

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 1



Key Paragraph, p. 1

“It was one of those super-duper-cold Saturdays. One of those days that when you breathed out your breath kind of hung frozen in the air like a hunk of smoke and you could walk along and look exactly like a train glowing out big, fat, white puffs of smoke. It was so cold that if you were stupid enough to go outside your eyes would automatically blink a thousand times all by themselves, probably so the juice inside of them wouldn’t freeze up. It was so cold that if you spit, the slob would be an ice cube before it hit the ground.

It was about a zillion degrees below zero” (p. 1).

Writing Prompt

This passage from today’s reading is filled with dynamic and engaging details that really draw the reader in. Christopher Paul Curtis uses metaphors, figurative language, and imagery to make the reader feel like a part of the story.

In 1-2 paragraphs, make an argument for Christopher Paul Curtis’ use of metaphors and imagery in the passage (above) describing the cold. Why are his techniques effective? What other techniques could he have used? Would they be more or less effective at describing the cold? Use examples from the text as well as instances from your own life to contribute to your claims. When you have completed your assignment, upload it to the online forum of your choice (Blog, Google Docs, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 2



Key Paragraph, p. 13

"I moved closer. I couldn't believe my eyes! Byron's mouth was frozen on the mirror! He was as stuck as a fly on flypaper!

I could have done a lot of stuff to him. If it had been me with my lips stuck on something like this he'd have tortured me for a couple of days before he got help. Not me, though, I nearly broke my neck trying to get into the house to rescue Byron" (p. 13).

Writing Prompt

Write an argumentative paragraph arguing in favor of Kenny's choice to help his brother instead of "[doing] a lot of stuff to him" while his lips are stuck on the mirror. How does his choice reflect justice? Remember that justice requires restraint and making choices that respect the rights of all. Support your claim with your own personal opinions as well as evidence from the text. When you have finished your assignment, upload a final version to the online forum of your choice (Google Docs, Blog, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 3



Key Paragraph, p. 25

"He punched me kind of soft in the arm and said, 'At least you oughta make 'em pay you for doin' that mess. If it was me they'd be comin' out they pockets with some foldin' money every time they took me around.'

I couldn't believe it. I think Byron was proud of me!" (p. 25).

Writing Prompt

Kenny was shocked by Byron's reaction. He was expecting and prepared for a beating from both Byron and Buphead. It dawned on Kenny that that Byron was actually proud of him, a reaction Kenny couldn't believe happened.

Pretend you are Byron. **Write an argumentative letter addressed to Kenny that claims you are proud of him. Use words and phrases that you would expect the character to use, and make sure to support your stance with relevant details from the text. Provide a counter argument (when was a time when you were not proud of your brother?) and conclude your letter with a reiteration of your stance.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 4



Key Paragraph, p. 36-37

"This saver stuff wasn't going anything like I thought it was supposed to. Rufus started acting like I was his friend. In the morning on the bus he'd always come sit next to me, and Mrs. Cordell put his regular seat next to mine in school. Every day at lunchtime he followed me out to the playground and ate half of my second sandwich, then sneaked the other half to Cody. He even found out where we lived and started coming over every night around five-thirty" (p. 36-37).

Writing Prompt

Kenny describes the beginning of his friendship with Rufus and how Rufus started working his way into Kenny's life and they began spending time together all day. Many friendships have unique beginnings. Some friends we are not prepared for and they work their way into our lives.

Pretend you are Rufus. From his perspective, write an argumentative letter in which you claim that you are indeed already friends with Kenny, whether or not he recognizes it. What are the traits of a true friend? Do you see yourself friends with Kenny 5 years from now? 10 years from now? Use evidence from the text to support your view. Also, be sure to incorporate words and phrases that you believe this character would use.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 44

“‘I thought you was my friend. I didn’t think you was like all them other people,’ he said. ‘I thought you was different.’ He didn’t say this stuff like he was mad, he just sounded real, real sad. He pulled Cody out of the doorway and shut it” (p. 44).

Writing Prompt

Rufus tells Kenny how disappointed he felt when he laughed on the bus. Rufus believed Kenny would behave differently than the others, but, in this instance, Kenny realizes he has taken Rufus’s friendship for granted.

Think about a time you took someone for granted. Or maybe, you were taken for granted instead. Have you ever had a similar situation?

Pretend you are Rufus. **Write an argumentative letter claiming how you thought he would have your back in any situation, but were disappointed to learn this was not true. Why were you disappointed with him in this situation? How would you have acted differently? Does his choice show justice or injustice? Remember, justice requires restraint and making choices that respect the rights of all.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 6



Key Paragraph, p. 47

“With a Maytag Wash you had to go through all the different cycles that a washing machine did, and even though when Larry gave you a Maytag all of the cycles were exactly the same each part had a different name and the wash wasn’t done until you went through the final spin and had snow in every part of your face” (p. 47).

Writing Prompt

Everyone has a Larry Dunn in his/her childhood: someone who picks on, teases, and/or makes fun of you (or others).

In 1-2 paragraphs, write an argumentative explanation as to why these ‘Larry Dunn’ characters are harmful in a child’s life. What can they do to change their bullying habits? Have you ever had an experience with a bully like Larry Dunn? What kind of lasting affects stick with someone who has been bullied? Feel free to research bullying and its impacts, as well as integrate your own personal experiences in your paragraphs. Conclude by explaining what you believe to be the lesson in this story. Then go through a final editing process and revise your work.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 7



Key Paragraph, p. 67

"I felt kind of sorry for Byron because Momma hadn't let go of his neck and, even though he was a lot older, we could tell he was just as scared as me and Joetta. He kept pretending he was Daddy Cool, though, and the only way you could tell he was scared to death was by looking at his eyes" (p. 67).

Writing Prompt

Today's reading we see a different side of Byron. He was afraid of Momma but tried to keep up the "Daddy Cool" façade. Even though he tried to appear calm, his eyes told the truth of how scared he really was. In today's reading, Byron was not the God of Clark Elementary who played protector to Kenny by giving Larry Dunn a beating during The Great Carp Escape in yesterday's reading. Think about your life own experiences related to this incident.

Today, make a comparison between the two different sides to Byron's personality: the side that would be willing to beat someone up to protect his younger brother, and the other side that is afraid of Momma. Which side shows the most justice? Remember that justice requires restraint and making decisions that respect the rights of all. **Write 1-2 argumentative paragraphs claiming which side of Byron's personality exhibits the most justice. How is being true to oneself a kind of justice? If you were Byron's younger brother, which side of his personality would you prefer? Use the juxtaposition of these two sides of Byron's personality to allow your reader a window into the character's complexity.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 8



Key Paragraph, p. 85

"Leave it to Daddy Cool to kill a bird, then give it a funeral. Leave it to Daddy Cool to torture human kids at school all day long and never have his conscience bother him but to feel sorry for a stupid little grayish brown bird.

I don't know, I really wished I was as smart as some people thought I was, 'cause some of the time it was real hard to understand what was going on with Byron" (p. 85).

Writing Prompt

Byron is quite a complex character. He surprises his own brother on a regular basis with his actions, which seem unpredictable. Today he kills a bird then gives it a funeral. This shocks Kenny since he sees his brother being mean to kids at school and living without remorse. Consider your life story – how is it similar or different to Kenny or Byron's?

Write an argumentative paragraph in which you argue that your life story is either similar or different than Kenny or Byron's life experiences in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. Does your personality have many sides? Are you a complex person like Byron? Or are your words and actions more consistent and predictable? Use evidence from the text as well as your own personal experiences to enhance your claim.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 9



Key Paragraph, p. 98

“Byron stepped into the living room with a real mean scowl on his face. Not only had dad cut all of Byron’s hair off, he’d also shaved his head! By’s head was so shiny it looked like it was wet” (p. 98).

Writing Prompt

In today’s reading Byron has Buphead conk his hair, turning it reddish brown, straight, stiff and slick looking. Momma nearly has a heart attack when she sees it, but didn’t discipline him; she leaves that for Dad to do when he comes home. Much to Byron’s disappointment, Dad takes clippers and a razor to Byron’s new hairstyle and shaves it all off.

Pretend you are Byron. **Write an argumentative speech that will be presented to your parents explaining why you conked your hair and why you think they ought to let you keep it. Be logical in your approach. Give at least two good reasons for you to keep your hair conked. Provide a counterargument and be sure to conclude with a reiteration of your claims. Upload a final, word-processed version of your speech to the online forum of your choice (Blog, Google Docs, etc.).**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 104

“Then Dad pulled one of his famous tricks on me. He said, ‘Kenny, look!’ and pointed out in the hallway. Even before I could think my head turned around and I followed Dad’s finger. When I saw nothing and looked back Dad was smiling a mile a minute, acting like he hadn’t done anything but I noticed that his toothbrush was gone. I let him know he didn’t fool me” (p. 104).

Writing Prompt

Kenny fell for another of his Dad’s tricks: “Hey look over there.” Kenny tried resisting this trick, but, before he even knew what happened, Dad cleverly hid his toothbrush. Do you have any family stories about your Dad or any other family member pulling a prank, joke, sleight of hand or trick? If so, how does this person make you feel when they play tricks on you? Annoyed? Loved? Humorous?

In a paragraph describe a trick that someone played on you and, in a second paragraph, argue whether or not you enjoyed it. Was it humorous? Embarrassing? Did it affect the relationship between you and the person who pranked you? Use words and phrases that are appropriate to the audience. Also, be sure to provide a counterargument somewhere in your second paragraph. Conclude your work with a reiteration of your stance. When you have completed your assignment, upload a final, word-processed version to the online forum of your choice (blog, Google Doc, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 11



Key Paragraph, p.118

"You've cut school so much that Mr. Alums has come here three times to see what's wrong with you, you've been lighting fires, you've been taking change out of my purse, you've been in fights, you had that trouble up at Mitchell's Food Fair, you had that...that...problem with Mary Ann Hill, you set mousetraps in the back yard for birds, you fell out of that tree when you were trying to see if that poor cat always landed on its feet, you got that conk, you joined that gang...There's just too much Byron. We can't have all this nonsense going on" (p. 118).

Writing Prompt

Byron has been getting into trouble because of the poor choices he continues to make. Pretend you are Byron, who, faced with many absences and detentions, decides to write to the principal of the school. **In a 1-2 paragraph letter, argue that one of your many offences should be forgiven. Explain the situation in detail and provide reasons as to why it should be excused. Be sure to include all five W's; Who, What, When Where and Why. Don't forget to use a formal tone and language that is appropriate to convince your principal. Provide a counterargument, but be sure to conclude with a reiteration of your stance.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 12



Key Paragraph, p. 129

"We'd just got into bed. Byron was up in his bunk and I was down in mine. I was so excited that I was talking a mile a minute, but I was talking to myself. Byron wouldn't answer to anything. There was a knock at the bedroom door" (p. 129).

Writing Prompt

The key paragraph above ends with a cliffhanger. Christopher Paul Curtis does this to push you to continue reading so you can find out what happens next.

Address a short letter to your teacher and classmates. Argue in favor of using cliffhangers in your own biography. How do cliffhangers positively impact the audience? Does suspense encourage people to continue reading? Or does it make them want to put the book down? In your writing, use words and phrases that are appropriate to the audience you are addressing. Use your own personal opinions and experiences to support your claims. Provide a counterargument and be sure to conclude with a reiteration of your stance. Upload a final, word-processed version of your letter to the online forum of your choice (Blog, Google Docs, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 13



Key Paragraph, p. 132-33

“Momma had everything planned about the trip, everything! Where we’d eat, when we’d eat, who got baloney sandwiches on Day One, who got tuna fish on Day Two, who got peanut butter and jelly on Day Three? She’d figured out how long we could hold ourselves between going to the bathroom, how much money we’d spend on hamburgers, how much was for emergencies, everything” (p. 132-133).

Writing Prompt

In the paragraph above Kenny describes how Momma had planned out every detail of the trip; where they eat, when they eat and who eats what as well as details regarding the spending of money and use of bathroom breaks. Have you ever taking a trip with someone who planned like Momma? What benefits does this have? What are the drawbacks of planning every detail?

Write a paragraph in which you argue either for or against this kind of behavior. Would you rather plan out every detail? Or adapt your plan as you go and just see what happens? Which way do you think is superior and why? Use details from past experience in your own life to support your claims. Provide a counterargument, and be sure to end with a reiteration of your stance. When you have completed a final, word-processed version of your paragraph to the online forum of your choice (Blog, Google Docs, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 14



Key Paragraph, p. 146

“Man they got crackers and rednecks up here that ain’t never seen no Negroes before. If they caught your ass out here like this they’d hang you now, then eat you later” (p. 146).

Writing Prompt

The above paragraph foreshadows the possibility of racial trouble for the Watsons. Yesterday, you reflected on the use of a cliffhanger as a literary device. Today, you are going to reflect on the use of foreshadowing: is it effective? Or it is unnecessary?

In an argumentative paragraph, write either in favor or against Christopher Paul Curtis’ use of foreshadowing in today’s reading. Do you find it effective? Is it helpful in pointing towards what is going to happen next? Or would you rather be surprised? Use examples from today’s reading as well as personal opinion to support your claims. Be sure to include a rebuttal or a counterargument in your paragraph and conclude with a reiteration of your stance. Upload a final, word-processed version of your paragraph to the online forum of your choice (Blog, Google Docs, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 15



Key Paragraph, p. 156

"All the Weird Watsons had real good imaginations but none of us was ready for what came out of the door of that house.

I was expecting a troll. I thought Grandma Sands would be bigger than Dad, I thought she'd be foaming at the mouth like she had rabies" (p. 156).

Writing Prompt

Kenny is unsure what to expect when he meets Grandma Sands, Byron has told him stories filling his head with crazy images where he thinks she's going to look like a troll bigger than Dad and foaming at the mouth. Have you ever had someone describe a family member you hadn't meet or a stranger? How did you imagine the person? Who was it that told you about this person?

Write a paragraph arguing either for or against this approach of preconceived notions. Draw on your own life for an example to support your argument. How can judging a person before you know them be a bad thing? How is it helpful to prepare yourself before you meet someone so you know what to expect? Be sure to provide a counterargument and conclude with a reiteration of your claims.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 16



Key Paragraph, p. 161.

“Instead of King Kong and Godzilla, it was like King Kong and Bambi; instead of Bobo Brazil and the Sheik, it was like Bobo Brazil and Captain Kangaroo; instead of Dracula and Frankenstein it was like Dracula and a giraffe, and Byron was all neck” (161).

Writing Prompt

In the above key paragraph, Kenny uses analogies to compare Grandma and Byron. He was expecting a major battle between them, but now it appears the battle will not happen. An analogy is a comparison between two different things in order to highlight some point of similarity.

Write an argumentative paragraph claiming whether or not Christopher Paul Curtis’ use of analogy comparing Byron to Grandma is effective. What are the limitations of this method? How is it creative and attention grabbing? In your paragraph, try to use an analogy to prove your point. Use personal experience to support your opinions. Include a counterargument, but be sure to conclude with a reiteration of your claims. Upload your final word-processed paragraph to the online forum of your choice (Blog, Google Docs, etc.).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 17



Key Paragraph, p. 179

“He just kept saying, ‘Kenny, Kenny, Kenny...’ a bunch of times with his mouth wide open on top of my head. I could feel his teeth grinding into my skull but By didn’t care. I said, ‘Awww, man...’ and tried to make him quit, but all I could do was sit there too tired to do anything but let Daddy Cool nibble on the top of my head while he cried like a kindergarten baby” (p. 179).

Writing Prompt

We see another side of Byron today when he acts out of character and is a completely different person than the one we saw in Flint. He acts responsibly and courageously.

Choose one person who is important in your life story and reflect on an instance when they acted courageously. **Write 1-2 paragraphs arguing in favor of the qualities that make this person courageous. How can you be more like them? What makes this person act with courage? Be sure to include a counterargument in which you address the times when this person did not act courageously. Conclude with a reiteration of your stance. When you have completed this assignment, upload a word-processed version to the online forum of your choice (Blog, Google Doc, etc.).**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 18



Key Paragraph, p. 183-84

"I ran out onto the porch and into the street. It looked like someone had set off a people magnet, it seemed like everyone in Birmingham was running down the street, it looked like a river of scared brown bodies was being jerked in the same direction that By had gone, so I followed" (p. 183-84).

Writing Prompt

Christopher Paul Curtis brings us to a powerful climax today by describing the scene at the church as Kenny arrives.

Write 2 argumentative paragraphs claiming that today's reading is indeed the climax, or the most intense and suspenseful moment in the story. In the first paragraph, use evidence from the story and passages from the text to support this claim. In a second paragraph, describe how you felt while you were reading it and how this contributed to the overall feeling of suspense. Conclude your paragraphs with a reiteration of your stance. When you have completed your assignment, upload a final, word-processed version to the online forum of your choice (Blog, Google Docs).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 19



Key Paragraph, p. 203

“Byron let go of my ear and thought for a second. ‘Kenny, things ain’t ever going to be fair. How’s it fair that two grown men could hate Negroes so much that they’d kill some kids just to stop them from going to school? How’s it fair that even though the cops down there might know who did it, nothing will probably ever happen to those men? It ain’t. But you just gotta understand that that’s the way it is and keep on steppin’” (p. 203).

Writing Prompt

Most stories follow the climax with a falling action and a resolution. In this part of the story, things get sewn up and there is closure. Byron tells Kenny that things in the world are never going to be fair, but that should not stop anyone from continuing on with their lives.

Do you agree with this statement? Is this a good resolution to the story? **In 1-2 paragraphs, argue either for or against this scene as an appropriate resolution. How did it make you feel? Was there a sense of closure? Was it everything you imagined it would be? How is Byron’s statement true/untrue? Be specific and use evidence from the text, as well as personal opinions to support your claim. When you have finished, upload a final, word-processed version of your work to the online forum of your choice (Blog, Google Docs).**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Day 20



Key Paragraph, p. 210

“These people are the true American heroes. They are the boys and girls, the women and men who have seen that things are wrong and who have not been afraid to ask ‘Why can’t we change this?’ They are people who believe that as long as one person is being treated unfairly, we all are. These are our heroes, and they still walk among us today. One of them may be sitting next to you as you read this, or standing in the next room making your dinner, or waiting for you to come outside and play.

One of them may be you” (p. 210).

Writing Prompt

Today’s reading identifies the fact that sometimes the real heroes in history are not always rewarded or made famous.

Think about a person in your own life who is not famous but deserves to be because of their courageous and heroic acts. **Write an argumentative paragraph in which you claim that this person is a hero. Use examples from your personal life to support your stance. When you have completed a final, word-processed version of your paragraph, upload it to the online forum of your choice (Blog, Google Doc, etc.).**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963, Final Writing Product



Final Writing Product

The Watsons Go to Birmingham reflects the CBL theme Justice Requires Restraint. Justice demands I not say or do some things to myself, any other person, or the planet. The actions I take, and the decisions I make, must respect the rights of all. The questions asked are questions that require justice.

Today, write an essay arguing in favor of a situation in which you took a stand and acted justly. Focus on a specific life experience, and pick a time in which you had to stand up for justice, make a decision and defend a cause/person that you felt passionately about.

Write 5 paragraphs: an intro describing the situation, 3 body paragraphs in which you identify different reasons you took a stand, and a conclusion that focuses on the outcomes of your choice.

Be sure to provide a counterargument somewhere in your essay, but make sure your conclusion provides a reiteration of your claim. When you have completed a rough draft of your essay, upload it to an online forum of your choice, 'share' it with your teacher/peers, and invite them to give you feedback. When you have received constructive criticism, revisit your essay and make the changes necessary to improving your writing and argument.