

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 1



Key Paragraph, p. 10

“When you are young and dumb as I was, you don’t think of the consequences of your actions. When I think back to this night, I think, ‘I didn’t even know Caesar well enough to give my life for him, and what if we did kill someone? For what? For someone I didn’t even know? For a cause that wasn’t even noble?’” (p. 10).

Writing Prompt

People often make exceptions to their rules or principles for a cause that is noble. In today’s reading, young Art convinces himself that fighting for the east side and Caesar is a noble cause. As he reflects back on his decisions, however, he realizes how that one choice permanently altered his life and impacted the lives of people he loved for many years to come.

Write an argumentative paragraph about a time when you had to set aside a rule or principle that you believed in for a cause you believed to be noble. Describe the setting, the people involved, and the situation. Explain logically why it made sense for you to set aside your beliefs and provide reasoning to your decision. As you look back at the situation, would you do the same thing again? Would you adhere to what you believe in? Why or why not?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 2



Key Paragraph, p. 25

“My mother didn’t know what was in store for her, all the worrying she was going to experience for the next few years” (p. 25).

Writing Prompt

Sometimes when we make decisions, especially when it is in the heat of the moment, we don’t consider all of the possible people who our actions might affect. This is why it is important to pause before reacting to an emotional situation.

Write 1-2 analytical paragraphs explaining the different perspectives on this situation. How does Arthur view it? How does his mother view it? How do his siblings view it? Use descriptive language and details offered in the reading to support your writing.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 3



Key Paragraph, p. 36

"Now, here I was, such a good fighter and loving it. Look where it got me—at the police station being questioned for murder!" (p. 36).

Writing Prompt

Sometime we receive affirmations from our peers for being good at something that does not have a positive influence on the world, like fighting. Think about something you are good at or that you like to do that IS positive.

Using concrete details describe what you are good at in 1-2 paragraphs. Use detailed descriptive language. Explain how that activity has helped you make positive decisions. Does that activity have a good coach or mentor? Are you able to help others and make your community better? Relate how you impact others or how others help you in that activity to make you better.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 4



Key Paragraph, p. 55

“Around noon one guard came to my cell to see how I was doing. I told him I was not doing very well; my tooth was getting worse. He opened the door and entered. He was a young Chicano. I like this man because I could see compassion in his eyes. He talked to me in a mild tone; it showed his feelings for me. He seemed to be the nicest guard of all” (p. 55).

Writing Prompt

Today we meet two different paternal figures: Arthur’s dad and the Chicano guard. What do you think Arthur wants you to understand by comparing these two characters?

In a 1-2 comparative paragraphs, compare and contrast Arthur’s dad and the Chicano Guard. Use a clear, concise thesis statement to introduce your comparison. Give two examples for each character from the reading that support your thesis.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 78

"I looked forward to visiting with my mother and family on Sunday's. We were only allowed one, one-hour visit a week. The visiting room had a small stool to sit on, with a plate glass in front, and a phone to talk through. This was no fun. My mother always looked tired and sad" (p. 78).

Writing Prompt

Arthur realizes that his actions have affected others, especially his mother. Although he likes getting visits, he would like to think that this is not how his life was supposed to turn out. He wishes he could have done something different.

Think about a time in your life for which you would like to have a "do-over". This would be a time that you wish you could do something different to produce a different outcome.

You will have one opportunity in life for your "Do Over". Write 1-2 argumentative paragraphs in a letter format persuading your reader to let you have a "Do Over". Introduce your argument, explain the significance of it, and address how others may argue against you Structure your arguments in a logical fashion supported by reasons and evidence.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 6



Key Paragraph, p. 96

"I wondered what was waiting for me at Perkins. Was I going to have to fight a lot there? With whom? How much would I have to do? Where would I go after Perkins? All these questions were racing through my mind. Thinking about these things was kind of spooky—going somewhere I have never been before and not knowing what I was going to encounter in the unknown" (p. 96).

Writing Prompt

Arthur committed his crime as a teenager. However, he is being tried as an adult. He has been transferred from "Juvi" to the county jail next door. Do you think it is right for teenagers to be tried as an adult?

In 2 argumentative paragraphs make a claim about whether or not Arthur should be tried as an adult. Is he a teenager who made a mistake and should have a second chance or a teenager acting as an adult who should be severely punished? Be sure to make an argument supporting your claim with reasoning and evidence.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 7



Key Paragraph, p. 116

“Once in my room, I was reminded of Juvenile. There was nothing to do. At least in Juvenile, if I was a good reader, I could read. In lockup there was nothing to read. Not even a magazine. I had a small window with nothing to see but a wall of a building. What I learned to do really well was use my imagination. I could go anywhere I wanted and be anyone I wanted to be. Of course, I thought of things I did when I was home and things I was going to do when I returned” (p. 116).

Writing Prompt

Imagine you are Arthur, lying in his cell thinking about what you are going to be on the outside. How are you going to change your life? What will you do differently?

Write 1-2 argumentative paragraphs about how you will change your life around life for the better. What is going to be different when you get out? Be as specific as you can be by making a claim, addressing the problems you will fix, solutions to those problems, how others will support you, and what others may think of your change. While being specific, make sure it serves as evidence as to why you will change for the better.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 8



Key Paragraph, p. 129

“Time went by slowly. Everybody told me it should be going by fast, but it wasn’t. I received letters from home all the time. My mother would be coming to see me soon. My poor mother wanted to see me every week, but money was a problem. Later on I learned my mother paid half of the lawyer’s fee; my father the other half. She came to visit every few months, not too often. I didn’t realize it then, but it was better that way. Guys who had a lot of visits had a harder time. They saw their families often and missed home even more. Some guys received packages every week, full of cartons of cigarettes and canned foods” (p. 129).

Writing Prompt

Jail life is often glamorized in the movies. What elements of jail do you think people are fascinated by? Based on what you have read so far, think of all of the ways “jail life” is unglamorous. Think of the things you have that you would not want to lose in your daily life. You have many freedoms that jail takes away. Use these examples to support your writing.

In 1-2 argumentative paragraphs support your claim that jail life is unglamorous with reasoning and evidence from the book. Use at least one direct quote from today’s reading to back up your argument.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 9



Key Paragraph, p. 145

“Walking into the visitor center, I looked around for my mother. She was nowhere to be found. At first, I thought it had to be a mistake; no one was there to visit me. The visiting center was a very large room, like a big hall with a lot of people. As I stood there trying to see if I would recognize anyone before turning around and walking back, I saw my father stand up. I couldn’t believe it. My father was there! I didn’t think he would come all the way to California, to see little old me. I didn’t think I was that important since I didn’t think that much for me. He and I had experienced a lot of problems before he left for Mexico” (p. 145).

Writing Prompt

This is Arthur’s father’s first attempt at making things up to Arthur for the way he used to treat him. From Arthur’s tone, one can tell that it means a lot to him. For Arthur, there are a few people he needs to fix his relationship with.

In an argumentative paragraph, choose one relationship that Arthur needs to fix. Have Arthur make a claim as to why he needs to fix this relationship. Explain the situation and reasons why Arthur needs to fix it. Describe his point of view about the situation and how the other person may argue against Arthur’s view. Convey your ideas logically and correctly.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 157

“After ninety days I went to the board on the date I was originally supposed to go. I thought for sure I was going to be released. I entered the room and sat down. One of the board members looked up at me and said, ‘Murder is a very serious crime. We’re going to give you another year.’ I almost fell off my chair. I didn’t know if I could take another year at Preston. I wanted to go home right then” (p. 157).

Writing Prompt

So far, this is the most that has been said about the kid(s) that died at the party. Pretend you are on the parole board. Think about what you want Arthur to learn about justice, restraint, and change while he is incarcerated. How can he show he has made the effort to change? Do not forget to mention the victims’ families. What would you like to see Arthur do to ask forgiveness from the families? Keep in mind that he killed two people.

Write two opposing arguments. The first will be from Arthur to the parole board arguing why he should be let out of Preston early. The second will be from the parole board to Arthur saying why he should stay. The parole board’s argument should start with, “Murder is a serious crime...” Both arguments should make a claim supported by reasons and evidence.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 11



Key Paragraph, p. 176

“As I stepped in, I just couldn’t believe it. Again! I looked up at the ceiling and what did I see up there etched in the wall? ‘ART WAS HERE’. It sent a chill up my back! Bringing my hands up to my face once again rubbing them against it and feeling frustrated, I sat on the bottom bunk. I couldn’t believe I was back for some dumb crime. I stood up and looked at the top bunk to see if anyone else was there. I thought I heard somebody breathing. Someone was sleeping all wrapped up in a blanket” (p. 176).

Writing Prompt

Arthur’s life has come full circle. Some would say that he is just a victim of circumstance—in the wrong place at the wrong time. While this might be true to a certain extent, Arthur cannot afford to find himself in this position anymore.

Write an argumentative paragraph about why being an accessory to a crime is still a criminal act. Make a clear claim, supported strongly with reasons, and have a strong conclusion.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 12



Key Paragraph, p. 179

"The detective continued, 'And as far as your parole officer is concerned, you don't have to tell him anything, because we are not going to notify him. Your buddies told us what went down.' He stood up from his chair. I also stood up and shook his hand, thank you for the break. I also asked him to thank the other cops for releasing me. Before I walked out, he told me to keep out of trouble. 'That is a hard thing for me to do,' I said to myself" (p. 179).

Writing Prompt

Arthur is starting to make some good decisions; however, he continues to associate with people that bring him down. Fortunately, his friends told the truth. What do you think Arthur should do to make some changes and stay out of trouble? As you write, think about obtainable goals that Arthur could start with.

In an argumentative paragraph, describe at least three things Arthur needs to stop or start doing to change his life. Use a clear thesis statement, explain your reasoning, and make clear, concise details to support your claims.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 13



Key Paragraph, p. 193

“Uncle Joe shot himself in the head a few years later, having become depressed with life. Later on Aunt Maryann divorced Uncle Alfred. A few years after that, Uncle Alfred died from a bad liver, the result of having a wild life. Uncle Ray died a few years later, also from the same illness, a bad liver” (p. 193).

Writing Prompt

Arthur lost three relatives at a young age due to the negative effects of drinking, and he has spent time in YA due to bad decision-making while drinking. His relationship with his parents has suffered and so has his job. Based on today’s reading, think about the direct effects that alcohol has had on every situation. Put yourself in each person’s shoes to gain their perspective. Also consider Arthur’s grandparents, who lost two sons at a young age because they “partied”.

Write 2-3 argumentative paragraphs against abusing alcohol. Make a clear claim, supported with anecdotal evidence from today’s reading and the background information provided at the beginning of the lesson. Include a quote from the text. Use a strong conclusion statement.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 14



Key Paragraph, p. 200-201

“They didn’t take me in, but they did take all my uncles. It was no light matter. My uncles had to go to court many times, for months. They had to hire lawyers, and it cost them a lot of money. Finally the court process was over. They all had to pay fines and go to jail for awhile. It sure wasn’t worth it, beating up the cops and having to pay so much. I was having a difficult time staying out of trouble. Would I straighten out my life? If I did, when? Would I get caught for some of the things I was doing and be sent back to jail? Would I end up dead like some of my old friends? Some of my friends were living on the streets. Others overdosed on drugs. Still others were killed. How was I going to end up?” (p. 200-2001).

Writing Prompt

Arthur knows he has to stay out of trouble with the police. In today’s reading, Arthur decides that “backing up” his uncles and grandfather is a “noble cause”. Look at the paragraph above. Think about noble causes.

Using the above paragraph, write an argumentative paragraph about whether “backing up” his family was a noble cause or not. Use examples from today’s reading and your own experiences as evidence to support your claim. Explain what alternatives Arthur had based on the situation.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 15



Key Paragraph, p. 206

"The next morning, my friend Art told me Noah had a knife about eight inches long. He had been holding it under his shirt. Art told me he thought I was going to be stabbed. I became really upset. 'Today I'm not loaded. I don't like that guy anyway. I'm going to get him for pulling a knife on me!' I went looking for Noah in the neighborhood and was planning to fight him. Later we met, but nothing happened. We both felt everything was over between us, and that's where it stayed" (p. 206).

Writing Prompt

As Arthur grows older, he is beginning to realize that his actions affect others, positively and negatively. He is also learning that sometimes you can go back and right the wrongs you have committed. He is beginning to realize how it frees him to move on with his life. Think about your own life. Have you ever gone back to right a wrong? The situation does not have to be a crime it can be a relationship that needed repair or a situation you wanted to fix.

Write an argumentative paragraph about a time when you were wrong. Argue against yourself being wrong and why you were wrong. Support your arguments with reason and evidence.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 16



Key Paragraph, p. 223

"My father was proud of me? I always had the impression he didn't love me. Maybe I was always wrong. My father gave me a look of approval. A second later he turned his attention to Max" (p. 223).

Writing Prompt

Arthur realizes for the first time that his father was proud of him. Think about how astonished you would feel the first time you realized you were loved.

In a 2-paragraph letter, pretend you are Pepe, and apologize to your son for one of the times you unjustly punished him. Describe the situation, explain your point of view, admit that you did something wrong, and explain what you would like to do to make things right. Be prepared to clarify any misunderstandings, biases, and expectations.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 17



Key Paragraph, p. 235

“When we got in the car and drove off, we knew we did all right. My father was in a pleasant mood. From that year on we worked in the field every summer” (p. 235).

Writing Prompt

Art Rodriguez has included many flashbacks in this novel. In this situation you are able to see how the lessons he learned in the past could be used as he in working in the present.

In an argumentative paragraph, explain what message the author is trying to get across with the flashback about working in the field as Arthur describes working at Owens Corning and driving a Mack Truck. Use a thesis, construct an argument, and support it with evidence from today’s reading.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 18



Key Paragraph, p. 249

“What I want you to do right away, Art is paint them your color. I don’t want them to look like my dumpsters. I’ll sell them to you for \$100.00 each, and you can pay me later when you have the money.’

What a generous man!” (p. 249).

Writing Prompt

Arthur’s father has taught him the value of hard work and respect. Read the key paragraph above. This is the second time that someone has helped Arthur in a very generous way. These people are assets to Arthur. Think back to the beginning two-thirds of the book. Did his friends want to see Arthur be successful? Why do you think that people want to see Arthur succeed and why are they willing to help him?

In an argumentative paragraph, explain the different people who wanted to support Arthur and those who did not. Use events and examples from the book to support your decisions. Be sure to support your claim with evidence.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

East Side Dreams, Day 19



Key Paragraph, p. 266

"I was shocked! I couldn't believe it at that instant. It took a few seconds for it to sink in. Then I cried and cried and cried. So did my brothers and sister. We grew to love my father a lot. Even though he was abusive when we young, he was a good man. He had a good heart. He just had his ways and was brought up in a hard way" (p. 266).

Writing Prompt

Arthur has learned to love his father and to understand him. Because of that understanding, he was able to forgive him and forge a new relationship with him that he valued.

Do you feel like Arthur's father "did the best he could"? Support your claim with evidence from the book and experiences from your own life. As you write, think about the changes that have occurred in your life as well to help you come to this conclusion.