

Low to High

How can you forget me?
But you do!
You said you was gonna take me
Up with you-
Now you've got your Cadillac.
You done forgot that you are black.
How can you forget me
When I'm you?

But you do.

How can you forget me,
fellow, say?
How can you low-rate me
this way?
You treat me like you damn well please,
Ignore me-though I pay your fees.
How can you forget me?

But you do.

High to Low

God knows
We have our troubles, too—
One trouble is you:
you talk too loud,
cuss too loud,
look too black,
don't get anywhere,
and sometimes it seems
you don't even care.
The way you send your kids to school
stockings down,
(not Ethical Culture)
the way you shout out loud in church,
(not St. Phillips)
and the way you lounge on doorsteps
just as if you were down South,
(not at 409)
the way you clown—
the way, in other words,
you let me down—
me, trying to uphold the race
and you—
well, you can see,
we have our problems,
too, with you.

(1951)

Langston Hughes' poems, "Low to High" and "High to Low" (from The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes, edited by Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, Vintage Books, 1995, p. 411-412).

1. Who are the speakers in these two companion poems?
2. How do those two speakers differ?
3. what does the low / high sustained metaphor mean? Explain.
4. What kinds of social differences exist in West Linn High School? Do social differences between students and / or groups of students determine what activities students become involved in? Explain.
5. Do different social groups in West Linn High School antagonize each other?
6. Are there any extra-curricular activities at West Linn High School that attract a diverse, mixed-group of members?

adapted from <http://www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus/resources/guide2.html>