

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 1



Key Passage, p. 4

“The way Nardo tells it, you’d think he did that man a favor working for him. ‘Don’t you ever get braces, Manny,’ he said, as if that were the lesson he’d learned” (p. 4).

Writing Task

In the paragraph above, Nardo fails to correctly identify the lesson to be learned after trying to get work in the fields. He deflects responsibility to the girl with braces and to Manny.

In 1-2 paragraphs, explain what you believe the real lesson to be learned is. What should Nardo have done instead, and what the likely results would have been had he acted differently? Can you relate to this situation? Is there a time in your life when you thought you learned a certain lesson, but actually realized that the lesson was different than the one you originally believed? Using techniques such as description and reflection, create a sense of nostalgia in your writing. When you have finished your assignment, upload a word-processed version final version to the online forum of your choice (i.e. Blog, Google Docs).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 2



Key Passage, p. 20

"I thought of the baseball glove, all clean and stiff and leather-smelling, and of myself in the cool green lawn of center field. I imagined already being on the baseball team at school, and people looking at me. Not these people picking chilies or those sent away in the vans, but people I had yet to know, watching me as I stood mightily in center field. I looked down at the sacks, then far out in the distance at the clouds of dust folding and wondered how long I'd have to work to fill those sacks. The weariness of it stretched as wide as the horizon" (p. 20).

Writing Task

In the paragraph above, Manny, the main character and narrator finds himself standing in the center field of his reality, imagining the center field of his dreams. Do you think Manny will ever reach his dream of being a baseball star? Why or Why not?

In one paragraph explain why dreams are important to stay motivated. Is there a particular dream you accomplished? If so, how did you feel? In a second paragraph, describe what Manny will have to do in order to reach his goal. What are barriers that might prevent him from becoming a baseball player? How can he overcome obstacles by being courageous?

Use reflection, description, and other literary techniques to be as descriptive as possible and to create a tone of accomplishment. In your writing, focus on creating a tone of courageous perseverance. When you have completed your assignment, upload a final, word-processed version to the online forum of your choice.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 3



Key Passage, p. 21

“Because of his drinking, and because of the milk she said drained into the gutter whenever he drank, Mom hated to see Dad go to Rico’s. She was always dragging me along with her to bring him home. On the day after the chili peppers, we were all piled in the car—my little sister Pedi whining about the heat, Magda clapping her hands to the rock-and-roll music inside her head, Dad complaining about a streak of clever pool shots he was working on before Mom yanked him rudely away. No telling how much money he could have won, he kept saying” (p. 21).

Writing Task

In today’s reading, Manny talks about how his dad is always drunk and is too prideful to collect money from the welfare office. It appears that Manny’s father’s dream was destroyed at the precise moment the Garcia Boys wrecked his croquet set.

Pretend you are Manny. Your journal, write a 2-paragraph entry about you father. How do you feel about being his son? What do you think he can do to change? **Use evidence from today’s reading and try to use imagery-rich language, such as a metaphor, simile, or an analogy in your paragraph. Also, when you have completed your assignment, upload a word-processed version to the online forum of your choice (i.e., Google Docs, Blog).**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 4



Key Passage, p. 35

“Mom just kept watching the TV. I guess she figured she could scold him for starving us, scold him about the unpaid rent or the job somewhere in the world waiting for him to try harder, but she was tired of all that. She knew if she cluttered his ears with too much griping, it would only thicken his stubbornness. He’d smolder around the house for hours, grumbling and haranguing until he gnawed her patience down to shreds” (p. 35).

Writing Task

In the paragraph above, Manny’s Mom decides not to say anything to her husband, because she knows he is just looking for an excuse to storm out of the house and head back to Rico’s. He finds a reason anyway.

Pretend you are Manny’s mom. From her perspective, write your husband a letter telling him how you feel about his drinking habits. Is his behavior disruptive to the family? Let Dad have it, “scold him for starving [them]” and about the “...unpaid rent [and] the job somewhere in the world...” “Clutter his ears with griping” and otherwise harangue him. Use descriptive words and sensory language to create a sense of extreme disapproval. Employ different narrative techniques such as dialogue, reflection, and description. Remind him of his responsibilities and tell him what he needs to do (and not do) in order to fulfill them. When you have finished your assignment, upload a final, word-processed version to the online forum of your choice (i.e. Blog, Google Docs).

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 5



Key Passage, p. 48

“‘He give you this?’ he asked, his voice croaking and the cords on his neck pulsing as he took in gulps of air. He didn’t really expect an answer. He looked over at me with glazed eyes, then turned toward the house. As he reached the door, he swung back around and pointing right at the president’s picture on the twenty-dollar bill, said, ‘Don’t you think I know people like this?’” (p. 48).

Writing Task

In today’s reading Manny is given money from Mr. Hart for “school supplies” and is given a ride home from his teacher. Upon arriving home Manny’s dad is furious that Manny would bring a guy like Mr. Hart home and takes the twenty dollars that Mr. Hart gives him. Analyze the paragraph above. Decide what you think Manny’s dad means when he says, “Don’t you think I know people like this?”

Write a paragraph explaining your interpretation of the above quote. Using descriptive language, sensory details and other techniques (i.e., reflection, pacing), explain why you think Manny’s Dad is so mad. What is the cause of his anger? How would you feel if someone treated your son that way? Explain why he took his son’s money. Be logical in your organization and show coherence in your writing.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 6



Key Passage, p. 51-52

“Perico, or Parrot, was what Dad called me sometimes. It was from a Mexican saying about a Parrot that complains how hot it is in the shade, while all along he’s sitting inside an oven. People usually say this when talking about ignorant people who don’t know where they’re at in the world. I didn’t mind it so much actually, because Dad didn’t say it because he thought I was dumb, but because I trusted everything too much, because I’d go right into the oven trusting people all the way—brains or no brains” (p. 51-52).

Writing Task

Manny is compared to a Parrot by his father. It is in today’s reading that we first get introduced to the significance of the parrot and its relation to the title of the book.

In a paragraph explain how you think Manny like a Parrot in the Oven. Use evidence from the story to back up your assertions. Also, create a persuasive tone in your paragraph by using reflection, description, and other narrative techniques. In a second paragraph, compare yourself to Manny. Are you like a Parrot in the Oven? Use personal details and other techniques to be as clear and coherent as possible.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 7



Key Passage, p. 67

“But Mom wasn’t listening. She seemed to still be hearing something in the air. Then her face became more alert, and she turned to the officer leading Dad out of the door. ‘Take him,’ she said, softly at first, then with decided anger. ‘Go ahead, take him!’” (p. 67).

Writing Task

When Manny’s father is arrested and put in handcuffs, Manny’s mother tells the officers to, “take him.” A lot of meaning is packed into those two little words. Let us unpack them and examine their meaning in the context of the passage.

Pretend you are Manny’s mother. Compose a letter to your husband, while he is being held in jail. In the letter, use techniques (such as description, reflection, dialogue and pacing) in order to convey your emotions towards him and what he did to you. How has he put you and your family in danger? Can you forgive him? Why or why not? Be creative and use Manny’s mother’s voice; create personal events that her character could use to support her stance. Try to be as concise as possible to create coherence and a tone of chastisement. When you have completed your assignment, upload a word-processed version to the online forum of your choice.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 8



Key Passage, p. 74

“Dad must have sizzled on some hot plans while he was in jail, and now, he was ready to get into action. I’d rather have gotten dragged across a cactus desert and dropped thirsty in a lake of salt than listen to him, but he had us there in the car, muscling his voice so our minds wouldn’t wander” (p. 74).

Writing Task

In today’s reading Manny’s Dad is released from jail. He has promised to be a better husband and look for a job. Dad has taken Manny and Nardo to Grandma’s house to clean. On his way there Dad tells them while in jail he “sizzled” up plans to make money.

Pretend you are Manny riding in the backseat of the car. Re write the monologue being given by Dad, describing the hot plans he “sizzled” while he was in jail. Be sure that Dad explains how your cleaning of Grandma’s yard fits with his grand plan. Focus on original word choice, use words that Manny’s Dad would actually use. Use techniques such as dialogue, pacing, and description. Your writing should be coherent and contribute to an overall sense of scheming. When you have completed your assignment, upload it to the online forum of your choice.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 9



Key Passage, p. 85

"I leaned forward on the couch and in a half whisper told Nardo that the night before I had dreamt about Grandma. She and I were walking together in the mountains, when suddenly, under our feet, a huge earthquake erupted, with fire tearing open the earth like a sharp knife through seams of old leather. I woke shivering and soaked in cold sweat" (p. 85).

Writing Task

Manny's grandma has passed away. On the day of her wake Manny tells Nardo about a dream he had about his grandma before her death.

What do you think Manny's dream symbolizes? In 1-2 paragraphs, explain what you think the symbolism of the earthquake, the fire and of Manny's grandma mean in the dream? What do the mountains and the earthquake and the fire symbolize? Feel free to research these symbols using authoritative print and/or digital sources. In your writing, use various techniques such as description to create coherence. Pay careful consideration to the sound, length and flow of your sentences. When you have completed this assignment, upload it to the online forum of your choice.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 10



Key Passage, p. 100

"The sound of the gun going off was like a huge mouth swallowing a noise, and Pedi was eaten by that mouth. Thoughts ran together inside my head and blurred, like currents of fast water flowing together. Loud shrieks inside my lungs were bursting to get out, but couldn't. Pedi was dead, I knew it. The way she fell back on the floor, she could only be dead. I was afraid to go up to her, thinking I'd see a gory gash where the bullet entered her head and I'd lose my mind" (p. 100).

Writing Task

Manny is fascinated with his father's gun in today's reading. Earlier we read that his father chased his mom throughout the neighborhood shooting at her with the same gun. In today's reading Manny is playing with the gun and accidentally shoots Pedi or in her direction. It wasn't until his incident with Pedi that he finally realizes the finality of bullets and how harmful guns can be.

Guns have been prominent in the media and news lately, and several debates are underway about gun rights and gun safety. Find information on this topic and use current authoritative news sources to support your research. Then, pretend to be Manny.

From his perspective, **write two paragraphs. In the first, pretend that the bullet that went off actually hit Pedi and wounded her. How do you feel? How are you going to explain this to your parents? What are the consequences of your actions? In a second paragraph, imagine that the gun did not go off. Still writing from Manny's perspective, describe how you feel (relieved, hopeful, etc.). How does the fact that your sister was not harmed change your relationship with her? In your writing, use different techniques such as reflection, description, dialogue and pacing. Try to create a sense of drama and suspense in the first paragraph, and a sense of thankfulness in the second.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 11



Key Passage, p. 109

“For a long time, I lay there, thinking, my head pillowed on my arm. Thoughts came like damp, echoing coughs, and the air felt empty. I sort of began to feel like no gravity was holding me, and I was spiraling down a long, black tunnel. Looking up, I remembered the bullet, which I figured got buried inside the cooler shaft. I prayed no one would ever see it. The thought of how close I’d come to killing Pedi gave my lungs a peculiar sponginess, as if apart from my body they’d been sobbing for hours” (p. 109).

Writing Task

Even after watching his dad chase after his mom with a gun Manny is intrigued by the rifle. While playing with the rifle the rifle goes off and shoots in Pedi’s direction. Manny puts the gun away and acts like nothing happens when his mom and sister return home.

Have you ever had a situation where you almost lost someone close to you because of irresponsible behavior?

In a paragraph describe what happened with the rifle. Did you learn anything from this situation? Do you regret playing with the rifle? Will you do it again? Put yourself in Manny’s shoes as you write and try to imagine what is going on in his mind. Try using descriptive, sensory language- sight, smell, taste, feeling, sounds, etc. You may also wish to include figurative language, such as a metaphor or a simile. When you have finished your assignment, upload a final, word-processed version to the online forum of your choice.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 12



Key Passage, p. 122

“What mostly fired us up, though, was Lencho’s inspirational talks. He spoke with braids of lightning in his voice, saying stuff he’d learned in the Beret’s about Mexicans and Chicanos being a special people, how power slept in our fists and we could awaken it with a simple nod of our heroic will. He piled it on about being proud, about how marvelous it was going to be after we pulverized those other guys, Lencho could really swell the chest muscles” (p. 122).

Writing Task

Albert decides to join Lencho’s boxing team. Manny decides not to join but becomes an equipment manager instead. During the weeks that followed Lencho trains Albert and another guy named Chico.

Often with sticky situations or character-changing events one is either talked into doing something “stupid” or talked out of a difficult situation. Recall on an experience in which you were either convinced to do something that you later regretted, or given advice that helped you leave a difficult situation.

Write a descriptive paragraph about the details of that experience. Who influenced you? Do you regret your decision? Were you courageous in the choices you made? Be as specific as possible and use techniques such as reflection, description, and pacing to create a coherent tone. When you have completed your assignment, upload a final, word-processed version to the online forum of your choice.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 13



Key Passage, p. 138

"I felt like screaming for him to shut up. The truth was, I was afraid that Lencho would go down. If he did, I didn't know what I'd do. I had expected and wanted so much from him, that for him to disappoint me then would hurt, really hurt. I suddenly realized that the whole fight shouldn't have been given so much meaning. When pumped up with pride, something so ugly as a boxing match could only grow too cruel to maintain; it could only burst, right in everybody's faces" (p. 138)

Writing Task

Chico, Albert, and Lencho are finally able to put the training into action. In today's reading all three fighters lose to their opponents, even though each fought hard. Albert loses to Boise's little brother, Albert to Malcolm Augustus, and Lencho loses to Boise. When Lencho loses he not only lets himself down but also disappoints the Brown Berets and Manny.

Have you ever been disappointed in someone you looked up to? Why were you disappointed? Could the person have done anything different in your eyes? Did you learn anything from the situation? Write a paragraph detailing why you were let down and what you feel the person could have done different to make you not disappointed. Try to use as many sensory details and images as possible to describe the situation coherently. When you have completed your assignment, upload a final, word-processed version to the online forum of your choice.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 14



Key Passage, p. 149

“Finally, we got her into the wheelchair. The receptionist held the hydraulic door and watched, her eyes a mushy boredom. She wasn’t preaching anymore. She didn’t even look embarrassed about her slobbery speech. If anything, it was my mom who looked embarrassed. She was rattled, too, by what the lady said. She wasn’t surprised, though. Nothing surprised my mom. She *expected* people to treat her mean. Then a little anger sparked inside her. When she turned the chair to wheel Magda out, she said in a gruff voice for me, *not* the lady, to hold open the door” (p. 149).

Writing Task

In today’s reading Manny’s mom is embarrassed by the situation she and her siblings find themselves in. Magda is having a miscarriage and is rushed to the hospital. Upon arriving at the hospital the receptionist is rude and makes Manny and his mom feel embarrassed about Magda’s condition.

Have you ever been treated in a way that has made you feel embarrassed about a situation you were involved in? Have you been judged by someone before they got a chance to know you? Write a paragraph detailing the events of the situation. Did you get mad like Manny’s mom during or after the situation? Did you think the other person had a right to judge you? How did it make you feel? Write your paragraph from a first-person perspective. Be as descriptive as possible by utilizing sensory details and images. Employ techniques such as dialogue, pacing, reflection and description to create cohesion and an overall sense of injustice about your treatment.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 15



Key Passage, p. 156

"I leaned against the wall, my arm dead to the coldness. 'How's he gonna blame me?' I asked, in a voice that sounded like a girl's. 'Who's he got to blame other than hisself?'" (p. 156).

Writing Task

After returning from the hospital Manny is told by his mom to be quite and to go back to bed. Manny refuses. Manny's mom then tells him that if Dad finds out that he will blame Manny.

There is an antagonist to most stories, a villain, or a person who leads the hero astray. In *Parrot in the Oven*, Manny sees his father as his antagonist. Is there a person in your life that can be described as an antagonistic? **Write a descriptive paragraph describing the antagonist. What is his/her relationship to you? How are you and he/she different? How are you similar? What dangers does the antagonist pose? Do you feel like a "*parrot*" in the oven? Use sensory language and be as descriptive as possible. When you have completed your assignment, upload it to the online forum of your choice.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 16



Key Passage, p. 167

'Well maybe you're right, honey.' Mr. Giddens said, putting his hand on his waist and eyeing Dorothy as if figuring out a complicated math problem. 'Maybe just Manuel, then—huh, sweetheart?'

An idea snapped inside Dorothy's head. She turned hopefully to me. 'Maybe he doesn't *want* to come, Dad?'

'Sure he wants to come! Don't you Manuel?' Mr. Giddens said, egging me on.

'Well,' I said. I didn't know what to say, really; didn't know what was going on. Whatever was going on, though, I knew words wouldn't help" (p. 167).

Writing Task

In today's reading Manny is placed in an uncomfortable position of being placed in a situation that will either lose him his "job with Nardo" or being at a party where he is not wanted and doesn't know anyone.

Write a 2 paragraph letter to Manny giving him advice about what he should do. Within the letter explain whether or no he should go to the party. Use techniques such as reflection and description to be as concise as possible. Create an overall sense of persuasion in your letter. Present the pros and cons of each decision. Make sure to provide a counterargument, and to conclude with a strong statement of your claim. When you have finished your assignment, upload it to the online forum of your choice. Use logical reasons and evidence from the book to support your answer.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 17



Key Passage, p. 183

"I wanted to tell him that it was all a mistake, that Mr. Giddens made me come, and that I wasn't dying of love anymore, but I knew my brain was just searching for excuses" (p. 183).

Writing Task

While daydreaming about Dorothy Many accidentally places his leg between Gloria legs and holds her too close for comfort. Instead of explaining his actions and apologizing, Manny leaves quickly out the sliding back door.

Have you ever been in a situation where there was a misunderstanding and you couldn't find the words to explain yourself? How did that feel? What were the outcomes?

Write a paragraph detailing the incident and what the misunderstanding. Were you able to explain yourself after the incident? Use descriptive language and techniques such as reflection, pacing and dialogue to be as coherent as possible. When you have completed your assignment, upload a word-processed version to the online forum of your choice.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 18



Key Passage, p. 192

“Actually, it wasn’t the pain of getting socked and kicked that bothered me, but more the pain of feeling afraid. When chicken feathers choke in your veins, being afraid could be a real knife in the ribs. Then any disgrace is possible. I worried that I’d start begging, maybe even drop to the ground, paralyzed with fear, like in the war movies when the bombs drop, shocking the dirt” (p. 192).

Writing Task

In the paragraph above, Manny alludes to the will power it will take to not cry out, or beg for mercy as he is being hurt. Some would say that it takes courage to resist his impulses. Others would argue that, rather than being courageous, he has acted before weighing all the options, and projecting all the possible outcomes (There are other girls and other ways of seeking a date. He could get severely hurt or even die. Worse trouble is likely to follow now that he is in a gang, etc.) While willpower alone does not equal courage, will-power or risk-taking for a noble-reason most certainly is. Often it takes courageous action to find redemption after having gotten ourselves into trouble.

Write a paragraph about a time where you had to find your own courage in a difficult situation and what it took to change your character. What qualities of courage did you realize that you possessed? Remember, courage is risk for a reason and not for a thrill. Was acting courageously hard or easy? In the long run, are you glad that you acted with courage? Be as descriptive as possible. Describe the experience with sensory details, imagery and techniques such as reflection, pacing and dialogue. In your writing, create an overall sense of courage and bravery.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 19



Key Passage, p. 203

“As he was shaking the cold out of his legs, a huge gust of wind came splashing against the tree above us, heaving over a branch and knocking it against one of the electric wires. ‘That’s not good,’ Mondo said, nodding ominously at the tree. Then without saying goodbye, he stretched his arms, made a military salute and walked across the parking lot” (p. 203).

Writing Task

In today’s reading of the story, Manny and his friends attempt to steal something from Long’s drugstore. While the gang discusses the best way to get money the weather begins to get worst. It’s raining and cold. The tree near them begins to break under the weather. Is it a coincidence that the weather is bad the same day that Manny is out with the gang that can lead to bad consequences?

In the paragraph above, the tree on the wire is an omen, a warning of bad things to come. Often, especially in hindsight, we see warning signs that, had we heeded, we might have managed to stay out of trouble. Think about the climax of your own story. Were there any warning signs that you can recall? If there were do you think they helped with your decision? Then think about the warning signs you didn’t heed. **Write a paragraph describing the events that led you to the troublesome climax and what happened afterward. What would you have done different if anything? Be descriptive; use sensory images and techniques such as pacing, reflection, and dialogue to build a coherent picture of the event. When you have finished your assignment, upload a final word-processed version to the online forum of your choice.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Day 20



Key Passage, p. 215

“Then I sat down on Dad’s cushion chair and watched them. I won’t say why, because there is no way of explaining why, even if I could or wanted to, but I knew, as my eyes got drowsy and the bright walls of the room glowed around me, that I’d never again see anything so wondrous as my two sisters lying on the couch. And it wasn’t just them, but the whole room: the squiggly TV, the lumpy cherub angels on the frame of the painting, the glass-top coffee table, my mother’s animals, gleaming in the sunlight. This room was what my mother spent so much energy cleaning and keeping together, and what my father spent so much energy tearing apart. And it was wondrous, like a place I was meant to be. A place, I felt, that I had come back to after a long journey of being away. My home. The light in the room was closing in around me, I was so sleepy. It was dissolving and sifting in through my eyelashes in thin, filtered streams, and then there was only the dull blood under my eyelids, then dark, then sleep” (p. 215).

Writing Task

Something happened to Manny on the way home. Seeing Eddie harm an elderly woman, and almost getting into trouble for being an accessory, has somehow transformed Manny. He is no longer a Parrot in the Oven. As he approaches home, he comes out of the shade of the oven and into the light of the world.

Write a paragraph explaining how your own personality has been transformed. What events in your life have helped you to change? How have you stopped being the “parrot” in the oven? Be specific and use evidence to explain your transformation. Be as descriptive as possible: utilize reflection, pacing and dialogue to be as coherent as possible. In your writing, be sure to create a tone of triumph. When you have completed your assignment, upload a final, word-processed version to the online forum of your choice.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Parrot in the Oven, Final Writing Assignment



As a final writing assignment, students will examine the theme of Courage and will write a biographical piece about a student in your class. It should be at least 4 paragraphs. Your biography should focus on some portion or phase of his or her life. It should have a beginning, middle, and an end. It should give the reader a strong sense of the main character through his/her actions, as well as through the use of imagery and descriptive language. Techniques such as pacing and dialogue should be used. It should follow the main character through an event or chain of events that results in significant change in character. Manny's life is gray shaded like the Parrot in the Oven- until the last chapter when he returns home, having made some big decisions for himself. What does your character's oven look like? How does he/she remove himself/herself from it? You already have much of the information to write this. You will, however, need to organize what you have in a logical order. You will also need to add more details and upload a final, word processed version to the online forum of your choice.