

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 1



Key Paragraph – 6

“I did not hear the rest of her words. I saw myself in a new Liberation Army uniform, slim and standing straight as a reed, long braids swinging at my waist. A Liberation Army soldier! One of the heroes admired by all, who helped Chairman Mao liberate China from oppression and defeated the Americans in Korea. And a performer, just like my mother used to be, touring the country, the world, to tell everyone about the New China that Chairman Mao had built and how it was becoming stronger and stronger.”

Ji Li is extremely excited about her opportunity to audition for the Central Liberation Army Academy. When she closes her eyes she imagines just what it will be like and how she will feel. Pretend you are Ji Li. Write a thank you letter to the school principal for recommending you to audition and explain you will have to decline.

Write an **argumentative paragraph** that proves you are thankful and excited for the opportunity. Support your claim with three examples from the reading.

1. Describe a time you were very excited about a new possibility.
2. Did things turn out the way you imagined they would?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Red Scarf Girl, Day 2



Key Paragraph – 14

“Ji-yong was eleven, one year younger than me, and Ji-yun was one year younger than Ji-yong. Once Mom told me that she had her three children in three years because she wanted to finish the duty of having babies sooner,, so she could devote herself wholeheartedly to the revolution. While I was tall and thin, like Dad, Ji-yong and Ji-yun were shorter and plumper, like Mom. Ji-yong was nicknamed Iron-Ball because he was dark skinned and sturdy. He liked to play in the alley and paid little attention to his studies. Ji-yun had two dimples, which gave her an especially sweet smile. She was easygoing and did not always strive to be the best, as I did. But I learned that she could be very stubborn.”

Pretend you are Ji Li’s teacher. Write Ji Li an encouraging letter reminding her that she is making a choice to feel sad. Write an **argumentative paragraph** to encourage her to overcome mental roadblocks that interfere with her studies. Include reasons why she needs to look on the bright side and be more optimistic.

1. Describe a time in your life when you were upset or disappointed.
2. How did you overcome your sadness?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 3



Key Paragraph – 37

“ ‘But maybe they’re right about the housekeeper,’ I admitted as we slung our schoolbags over our shoulders. ‘I guess I’ll have to tell Mom what they said about Song Po-po.’ ”

If you were living in China during the Cultural Revolution, what role do you think you would have played? Write an **argumentative paragraph** defending your decision to join the Red Guard or your decision to rid yourself of four-old thoughts and behaviors. Include three reasons to support your answer.

1. What excites you but not your family, parents, or teachers?
2. Do you think this is a generational difference? Why or why not?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 4



Key Paragraph – 38

“I stopped. I was afraid to look at her. Her hand squeezed my shoulder, and I felt her sobbing quietly.

We stood together like that for a long time, in the darkness and in the silence.”

In today’s reading, Ji-li realized that something she originally thought was a good idea, had gone too far and become a bad one. However, by the time Ji-li came to this realization it was too late. Pretend Ji-li realized the consequences of this plan sooner. As Ji-li write an **argumentative paragraph** to persuade the students from carrying out their plan. Provide three reasons to support your answer. Suggest an alternative plan of action.

1. Write about a time in your life when something happened to make you realize that what had seemed previously like a good idea, had obviously been a bad one.
2. Tell how this realization changed the way you interacted with or saw the world.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 5



Key Paragraph – 59

“‘Of course I know.’ Du Hai smirked openly. ‘My mother is the Neighborhood Party Communist Secretary. She knows everything.’”

Pretend you are Du Hai and that as a dedicated Red Successor, you wish to record everything you know about families with bad class status. Use what you learned from Ji-li’s father today to write an **argumentative report** that exposes and explains why Ji-li’s family has a bad class status. Provide 2-3 examples from today’s reading to support your claim. As a Red Successor that personally despises Ji-li, you will want to make her family sound bad. You may wish to leave out parts that make the family sound honorable and even twist some of the facts to make things sound worse than they are. Be sure your revolutionary voice comes through to the reader.

1. What do you think about capitalism?
2. How are you involved in a capitalist society?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 6



Key Paragraph – 77

“Teacher Gu nodded. ‘We got a new directive from the city. All students will be assigned to schools by their residential districts. The teachers’ assignments have been invalidated.’”

Pretend you are a reporter for the local Shanghai newspaper. Write an article that explains the changes in school policies (no entrance exams and the assignment of students to schools based solely on their residential districts.” Include an **argumentative paragraph** supporting Communist Planning Committee’s reasons for these changes. REMEMBER: The Communist Party makes decisions based on what is best for the Party. Be sure that the reasons you provide are revolutionary in nature. Conclude with a reassurance that these changes are best for the party and the people, especially the working class.

1. Did you have to take an entrance exam when you started school?
2. If you were a teacher, how would you evaluate your student’s academic level?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 7



Key Paragraph – 85

“Everyone could identify the sounds of the search, and we had grown expert at locating them in the neighborhood. After six more searches had been conducted in our alley, they were no longer exciting, but the adults I knew grew more and more tense.

Pretend you are a newspaper journalist for a Chinese or American newspaper. Complete the story about the searches using the correct perspective. Write an **argumentative article** supporting or disproving the Red Guard neighborhood searches. Provide information from today’s reading, including the who, what, when, where, and why to flesh out your story. Choose your words carefully to portray the correct mood for the story and to imply your paper’s position on the events. Support your position with three reasons of why these searches are just or not.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 8



Key Paragraph – 107

“ ‘We waited and waited, straining our necks to be the first to see him. The sun was so hot. A few female comrades felt faint, but no one wanted to leave. Some comrades brought us water, but we never even thought of eating anything. Finally at five o’clock in the afternoon the people near the gate started cheering. I looked up, and there he was.’ ”

Pretend you are a reporter for a Beijing Government-owned newspaper. Write an article on the convergence of Red Guards from all over China. Include an **argumentative paragraph** that encourages others to join the Red Guards. Provide at least three reasons why they should support the Red Guards. Be sure that the tone of the article is one of admiration for the Red Guards. You may wish to focus on the sacrifices that many made to be there. Use examples from today’s reading to make your article believable.

1. Who inspires you?
2. How are you inspirational to others?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 9



Key Paragraph – 111

“ ‘Still the same.’ I shook my head and said no more.

I tried to sit and read but found myself pacing up and down the room. My knees hurt when I thought about the washboard, and my head felt dizzy when I imagined the sun burning down on him. ‘Poor man, he might get heatstroke,’ I murmured to Grandma. But immediately I scolded myself. How could I feel sorry for a counterrevolutionary’s family member who refused to support the Red Guards? Still I could not help going back out to look at him.”

Pretend you are an American reporter, reporting on the power of propaganda in China. Write an **argumentative article** proving that Chinese propaganda is governing the behavior of the masses and in influencing people to turn on each other. Use Ji-li as an example. Include a quote from her. (You may choose to select a quotation from the text, or you may wish to make up a quotation of your own.)

1. Where do you go when you are anxious or nervous? What do you think about?
2. How does this calm your anxiety?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 10



Key Paragraph – 135

“All my treasures were scattered on the floor. The butterfly fell out of its glass box; one wing was crushed under a bottle of glass beads. My collection of candy wrappers had fallen out of their notebook and were crumpled under my stamp album.

My stamp album! It had been a birthday gift from Grandma when I started school, and it was my dearest treasure. For six years I had been getting canceled stamps from my friends, carefully soaking them to get every bit of envelope paper off. I had collected them one by one until I had complete sets with my own allowance. I loved my collection, even though I knew I should not. With the start of the Cultural Revolution all the stamp shops were closed down, because stamp collecting was considered bourgeois. Now I just knew something terrible was going to happen to it.”

Pretend that a newspaper article that reported on the Red Guard’s search of Ji-li’s house and on the number of fourolds found there. Now pretend you are Ji-li, and that this experience has changed your mind about the Cultural Revolution and the Red Guard. You realize how propaganda is being used to make people fear that they are not red enough. This fear has turned people against each other. Write an **argumentative letter** to the newspaper that exposes the problems with the Cultural Revolution in your neighborhood. Use examples from today’s as well as previous day’s readings to show how the zealotry of the movement has harmed innocent people.

1. Describe a time when you felt your privacy was invaded.
2. How did this exposure make you feel?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 11



Key Paragraph – 141

“I had seen her coming home, surrounded by an escort of six or seven shouting Red Guards. Her head was bowed down by a sign that read, REACTIONARY MONSTER WEI DONG-LI. She beat a gong and shouted, “I am a reactionary teacher. I am a reactionary monster.” While I watched, she stopped shouting and tried to catch her breath. Immediately one of the Red Guards kicked her. Another cuffed her, and she began to croak out her chant once more.”

Pretend that you are an American who has just read a story about the “re-education of teachers in China.” Write an **argumentative editorial** (an opinion-based piece to be published in the paper) about how to convince readers that the Cultural Revolution is a social experiment gone horribly wrong. Use examples from today’s reading (i.e. regarding Teacher Wei) to back up your assertions.

1. Describe a time when you felt bullied.
2. What would you do if you saw someone get picked on? Would you stop them? Why or why not?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Red Scarf Girl, Day 12



Key Paragraph – 153

“I saw her mother clinging to the chimney. I shivered. I saw her grandma standing by the window in her black clothes; Old Qian, collapsed at the foot of the propaganda wall; Xiao-cheng’s father, arms wrenched behind his back; Ming-ming’s father, dangling in the air, his tongue dangling out of his bruised, purple face.”

Pretend you are a foreign reporter that has witnessed everything Ji-li has been through. Write an editorial titled, “The Cultural Revolution Is A Harmful Failure.” Write an **argumentative paragraph** that proves the revolution is harmful. Describe the events that have taken place. Provide at least three facts or examples to create a strong argument that the revolution is harmful. Be logical in your structure.

1. What type of science are you learning in school (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Oceanography, Earth Science, etc.?)
2. Why do you think you are required to learn this type of science?
3. How is the U.S. economy and society benefit from this knowledge?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 13



Key Paragraph – 178

“ ‘Well, do you want to confess then? It might be better than being punished.’
Grandma’s voice sounded unusually old.”

Ji-li’s father has to decide whether or not to confess to his sins, regardless if he had sinned or not. What would be the benefits to confessing early to something he did not do? What would be the argument for not doing so? What is likely to happen to him and his family in each scenario? Write an **argumentative paragraph** defending whether you believe Ji-li’s father should confess or not. Include three reasons to support your answer.

1. How do you make a big decision?
2. What factors (i.e. money, people, time) influence your decisions?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Red Scarf Girl, Day 14



Key Paragraph – 189

“ ‘You saw your father. He is being remolded through labor. We have evidence that he has committed a serious counterrevolutionary crime.’ He paused and fixed me with his eyes. ‘But he is very stubborn and refuses to confess. And your mother. Humph. She’s another despicable thing.’ ”

Pretend you are Ji-li. Write a letter to the foreman who tried to convince you to turn against your parents. Include an **argumentative paragraph** to convince him that they have done nothing wrong and that they are loving parents who love their country and their people. Provide examples to back up your opinion.

1. Describe a time when had to convince someone.
2. Did you convince them? How? If not, how would you do it again?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 15



Key Paragraph – 205

“ ‘ Why don’t you stay at home with him? In case...’

‘I’ve thought about that.’ She looked away from my face to the litter on the table. ‘But we can’t allow personal matters to interfere with revolutionary duties. Especially for an important political assignment like the exhibition.’”

Ji-li continues to wrestle with the question: What is more important, Family or Revolution? Write an **argumentative paragraph** that explains what you value the most. Provide three personal examples to support your answer. Include an anecdote to demonstrate your position.

1. Describe a time when you stood up for a family member.
2. How did this make you feel?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 16



Key Paragraph – 217

“Suddenly I found myself weeping. What everyone else was saying about us did not make any difference to Song Po-po. She treated us just the way she always used to. Life couldn’t be easy for her either, since she no longer had a job, but she was still concerned about others. I felt ashamed. I had been selfish and inconsiderate. Life was difficult for me, but it was even more difficult for Mom. How could I think of hurting her this way?

I heard Song Po-po go back into her room. I ran in and gave her a hug.

‘Be careful, child, be careful. I’m just bringing this bowl of soup to your mother.’

‘I’ll take it,’ I said.”

Pretend you are Ji-li and think of the apology letter that you want to give to your mother with the soup. Write an **argumentative letter** that convinces your mother that you are sorry for your mistakes. Provide three examples of your mistakes, state what you have learned and what you intend to do differently in the future so as to not repeat the same selfish, inconsiderate behavior. Since you still believe in the revolution, you should include a concession to Chairman Mao.

1. If you had the opportunity, would you change your name? Why or why not? What would you change it to?
2. What is the significance of last names?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 17



Key Paragraph – 226

“ ‘Now you have to choose between two roads.’ Thin-Face looked straight into my eyes. ‘You can break with your family and follow Chairman Mao, or you can follow your father and become an enemy of the people.’ His voice grew more severe. ‘In that case we would have many more study sessions, with your brother and sister too, and the Red Guard committee and the school leaders too. Think about it. We will come back to talk to you again.’ ”

Pretend you are Ji-li. Write an **argumentative letter** to the foreman explaining that you will never testify against your father. Tell him what you truly know about your father. Explain to him that you will follow your father and thereby become a comrade of the people rather than an enemy as he says you will become. Include an argumentative paragraph that reveals that he is the true enemy of New China. Support this statement with at least three facts and/or examples. Consider the focus of this unit- “Justice Requires Restraint.”

1. Describe a time when you supported a parent or family member.
2. How did this make them feel? How did this make you feel?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 18



Key Paragraph – 245

“The letter complained about the situation in the theatre. The faction in power, the Rebels, did whatever they wanted, ignoring the policy directives from the Central Committee of the Party, the letter said. They treated people with nonpolitical problems, like Aunt Wu, as class enemies, and the humiliated her, shaving half of her head in a yin-yang hairdo. They frequently beat their prisoners and had already beaten two to death. They even recorded the screams and most of the prisoners being tortured, and played the tapes to frighten other prisoners under interrogation.”

Respect is the threshold of acceptable human treatment that ought to be afforded to everyone. When someone is being treated in a way that falls below the threshold of the human minimum, that treatment is unjust. Use the facts from today's reading to write an **argumentative paragraph** in a letter to the Central Party Committee that convinces them that the faction at the theatre is treating people disrespectfully, and therefore unjustly. Use logic to appeal to their desire for a healthy New China. Appeal to their sense of justice to take action against the Theatre Rebels. Provide three reasons to justify your argument.

1. How can you stand up for injustice?
2. What changes do you wish to see in the world in the next year?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 19



Key Paragraph – 253

“ ‘She’s over seventy, you—How could you?’ Shielding Grandma wither own body, Mom shouted back at Thin-Face.”

Once the Theatre Rebels locate the letter there was nothing to Ji-li could do. She could not re-write it or add to it. Write an **argumentative paragraph** that proves it was unjust to search Ji-li’s house. Provide three detail facts to support your answer. Include the brutality of Thin-Face. Write a second **argumentative paragraph** to the Central Committee that reveals Thin-Face has a lack of restraint especially related to his treatment of children and the elderly. Convince the Central Committee that Thin-Face’s actions constitute as severe injustice. Provide three reasons to support your statement. Appeal to the committee to take action against Thin-Face’s faction and to restore the Jiang name to good standing in China.

1. Describe a time when you were caught for hiding something.
2. How did this make you feel? How do you think Ji-li felt?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Red Scarf Girl, Day 20



Key Paragraph – 266

“It was only after Mao’s death in 1976 that people woke up. We finally learned that the whole Cultural Revolution had been part of a power struggle at the highest levels of the Party. Our leader had taken advantage of our trust and loyalty to manipulate the whole country. This is the most frightening lesson of the Cultural Revolution: Without a sound legal system, a small group, or even a single person can take control of an entire country. This is as true now as it was then.”

Final Writing Assignment:

Your final assignment is to write an **argumentative essay** on that supports the importance of justice (in terms of respect for others) and personal restraint. Provide three examples from the novel to support your claim. Include 2-3 quotations from the text to support your opinion. Include an introduction and a conclusion. Remember to place your arguments at the beginning and end of your essay.

1. What part of this book stood out to you?
2. What is the most important lesson that you learn from this novel?