

PREREADING

1. Which is harder to write about: yourself or something outside yourself? Which kind of writing do you prefer to read? Why? Which kind do you prefer to write? Why?
2. How important is it to tell the truth when you write? Should you do so even if it offends the reader?
3. What is a stereotype? Can you think of negative ones? Positive ones?

Theme for English B

Langston Hughes

A major figure in the literary movement known as the Harlem Renaissance, James Langston Hughes wrote novels, stories, plays, songs, essays, memoirs, and poetry, of which the following is an example. He is thought to be the first African American to have made a living from writing.

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.
 10 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
 15 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:

20 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.
 25 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
 30 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 part of me.
 35 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—
 40 and somewhat more free.
 This is my page for English B.

♦ WORKING WITH WORDS

Following are lists of words that have at one time or another been *socially acceptable designations* for different ethnic groups.

Colored	white	Hispanic	Indian
Negro	Caucasian	Latino/Latina	Native American
Black	European-American	Spanish	
Afro-American		Spanish-speaking	
African		Latino American	
American			

Give your reaction to or your feelings about some or all of these words.