

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 1



Key Paragraph, p. 10

“But he did know. He didn’t want to confide the knowledge to the doctor, however. The doctor was a complete stranger and although he seemed sympathetic and friendly, he wasn’t entirely comfortable with him. It should have been easy to tell him everything, all his doubts, to get it all off his chest, but he wasn’t sure how to proceed. He wondered if he should tell him about the clues” (p. 10).

Writing Task

Write a paragraph arguing either for or against the narrator’s use of a bike on his journey. If you were in his situation, would you use a different mode of transportation? Why or why not? Do you think he will make it all the way to Rutterburg on his bike? What does his choice to ride his bike tell you about his character?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 2



Key Paragraph, p. 23-24

“He had stepped outside himself, departed, gone from this place and was outside looking in, watching himself and the doctor, if he was a doctor. He could be a doctor, he had a kindly face although sometimes his eyes were strange. The eyes stared at him occasionally as if the doctor—if that’s what he was—were looking down the barrel of a gun, taking aim at him. He felt like a target. That’s why he was glad that he could stand aside like this, step out of himself and look back and see the two of them there in the room. He was curious about himself, of course, but he really didn’t want to look at himself and so he kept his eyes directed at his questioner, obliterating himself from the view. He hadn’t realized he could be so clever, so cunning. And the thought, If I can step outside myself like this, maybe I can go to other places” (p. 23-24).

Writing Task

Write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that Adam is either a victim of the doctor’s severe questioning, or simply receiving help to work through his difficult past.

Why do you think Adam seems to have so many doubts and unanswered questions? Why does Adam seem to distrust Brint? Why does Adam seem curious about his own identity? Support your claim with evidence from the book.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 3



Key Paragraph, p. 30

“He was wary again, on guard, distrustful. Yet he had no reason to distrust Brint, even though he was a stranger. Anyway, he was feeling much better, and he didn’t even care if feeling better was only an illusion. Maybe he should tell Brint some of the clues. Not all, but some. He could do it because he felt good, in command. He could parcel out information as if he were dealing cards, a little at a time. But he would have to be clever, cunning” (p. 30).

Writing Task

Pretend that you are one of Adam’s closest friends. A school bully has been spreading a rumor that Adam is lazy and unmotivated. **Write a letter to the bully that argues on Adam’s behalf, claiming that he is actually very motivated and determined.** Describe what you think motivates Adam to keep pedaling, even though he is in pain and is completely exhausted? How do Adam’s family and friends help Adam to push on? Support your claims with evidence from the text.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 4



Key Paragraph, p. 54

“Adam was amazed at his ability to lie, the way his mind had been quick to invent a new set of circumstances for himself and his parents. But he wondered, why? Why is it necessary to lie?” (p. 54).

Writing Task

Write a paragraph arguing whether or not you feel that Adam’s amazing ability to lie is a good or bad trait to possess. When would that talent help you? When would it hurt you, and the ones you are lying to? Are ‘white lies,’ small untruths that ultimately cause little/no damage, bad? Support your claims with personal experience and evidence from the text.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 69

“Actually, there was a lot to tell but he didn’t want to speak anymore, he wanted only to say the minimum, to say the words that would satisfy Brint and then go back to his room, to rest and relax. He didn’t want to pick up the burden of remembering any longer. He wanted to coast awhile, float, not let it matter, drift. This is why he hated Brint sometimes. Because he interrupted the sweet drifting. With his questions. His incessant, never-ending questions” (p. 69).

Writing Task

Pretend you are Adam. Write a paragraph arguing against remembering your past. **Why is it hard for you to remember? Why are you afraid of blankness? What does the blankness represent to you? Do you think that blankness is more terrifying or are the memories that fill that blankness more terrifying? Why or why not? Describe why the sweet drifting appeals to you.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 6



Key Paragraph, p. 70-71

"Adam had accepted the explanation without question and the telephone hour became part of the fabric of the household. He figured that his mother had set aside this time of day to complete all her calls to friends (but what friends?), to relatives (they had no living relatives, his father had informed him with regret a long time ago), her committeewomen (his mother was too shy and withdrawn to be active in social or civic affairs). And yet the telephone hour had gone on for so long a time that Adam had never really questioned its purpose or reason" (p. 70-71).

Writing Task

Why hasn't Adam ever questioned his mother's weekly phone calls?

Write a paragraph arguing whether or not it is better to a) refrain from questioning the everyday patterns of life or b) question the things that have become mainstream or commonplace. What can the benefits/drawbacks of either choice be? Is it better to be ignorant and content, or to be informed and left questioning? What do you think will be the outcomes of Adam's search for the truth? Do you think he will gain peace with the information he seeks? Or will it only lead to more questions?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 7



Key Paragraph, p. 88-89

“And I slam down the phone. I don’t like to hang up on people but the troublemakers are drifting closer and I have to get out of there. I’m sorry, Amy. I can’t even get a telephone number right. I don’t deserve you.

The boys are coming closer, slowly but surely and menacingly, and I swing open the door of the booth and grab the bike. I run along beside the bike and then leap upon it. My feet engage the pedals and I pump away. I shoot through a red light and a car blows its horn at me but I am away, leaving Carver behind, leaving the troublemakers behind, but I don’t feel brave anymore and my cheeks are wet even though it isn’t raining” (p. 88-89).

Writing Task

Do you think that Adam’s inability to reach Amy is affecting his attitude and performance on his journey? How would you feel if you were in his situation? **Write a paragraph arguing either for or against Adam’s reliance on Amy to soothe/motivate him.** Is his devotion to her worth his reckless behavior on the bicycle?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 8



Key Paragraph, p. 107

“It’s possible that you went into retreat because you were getting close to remembering—and there will be pain in the remembering. You realize that, don’t you? It’s possible that the gray man represents the key and at the last moment you refused to use the key, afraid of what would be lurking beyond the door the key would open” (p. 107).

Writing Task

Why do you think Adam is afraid to remember his past? Are there things in his past that might be painful? Is it better to forget the painful things or to remember them? Why?

Write a paragraph arguing for the importance of memory. Do you think there is any value in trying to remember the past, even if those memories might be painful? What do memories teach us? How do memories shape who we are as people? Would you be a different person if you lost some of your memories? Without our memories, what would our world be like? Is remembering his past important for Adam if he wants to discover who he really is?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 9



Key Paragraph, p. 117

“He knew that by asking the questions he was betraying himself, admitting that he had been spying and eavesdropping. He also knew, deeply and sadly, that there would be things in his life, in their lives, that he hadn’t known before. Maybe that’s why he had delayed the questions from the very beginning. Because he didn’t want things to change. But the questions had been asked now. And he opened his eyes to confront his father” (p. 117).

Writing Task

What does Adam’s mother mean when she say that they are “surviving, not living” on page 115? What is the difference?

Write an argumentative paragraph claiming whether or not Adam and his family are merely surviving or actually living after re-identification. Does living in constant fear make a whole and happy life? Should Adam’s mother be glad that they are at least surviving when their lives could be in danger? Do you think that Adam’s family will ever be able to feel as though they are living instead of just surviving? Why or why not?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 133

“‘We’re like puppets, you, your mother, and I,’ his father said. ‘As if we had no control over our lives. And now didn’t, of course. Others pulled the strings and we jumped. Sometimes, I think someone with a terrible sense of humor was toying with us. Look at the name they selected for you—Adam. Somebody’s whim, maybe. Adam: new birth, first man. I don’t know. Your mother and I felt helpless but the thought of that bomb and that phone call made me go along. And so we found ourselves in Monument, Massachusetts’” (p. 133).

Writing Task

Why do you think Adam is so protective of the package that he is carrying? Adam leaves the bike, but always makes sure to keep the package with him. What is in the package? Who is it meant for? What does the package represent to Adam?

Write a paragraph arguing either for or against the importance of Adam’s package. Do you believe the contents of the package are as precious as Adam is making it seem? Why or why not? Do you have something that is special to you in the same way that the package is special to Adam? Is it natural to have an attachment to certain objects?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 11



Key Paragraph, p. 157

“Suddenly, life became unbearably sweet to Adam. Funny, he had taken the events of his life for granted for a long time, the days and nights passing routinely as if they’d continue forever, but the threat to that life and the routines suddenly made every minute and hour precious. Food had never tasted so good before. He’d stop after school to buy a Mister Goodbar or a Three Musketeers and the candy was more delicious than it had ever been. He also loved his father and mother more and wanted to be with them. When they ate dinner together, he felt a sense of intimacy with them, as if he were more than just a son, more than someone who was told to make his bed and take out the rubbish. He was part of them. Somehow fear had forged love” (p. 157).

Writing Task

Write an argumentative paragraph about whether or not you agree with Adam’s outlook on life: “but the threat to that life and the routines suddenly made every minute and hour precious.” How can this sense of danger help you appreciate your life more? How can it lead to more stress? Present your claims, support your arguments with your own opinions, provide a counterargument, and finally conclude with a final presentation of your argument.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 12



Key Paragraph, p. 159

“His mother was really the rebel. She often spoke resentfully, almost contemptuously, of Mr. Grey. ‘I sometimes think we were too unquestioning, Adam, too naïve. Did your father really have to give up newspaper work? Weren’t there any other alternatives?’ Adam was delighted to see this defiance. He realized that his mother wasn’t the compliant woman he had known before. Although she seldom smiled and sadness clung to her most of the time, she was capable of anger. And deception. One day, she studied Adam’s face as if trying to make up her mind about something” (p. 159).

Writing Task

At this point in the book, we have received a lot of information about Adam’s father and mother. Who do you think is a better role model for Adam, his mother or his father? What traits do they have that would make them a better role model?

Write a paragraph arguing in favor of who you think would be a better role model: Adam’s father or mother. Do you have any role models in your own life? What traits should a good role model embody? Do either of Adam’s parents have those traits?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 13



Key Paragraph, p. 182

“His father’s voice was buoyant, eager—and Adam suddenly realized, with a chill, the truth. His father was playing the game, not trusting the walls, acting as if no phone call had been received from Mr. Grey. His face was still haggard and his eyes wary and haunted and the bright enthusiastic voice was a sharp contrast” (p. 182).

Writing Task

Do you think it is easier to hide from the truth or to seek the truth? Which is more beneficial? Do you think that Adam will benefit from seeking the truth, or will it only result in more pain and suffering?

Write a paragraph arguing whether or not Adam should seek the truth. Do you think it is better to tell the truth, even if there is a risk of hurting someone’s feelings?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 14



Key Paragraph, p. 191-192

“Finally, I am across the street, the bike, the package, and me. The grass is soft beneath my feet and I think I have stopped screaming now because everything is quiet. I check my mouth and it’s still open but I am not screaming any longer. I push toward the cabin where my mother and father and I stayed, all together, nice that night, the three of us together. I place the bike carefully against the cabin. I look across the street at the gas station and the attendant is standing there looking at me. The Orphan Annie women is out of the car now and also looking. My mouth is still open and maybe I’m still screaming” (p. 191-192).

Writing Task

Do you think that the three different types of narratives are effective in telling the story? Why or why not? Do you think that Cormier could have told the story better if he used a different structure or did you like the structure that he used?

Write an argumentative paragraph about the structure of the novel. Do you think that the author’s style was effective in communicating what Adam is going through? If not, how could it have been more effective? Support your claims with relevant details and examples from the text.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

I Am The Cheese, Day 15



Key Paragraph, p. 204

"I look for a telephone booth, but I don't see any. I'm not sure why I want to find a phone booth; in fact, the thought of a phone booth makes me sad. I don't know why it makes me sad but it does. It opens up a loneliness in me, like a hole, a deep, dark hole. The hole is threatening somehow; if it gets too big it could swallow me up, so I try not to think about it. The medicine always helps me not to think about it" (p. 204).

Writing Task

Why does Adam say, "I am the cheese"? What does this represent? If the song is so important to Adam's family, what does it mean that Adam is the cheese? Why don't we hear the whole song until the end of the story? Do you think that Adam is justified in saying that he is the cheese?

Write a paragraph arguing whether or not you believe Adam is correct in claiming that he is the cheese. Support your argument with evidence from the text and also provide your own opinion of Adam's choice.