

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 1



Key Paragraph

"Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve, and hope without an object cannot live." -Coleridge

Writing Prompt

Think about a time when you have worked really hard on something when there seemed to be no point to it. How did that feel? How does it feel different when you are working toward a goal that has meaning?

What's a goal you have today? What work do you need to do to get there? What role does hope play in helping you to keep working?

Using the questions above as a guide, write an informative or explanatory paragraph. In addition, explain/make predictions about the novel, given the title? Use proper formatting and organize your ideas, use the above quotation and support it with facts. Give relevant information to support your topic.

-OR-

Key Paragraph, p. 9

"While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for? My heart sang and my feet were light as I went about my work, getting up at sunrise and going to sleep content. Peace and quiet were ours. How well I recall it, how grateful I am that not all the clamor which invaded our lives later could subdue the memory or still the longing for it. Rather, it has strengthened it: had there not been what has been, I might never have known how blessed we were" (p. 9).

Writing Prompt

Think about a time in your life that you experienced hardship. How did that experience make you appreciate the simple things in life? (Maybe being in the Hall makes you appreciate freedom. What do you have to do to stay out of trouble and out of the Hall?)

Write a paragraph explaining your thoughts. (Discuss the notion that *Rukmani* is able to look back on those moments that were peaceful with much more appreciation because of the hardship she faced. Hardship can make us appreciate the simple things in life—food, shelter, family, and love). Introduce your topic with a strong thesis. Utilize quotations and support them with facts to strengthen your writing. Provide a strong conclusion to your writing.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 2



Key Paragraph, p. 24

"But we never went hungry as some families were doing. We grew our own plantains and coconuts, the harvests were good and there was always food in the house—at least a bagful of rice, a little dahl if not more. Then when the rice terraces were drained, there was the fish, spawned among the paddy, and what we could not eat, we dried and salted away. And every month I put a rupee or two against the time Ira would be married. So we still could not grumble" (p. 24).

Writing Prompt

Change requires a vision, a plan, and effort. Rukmani and the family are currently in a period of good fortune. However, Rukmani is taking advantage of the fortune and saving for Ira's wedding and also for a period in time that they may not have so much. She has a plan.

Think of a time that you were having good luck and fortune. Did you use that time to plan for a rainy day?

Read the story below called "Sleeping Through the Storm." Can you sleep through a storm? Do you use the good times when you are doing well and thriving to save for a rainy day?

Write about a time that you planned ahead and were able to "sleep through a storm." Inform/explain to your reader, what you did to "*sleep through the storm*" How did that planning make you feel? Did you have to make sacrifices to plan ahead? How will that planning help you in your future? As you write, organize your topic and ideas. Use relevant facts and information to support your writing. Utilize quotations if appropriate. Use precise language and a formal style to support your writing. Provide a concluding statement that expands on and supports your thesis.

"Sleeping Through the Storm"

Author Unknown

Years ago, a farmer owned land along the Atlantic seacoast. He constantly advertised for hired hands. Most people were reluctant to work on farms along the Atlantic. They dreaded the awful storms that raged across the Atlantic, wreaking havoc on the buildings and crops. As the farmer interviewed applicants for the job, he received a steady stream of refusals.

Finally, a short, thin man, well past middle age, approached the farmer. "Are you a good farm hand?" the farmer asked him.

"Well, I can sleep when the wind blows," answered the little man.

Although puzzled by this answer, the farmer, desperate for help, hired him. The little

man worked well around the farm, busy from dawn to dusk, and the farmer felt satisfied with the man's work.

Then one night the wind howled loudly in from offshore.

Jumping out of bed, the farmer grabbed a lantern and rushed next door to the hired hand's sleeping quarters. He shook the little man and yelled, "Get up! A storm is coming!

Tie things down before they blow away!"

The little man rolled over in bed and said firmly, "No sir. I told you, I can sleep when the wind blows."

Enraged by the response, the farmer was tempted to fire him on the spot. Instead, he hurried outside to prepare for the storm.

To his amazement, he discovered that all of the haystacks had been covered with tarpaulins. The cows were in the barn, the chickens were in the coops, and the doors were barred. The shutters were tightly secured. Everything was tied down.

Nothing could blow away. The farmer then understood what his hired hand meant, so he returned to his bed to also sleep while the wind blew.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 3



Key Paragraph, p. 25; p. 28

“Change I had known before, and it had been gradual. My father had been a headman once, a person of consequence in our village: I had lived to see him relinquish this importance, but the alteration was so slow that we hardly knew when it came. I had seen both my parents sink into old age and death, and here too there was no violence. But the change that now came into my life, into all our lives, blasting its way into our village, seemed wrought in the twinkling of an eye” (p. 25).

“‘Foolish woman,’ Nathan said. ‘There is no going back. Bend like the grass, that you do not break’” (p. 28).

Writing Prompt

Think about a time in your life when change came suddenly. How did it feel? Did it throw you off? How did you cope? What did you learn about yourself from the experience? How could you apply what you learned to future experiences?

In terms of the second quote, what does Nathan mean? How does being flexible help us deal with change?

Write an informative/explanatory text in which you explain to your reader how critical a positive response to change is. Introduce your topic. Organize your ideas so you can connect a positive response to change and a positive outcome. Ensure your paragraph is formatted correctly. Expand your writing with concrete details, extend definitions, add quotes. Establish a formal style and use formal/concise language.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 4



Key Paragraph, p. 42

“At dusk the drums of calamity began; their grave, throbbing rhythm came clearly through the night, throughout the night, each beat, each tattoo, echoing the mighty impotence of our human endeavor. I listened. I could not sleep. In the sound of the drums I understood a vast pervading doom; but in the expectant silences between, my own disaster loomed larger, more consequent and more hurtful” (p. 42).

Writing Prompt

Think about a time when you knew things were not going to turn out well—like there was a pervading doom and you could not sleep. What happened? What part of that situation were you responsible for? What could you have done to prevent that situation from occurring? When things have happened to you, how have you dealt with them when they were not your fault?

Write a paragraph explaining your strategies for disaster. As you write use well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts to support your thesis. Provide a concluding statement that supports and expands on your thesis.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 47-48

“What they did in their houses I did not know, for they employed servants to do the work; but they stayed mostly indoors, or if they went out at all they went veiled in bourkas. It was their religion, I was told: they would not appear before any man but their husband. Sometimes, when I caught sight of a figure in voluminous draperies swishing through the streets under a blazing sun, or a face peering through a window or shutter, I felt desperately sorry for them, deprived of the ordinary pleasures of knowing warm sun and cool breeze upon their flesh, of walking out light and free, or of mixing with men and working beside them” (p. 47-48).

Writing Prompt

Take 5 minutes and write down everything you know about Muslims or people from India. Write down the answers on the board. Brainstorm with the class which responses are true and which may be stereotypes. **(Possible research topics generated here as well.) Write a few sentences about something you would like to learn more about.**

Think about a time you have seen someone dressed in a way that you thought was “strange.” What thoughts went through your head? What stereotypes do you think you have about different races? Different cultures? Different religions? Different genders? How would you feel if you were judged by something you did or wore if people did not know the meaning behind it? Humans are 99% the same. Only 1% of our genetic makeup is different. Why do you think there is so much hatred and prejudice against people who are different than we are? What can we do to change that?

Brainstorm ideas that answer the above questions as a class. Write one paragraph in which you explain to your reader why you feel there is hatred and prejudice toward people who are perceived as being different than you.

In a second paragraph explain what you can do to help change your attitude or other peoples attitudes to be less hateful.

In each paragraph introduce your topic in a well-organized fashion with relevant details to support your thesis. Use appropriate transitions to link supporting material and create cohesion. Use a formal style of writing. As you conclude that follows form and supports the material you provided your reader.

Week 1: Social Studies Research Opportunities

Find out more about:

Arranged marriages, dowries, gender roles in India, caste systems, and father/son expectations, the concept of “beauty,” Muslim customs, religion, Hindi language, Deepavali-Festival of Lights, industrialization, and natural disasters.

What has changed over time in India? What remains the same?

This research will help you write your final essay at the conclusion of the lesson.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 6



Key Paragraph, p. 67-68

“‘What is it that calls you?’ I said. ‘Is it gold? Although we have none, remember that money is not everything.’

‘It is an important part of living,’ he answered me patiently, ‘and work is another. There is nothing for us here, for we have neither the means to buy land nor to rent it. Would you have us wasting our youth chafing against things we cannot change?’” (p. 67-8).

Writing Prompt

Think about a time in your life when you have wanted to change something. What was it? What obstacles got in your way? How did you go about making the decision to try to change it or just to leave it? (problem solving strategies).

Write a paragraph in which you explain to your reader how you changed something important in your life. Introduce your topic. Organize your details and facts. If using quotations properly format them. Develop your topic with relevant details and facts. Use varied transitions and precise language. Provide a strong concluding statement that supports your thesis.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 7



Key Paragraph, p. 73

“‘Rather these should go,’ said Nathan, ‘than that the land should be taken from us; we can go without these, but if the land is gone our livelihood is gone, and we must thenceforth wander like jackals.’ He stared awhile at what we had to sell, and made an effort to say something and tried again and at last he said, choking, ‘The bullocks must go. Otherwise we shall not have enough’ (p. 73).

Writing Prompt

Rukmani and Nathan are trying to negotiate what belongings they have to sell to help save their land and home. Make a list of things you think they should get rid of and the things you think they should keep (at least 5 each).

When finished, prioritize the things that they should sell and those you think are most important to keep. Defend in writing why they need to keep the items you have on your list. Explain to your reader the significance of each item and how it can help them in the future. Introduce your writing and your topic to your readers. Support your thesis with relevant and concrete details. Add additional support material from other sources if that will help you support your topic. Provide a concluding statement in which you state the significance of your topic.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 8



Key Paragraph, p. 85

“It became possible for me to speak as well. I told him of her earlier visit and the grain she had extorted from me also; and it seemed to me that a new peace came to us then, freed at last from the necessity for lies and concealment and deceit, with the fear of betrayal lifted from us, and with the power we ourselves had given her wrested finally from Kunthi” (p. 85).

Writing Prompt

Think about a time in your life when you have told someone the truth about something that was difficult to admit. Did you feel relieved? What were the advantages of being honest?

Write a paragraph in which you explain to your reader the benefit of honesty, “*Honesty is the only policy.*” Organize your ideas to connect complex ideas. How can being dishonest end in a web of lies, etc.? Develop your topic with relevant details. Give examples that are relevant from the reading or from your experiences. Use appropriate transitions. Maintain a formal style in your writing. Provide a concluding statement that supports your topic.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 9



Key Paragraph, p. 90

“Compensation, I thought. What compensation is there for death? I felt confused, I did not understand what he was getting at. There was a pause. The timid man said kindly; ‘He was not brutally treated or anything you know. They merely tapped him with a lathi, as he was trying to escape, and he fell. He must have been very weak or something’” (p. 90).

Writing Prompt

Rukmani does not understand why the men are discussing compensation for Raja’s death. Think about a time that something bad happened to you and you wanted compensation. Do you think that people deserve compensation when bad things happen? How does compensation help people? Are there things that cannot be compensated? Do you think that money is appropriate compensation in death? What do you think is appropriate compensation? Take a moment to investigate your state’s compensation levels for loss of limb or life.

Write an explanatory paragraph in which you introduce the idea of compensation for such a loss. Give facts and details as they relate to your research. Explain why you think this practice is fair or not fair. Give logical reasons for your opinion. Use precise and formal language. Conclude your paragraph that helps support your introduction.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 94

“This has been a bad time but it is passing as all things must, and now it is not joy, which passes in a trice, but sorrow, which is slower in the going, and so one must be patient. A few more days’ waiting, a few more days’ anxiety—it is not beyond enduring, it is not too much to ask. This I thought as I lay there, listening to the sounds of sleep and lost in my own imaginings” (p. 94).

Writing Prompt

Why is it so hard to be patient? What can we say to ourselves that will help us cope during these times? Take 3 minutes to write down your ideas and then brainstorm as a class. Choose one technique that you have used to help you be patient.

Write an explanatory paragraph in which you detail how this technique has helped you. Inform your reader about this technique giving them steps of how to use it. Give facts and details, step-by-step instructions if needed. Use varied language to help transition through your topic and maintain a formal style.

Week 2: Social Studies Research Opportunities

Find out more about: farming in India, starvation, health care, funeral rituals, husband/wife expectations, and cultural norms about fate and destiny. Choose one topic and write a paragraph informing your audience about it. Cite your source.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 11



Key Paragraph, p. 106

“‘Save your wishes,’ he said unpleasantly. ‘My wife has left me. My sons have been taught to forget me.’

I tried and failed to imagine her, this woman who could after so many years renounce altogether her husband, break the bond that must surely have existed despite his long absences. Perhaps it is just this that has driven her to it, I thought. He is not without blame.

‘You think it is my fault,’ he said. ‘Do not deny it, your face speaks plainly enough for me.’

‘Women need men,’ I said, shrugging. ‘It is not right to deprive a woman.’

‘Tell me also, he said, ‘Do you not think a man must choose his work?’

‘Such a man as you, yes,’ I replied.

‘What then if his wife cannot accompany him?’

‘Cannot?’ I said. ‘She must. A woman’s place is with her husband’” (p. 106).

Writing Prompt

Rukmani believes it is a woman’s duty to follow her husband wherever he goes. Kenny has a different perspective about the possible relationship a husband and wife can have. Think of some ways Rukmani’s views differ from Kenny’s. Think about your views about the relationship a husband should have with his wife.

Write a paragraph in which you detail how a husband and wife’s role should be determined (culture, negotiation, ect). Explain to your reader how your culture and background plays a strong role in marriage and the roles that a husband and wife should assume. If your culture is lenient write a paragraph explaining how you will determine the roles of your future relationship. Organize your ideas clearly and coherently. Give facts and details to support your thesis. Use varied transitions and formal style. Provide a strong conclusion that supports your thesis.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 12



Key Paragraph, p. 111

“‘I have little understanding,’ I replied humbly. ‘I do not know why people who have not seen us and who know us not should do this for us.’

‘Because they have the means,’ he said, ‘and because they have learnt of your need. Do not the sick die in the streets because there is no hospital for them? Are not children born in the gutters? I have told you before,’ he said. ‘I will repeat it again: you must cry out if you want help. It is no use whatsoever to suffer in silence. Who will succour the drowning man if he does not clamour for his life?’” (p. 111).

Writing Prompt

Throughout the novel, Rukmani has accepted things that have happened to her as fate. Some of those things have been out of her control, like monsoons or drought. Other things, perhaps, have been in her control.

Do you think it is because she grew up in India that she believes she needs to accept things as they are? Or do you feel that is her individual choice? Or, perhaps is it a combination? How is this the same or different from people in the United States? From you, your friends, or your family? If you are victim to a natural disaster can you still control your outcome?

Write a paragraph in which you explain to your reader that individuals have control of their own fate. Give the reader facts to support your thesis. Use relevant websites, quotes, or information to support your thesis. Use strong and varied transitions to create cohesion. Establish and maintain formal style.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 13



Key Paragraph, p. 121-122

“‘You are being childish,’ Nathan said. ‘How long would a rupee have kept her?’

‘A few days at least,’ I said.

‘And what when those few days ran out?’

‘I don’t know . . . something may have turned up. It is a pity the hospital was not ready. She could have gone there.’

‘A hospital is not a soup kitchen,’ he said.

I did not know what he meant by a soup kitchen and I stared at him. He repeated the words, pleased that I did not.

‘Where the poor are fed free of charge,’ he explained. ‘In other countries Selvam tells me this is a fact’” (p. 121-122).

Writing Prompt

Nathan explains to Rukmani about a soup kitchen and how in other places the poor are fed. In their village many die due to starvation, yet they are building a hospital.

What need would you address? Do you think there is more need for a hospital or to provide food? Do you think it is a global responsibility to provide food to those who do not have it? What is the social implication of not giving to others? Is there a way that we can help others without giving, but by teaching?

Choose one of the issues above and address it in an explanatory paragraph. Write a strong thesis that introduces your topic. Add relevant data, quotes, or sources to support your ideas. Write in a formal style with good transitions. Conclude your paragraph by supporting your thesis.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 14

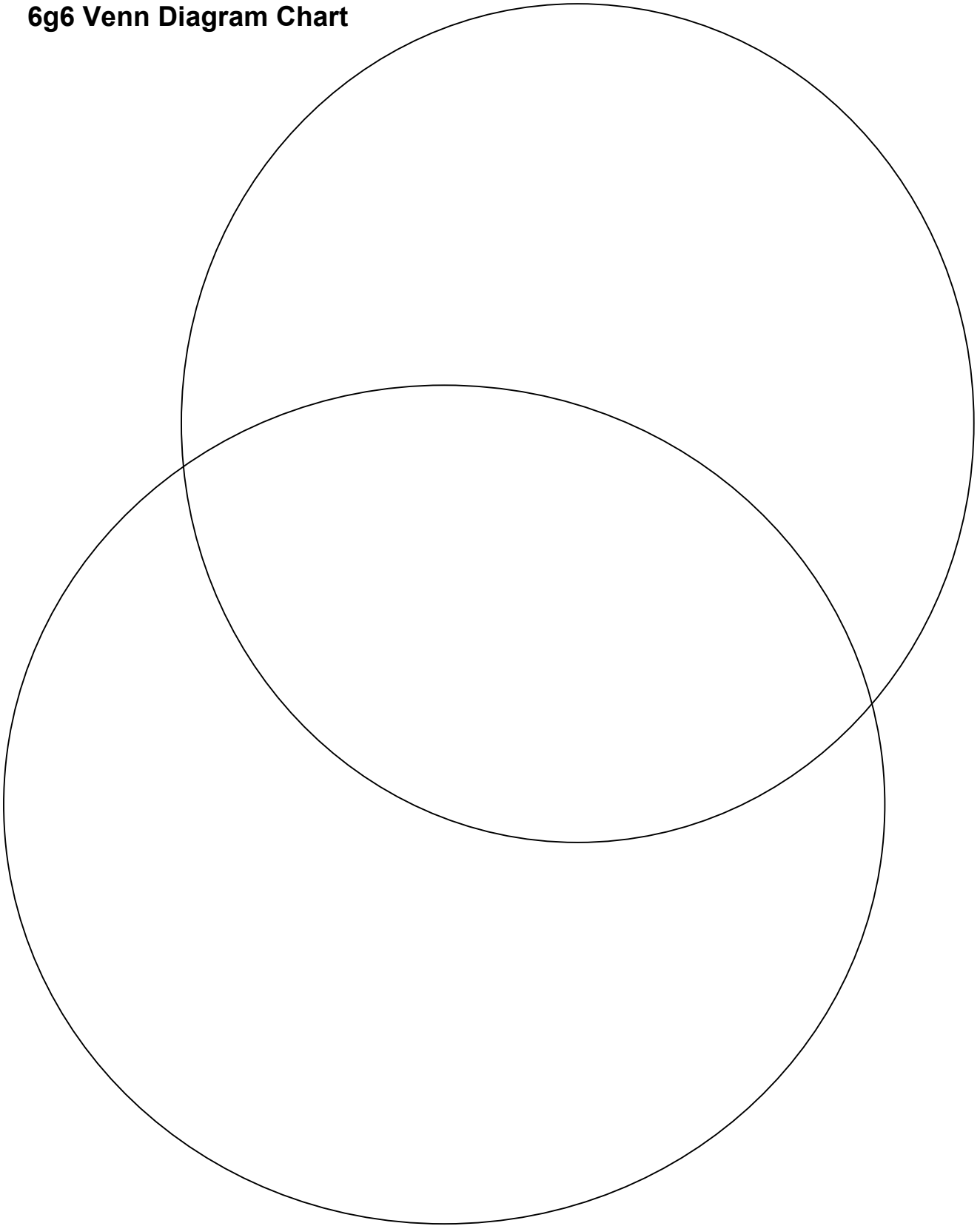


No key paragraph today.

Writing Prompt

Take out all the writing prompts Character Profile sheets you have completed. You will be using the Venn diagram sheet to examine both similar and different character traits between you and Rukmani. On one side of the diagram, list all of Rukmani's character traits. On the other, list yours. In the middle, where the circles meet, write down any that you share. Debrief as a class. Are there any that you missed?

Use this diagram to write a three-paragraph comparison of you and Rukmani. In your writing explain/inform your readers of your similarities. How can the similarities of two people be used to bridge cultural and gender gaps. Explain how you can build off the similarities in people to make certain aspects of life better. Use information from outside sources to support your statement. Be clear and concise. Conclude by restating your thesis.

6g6 Venn Diagram Chart

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 15



Key Paragraph, p. 139

"I took down the mats on which we slept from the wall where they hung and rolled them up. Inside I placed the cloth bundle which contained two ollocks of rice, some chilies, tamarind and salt, and the two wooden bowls, Nathan's and mine, tying the ends of the rolled mats to make sure nothing fell out of the way. Most of the cooking vessels I had brought with me on my marriage had been sold to pay our debts, of the remainder I left two for Ira and the other two I put aside for ourselves. The grindstone, pestle and mortar were too heavy to take" (p. 139).

Writing Prompt

The above paragraph describes the only material belongings left for Nathan and Rukmani. If you were asked to leave your home, how would your material belongings differ from that of this Indian couple? What would you try to take with you?

Write an informative/explanatory paragraph in which you show your reader what items you would take with you on a trip similar to Rukmani's. As you write make sure you consider what you are able to carry and the form of travel you will be taking. You can research survival or camping websites to assist you. Open with a strong thesis that enables you to convey your opening clearly. Give details and facts from relevant sources. Use varied transitions to link your text together. Establish a formal style.

Week 3: Social Studies Research Opportunities

Find out more about material goods in India versus the United States. Remember that in each society, there is a "caste" system of sorts, meaning that there will be both poor and wealthy people in each country. Perhaps choose one caste and focus on the differences between countries.

Or

Research medical concerns in India. One specific medical concern in India is leprosy. Has leprosy ever been a problem in the United States? Why or why not? Explain. Make sure you cite your sources.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 16



No key paragraph today.

Writing Prompt

Complete the cubing activity (attached).

Create a cube of the basic geography of India.

Pretend you are a travel agent or an agent of the Indian Travel and Tourist Council

Once you have completed your cube write a one-paragraph explanatory or informative text directed at clients who are not familiar with the country. Use the information from the cube to encourage visitors to come to your country. Be clear, concise, give factual information, and be descriptive. Give details about the country. Use varied transitions and precise language. Maintain a formal style as you write. Conclude with a statement that supports the information presented.

Types of Weather		
	Foods	
	Culture/Customs	Religion
		Landforms
Other Resources		

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nectar in a Sieve, Day 17



No key paragraph today.

Writing Prompt

Look back over your daily writings and compare and contrast different aspects of Indian culture with life in the US. Include information on marriage rituals, the caste/class system, housing, natural disasters and climate, possessions, and relationships and roles of family members.