

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Buried Onions, Day 1



Key Paragraph, p. 2

"I returned to my apartment, which was in a part of Fresno where fences sagged and the paint blistered on houses. The swamp coolers squeaked like squirrels. Dogs pulled at chains, the clover leaf of their padded paws hardened by years of this kind of traction. Laundry wept from the lines, the faded flags of poor, ignorant, unemployable people. The old sat on porches, fanning themselves, stirring up the onion smell so that it moved up and down the block. Some guys, all of them Mexican like me, worked on their cars, and the young mothers stood on their front lawns, talking as they pushed their strollers back and forth a few inches. Still the babies cried, and their crying stirred up our frustration because we were like those strollers going back and forth, back and forth, getting nowhere" (p. 2).

Writing Prompt

Eddie has compared Fresno's heat to onions and the pace of life to strollers.

Write a narrative paragraph in which you describe your life you have and the life you want to have. Describe the people, the neighborhood, and the goals you wish to have. In what ways are you responsible for the actions and your place in life?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Buried Onions, Day 2



Key Paragraph, p. 5

“I went to the garage to get my bike. My stuff—the paints and stencils, a piece of cardboard and a rag, a length of chain to lock my bike—was in the basket. I walked my bike to the front yard. The street was deserted. It was eleven o’clock and already everyone had retreaded inside, either to get away from the heat or to tune into the Mexican soap operas—telenovelas. I straddled my bike and sat on the seat, not wanting to go. But I forced myself, pushed on the pedal, because like that red ant, I had to come home with my own crumbs” (p. 5).

Writing Prompt

Eddie dreaded having to go into the heat and start his job of stenciling, but “like the ant” he has to make his own crumb. **Write a narrative paragraph in which you reflect on a time in which you had to maintain responsibility. Describe in detail the actions you had to do to maintain that responsibility even when you do not want to.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Buried Onions, Day 3



Key Paragraph, p. 23

“‘Eddie,’ he said calmly as he walked up to me, his head lowered. He gave off a smell of cologne and coffee. A red vein throbbed by his left eye. ‘Eddie, my neighbor said that you called him...a foul name’” (p. 23).

Writing Prompt

In today’s reading, Eddie was accused of saying a foul name, when in fact he said the word “birch” not “bitch.” Think back to a time when you were accused of doing something you did not do. **Write a narrative paragraph that is a detailed description of the event and how it made you feel? How did you handle the situation? Do you believe you handle it correctly? If so, how and why?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Buried Onions, Day 4



Key Paragraph, p. 31

“I felt like a deflated inner tube hanging in a garage, black from depression, because I had done what people and the Bible told me to do: work. But that advice had failed me... the working life was a scam. I could stencil every curb in Fresno from pagan Monday to holy Sunday... But no matter how hard I tried to live a straight life. I could still mess up” (p. 31).

Writing Prompt

In today’s reading selection, the reader finds that Eddie is human—a person gets down and feels defeated even though he is trying to do the right thing. This quarter emphasizes the importance of doing what you should be doing right now – the active side of morality and something that responsibility requires. There are times, though, that doing the “right thing” does not end up perfect. People have to persevere through the difficult times knowing that the “right thing” is worth the effort in the end. It requires faith in ones goals and values. **Write a narrative paragraph in which you describe a time a time when you felt you were doing the right thing, but things did not go as well as expected. How did you feel? What did you do? How did you handle the disappointment?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Buried Onions, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 36

“I poured a bowl and splashed milk on those wimpy-ass flakes, remembering when I ate boatloads of Wheaties and believed they would make me a man one day. It didn’t work” (p. 36).

Writing Prompt

At the beginning of this lesson, the teacher and the class discussed the American Dream concept and the vision of the good life. **Now, each student should write a narrative paragraph about a time in his/her life when his/her vision of the good life was reality. If more appropriate, have the student write about how the good life would play out in his/her future.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Buried Onions, Day 6



Key Paragraph, p. 47

“I felt for the envelope in my back pocket and scolded myself for being such a good Boy Scout. I should have just tossed the keys in the trash and forgotten about it” (p. 47).

Writing Prompt

Thus far in the novel, Eddie seems to admire Mr. Stiles and his sense of order. Eddie admires the lawn that is kept so nicely – the lawn representing security and calm that is the opposite of the chaos he sees daily in his neighborhood (the barrio). People of any age tend to look to others to see what they have – occasionally being jealous of what others seem to have. But, it is perfectly human to admire other people – especially in childhood.

Think back to your childhood. Who did you admire? **Write a narrative paragraph in which you tell a story about a person from your childhood that you admired. What drew you to that person? What characteristics made that person someone to look up to? And why? Do you still look up to that person? Why or why not?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Buried Onions, Day 7



Key Paragraph, p. 65

“‘Why did you do it, Eddie?’ he cried...‘I’m telling you, I didn’t do it!’ I told him I had gone to the dump, done my job, and picked up a refrigerator, and when I took it home, someone snagged his truck” (p. 65).

Writing Prompt

Eddie and Jose appear to be doing the right thing. They are returning the stolen truck back to the owner. However noble, maybe they should have called Mr. Stiles first rather than try to handle the situation themselves. **Write a narrative paragraph in which you describe a time in your life when you did the right thing even though it may have cost you a job, a trust, or friendship.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Buried Onions, Day 8



Key Paragraph, p. 72

“‘Little punks,’ Coach said, ‘I don’t know if they’re going to stay alive the way they act’” (p. 72).

Writing Prompt

The saying goes that a person gets wiser with age. In today’s reading Eddie sees a lot of his younger self in the faces of kids like Samuel and others in his neighborhood. Are there any friends that you no longer keep in touch with or talk to because you have “outgrown” your younger self? **Write a narrative paragraph in which you describe a time when you realized that you had nothing in common with your childhood friends. How did you know? How did it make you feel? What were you doing when you first realized it?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Buried Onions, Day 9



Key Paragraph, p. 81

“I returned the next day toward the evening and told him (Lupe) that his asshole brother was messing up and if I had my way I was going to kick his ass” (p. 81).

Writing Prompts

Responsibility is the active side of morality and includes doing what is best for everybody. In today’s reading selection, Eddie did what he thought was best for everyone by telling Lupe that his brother was messing up. The way Lupe handled it may not have been appropriate, but one can assume that Eddie had good intentions in that he wanted to help Samuel. And by helping Samuel, Eddie would be doing what is best for everyone in the community.

Write a narrative describing a time when you did the best thing to better the community. Or, have you ever witnessed such an act. Or, has anyone tried to help you and upon reflection you realize that s/he was trying to do what was best for the community.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Buried Onions, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 94

“I wanted to get out of Fresno, but at the same time it alarmed me. I was nineteen and I hadn’t been anywhere – two times to L.A. an four times to Sacramento. But Sacramento didn’t count. It looked a lot like Fresno” (p. 94).

Writing Prompt

Eddie wants to leave Fresno, but he is scared. Understandable, change can be frightening even if it seems the right thing to do. In fact, even when it seems the best thing for you. **Write a narrative in which you describe a time in your life that you were afraid to make a change. Why were you afraid? Did you actually try the change? What was the result of the change? If you did not follow through with the change, why not?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Buried Onions, Day 11



Key Paragraph, p. 101

“... I didn’t have to knock on Mr. Stile’s door. He was in the garage, wearing safety goggles, sawing planks the length of a coffin.

‘Eddie,’ he said.

We shook hands. I told him how sorry I was about his truck. ‘I wouldn’t steal from you,’ I nearly blubbered. I was glad to be trusted. I felt that would slave for this man, work until there was nothing left in my shoulders and back” (p. 101).

Writing Prompt

Eddie has always felt that Mr. Stiles was a great man and that he wanted Mr. Stiles to trust and believe in him. Have you ever broken a trust or bond between you and a family member or friend? **Write a narrative in which you describe a time where you were no longer trusted by a friend, family member. How did it make you feel? Describe the incident in which the trust was lost. Were you able to repair the trust? Use detailed examples and feelings to write you paragraph.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Buried Onions, Day 12



Key Paragraph, p. 109

“In those two days I wavered between hate for Mr. Stiles to something like love for him because he was the kind of guy who was putting together a life for his family. I still couldn’t make up my mind” (p. 109).

Writing Prompt

Write a narrative paragraph in which you describe a time in your life when you could not make up your mind if someone was trying to help you or hurt you. Include how it made you feel and if today you believe the same thing as you did when it was happening. In other words, today, do you believe the person was trying to help you or harm you?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Buried Onions, Day 13



Key Paragraph, p. 120

“We stopped at a drive-in dairy and bought bottles of chocolate milk. We each got our own bottle, nearly as cold as the river. We drank them leaning on a fence, our bellies filling with that *beautiful childhood liquid*. In the dusk, in the quiet before actual night, cows chewed their grass and the flies chewed their cows” (p. 120).

Writing Prompt

Write a narrative paragraph in which you describe your favorite childhood memories. Describe the people, events, and places that brought you great happiness. Try and use as many of your senses as possible to paint the picture. Describe why these memories are so memorable and important to you.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Buried Onions, Day 14



Key Paragraph, p. 138

“Instead of taking the elevator we took the stairs, and whether it was God’s choice or the devil’s I don’t know, but at the landing at the bottom stood Angel, his eye swollen from a row of new stitches” (p. 138).

Writing Prompt

In today’s selection, the author writes, “Maybe there was no way to look back. Maybe we should stare into the future. I didn’t even try to help with the rearview mirror.” This statement came from a car ride that Eddie and Jose were taking to the hospital. But, looking back helps people learn about the future. When a person reflects on past behavior that led to trouble, the person hopefully learns to modify future behavior. **Write a narrative describing a past event that led to trouble for you and discuss what you learned from it. Then, write about what you can do differently if the same thing happened in the future.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
***Buried Onions*, Day 15 and Final Assignment**



Key Paragraph, p. 146

“... I hurried over the clods, my legs suddenly heavy, hurried to meet these brothers. I slowed to a stop. I stood within a yard of them and could have touched their faces but knew it wouldn't be right. They were dirty but hard-muscled, these men who were sweaty but making a living from leftovers” (p. 146).

Final Assignment:

Unit: Responsibility Requires Action

Novel: *Buried Onions* by Gary Soto

Final Assignment: Autobiographical Essay

Task: Write an autobiographical essay.

Directions

Over the past three weeks, you have read the novel *Buried Onions* by Gary Soto. In the novel, Soto guides the reader through the life of a young Mexican-American growing up in Fresno, California – in a neighborhood burdened with violence, frustration, and anger. But the main character, Eddie, believes there is more to life than the violence and depression. Throughout the story the reader is given insight into Eddie's views through his reflections and commentary on the happenings around him. He shares who he is and what he hopes for through the story.

Using the writing snapshots you kept over the three weeks, write an autobiography sharing a period of time in your life. You should use the section on Autobiographical Writing to guide you through this exercise.

Remember that one paragraph should flow into the next. In order to produce this effect, you may have to re-write some sentences or paragraphs from your daily snapshots. You may also need to add leading or unifying sentences at the beginning or end of paragraphs to aid your reader in following the direction of your essay.

- Type your essay.
- Spell check it.
- Save it.
- Print and trade with a peer. Edit each other's essay using the rubric discussed in class.
- Revise your essay.
- Save and print again.

If you have a portfolio, place the final autobiographical writing inside the folder.