

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 1



Key Passage, pg. 5

The doctor was pleased because the bone appeared to be growing back, but with a crying lack of tact he told Johnny, “Oh yes... it’s growing... but in the wrong direction, the wrong way.”

Johnny controlled himself and said nothing until the doctor left the room. His face had gone white and he was sick with sudden worry and harsh disappointment. Then he murmured to me, “Better not tell Mother it’s growing wrong.” (5)

Writing Prompt

After receiving the news from the insensitive doctor that the bone is growing back in the wrong direction Johnny’s thoughts are not about the news or feeling sorry for himself but about not telling his mother the bad news. He is more concerned about her feelings and not disappointing her than he is about his own diagnosis. What does this say about Johnny as a young man? What does he immediately think about when given bad news?

The CBL theme Leadership Requires Engagement definition reads; Leaders develop and dedicate their talents to promote the common good. This is where they choose to spend their time and effort, Leadership requires positive civic engagement. It is making sure that the communities I am part of are better because I am in them. And that I am better because of the communities I choose to be part of.

In an informative paragraph explain why Johnny decided not to tell his mother about the bone growing back in the wrong direction.

Consider the following question:

- **Is he showing leadership qualities?**
- **Does he have an impact on this community or does the community impact him? Provide reasons for your opinion.**
- **Is this the kind of son you would like to have?**

1. Describe a time when you withheld information from your parents/friends.
2. Do you consider this lying? Why or why not?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 2



Key Passage, pg. 18-19

It was almost impossible to make him lose his temper, and during the whole course of his illness and the frightful demands it made on him, I scarcely ever heard him utter a serious word of protest or complaint. He was always obedient—if only because he wanted so desperately to get well. Johnny was a careful boy; he was truly modest and he believed in the goodness of people—he gave out something, so that people entering a room felt at once a warm, compelling, sunny contact. But he was, like most exceptional children, a very complex character. (18-19)

Writing Prompt

John Gunther is describing more about his son Johnny's personality. He discusses how Johnny kept his composure and maintained his integrity even in the face of his illness. His outlook on life was still positive as he was modest and believed in the good side of people. His father goes on to describe the feeling people got when he came into their presence and they responded to him.

In an explanatory paragraph discuss how Johnny's father's describes Johnny. Write a second informative paragraph that explains how this description of Johnny fits into the definition of the quarter theme Leadership Requires Engagement.

Consider the following questions:

- **Are his father's feelings aligned to the theme?**
- **How does he have impact his community? Provide examples from the book as supports for your opinion.**

1. How do you think your parents would describe you?
2. How is it different or similar to your own perception of yourself?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 3



Key Passage, pg. 30

Between the Friday and the Monday I tried to find out something about brain tumors. I prodded through several texts full of the frightful jargon of medical writers, and consulted Traeger almost hour by hour.

A tumor is a growth. What I asked about first of all was whether or not Johnny had cancer. All cancers are tumors, but not all tumors are cancers by any means. By one definition, Johnny did have cancer, by another he did not. That is, a brain tumor (though it may strike the spinal cord in some rare case) never metastasizes, i.e. spreads through the body to attack liver or bones or what not. (30)

Writing Prompt

Upon learning that Johnny has been diagnosed with brain tumors John sets out to learn as much as he can since that is what educated men do. He comes across a dilemma regarding if Johnny's diagnosis is cancer or not. He finds that the area is grey and unclear.

Write an informative paragraph summarizing John's findings about tumors and cancer. Explain what he learned about Johnny's condition. Include one quote from the text in your paragraph.

1. Describe when you were really sick.
2. What did you do to get better?
3. Who helped take care of you?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 4



Key Passage, pg. 41

Then the next day Putnam called me into his office, with Lester Mount, his youthful associate who carried on to the end, standing by. What Johnny had was much worse than they had feared; it was not an astrocytoma but something called an astroblastoma undergoing transformation. Now Putnam explained why he had not closed the skull but had left open, covered only by a flap of scalp, an area in the head about as big as my hand. This was to provide “decompression” i.e., to allow the tumor, if it continued to grow, to bulge outward, instead of inward which would destroy the brain. If Putnam had sealed up the skull with bone or a plate, Johnny would have been dead in a month. (41)

Writing Prompt

Dr. Putnam explains to John that Johnny’s condition is much worse and more severe than they had originally believed. Dr. Putnam then provides explanation for leaving Johnny’s skull open and only covered by his scalp. If Dr. Putnam had sealed Johnny’s skull the brain would have grown inward instead of outward and he would be dead in a month’s time.

Leadership Requires Engagement definition includes the following explanation that we have consistently looked at through the novel. Leaders develop and dedicate their talents to promote the common good. This is where they choose to spend their time and effort. In what ways do you believe Dr. Putnam exemplified the definition? Do you believe in his explanation to Johnny’s parents he promoted the common good?

In an informative paragraph explain Dr. Putnam’s decision as well as his explanation. Be sure to use three examples from the reading to support your opinion.

1. How would you feel if you were Johnny?
2. What advice would you give Johnny?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 5



Key Passage, pg. 50 - 51

He was vehemently worried that his illness might upset our future plans and about how much it was costing and about Frances's work and my book. I was less than halfway through *Inside U.S.A.* and hopelessly behind. Johnny knew that the deadline for delivering the MS was October 1, and he knew perfectly well that I could never make it. His first question when I came out, expressed with lively irony and disbelief in the veracity of what I would tell him, was usually, "Well, how many whole chapters did you write yesterday?" Then: "You'd better hurry!" As to the work Frances was doing he would remonstrate with her gently and then encourage her, "Remember your destiny, Mother!". (50 - 51)

Writing Prompt

Johnny was worried that his illness would have a negative impact on his parent's life and future plans. He was constantly checking on their progress on projects they were working on as well as motivating them to finish and become everything the possibly could become. How were the lives of John and Frances Gunther better for having Johnny as their son? In spite of his illness he still went above and beyond to support his parents personally and professionally.

Write an explanatory paragraph describing Johnny's leadership skills while fighting his tumor. How does Johnny Gunther embodies Leadership Requires Engagement as it states "It is making sure that the communities I am part of are better because I am in them." How does Johnny make his family and community a better place?

1. Give an example of your leadership abilities.
2. How can you better serve your family and community?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 6



Key Passage, pg. 60

He could not have survived this summer had it not been for his mother's brave and understanding spirit. So that he would not be frightened she talked to him as if casually about the narrow escapes she and other people had had from Death, and it relieved him greatly to learn that several of those who he loved had almost died. She made the most of every medical ritual, and taught him to squeeze out of every conceivable occasion, no matter how painful, every atom of humor possible. (60.)

Writing Prompt

John attributes Johnny's ability to survive the summer to Frances' spirit and attitude. She did everything she could to explain how people overcome death to achieve life. She taught him that every minute is an experience that should be cherished and lived fully.

In an explanatory paragraph describe the impact Frances had upon Johnny that summer. Be sure to include examples from the text to support your explanation.

1. Who has deeply impacted your life?
2. How are you a different person from knowing that person?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 7



Key Passage, pg. 72 - 73

I left Mrs. Seely's one evening and walked to the corner and had a cup of coffee, almost insane with sudden hope. I was beside myself with a violent and incredulous joy. Johnny was going to recover after all! I thought of all the surgeons and the specialists and how dumfounded they would be; I thought of all our friends and their sympathy and how the burden of grief would be lifted to a whole small community. Johnny was going to pull through, after all, despite everything, and get well! He was going to beat this evil, lawless thing! He'd show the surgeons how a boy with a real will to live could live!

Writing Prompt

As Johnny's health improved John Gunther was so happy he couldn't contain himself. He now felt Johnny was going to recover and looked forward to seeing the surgeons and specialist who previously gave them no hope. He thought of the friends who provided sympathy and support and the impact of the community as a whole who have ridden the rollercoaster with the family during Johnny's illness. John attributed Johnny's will to live as the reason for beating the illness that he describes as evil and lawless.

Leadership Requires Engagement quarter theme states "It is making sure that the communities I am part of are better because I am in them. And that I am better because of the communities I choose to be part of". Today John Gunther describes the impact the community has had on the family through Johnny's illness.

Write an explanatory paragraph describing the importance of community during trying times for family. Include how can the outpouring of a community support can aide in the healing of an individual illness.

1. Describe a time when you felt the support of your community?
2. Who makes up your community?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 8



Key Passage, pg. 86

My sister was with Johnny and me when he got this news that the eyes were normal. I never knew till this moment just how anguishing was the strain that he strove so hard to conceal. He jumped bolt upright; then slowly, proudly, very slowly and proudly, he relaxed downward to the pillow, while across his face spread the most beatifically happy expression I have ever seen on a human being, and his eyes—normal eyes now—filled just to the brim with tears, but did not spill over, as he smiled with relief, pride and exhaustion that comes from intolerable strain.

Writing Prompt

Johnny gets word that his eyes are normal and his father for the first time realizes the pressure and the strain that Johnny has inflicted upon himself trying to keep secret how he felt about his illness. He was brought to the edge of tears but not tears of pain but happiness, relief and pride from the exhausting journey he had been through to this point.

Why do you think Johnny kept his feeling secret? Who was he trying to protect? The quarter theme Leadership Requires Engagement states “It is making sure that the communities I am part of are better because I am in them. And that I am better because of the communities I choose to be part of.”

In an explanatory paragraph, describe how Johnny exemplified this part of the theme. Be clear and concise in your explanation.

1. If you were Johnny would you keep your feelings secret?
2. How often do you complain about minor discomforts?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 9



Key Passage, pg. 94

Frances had rehearsed this with him several times, though she had a horror of doing the actual injection herself. In fact one of the reasons he did it alone was to spare her. They called it “bayonet practice.”

Steadily, too, she helped him in physical activity. She taught him to be deliberate about almost every physical movement, so that he picked his stance carefully and knew exactly what he was going to do next before doing it. The stronger parts of his body must, she told him, be trained to assist those weaker; more and more his good right side must take up the burden from the other; she showed him how his right hand could unobtrusively assist the left. (94)

Writing Prompt

Frances prepared Johnny for the injections he would need to take, she also taught him move, use his body to help with strengths aiding weaknesses without bringing attention to himself while out in public.

Leaders develop and dedicate their talents to promote the common good. This is where they choose to spend their time and effort, Leadership requires positive civic engagement. It is making sure that the communities I am part of are better because I am in them. And that I am better because of the communities I choose to be part of.

In an explanatory paragraph describe how Frances Gunther exemplifies the definition of Leadership Requires Engagement as it is defined above. Provide three examples for the text to support your answer.

1. What word of encouragement would you say to Johnny?
2. What do you predict will happen next?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 10



Key Passage, pg. 105

I took him home after a brief talk with Mount. It was all hopeless now. What Johnny had now, the pathologist said, was one of the worst forms of tumor, glioma multiforme; moreover the specimen Mount got showed many mitotic figures: i.e., the production of malignant cells was rapidly increasing. All neurologists are pessimists. I tried to argue with the diagnosis by pointing out how generally well Johnny still was. And indeed the doctors were astonished to the point stupefaction that he had been able to take those college entrance exams. But Mount, so kind and decent, could offer no hope at all when we asked him what to do next. He said, "Let Johnny do exactly what he wants to do and die happy." (105)

Writing Prompt

Mount gives John some very difficult news that Johnny has no hope, the tumor is spreading and it was one of the worst forms of tumors. When John tried to argue Mount the response was simply to allow Johnny to do what he wants and let him die happy. In spite of the news he shared John still believed that Mount was kind and descent.

If you were in John's shoes would you still feel the same way about the doctor?

It is making sure that the communities I am part of are better because I am in them. And that I am better because of the communities I choose to be part of.

Are the Gunthers better for Mount being their doctor?

In an informative paragraph explain how John can still believe Mount is a kind and decent person even though he believes there is no hope for Johnny. Provide three facts to support your answer.

1. How would you respond if you were John?
2. Do you think Johnny can overcome this tumor? Why or why not?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 11



Key Passage, pg. 17 & 23

The effort to pretend that the tumor was nothing cost him dearly; the price of his invincible fight was great fatigue. It took a miserable lot out of him to pretend to ignore what he must have known to be the truth, that he wasn't getting any better. The faraway look was in his eyes more often now. But it was impossible for us not to support his optimism, because any discouragement would have been a crushing blow. All he had now was his will to live. We had to keep that up at any cost. The cord of life was wearing very thin, and if we took away hope, it would be bound to snap. (117)

Everything that Johnny suffered was in a sense repaid by the few heroic moments of that walk down the center aisle of that church. This was his triumph and indomitable summation. Nobody who saw it will ever forget it, or be able to forget the sublime strength of will and character it took. (123)

Writing Prompt

Johnny wore down a great deal from trying to battle the tumor and pretend that nothing was wrong. Johnny's will to live and optimism were crucial to him staying strong, his parents were bound and determined to support him. The act of his walking down the aisle to receive his diploma is one of triumph and celebration that would not be forgotten by anyone who was in attendance watching him.

Pretend you are a newspaper reporter. Write an informative article that describes the graduation ceremony. Include an explanatory paragraph about Johnny and his will to graduate under challenging circumstances. Be sure to make up a quote from Johnny to include in your article.

1. What do you imagine your high school graduation to be like?
2. How determined are you to graduate?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 12



Key Passage, pg. 140

Letters came in like an avalanche, until we counted them by the hundred. He was just a boy of seventeen; yet what an imprint he made on anybody who ever met him! There were condolences from camp counselors who had not seen him for year and from a barber in a downtown hotel; from the Negro elevator boy in my office building and the proprietors of a friendly restaurant on Madison Avenue; from playwrights, judges, politicians, old Chicago friends whom we had not seen in years, from teachers and doctors and newspaper folk, old schoolmates, several of those who had seen him graduate at Deerfield, movie people, poets, acquaintances from faroff days in Vienna, physicists, his godfather in Washington, the doormen at our apartment building, refugees from Europe, his devoted governess Milla, scores of writers, and above all people who had never met him or us – parents whose sons had also died. (140)

Writing Prompt

The volume of letters that the Gunther's received following Johnny's was amazing to them. People from across the country, all areas of his life regardless of age, race, or social status. Johnny impacted people around the world. The quarter theme is Leadership Requires Engagement, it is defined as "Leaders develop and dedicate their talents to promote the common good. This is where they choose to spend their time and effort, Leadership requires positive civic engagement. It is making sure that the communities I am part of are better because I am in them. And that I am better because of the communities I choose to be part of".

Pretend you are Johnny. Write a journal entry, 1-2 explanatory paragraphs, describe how you felt after receiving the enormous amounts of letters. End your journal entry with an informative paragraph describing your desire to be a leader and role model to others.

1. When have you received praise?
2. How did it make you feel?
3. What did you do to earn praise?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 13



Key Passage, pg. 153

In the beginning of the summer we decided that I should go fishing every Friday and catch some fish for dinner. After a few times I found I didn't like it because I kept thinking about how I would feel if I were the fish. Mutti thought that I ought to fish anyway and not think about how the fish feels. But when I took her fishing and she tried to dehook the fish, she immediately changed her views on the subject. Now we buy our fish. (153)

Writing Prompt

In a letter to John in August of 1943, Johnny describes his experiences fishing, the challenges he faced and how he thought through the process. Johnny was unsure about fishing but Frances encouraged him to continue and not think about it. Johnny does and then when Frances joins him one day she agrees with him and they decide to buy their fish in the future.

The quarter theme Leadership Requires Engagement definition includes "It is making sure that the communities I am part of are better because I am in them. And that I am better because of the communities I choose to be part of". How does Johnny make the communities better around him and in what ways does he improve his communities.

In an explanatory paragraph describe how Johnny is a better person for his time with Frances. Write a second explanatory paragraph describing how Frances is a better person for being around Johnny.

1. What can you do to encourage others to be better people?
2. Do you strive to be a better person? Why or why not?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 14



Key Passage, pg. 168

Sporadically for some years Johnny kept a diary, at Frances's suggestion and under her encouragement. When he became ill he carried his notebook wherever he went; on any trip to the hospital, no matter how brief, two things were musts: the recorder and his diary. He told her once, "You put it on my desk so gently. You didn't tell me to use it. You just it gently on my desk, remember, and then I began using it, and I'm so glad." (168)

Writing Prompt

With quiet and gentle encouragement from Frances, Johnny began writing in his diary, when he became ill it went everywhere with him. The theme of the quarter is Leadership Requires Engagement and we define it as "Leaders develop and dedicate their talents to promote the common good. This is where they choose to spend their time and effort, Leadership requires positive civic engagement. It is making sure that the communities I am part of are better because I am in them. And that I am better because of the communities I choose to be part of".

In an explanatory paragraphs describe how Frances exemplifies the theme of Leadership Requires Engagement based upon her handling of the diary with Johnny. Refer back to the key paragraph to provide your evidence in your explanation.

1. What would you do if you were Francis?
2. What advice would you give Johnny?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Death Be Not Proud, Day 15



Key Passage, pg. 193

We always discussed things a little ahead. In a way I was experimenting with Johnny as he dreamed of doing with his elements, as artists do with their natural materials. I was trying to create of him a newer kind of human being: an aware person, without fear, and with love: a sound individual, adequate to life anywhere on earth, and living life everywhere and always. We would talk about all this as our experiment together. (193)

Writing Prompt

Frances shares what she was trying to accomplish as she was raising Johnny. Did she accomplish her goals? Was she a good mother? Were her methods of mothering and parenting wise?

In an explanatory paragraph discuss Frances parenting. How do you feel about the direction her parenting? Include 2-3 examples to support your explanation.

1. What did you like and dislike about this memoir?
2. What would you include in your memoir?