

Jesse



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Author Soto, Gary

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Genre Young Adult Literature

Synopsis Jesse struggles with transition to independent living, working conditions of Mexican Americans, and the tensions caused by the Vietnam War. Jesse works hard to save money for college and find a way out of poverty.

Themes Prejudice, Family Relations, Poverty

Protagonist Male, Mexican American

Note Over the years, these books have been published in multiple editions. The page numbers in your book may be different than the ones on the lesson plan.

More Information www.scu.edu/character



Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 1



Key Paragraph Pg. 9

“This was me, a boy getting ahead. Most of our cousins my age were cutting lawns or pounding nails into new houses. Some were pregnant. One was in jail with tattoos riding up and down his body. Abel and I wanted to do something really big. We were Mexican and we knew it would be a struggle. Mexican jobs weren’t good jobs, though Cesar Chavez and others were trying to change this by marching up and down the valley. We would march too, and we would listen up when our teachers talked.”

Writing Prompt

Read the key paragraph. What may they be trying to “escape” other than just their unhappy home with their mom and stepdad? Do you agree or disagree with the boys, Abel (19) and Jesse (17), moving out on their own? If you were in a similar situation would you move out of your home and fend for yourself along with the help of a close sibling? What social factors do Abel and Jesse face that make it increasingly difficult to survive? **Write an argumentative paragraph predicting what you think will happen with Jesse and Abel; do you believe they will succeed or fail in their quest for success and independence, why or why not?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 2



Key Paragraph Pg. 12-13:

“Do you think Cesar Chavez can really change things?” I asked Abel...

Abel stared at the water. He chewed his carrot and after a long silence remarked, “I can’t do this no more.” “What?” I asked. “Chop cotton,” he said.

[Jesse] But except for picking grapes, I told him field work was easy. All you had to do was wake up really early and then go to bed really early and we would feel OK. “You are thinking like a slave,” Abel said.

Writing Prompt

In the key paragraph we hear both Abel and Jesse’s opposing opinions on the issue of working a laborer. Jesse argues it is easy work and the pay is enough to get by. Abel counters that with remarking Jesse is thinking like a slave. What do you think Abel means by that slave comment? Do you agree with Jess or Able? **Write 2 argumentative paragraphs, one as Jesse defending the position of working in the fields and the other as Abel who sees it differently.**

Another possible Writing Assignment: How does Cesar Chavez optimize the theme Change Requires Effort? What changes did he fight for? Who worked alongside him? What was his motivation? What effort did it take for him to promote change? **In an argumentative paragraph defend the position that Cesar Chavez optimized Change Requires Effort.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 3



Key Paragraph Pg. 24:

“I knew Chavez was a great man and I knew that it would be a good thing to picket for the farm workers. But I would lose sixteen dollars, not counting the fifty cents I’d spend for gas. I worried that I wouldn’t make it to the end of the semester.”

Writing Prompt

What did Cesar Chavez want for the farm workers? In what way does his vision have impact on people like Jesse? What do you think you would do in Jesse’s shoes; would you miss work and support the cause knowing you were tight on money or not?

Write an argumentative paragraph explaining if you are for or against Jesse joining “the fight”? Use evidence to support your claim.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 4



Key Paragraph Pg. 36:

Even in the dark, I could see a few ants struggling over the tallest blades, a terrible wilderness for them. I felt I was losing my brother to Glenda, a girl we didn't really know, and in the end I would be left looking down at my empty palms.

Writing Prompt

Jesse remarks, "It's for the cause." (pg. 27). What is meant by "The Cause" or *La causa*? What cause are they fighting for in this book? What other causes were people fighting for in the 1960's? How are they related? What are people fighting for today? Often times fighting for a cause involves sacrifice; for example Jesse is sacrificing his Saturday pay. **Write 1-2 argumentative paragraphs about a current cause worth fighting for; include what you would be willing to sacrifice for this cause?**

Alternate writing assignment: Or if you struggle to identify a cause in an argumentative paragraph write about the difference of the youth described in this novel (and the many other of the 1960's) who picket, boycott, and get involved and compare them to today's youth. Do you see your generation as more or less involved with causes/politics? Why/why not?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 5



Key Paragraph Pg. 45:

“Some really deep air left my body in a sigh, and I could feel my eyes get moist. Not yet twenty; did my brother know what he was doing?”

Writing Prompt

Jesse continues to express concern about Abel's possible interest in Glenda. At first it appears to be simple jealousy but in today's reading there is something more to Jesse's concern. What facts about Glenda and his brother concern him? Does her having a baby or her age or both play into Jesse's concern? Is Jesse's concern coming from a good place? Is he worried it will deter his brother from his goals? Do you agree or disagree with Jesse's concern? **In an argumentative paragraph, write to Abel as Jesse, sharing your concern for his further involvement with Glenda.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 6



Key Paragraph Pg. 49:

“The day moved slowly; the crucifix-like shadow of the telephone pole crawled across the road. We crawled as well, chanting, and I began to recognize the faces I passed, those of old men and women, their skin lined, their hair matted behind bandanas and hats. They were the faces of my grandparents, who had all been field workers at one time and who now peeled potatoes or sorted fruit for a living.”

Writing Prompt

“Part of being socially responsible is accepting the task of individual action. Civil disobedience, non-violent-protests, and rebellion permeate American history and its literature—both fiction and informational. Cesar Chavez was a twentieth-century activist, and like so many American activists before him, Chavez understood the importance of young people to a social cause—their voices and their beliefs.”

Jesse describes the scene of the Delano protest. Do you think this is a worthwhile form of promoting change? Is it a dangerous situation? What are some potential hazards to such a form of protest? What other forms of protest are there? Write an argumentative paragraph defending your position.

Source:

<https://tools.discoveryeducation.com/writingprompt/viewWritingPrompt.cfm?guidAssetId=3F7E7659-0C10-4EFF-BA2A-61ADC7BC6111&assetGuid=3F7E7659-0C10-4EFF-BA2A-61ADC7BC6111&bInPopup=1&strEditCopy=Copy&bInPlayer=1>

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 7



Key Paragraph Pg. 57:

“Leave him alone?” my stepfather growled. “What am I doing to him?”

“You’re ruining his dinner,” my mother scolded.

“Who paid for this food? This is my house!” he yelled, almost out of his chair. He took a drink from his beer, one eye on me.

I looked down at my *mole*. I wondered how long he would live. He was almost fifty, and his heart must be used up—a small heart for a large man. He ate and drank, and now was filled with anger.

Writing Prompt

What does Jesse mean when he wonders if his stepfather’s heart is all used up? In what way do you think being angry hurts our health? Are there healthy and unhealthy ways to express anger? **Write one argumentative paragraph defend the position regarding how anger and bitterness can damage our health and lessen our lives.**

Another possible writing assignment: What does college represent for Jesse and Able? Does it require effort to stay in college? What sacrifices is Jesse making to attend college? **In an argumentative paragraph, write whether or not you agree or disagree that college will alter Jesse’s future. Or do you think college will do little to change Jesse’s future?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 8



Key Paragraph Pg. 76:

Then Abel asked quietly, "Do you ever think about Dad?"

"Yes," I whispered through my blanket.

"Do you miss him?"

"Yes, and mom misses him, too," I said. "Abel come on, no more."

"We never talked about our father. He lived in our hearts and in the photograph of us on his shoulders at the beach in Santa Monica."

Writing Prompt

Absentee Fathers: The issue of absentee fathers, both by death and by choice, comes up in the reading. Is there a different affect on the sons/daughters depending on the reason for being absent? How so? How can having an absent parent be a hardship? **In an argumentative paragraph, take a position and defend it.**

Another possible writing assignment: So many people flee to beach cities for Spring Break and or Vacation. What does the sea represent? Why do Abel and Jesse select this destination? **In an argumentative paragraph, first select a location for pure relaxation from the stresses and pressures of life and argue in support of it being the ideal spot for a mini-vacation.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 9



Key paragraph Pg. 86:

“Raul cut him off. He stepped toward the camera and yelled louder than necessary, in English, then Spanish, that the government was full of no-good gavachos and stupid pig cops, and if they didn’t watch out, everything was going to change hands. Raul snapped his fingers and said, “Bombs will fall on you people! *Entiendes?* The *cholos* and *cholas* are gonna come down on you.”

Writing Prompt

Raul is more aggressive and forward than Jesse. He takes a more intense approach as he fights for “the cause”. Does it take more effort to speak calmly or resort to violence in the face of adversity? Do you think his method is successful in forwarding the cause, why/why not? Do you think he will last in this cause? Do you think his behavior and aggressive approach will lead him to trouble? How might his manner of speaking and behavior hurt the cause? **In an argumentative paragraph take a position if you feel Raul’s approach to activism is helping or hurting the cause, include why, and include examples from the text.**

Another Writing Activity: *“Students must have initiative; they should not be mere imitators. They must learn to think and act for themselves – and be free.”* **In an argumentative paragraph share if you agree or disagree with Chavez’s statement?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Jesse, Day 10



Key Paragraph Pg. 99:

"I promised God I would return to a deeper faith and that I would try to forgive Ron Dryer...I forgave him and his friends for laughing at me."

Writing Prompt:

At the end of today's reading, Jesse prays and says he forgives Ron Dryer. Is this surprising to you? Can you forgive someone who does not apologize to you? Why is this so important in life? Often time harboring resentment, not forgiving those who have wronged us, can be a huge deterrent to making positive changes.

Consider the following quote and in **an argumentative paragraph defend why forgiveness can happen even if the person doesn't apologize directly to you.**

"Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 11



Key Paragraph Pg. 101:

"My eyes filled with tears. I thought of my brother, and I thought of my step father, who was probably scrubbing a piece of furniture with a wad of steel wool, his knuckles a nest of wiry fibers. I thought of my mom with a telephone to her ear, and my dead father on his rack of blackness, lighting up the earth with the glow of his bones."

Key Paragraph Pg. 107:

"Leslie brought over eggs and bologna. We cooked up a storm, the quartered bologna flapping like tongues in a black frying pan. We added bell peppers and made toast. Smoke filled the kitchen. Steam dripped from the kitchen window over the sink. I wiped the window and looked out; Glenda was parking her Chevy. "Let's invite Glenda," I called out. I was feeling happy because we seemed like one family."

Writing Prompt

In the key paragraph, Jesse describes his parents. What does he sympathize with? What type of work do they do? By the way he describes it, does it sound like the work he wants to do? Why does he feel bad for them? How does this tie into the changes he is attempting to make? **In an argumentative paragraph, write about the type of work Jesse wishes to have, why is it important to him, and how he demonstrates the determination to be different than his loved ones.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 12



Key Paragraph Pg. 124:

“She shook her head and looked through her purse for a piece of Juicy Fruit. She tore it in half and gave me the bigger of the two pieces. We then approached a pair of boxing gloves with their guts ripped out. “What’s wrong here?” “Mom, it’s art. This is how you do it.”

Key Paragraph Pg. 126:

“Something dropped like a rock inside of me. Mom didn’t know anything, and I thought for a second that maybe she had peeled too many potatoes in her life to understand very much.”

Writing Prompt

Jesse’s mom does not seem to understand Jesse’s art. How does this scene represent the hardship of change? Does it make it harder to stick to ideals not understood by your family? What represents success in your culture? Is going to college, a long term investment supported in a family struggling for money? **Although Jesse choose to lie to his mom, as Jesse write a response to his mom’s confusion and devaluation of the art in an argumentative paragraph.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 13



Key Paragraph Pg. 134:

“Jealousy clawed at my heart because Luis was a rich kid, the only Mexican rich kid I knew. If I told him that I worked in the fields for my money he might let me off at a corner and just speed away. But jealousy was a sin, and I cooled my thoughts by breathing deeply in and out.”

Writing Prompt

Jesse describes different friends throughout the novel: Raul, Leslie, Luis Estrada. How do they treat Jesse? Who do you as behaving well toward Jesse? In what ways are his friends a hindrance to his quest for change? In which ways are they a benefit? **Write 2 argumentative paragraphs defending the position that his friend or friends is a help or hindrance in his effort to be successful. Include examples from the book.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 14



Key Paragraph Pg. 145:

“Then I repotted the sapling in a Folgers’s coffee can and fed it water from a Coke bottle. I talked to it. I told the sapling, “You’re going to be OK. I’m going to put some wire on you, and you’re going to look great.”

Writing Prompt

Jesse buckles down at the end of the semester and focuses hard. He also makes an attempt to complete an extra credit assignment. How does Jesse demonstrate our Unit theme of Change requires Effort? Is it an easy fret for Jesse to stay in school, work while balance family responsibilities and friends? What challenges has Jesse faced throughout the novel?

Write an **Introduction** paragraph for an Argumentative essay entitled:

Jesse: Change Requires Effort.

Next **brainstorm** 3 body paragraphs labeled:

1. Family: It what was has Jesse’s family created obstacles for Jesse’s positive change?
2. School: How has school been a challenge for Jesse? What efforts does he make at school to promote a positive change?
3. Friends: How has Jesse’s friends and his social life created obstacles for positive change?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Jesse, Day 15



Key Paragraph Pg. 161:

“...Abel had been drafted. Jesus listened without looking at me. I told him I just wanted to be good. I did everything everyone told me, I thought, I would get a job and live quietly.”

Writing Prompt

Even though Jesse faces a lot of struggles, he perseveres. This is the embodiment of change requires effort. Jesse wants makes an effort to the do right thing all throughout the novel, even on the smallest level. What is admirable about his character? In what way does he continue to strive to make the world a better place despite sometimes his challenging reality? **In an argumentative essay, began on day 14, defend the position that Jesse embodies our Unit theme: Change requires Effort?**