

Token Sings the Blues by Joshua Bennett

Introduction: “What is the token black person? The token is not supposed to be your everyday black person. The token is the good black person. You know, the black person that doesn’t adhere to all the negative stereotypes of black people. People of other races feel a little less threatened by him. Apparently, the token is different from all the other black folk; however, he’s still black enough for people to mention his name when talking about diversity...

...Making someone the token black person and placing him above other black people assumes that all of us—except for the token, of course—are the same. We live in a society still very much conscious of race—even if people don’t like to admit it openly. Making one black person your trustworthy token while you still view black people as a monolith will not fix the ongoing problem of race in America.”

- Lumumba Seegars, *The Harvard Crimson*

Directions: Follow the steps provided below:

1. Read through Joshua Bennett’s “[Token Sings the Blues](#),” paying close attention to any poetic elements or techniques the poet uses to convey his message.
2. Go to the following “random phrase generator” [website](#). When you are on the site, input “3” as the number of phrases you need to generate.
3. When you generate your three phrases, type them into the three spaces provided for you in the left-hand column.
4. In the column on the right, explain how each of the three phrases relates or connects to, in some shape or form, the message(s) and themes of the poem.

Each of your connections must:

1. Utilize specific textual evidence from the text to support your interpretation or connection.
2. Consist of at least 100 words.

Example	
Phrase:	Connection:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Wouldn't Harm a Fly” Meaning: Nonviolent; someone who is mild or gentle. 	<p>The phrase “wouldn’t harm a fly” is usually used in cases when describing somebody docile, gentle, and harmless. Unfortunately “wouldn’t harm a fly,” at least according to the speaker, is something that black people, even “tokens” will most likely never experience. Throughout the poem, the racial stereotypes and labels placed upon the “token” run rampant, as others persistently view him as a threat. Words like “thug” and “gang” and “thieves” all carry violent connotations, as they are all used in such a way to depict the common misconceptions people have about black people, particularly in the sense of criminality. Since there is that consistent, looming link to criminality and danger, “token” has to watch his “volume,” “hair,” and “tone” to ensure that he doesn’t raise any concerns and essentially assuage any fears against others who hold preconceived notions or biases against him.</p>

Phrase:	Connection:
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