narrative and to “limit their narrative in **time**, **space**, and **action**.”

"The Roller Coaster"

Screams and shouts could be heard in the distance as the line droned on in the summer heat. We clambered into the seat and sat down. The restraining bar locked over my shoulders as I buckled my seatbelt. The cars rolled down toward the incline, leading to the first large drop.

When I heard the clickety-clack of the rivets as we made our ascent, a feeling of nervousness and extreme excitement swept over me. Thousands of thoughts raced through my mind. What will the ride be like? Will I like it?

I had no more time to think as we slowly rose over the massive peak. While we crept along, I could see the steep plunge downward. Then, all of a sudden, we sped down the slope with our hair pulled back by the wind. As we slid down, I felt weightless, but when we reached the bottom, it felt as if I weighed tons. We raced from one drop to another, turning and lurching, screaming all the way.

Then, as if it all had been a dream, the cars jolted to a stop. Forced to get out, I found myself slumped in the seat. As I walked away, shaken and relieved, I exclaimed, "Let's go again!"

Literary Analysis Papers

(also from the Stack the Deck Writing Program, Chicago, IL;
<http://www.stackthedeck.com/s-cut.html>)

The following student sample papers are literary analysis papers focused on characterization. These papers were focused on a character, Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, in Langston Hughes' short story entitled "Thank You, Ma'm."

Paper #1

"Thank You, Ma'm"

Langston Hughes, the author of this inspirational short story "Thank You Ma'm," creates a strong, admirable personality in Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, one of two of the main characters. She has the privilege of changing the lifestyle of Roger, a desperate teenager in need of guidance. He goes from being a would be thief to a person with respect and higher self-esteem.

In the beginning, Mrs. Jones is walking home from her job around eleven o'clock which isn't very safe when you are in the city. This immediately reveals that she is brave and independent. When she turns the corner, a teenager tries to steal her purse. What this thief doesn't know is that this purse is not like other purses. It was very heavy and seemed to have everything in it except 'hammers and nails.' Due to the unexpected weight, Roger ends up on the ground. His attempt to take Mrs. Jones' purse had failed. He is now at Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones' mercy. Being a large, strong woman, she picks him up and asks him why he tried to steal her purse. He tells her he wanted blue suede shoes. In a panic, Roger asks if Mrs. Jones was going to take him to jail. She tells him she wouldn't take him anywhere with his dirty face and insists on taking him home to clean him up. Roger, unsure of his own safety and not wanting to end up in jail, struggles to get free. Mrs. Jones, knowing what was best, puts him in a headlock and proceeds home. Roger has now been introduced to Mrs. Jones' determination.

Once at her house, she leaves the door open as they walk into the kitchen and tells him he could wash his face in the sink. Roger obeys and hesitantly washes his face. Mrs. Jones, not exactly the richest woman in the world, offers Roger lima beans, ham, and canned milk. She exits the room to get started on their dinner and leaves her purse with Roger. The only thing is, Roger can't trust himself not to steal so he moves where Mrs. Jones' can see him. This hints to Roger that Mrs. Jones trusts him. As they eat their meal, Mrs. Jones socializes nicely while avoiding any type of offending questions that might embarrass Roger. She does, however, ask him about his home. He tells her that no one is home which adds some mystery to the story and to Roger's life. Roger probably hasn't ever been exposed to this kind of hospitality.

In the end, Mrs. Jones has given Roger food and ten dollars, but that is not all. She has given him advice, love, care, attention, and hospitality. She did everything so casually she probably doesn't realize just how much she has done. As Roger leaves, he wants so badly to say something besides the plain, old, everyday thank you, but doesn't know what to say. Everything happened so quickly in the end that he had to say something but all he could manage was thank you. It's a good thing he did because as soon as he was out the door, Mrs. Jones told him to behave and the door was closed.

Thanks to Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, a teenager with no hope for the future except to be a no good thief, was evaporated with the simple act of kindness by this unselfish person. The world would be so much better off with more people like Mrs. Jones. Just think about it! So next time you get the chance to help a person in need, remember this story and its affect on Roger.

Paper #2

"Thank You, Ma'm"

"Thank You, Ma'm" was a meaningful story written by Langston Hughes. It demonstrates how a woman named Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones changes a trouble bound boy named Roger. Mrs. Jones is very firm with Roger, but as the story progresses, she becomes more understanding and generous toward him.

In the beginning of the story, Mrs. Jones is bravely walking home from work. She is a very large, strong woman with a purse just like her. Suddenly, a poor, filthy boy named Roger tries unsuccessfully to steal her stubborn purse. Since he does not intimidate Mrs. Jones, she firmly grips Roger and demands he give back her purse. As Roger struggles to break loose of Mrs. Jones' strong grip, he becomes embarrassed as she questions him about his dirty face. Roger is uncertain about his future with Mrs. Jones as she continues to drag him to her apartment. He certainly regrets ever coming across Mrs. Jones since she is very controlling.

Upon arrival at her apartment, Roger becomes worried. Would the unpredictable woman send him to jail? Before Roger had a chance to ask questions, Mrs. Jones sent him to her bathroom to wash his face. There was great trust in Roger shown when she left the bathroom door wide open. Roger could have run away, but he decided against betraying Mrs. Jones' trust. She is compassionate as Roger tells her his story. He told Mrs. Jones that he was sorry for trying to take her purse and that he needed to buy blue suede shoes. Mrs. Jones told Roger that she understood what it was like to not have things you want; she had a troubled youth just as Roger. As their conversation goes on, Roger begins to trust himself more and starts to care about Mrs. Jones.

After their heart to heart conversation, Mrs. Jones begins to make a meal for them to share. While she is preparing the dinner, Roger has the opportunity to run again. He doesn't, however. After dinner, Mrs. Jones generously gives Roger ten dollars for the shoes he wanted. Then she wishes him well, telling him so stay out of trouble. Roger is very grateful to her, but only has time to muster a quick "Thank You", before she shuts the door on him. Mrs. Jones has given Roger kindness and confidence that will most likely stay with him throughout his life.

To conclude, Mrs. Jones had many positive character traits that will alter Roger's life forever. Roger could have become a rotten, purse stealing punk with no future. It was by fate that he came across a firm, understanding, and generous lady named Luella Bates Washington Jones who helped him become a better person.

Paper #3

"Thank You Ma'm" is a short story written by the author Langston Hughes. There are two characters with completely different personalities named Mrs. Jones and Roger. Mrs. Jones was a great role model for any person. Her actions caused Roger to become the better person Mrs. Jones knew he could be.

In the beginning, Mrs. Jones is walking home by herself from work. She's a rather large woman with a large purse. While minding her own business as she hurriedly walked home, a dirty teenaged boy tries to snatch her purse. The purse, being so large, knocked the boy down flat on his back. When trying to run away, Mrs. Jones picks him up and puts him in a headlock. People are stopping and staring at the scene, which makes Roger very embarrassed by the whole situation. The woman doesn't stop with this action though. In a mighty way, she continues on home dragging the boy behind her. Roger isn't the wild teenaged boy that he seems to be. This enormous woman's strength and attitude makes Roger scared to death of what will happen next.

Later on, the two strangers arrive at Mrs. Jones boarding house. She asks the boy why he isn't at home, and he says that there's no one at home. Considerately, Mrs. Jones doesn't ask any further questions on that subject so the boy won't be uncomfortable. She makes him wash his disgustingly dirty face. Roger is worried that Mrs. Jones might call the police. Strangely, Mrs. Jones trusts Roger enough to leave him alone in a room with her purse. He could've easily taken the purse. Mrs. Jones must've trusted him even more considering that she left Roger alone in a place where he could easily run away. The extremely clever character, Mrs. Jones, is starting to make the boy out to be a person she can trust, and is trying to make the boy realize he's a good kid.

Finally, Mrs. Jones feeds Roger dinner. She tries to see things from the boy's point of view. When she was young, she tried to steal things too. The woman

asked Roger why he tries to steal her pocketbook, and he answered honestly that he wanted some blue suede shoes. All he wanted was to fit in. After the dinner, Mrs. Jones gives Roger \$10 to get shoes and lets him leave. As he turns around to say "Thank You," the woman shuts the door. He probably couldn't have said it anyway because he was speechless by the way that she was so nice to him after he tries to steal her pocketbook. Roger is now a completely different person and feels loved. Mrs. Jones was kind enough to show him love and isn't the big, tough woman he thought she was.

To close, at the beginning of "Thank You, Ma'm," Roger is a wild teen who wants to fit in. Mrs. Jones changes him to a trustworthy and thankful fellow who feels love that he's probably never experienced before. Mrs. Jones was like a hero to Roger since she changed him and made him realize that he was somebody special. More people should try to follow by her example.