

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 1



Key Paragraph, p. xx

"The past five years of my life have been a journey down a bumpy road with many jolts and upsets, but well worth every bump. My dad says you learn more about an individual's character after a defeat than after a win. I have learned that winners shake off the bumps, don't cast blame or make excuses, and continue down the road with their goals and destination intact."

Writing Prompt

Hunter Scott took up a fight for justice that began nearly forty years before he was born. For five years, he devoted a large amount of time and energy to the cause of clearing the name of Captain McVay. What do you think motivated him to this? As Hunter Scott, **write an argumentative paragraph that demonstrates why this issue is important to you. Provide three reasons to support your answer.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 2



Key Paragraph, p. 5

“There were 250 new recruits on the ship. They were all headed for the Philippines for gunnery practice, before an invasion of the Japanese main islands. What sense did that make? Smith had been firing the guns for over two years—he didn’t need any practice. The dead man is floating face-down. Smith swims away from the body. He looks around. He sees a second body, then a third. There are bodies everywhere. *How many of my shipmates are dead? How many of us have survived?* He sees a splash in the distance, and thinks it could be a man slapping his hand against the water, trying to swim, but then he sees a fin. The terror of it hits him. To his left, he watches as a body is suddenly pulled under. He sees a tail.

The water is full of sharks.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you were a sailor that survived the sinking of the ship with Smitty and Dronet. **Write an argumentative paragraph to motivate and convince Smitty and Dronet to stay positive and have courage. Include three motivating reasons in your response.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 3



Key Paragraph, p. 17

“What Hunter cannot imagine, because he’s only eleven and because no one can truly know the heart and soul of someone in deepest despair, is what must have been going through the captain’s mind when, at the age of seventy, on a cold November day in 1968, he lay down in the front yard outside his house in Litchfield, Connecticut, and shot himself through the head with his nave-issued .38 caliber revolver. Hunter can’t understand either why relatives of the men who died on the *Indianapolis* sent McVay hate mail for the rest of his life, hounding him long after the fact, particularly during the holidays. Surely Captain McVay felt responsible, even if losing the ship wasn’t his fault. Surely he grieved the loss of his crew. Surely he empathized with the wives and parents and families the left behind. Why were they trying to make it worse? Is that the reason, Hunter wonders, why he was holding a small toy sailor when he killed himself?

Why did the Navy blame him?”

Writing Prompt

Write an argumentative and encouraging letter to Captain McVay in order persuade him that his life and every life has value. Include three specific examples of what makes Captain McVay so special and unique. End the note with encouraging words of love and support.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 4



Key Paragraph, p. 21

“War became inevitable on October 23, 1941, when Japanese Prime Minister Prince Fumimaro Konoe, a pacifist, resigned. He was replaced as prime minister by the minister for war, fifty-seven-year-old extremist Hideki Tojo, a man whose nickname as an army officer had been “The Razor.” Even as Japan continued diplomatic efforts to get the U.S. to release its oil, plans were drawn up to attack the American fleet at Pearl Harbor.”

Writing Prompt

Review today’s reading beginning with Black Friday, 1929. How do you think the war started between Japan and the US? **Write your explanation in an argumentative paragraph that convinces your readers that this is the true reason why the war began. Include three details from today’s reading to support your claim.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 31-32

“Captain McVay told his officers what he knew. Most of the common seaman knew only that they were heading back into the war, possibly gearing up for the invasion of the Japanese home islands.”

Writing Prompt

Review the descriptions of today’s characters and the jobs that they were assigned. Choose the character or job that you most identify with. **In an argumentative paragraph, prove why you identify with this character and/or job. Explain why you identify with a particular type of work, ranking, or personality description? Provide three reasons to support your claim.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 6



Key Paragraph, p. 47

“To some it may have seemed like they were the only ship on the sea.
They weren’t.
A Japanese sub lay directly ahead.”

Writing Prompt

From the vaguely written itinerary of the *Indy*’s orders, to the decision not to provide an escort; from the downplaying of actual enemy threat along the Peddie route to allowing all of the water-tight hatches to remain open; from McVay’s order to stop zig-zagging to his apparent lack of concern regarding recent intelligence regarding the possible presence of a Japanese submarine dead ahead, many mistakes were made by many people that could be attributed to the sinking of the *USS Indianapolis*. **Write an argumentative paragraph supporting the fact that there is not one person to blame for this atrocity. Provide three reasons to support your answer.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 7



Key Paragraph, p. 52

“At 12:02, Captain Mochitsura Hashimoto looked through his periscope and saw a column of water shoot up into the sky near the front of his target, followed by tongues of red flame lighting up the darkness.

‘Meecyuu!’ He said. (‘A hit!’)

A few seconds later, he witnessed a second explosion.

‘Meecyuu!’ he repeated.”

Writing Prompt

Captain of the I-58, Mochitsura Hashimoto, decided to fire 6 torpedoes. Do you believe this was a just decision? **In an argumentative paragraph support or disprove Mochisura Hashimoto’s decision to launch the torpedoes. Provide three reasons to support your position.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 8



Key Paragraph, p. 64

"It took only twelve minutes. Shorter than halftime at a football game, but enough time to kill about 300 men and put the rest in the water, roughly 880 men scattered 600 miles west of Guam, 550 miles east of Leyte and 250 miles north of the Palau Islands, the closest land.

Twelve minutes."

Writing Prompt

In today's reading, each seaman described (Kuryla, Moslely, Twible, McCoy, and McVay) had to make sacrifices to save himself. If they survive, each character will re-analyze these past events and question whether or not they could have- or should have- done more. Chose a seaman, pretend you are one of his closest loved ones- a girlfriend, wife, or family member. **Write an argumentative letter convincing the seaman that he did everything he could under the circumstances. Consider the time it took for the ship to sink, the laws of seamanship, and the chaos of the situation. Make your argument heartfelt and sincere.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 9



Key Paragraph, p. 71

“Suddenly Smith felt a shark take him by the left hand and pull him under before he had a chance to scream. His left hand was in the shark’s mouth up to his wrist. He couldn’t shake it loose. He could see the shark under water. It was maybe eight or ten feet long. It rolled, then twisted, trying to rip his hand off. Smith held his breath and pushed at the shark, trying to get his left hand free as the shark jerked from side to side. Smith’s right hand slipped off the shark’s nose until he felt a soft spot on the side of the shark’s head. Smith plunged his middle finger into the soft spot and slid it in all the way to the last knuckle. *His eye*, Smith thought. *I’ll rip his eye out if he thinks he can pull me down.* Then the shark turned him loose. Smith kicked for the surface, certain the shark would take him again. He surfaced, gasping for air. His hand was torn and bleeding, but at least it was still connected to his arm. He swam back toward the group, but found he was no longer welcome there. Men feared that Smith’s wounds would only attract more sharks.”

Writing Prompt

Smith is injured and could use the help of the group to survive. However, Smith is also bleeding and the group fears that Smith’s blood will attract more sharks and place them in more danger. **Write an argumentative paragraph that defends Smith survival or the group’s safety. Begin with a firm statement in support of either helping Smith or alienating Smith for the group’s safety. Include three reasons to support your statement. Conclude with a sentence that reaffirms your position.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 78

"The men in the water suffered from a variety of delusions. Some believed that the water at their feet had to be fresh water because it was colder than the water nearer the surface, and that it would be safe to dive down and take a drink as long as the water they drank was cold."

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are one of the sailor-leaders (McVay, Mosely, Smith, Twible, Miner, Kuryla, etc.) and that one of your shipmates nearby is considering diving down for a drink of "freshwater." **Write an argumentative paragraph to convince your shipmate not to drink the water. Explain what will happen to him if he drinks the water. Provide three consequences for drinking the water. Be descriptive and convincing.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 11



Key Paragraph, p. 79

“Many of the men went out of their heads, to varying degrees, for varying lengths of time, from simple sleep deprivation. Hallucinations, compelling fantasies, obsessive thoughts, uncontrollable fears and emotions, delirium, hopelessness and despair are all expressions of psychic damage, and during sleep is the time when the psyche heals and repairs itself by dreaming. Without sleep, microscopic psychic injuries rub and chafe and become infected too.”

Writing Prompt

In order to survive a torturous situation it is important to keep your mind sharp and not fall into hallucinations. Is it possible to prevent hallucinations? How can a focus mind-set help humans overcome mental roadblocks, provide hope, and think about solutions? **Write an argumentative paragraph to convince and motivate the men who are hallucinating. Provide three reasons why it is important not to hallucinate in order to survive.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 12



Key Paragraph, p. 92

"[Marks] was informing, not asking permission. Marks made his decision to land because as he circled low, he'd actually seen sharks taking men in the water, and the sight horrified him. There was a standing order in the squadron that nobody was allowed to land PBY-5As in open water. Unlike standard PBYs, PBY-5As had three large wheels, which, though retractable, put extra weight in the nose and made the aircraft less seaworthy. Other attempts to land 5As in the open water had met with disaster, but Marks decided it was worth the risk, and when he'd polled his crew to ask them what they thought, they agreed. He'd established a reputation for fearlessness in prior rescues, and his men admired him for that. The wind was eight knots, blowing from the north, but the seas contained twelve-foot swells running from the northwest, promising a roller-coaster landing at best. At worst, *Playmate 2* could break up if it hit the sea wrong. Insofar as he was putting his crew in danger, Marks was aware that he could be court-martialed later, but right now, men were being ripped to pieces by sharks."

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are Lt. Marks and that the war is over. You have been notified that you are to be court-martialed for disobeying a standing order and thereby endangering your aircraft and your crew. **Construct an argumentative response that explains why you disobeyed the order. In order to convince the tribunal that you did the right thing, provide three strong convincing reasons to support your decision. Include three specific examples from today's reading to back up your argument.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 13



Key Paragraph, p. 101

“Knowing *how* the men in the water died is not the same thing as knowing *why* they died. The 317 men who were saved from exposure and shark attacks were asking, ‘Why me? Why did I live when my shipmates didn’t?’ The relatives of the other 880 men were asking the navy, ‘Why did this happen? Why wasn’t the ship given an escort? Was the captain doing all he could have done to prevent the attack? How could the ship go down so fast? Why weren’t there more lifeboats? Why didn’t anybody hear the SOSs? Why didn’t anybody notice the ship was overdue in port? Why wasn’t anybody keeping track of it? Why didn’t somebody send rescue planes and ships immediately? What should the navy have done that they didn’t do?’”

Writing Prompt

Today’s reading analyzes what the Navy *should* have done. **Write an argumentative paragraph to convince readers how the Navy could be partly responsible for the sinking of the *Indy*. Describe in detail the mistakes and assumptions that were made.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 14



Key Paragraph, p. 113

“Then Judge Advocate Hillbert listed what he construed as the facts of the case regarding McVay. He maintained that Waldron had indeed warned McVay of the submarine menace, that visibility was good enough the night of the sinking that McVay should have been zigzagging, and that he’d delayed sending an SOS. The court of inquiry ruled that as a consequence, Captain McVay should be issued a letter of reprimand and court-martialed for endangering the lives of his men through negligence.”

Writing Prompt

The above charges are likely true of McVay. The ship’s log notes that the sky at the time of the sinking was only 60% covered. Further, the author notes that McVay did indeed hold off sending an SOS believing that the ship would hold together, despite the damage from the torpedoes. Pretend you are McVay’s defense attorney. As his attorney, **write an argumentative statement to prove McVay is not completely to blame to the court. Redirect blame to the navy, reminding the court of the Navy’s errors in judgment. Explain how failing to provide the necessary intelligence, a safe route of passage, an escort equipped with sonar had far more to do with the sinking of the ship than McVay’s minimal negligence. Conclude your statement with a strong closing sentence.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 15



Key Paragraph, p. 124

“The charges were: 1. ‘Through negligence suffering a vessel of the Navy to be hazarded...by failing to cause a zigzag course to be steered...during good visibility,’ and 2. ‘Culpable inefficiency in the performance of duty...by failing to issue timely orders to abandon ship.’ Limiting the scope of the charges to McVay’s actions before the sinking effectively prevented McVay’s defense from raising any questions about the delay in rescue or the failure by the various commands to keep track of the ship. That, in turn, enhanced the impression that McVay and only McVay was responsible for the loss of his crew.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are McVay’s lawyer. McVay has been accused of failing to zigzag and delaying the order to abandon ship. **Construct an argumentative opening statement in Defense of McVay. Focus on what the Navy could have done differently to prevent the attack by the I-58. (HINT: Consider their failures to provide adequate intelligence, an alternative route to Leyte, and an escort.)**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 16



Key Paragraph, p. 133

“Testimony ended on December 18, a week before Christmas. The next day, the two lawyers gave their summations. Cady maintained that the charges had been disproved. Ryan summarized the evidence and defined negligence as failing to do something a reasonable man should have done, or doing something a reasonable man wouldn’t. ‘And the negligence, in this case, as we see it, is that the accused failed in his general overall responsibility to cause a zigzag course to be steered under the conditions proved, together with the fact that he failed to incorporate in his night orders, or by issuing define instructions to commence zigzagging if and when the moon rose. He failed to issue these instructions to the officers of the deck.’”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are either prosecutor Ryan or defense attorney Cady. **Write an argumentative summation, proclaiming McVay’s guilt or innocence. A summation should provide the essential facts to back up your findings. Conclude with a strong statement defending your position.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 17



Key Paragraph, p. 147

“Perhaps hardest of all for McVay to bear were the cards and letters he received from the families of the sailors who died when the *Indianapolis* sank, hate mail blaming him and asking him how he could live with himself, even Christmas cards from families telling him how he’d ruined their Christmases forever because he’d killed their sons. Louise had tried to screen his mail for him and keep him from seeing the hate mail, but she was never entirely successful. Since her death, he’d collected a large number of letters, which he saved in bundles bound by string or rubber bands.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are McVay and that you have just received and read a Christmas card filled with sadness and anger from a relative of one of the men who died on the *Indy*. **As McVay, construct a heartfelt response to the deceased mens’ family members. Include an argumentative paragraph persuade the family members that you are truly sorry for their loss. Ask the family members for their forgiveness.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 18



Key Paragraph, p. 163

“Allen finished his duty, went to bed and woke up curious to hear what had happened to the *Indianapolis*. When he asked, he was told that Gillette had become furious that a subordinate officer had dispatched ships without permission and actually ordered the tugs to turn around and return to base, simply because he hadn’t been the one who sent them. In a follow-up letter to Hunter Scott, Allen alleged that a cover-up had taken place at the naval shore facilities at Tacloban. Considering that both Gillette and Gibson were questioned in the inquiry that followed the disaster, if what Allen was saying was true, the navy had even more to answer for than anyone had previously known. If those tugs had been allowed to proceed, hundreds of sailors on the *Indianapolis* might have been saved.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are Hunter Scott. Write a letter to Commodore Gillette. Introduce yourself and your mission. Tell him what you heard about the SOS and the tugboats. **In an argumentative paragraph persuade him to come forward and tell the truth. Consider appealing to his emotions, knowing that if this is true, the deaths of many have likely been weighing heavily on his conscience for years and years. Explain that this is a chance to free himself of that weight through telling the truth.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Left for Dead, Day 19



Key Paragraph, p. 178

“There is an inconsistency here. If you’re going to use the principles of accountability, then you have to apply them to all officers who are involved. You did not do that. What I am saying to you is,’ Smith said, punctuating with a thumb and forefinger, ‘if you’re going to do this to one man who was involved in this incident, you’ve got to do it to everybody. And you didn’t do that, which is what makes the court-martial, in my opinion, morally wrong.”

Writing Prompt

As concisely as possible, explain Senator Smith’s argument that suggests McVay’s conviction was unfair. **Construct an argumentative statement to convince Congress that McVay’s court martial was wrong. Provide three reasons to support your statement. It may be helpful to think in terms of an “If...then...statement.”**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Left for Dead, Day 20



Key Paragraph, p. 182-183

“1. In light of the remission by the Secretary of the Navy of the sentence of the court-martial and the restoration of Captain McVay to active duty by the Chief of Naval Operations, Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, that the American people should now recognize Captain McVay’s lack of culpability for the tragic loss of the USS *Indianapolis* and the lives of the men who died as a result of the sinking of that vessel; and

2. In light of the fact that certain exculpatory information was not available to the court-martial board and that Captain McVay’s conviction resulted therefrom, that Captain McVay’s military record should now reflect that he is exonerated for the loss of the USS *Indianapolis* and so many of her crew.”

Writing Prompt

Write an argumentative essay that answers the question of whether or not you believe Captain McVay was responsible for the sinking of the USS *Indianapolis* or the loss of lives that resulted from it. Use the information you have collected while reading this book. Provide at least three reasons to support your opinion regarding his culpability. Include an introduction, a body paragraph supports your position, and a conclusion that reiterates your position.