

Figure 3.6: Langston Hughes’s “Theme for English B” Spoken Word Poetry

Guiding questions: How does learning about others lead us to empathize with them? How does learning about others help us to be more compassionate toward ourselves? How does understanding other people’s perspectives enable us to be grateful for the gifts in our own life as well as make us happier?

Your task: After reading and discussing Hughes’s (2001) “Theme for English B,” you now have the same directions Hughes had. Write a thirty- to forty-line poem that only you could have written. *You may either recite your poem or create a video we will watch together in class.*

Your purpose: Create a spoken word poem in which you share specific details about yourself others may not know. Your poem should show that although in many ways you are unique, you are also the same as the rest of us. Your goal is to make listeners feel like they know you on a more personal level—to make the listeners feel connected to you. Let’s see how we are more the same than we are different.

Your audience: Your teacher and your peers

Stanza one: Simply copy Hughes’s first stanza and include it in your poem.

Stanza two: Your first line should start something like Hughes’s: “I wonder if it’s that simple?” Then, write between ten and fifteen lines about who you are and where you’re from. You might want to include these details.

- ◆ Age
- ◆ Race and religion
- ◆ Hometown or neighborhood
- ◆ Family life

Stanza three: Write between twenty and twenty-five lines about who you are, what you are like, what matters to you, and how you see yourself. Try to include the following.

- ◆ Your first line should start something like Hughes’s: “It’s not easy to know what is true for you or me . . .”
- ◆ Your likes and dislikes
- ◆ Your beliefs, morals, values, or any motto you live by
- ◆ Physical characteristics, ethnicity, religion, or family traditions
- ◆ Favorite memories or important relationships
- ◆ Maybe even finish the stanza with your initial thoughts of me (the teacher), this class, or this school.

Stanza four: Simply finish off your poem with Hughes’s following line: “This is my page for English B.”

Source: Adapted from Hughes, L. (2001). The collected works of Langston Hughes. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.