

Nightjohn



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Genre Historical Fiction

Synopsis Sarny, a female slave at the Waller plantation, first sees Nightjohn when he is brought there with a rope around his neck, his body covered in scars. He had escaped north to freedom, but he came back--came back to teach reading. Knowing that the penalty for reading is dismemberment Nightjohn still returned to slavery to teach others how to read. And twelve-year-old Sarny is willing to take the risk to learn.

Themes Human Rights, Prejudice

Protagonist Female, African-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
Nightjohn, Day 1



Writing Prompt

Sarny introduces Waller who is a major source of conflict for the main characters in the novel. Think of a time when you met or knew someone who was mean to you or caused a very negative experience for you in some way. Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) telling about a conflict you had with that person. Remember, in a narrative, you are telling a story, so be sure you are telling a story about that moment.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn, Day 2



Writing Prompt

Mammy is a very religious woman. Her faith in God gives her a lot of courage to get through the difficult situations in her life. What gives you courage? Think of a time when you had to have courage to face a certain situation. Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) describing that situation.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn, Day 3



Writing Prompt

Although Sarny is very young and uneducated, she is wise enough to see that Waller is not a man of real courage. It is in the whip and the pistol and the pro-slavery society around him that gives him his false courage. Think of another story when someone hid behind something (such as the whip and pistol in Waller's case) and called themselves brave. Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) describing what happened.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn, Day 4



Writing Prompt

From the first day Nightjohn arrives it is obvious that he is not afraid of much. Think of a time when you met someone, or describe a scene from a book or movie where someone did something brave. Write a short narrative about it (1-3 paragraphs).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn, Day 5



Writing Prompt

In Sarny's first experience with reading, she realizes that it is not hard at all. Have you ever done something that you thought was hard or scary, but when you actually tried it, you realized it wasn't nearly as hard or as scary as you thought? Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) describing that experience.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn, Day 6



Writing Prompt

The reason the slaves do not run away is not because they don't have enough courage to run, it is because they know the odds of getting caught outweigh the risk. Think of a time when you were tempted to do something but knew you would probably not succeed. Did you do it, or did you decide not to do it? Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) describing the situation.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Nightjohn, Day 7



Key Paragraph

Page 53:

Mammy was standing there, big and black and tall in the moonlight. “What you doing to this girl?” She had come from the side and fetched John such a blow on his head that it knocked him back into the wall and on his back...

“Don’t you know what they do to her if they find her trying to read? We already got one girl torn to pieces by the whip and the dogs. We don’t need two.”

Writing Prompt

Mammy struck John, not because she didn’t want Sarny to read, but because she didn’t want Sarny to get caught reading by Waller. Mammy watches out for the other slaves. Can you think of a time when someone watched out for or protected you in some way. Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) describing that situation

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt *Nightjohn, Day 8*



Key Paragraph

Page 58:

“They have to be able to write,” John said. Voice pushing. He stood and reached out one hand with long fingers and touched mammy on the forehead...

“They have to read and write. We all have to read and write so we can write about this—what they doing to us. It has to be written.”

Writing Prompt

John's courage to stand up against Southern slavery society and his willingness to risk his life to give others the power to read is the driving force of the story. Think about a time when one person or a few people stood up against the majority. Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) describing that situation.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn, Day 9



Writing Prompt

Sarny's first word was a major breakthrough in her life. It gave her a new confidence in herself. While you may not remember your first word, you probably remember something that was a big deal for you in your life, that boosted your hope or confidence. Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) describing a time when something like that happened to you.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn, Day 10



Writing Prompt

Mammy had nothing to do with Sarny learning to read, yet Waller decided to punish her for it. While Mammy was chained up and waiting for Waller to come back to beat her, she tried to comfort Sarny instead of blame her for what was happening. It took a lot of courage for her to act that way. Think of another story you have heard that a character acted in a selfless way. Write a short narrative (1-3) describing that story.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn, Day 11



Writing Prompt

Nightjohn showed real courage when he stood up and told Waller to leave Mammy alone because it was him that taught Sarny to read, not Mammy. It showed courage, and it also showed loyalty to his friends. Think of your life when you or someone else stood up for someone. Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) describing how it happened.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn, Day 12

**Writing Prompt**

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Waller cut John's toe off for teaching Sarny to read. Can you imagine how bad the pain must have been for him? Have you ever been injured severely? Think of the worst physical pain you have ever felt. Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) describing that experience. Remember, in a narrative you are telling a story. Tell the story of how you were injured and describe how you felt. Include dialog if other people were involved.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn, Day 13



Writing Prompt

John did come back. He had the courage to return and help others. Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) telling about another person who showed that kind of courage for others. It can be a true story, or your own.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn Day 14



Writing Prompt

Nightjohn brings a catalog from a store to teach the other slaves to read. Sarny starts crying because she can't have any of those pretty things. Think of a time when you wanted something that you couldn't have. Write a short narrative (1-3 paragraphs) telling about that experience.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Nightjohn, Day 15



Writing Prompt

Nightjohn is a novel narrated by the main character, Sarny. A novel is one type of narrative. A short story is another type of narrative. It is much shorter than a novel. Re-write the story, Nightjohn, as a short story (1-2 pages) from John's point of view. Be sure to include dialog. Refer to the novel for style, but it should be a much more summarized account of the months covered in the novel.