# Theme for English B

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

**The School in August**

The cloakroom pegs are empty now,  
And locked the classroom door,  
The hollow desks are lined with dust,  
And slow across the floor  
A sunbeam creeps between the chairs  
Till the sun shines no more.  
  
Who did their hair before this glass?  
Who scratched ‘Elaine loves Jill’  
One drowsy summer sewing-class  
With scissors on the sill?  
Who practised this piano  
Whose notes are now so still?  
  
Ah, notices are taken down,  
And scorebooks stowed away,  
And seniors grow tomorrow  
From the juniors today,  
And even swimming groups can fade,  
Games mistresses turn grey.

—Philip Larkin

**Class Reunion**

Where others ran I run my hand

across a photograph. It shows

me standing where I am, applauding them.

They are far along the track; it’s

evening, lights coming on. I

didn’t mean to win like this. I mean,

they’re gone. I mean,

I didn’t win.

—William Stafford

**The School Children**

The children go forward with their little satchels.

And all morning the mothers have labored

to gather the late apples, red and gold,

like words of another language.

And on the other shore

are those who wait behind great desks

to receive these offerings.

How orderly they are—the nails

on which the children hang

their overcoats of blue or yellow wool.

And the teachers shall instruct them in silence

and the mothers shall scour the orchards for a way out,

drawing to themselves the grey limbs of the fruit trees

bearing so little ammunition.

—Louise Glück

**Hedge School**

Not only those rainy mornings our great-great-grandmother was posted at a gate

with a rush mat

over her shoulders, a mat that flashed

Papish like a heliograph, but those rainy mornings when my daughter and the rest

of her all-American Latin class may yet be forced to conjugate

Guantánamo, amas, amat

and learn with Luciana how “headstrong liberty is lash’d

with woe”—all past and future mornings were impressed

on me just now, dear sis,

as I sheltered in a doorway on Church Street in St. Andrews

(where, in 673, another Maelduin was bishop),

and tried to come up with a ruse

for unsealing the New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary back in that corner shop

and tracing the root of metastasis.

—Paul Muldoon