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Writer’s Workshop Argumentative Essay

**That “Boy” Just Needed Some Lovin’**

There is no character in the real world, or the fictitious for that matter, that comes close to “Ma’am.” Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, Ma’am, is such a great character in Langston Hughes’ short story titled, “Thank You, Ma’am.” She gives the kind of love that we sure don’t see anymore, and there are a lot of kids out there that just need someone to take a moment of their time to give a little love. Ma’am’s best character trait is that she is a loving individual. She takes the time to teach this boy a lesson, she takes him into her home, and lastly she listens to him. Some other kids in this classroom might try to tell you her best quality is generosity, but I propose that her generosity is only a thin frail strand of the much more extensive braid found in Ma’am’s loving character.

Roger, the boy, sees Ma’am at eleven o’clock at night walking alone when he decides to run up on her and steal her purse. The weight of the purse causes him to fall down and Ma’am goes after him and roughs him up a bit. She scares the daylights out of him, and so much so that his “teeth rattled.” The thing is that these two people were strangers, but soon within the story Ma’am takes a motherly role with the boy by examining his dirty face and wanting to feed his belly. She even eventually calls him “son,” and it’s almost as if the boy had stolen the purse from his own mother, but of course what kid would bum-rush his own mom and steal her purse in such a manner. Ma’am chastises the boy by asking, “Now ain’t you ashamed of yourself?” She has quickly turned this situation around on the boy. She is no longer the victim, but rather he is. He is the one who cowers, tries to lie, gets called on it, and only when she finally breaks him down is he able to receive the lesson. The lesson was that he might behave, but in order to deliver that lesson, she fed him, she washed him up, she listened to him, she kept it short and sent him on his way. This was a lesson learned and one that usually is rendered from a mother’s love for her child.

Taking a thief into her house is a scary proposition, but Ma’am doesn’t care. She would let him have everything she had in that house if he was aiming to take it, and maybe even if he asked for it. She is not concerned with the things she has, but rather the differences between right and wrong. When she decides to take the boy home, wash him up, and feed him, it’s almost like she is taking home a feral cat hoping to make something of the fury feline.. The boy doesn’t trust her at all, and she’s not to concerned with what they boy thinks, but she’s going to make him presentable, feed him, and teach him a lesson. A person’s home is private and special. It is reserved for close friends and family members not the local street thugs. So when Ma’am takes this boy home, it is a sign of familial love and she makes this boy feel apart of something that has been missing for some time.

Ma’am is a good talker and has all the best lines in this story, but she is also a great listener who challenges the boy and his juvenile thinking. When she prods him with questions, even a simple one like, “Are you hungry?” or “Was I bothering you when I turned that corner?” These questions all evoke an answer, but not one that the boy has readied to use. And Ma’am doesn’t listen to his answers anyways She has a knack for listening to the truth deep down within the boy. We don’t know where or what the boy’s parents are up to, but chances are they haven’t been able to take the opportunity to listen to their son. Ma’am does. Ma’am listens to the boy, takes care of the boy, teaches the boy, and sends him back out into the world. She encompasses that whole aspect of the African proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child.” It is her love of the child that drives her to listen.

Some students may believe that it is her generosity of spirit that is the best character trait of Ma’am. She certainly does have a lot of generosity, but the fact that she gives the boy ten dollars to go buy shoes is not a generous trait. It is an example of how she loves the kid. That kid sat scared in her apartment, afraid he was going to jail, afraid of the woman, but he started to develop a trust in her. The boy eventually knew she wasn’t going to hurt him and Ma’am trusted him. Better yet, she believed in him. She believed the boy could be better, was better, and a new trust was developed. The boy left the apartment forever, never to see her again. He most likely went back to having a hard life, but he was also reminded that he could be loved. The ten dollars is generous, but the ten dollars symbolizes the love between a parent and a child. Maybe this love reminded him that he didn’t need a materialistic good, but rather he just needed to love himself.

Ma’am is a godsend to the boy who was completely lost. So lost in his own selfish desires that he did not see the bigger picture. Ma’am knocks sense in to the boy both physically and mentally and all at the same time with “love” as its central core. She “takes him over her knee,” so to speak and has to reteach this lesson of right and wrong even though he knew it already. She invited him into her home, which lets him know he is loved like a son, and lastly she, like the most loving and attentive of mothers, listens to every verbal and nonverbal message the boy sends forth. Ma’am is certainly a generous figure and in more ways than one, but undoubtedly she is nothing if she is not love personified. She takes him like a fledgling into her wings, comforts him, and sends him out the nest again. Life is harsh and unforgiving most of the time, so a second chance is a true gift of one’s love for her fellow man.