

Little Things Are Big, by Jesús Colón

I've been thinking; you know, sometimes one thing happens to change your life, how you look at things, how you look at yourself. I remember one particular event. It was when? 1955 or '56...a long time ago. Anyway, I had been working at night. I wrote for the newspaper and, you know, we had deadlines. It was late after midnight on the night before Memorial Day. I had to catch the train back to Brooklyn; the West side IRT. This lady got on to the subway at 34th and Penn Station, a nice looking white lady in her early twenties. Somehow she managed to push herself in with a baby on her right arm and a big suitcase in her left hand. Two children, a boy and a girl about three and five years old trailed after her.

Anyway, at Nevins Street I saw her preparing to get off at the next station, Atlantic Avenue. That's where I was getting off too. It was going to be a problem for her to get off; two small children, a baby in her arm, and a suitcase in her hand. And

there I was also preparing to get off at Atlantic Avenue. I couldn't help but imagine the steep, long concrete stairs going down to the Long Island Railroad and up to the street. Should I offer my help? Should I take care of the girl and the boy, take them by their hands until they reach the end of that steep long concrete stairs?

Courtesy is important to us Puerto Ricans. And here I was, hours past midnight, and the white lady with the baby in her arm, a suitcase and two white children badly needing someone to help her.

I remember thinking; I'm a Negro* and a Puerto Rican. Suppose I approach this white lady in this deserted subway station late at night? What would she say? What would be the first reaction of this white American woman? Would she say: "Yes, of course you may help me," or would she think I was trying to get too familiar or would she think worse? What do I do if she screamed when I went to offer my help? I hesitated. And then I pushed by

her like I saw nothing as if I were insensitive to her need. I was like a rude animal walking on two legs just moving on, half running along the long subway platform, leaving the children and the suitcase and the woman with the baby in her arm. I ran up the steps of that long concrete stairs in twos and when I reached the street, the cold air slapped my warm face.

Perhaps the lady was not prejudiced after all. If you were not that prejudiced, I failed you, dear lady. If you were not that prejudiced I failed you; I failed you too, children. I failed myself. I buried my courtesy early on Memorial Day morning.

So, here is the promise I made to myself back then: if I am ever faced with an occasion like that again, I am going to offer my help regardless of how the offer is going to be received. Then I will have my courtesy with me again.

* The word Negro was commonly used in the early and middle years of the last century to refer to an African American. Its use reflects the time period.

Character Change

Character/Text _____

What does the character think or believe at the beginning of the story?

What does the character think or believe at the end of the story?

**WHAT
DID
HE LEARN?**

Why did he change?

What caused the change?

What did he realize? How is he a better person?

THEME TOPICS

Accept and respect
Beauty of simplicity
Capitalism – effect on the individual
Change of power – necessity
Change versus tradition
Chaos and order
Character – destruction, building up
Circle of life
Coming of age
Communication – verbal and nonverbal
Companionship as salvation
Convention and rebellion
Cooperation and teamwork
Courage and strength
Dangers of ignorance
Darkness and light
Death – inevitable or tragedy
Desire to escape
Destruction of beauty
Disillusionment and dreams
Displacement
Empowerment
Emptiness of attaining false dream
Everlasting love
Evils of racism
Facing darkness
Facing reality
Fading beauty
Faith versus doubt
Family – blessing or curse
Fate and free will
Fear of failure
Fulfillment

Generosity and consideration
Good versus bad
Greed as downfall
Growing up – pain or pleasure
Hazards of passing judgment
Heartbreak of betrayal
Heroism – real and perceived
Hierarchy in nature
Identity crisis
Illusion of power
Immortality
Individual versus society
Inner versus outer strength
Injustice
Isolation
Knowledge versus ignorance
Loneliness as destructive force
Losing hope
Loss of innocence
Lost honor
Lost love
Loyalty and devotion
Love and sacrifice
Man against nature
Manipulation
Materialism as downfall
Motherhood
Nature as beauty
Necessity of work
Oppression and prejudice
Optimism
Overcoming – fear, weakness, vice
Patriotism – positive side or complications

Perseverance
Power and corruption
Power of silence
Power of tradition
Power of wealth
Power of words
Pride and downfall
Progress
Quest for discovery
Quest for power
Reunion
Revenge and vengeance
Role of men
Role of Religion – virtue or hypocrisy
Role of women
Self – inner and outer
Self-awareness
Self-preservation
Self-reliance
Social mobility
Technology in society – good or bad
Temporary nature of physical beauty
Temptation and destruction
Truth, trust, and honesty
Vanity as downfall
Vulnerability of the meek
Vulnerability of the strong
War – glory, necessity, pain, tragedy
Will to survive
Wisdom of experience
Working class struggles
Youth and beauty

- Individuals can...
- One must ...
- People should ...
- When someone ...

Theme 1

The author believes
that _____

Theme 2

Character/Text Roger / Thank you, M'AM

What does the character think or believe at the beginning of the story?

Thief
Greedy, I deserve
Not trustworthy
Didn't care about others
Didn't care about self

Integrity, trust
appreciative

Compassion, Kindness from others

Cared what others thought

What does the character think or believe at the end of the story?

WHAT DID HE LEARN?

Why did he change?

What caused the change?

What did he realize? How is he a better person?

- Someone cared about him / valued him more than he valued himself.
- Mrs Jones compassion / concern / pity for him trumped her revenge / anger
- Mrs Jones showed grace, kindness - She recognized Roger's misfortunes
- Roger saw the value in being trustworthy - Wanted to be trusted

ADAPTED FROM TIM SHANAHAN

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EXAMPLE THEMES FROM THE LESSON

Self-awareness

People ^{can} grow and mature from honest feedback.

Love

When people show compassion, it motivates others to be kind.