

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 1



Key Paragraph, p. 1-2

“But anyway, Grampa scrubbed that flag clean. Usually, my friend Billy Davis and I thought it was pretty funny when he did something strange like that – like wash a flag, or take a bath in the stream, or laugh hysterically at Laurel and Hardy movies. Once, we got thrown out of a theater because Grampa kept on laughing, laughing, laughing, even when everyone else was quiet. Billy and I were nearly crying, Grampa was so funny. Grampa got mad and chased us. He was pretty tough about showing respect for your elders” (p. 1-2).

Writing Prompt

Tomi and Grampa are separated not only by age and generation, but also by culture. Grampa immigrated to Hawaii as an adult, but Tomi was born there. Grampa identifies most closely with Japanese culture, but Tomi is an American. Young people often find their elders’ behavior comical, especially if their actions are rooted in another culture.

Think of an older person in your life whose behavior sometimes amuses you the way Billy and Tomi are entertained by Grampa. **In your own words write two narrative paragraphs describing this adult. Does the person behave comically? Do they fit in with American culture? What can you learn from observing their life?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 2



Key Passage, p. 22-23

"He was okay, Mr. Ramos.

And he was smart, too. Mose told me that out of all his hundreds of relatives, Mr. Ramos was the only one who'd ever gotten a scholarship to college. And not only that, he got it from the famous University of Notre Dame. On the mainland" (p. 22-23).

Writing Prompt

Mr. Ramos emerges as one of Tomi's mentors on his heroic journey. Although Tomi does not know him well, he admires Mr. Ramos for his background and the choices he has made in his life. Mr. Ramos treats Tomi with respect, and listens carefully to what he has to say. Think of a teacher or a mentor in your past that you liked and respected, as Tomi likes and respects Mr. Ramos.

Write at least 3 narrative paragraphs describing your teacher/mentor. Explain who he or she is, their relationship with their students or the people being mentored, and how they came to be a teacher or person being mentored, and what kind of teacher/mentor they are. What about their pasts or their personality do you think motivated them to work with young people?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 3



Key Paragraph, p. 30

“If I ever became worthy, Grampa said, he would pass it down to me. He spent many hours telling me about how important it was, trying to prepare me for the day he would hand it to me to be its keeper and protector. It was our most prized possession, he said, the symbol of generations of honorable living in our family. Thinking about all that responsibility made me nervous, and Grampa could probably see that. I wanted to show it to Billy so much, I almost had to tie my hands behind my back. But it was sacred and I couldn’t treat it like just some toy” (p. 30).

Writing Prompt

The *katana* is the most important heirloom Tomi’s family possesses. They have passed it down for many generations, and it is the responsibility of the family members to keep it safe, well protected, and honored. Tomi recognizes its importance to the family, and the *katana* will continue to play an important role throughout the novel.

Every family has a prize possession that it values above all others. To some, it may be an important portrait or scrapbook. To others, it may be a piece of jewelry. What is your family’s most important heirloom? **Write one or two narrative paragraphs about an artifact that your family reveres. Describe it. Then explain its significance, its history, and its importance to the members of your family.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 4



Key Passage, p. 52

“‘It’s because of the war,’ Billy said.

‘What war?’

‘The one in Europe, and China. That’s why we got so many ships and planes and soldiers here.’

‘But no more war here,’ Sanji said.

Billy frowned and looked back toward the island” (p. 52).

Writing Prompt

In Tomi’s circle of friends and acquaintances, Billy seems to be the only one who is concerned about the war that is raging across Europe and Asia in 1941. In the novel, he is the character who steps in as a herald, one who tells of great change to come in the life of the hero.

Pretend you are someone who can see into the future and you know the bombing of Pearl Harbor will happen soon. **Write an open narrative letter to be printed in the newspaper about why people in Hawaii should be concerned about the war in Europe and Asia. Explain the connections between Hirohito and Hitler. Explain what will happen in Hawaii when the U.S. finds itself involved with the war in Europe.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 60

“Papa broke out Mama’s *bento*, which means “lunch,” and it was extra good, because we had Billy as our guest. *Musubi*, sticky rice wrapped in seaweed, with *ume* inside. *Ume*, which is the best part, is a small, red, pickled plum. So good when you finally reach it in the middle. Even Billy liked it. In fact, he ate three of them. And mama had also put in some *shoyu aku*, marinated to perfection. And to top it off, she made *tamagoyaki*, which is grilled egg, shaped like square cookies. Put all that together with the cool, fresh drinking water and you have a feast. Billy was converted. He said that after a roasting day of hard work, it tasted like heaven itself. For me, I could see the *magukoro*, all the love and attention Mama put into making it for us. For a moment, I missed her” (p. 60).

Writing Prompt

Tomi’s mother shows her love for her family and her respect to their guest by preparing an impressive meal for them. She probably spent many hours preparing the feast, which she will not even be present to enjoy with the men. Billy is the guest of honor, and she puts in more effort to honor him.

For today’s writing task, pretend you are Billy. **Write a narrative thank you note to Mrs. Nakaji for the great food she provided. Describe the feast and tell her you know how much effort and *magukoro* it took for her to put it together. Also, tell her something about your experience on Papa’s *sampan*, and what it meant to you.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 6



Key Passage, p. 76

“You had to love that old man. He did what he wanted, no matter what. And he didn’t always back away from trouble, like Papa wanted me to do. If Grampa would have been me, he would have busted Keet Wilson’s nose already. I was sure of it” (p. 76).

Writing Prompt

Tomi is getting mixed messages from the adults in his life when it comes to dealing with a bully. His parents want him to turn the other cheek. His teacher modeled a more aggressive response. He suspects that Grampa would tell him to fight. Tomi just isn’t sure what to do in this situation.

Pretend you are Tomi. **Write a narrative letter to the Dear Abby column of the local newspaper. Explain the history of your relationship with Keet, and the increasingly uncomfortable situation that is developing. Tell what your father would have you do, and what your Grampa would do. Explain why you haven’t told your friends about Keet’s behavior. Ask for advice.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 7



Key Passage, p. 87

“‘Lot of people in Honolulu starting to point finger,’ Papa said. ‘They wondering whose side us Hawaii-Japanee going take, and what we going do if Japan and U.S. got into a fight’” (p. 87).

Writing Prompt

Even though Honolulu is their home, Tomi and his family feel threatened by the rest of the community. They are suspected of being more loyal to Japan than the U.S., and some think they might be spies. Even though the Nakaji family opposes Japan’s warlike actions, their fellow Americans don’t trust them.

Pretend you are Tomi. **Write another open narrative letter to the people of Hawaii, and send it to the newspaper. In your letter, introduce yourself and your family. Explain your situation – what it’s like to be a Japanese person living in America. Mention the value your family puts on honor, and how fighting against America would go against that honor. Finally, explain where your loyalties lie. After all, you are an American citizen!**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 8



Key Passage, p. 101

"I held my breath and listened to the clink of Keet's dog tags fade away. I stayed hidden until I couldn't hear them anymore. The only sound was Lucky panting, hot in my ear. I felt sick. The ugliness in Mr. Wilson's voice was meaner by far than anything Keet had ever tried to aim at me" (p. 101).

Writing Prompt

Even though Tomi doesn't like Keet's actions, he is bothered by how his father treats him. Tomi, whose parents are strict but kind, doesn't understand why Mr. Wilson would treat Keet the way he does. Keep in mind that Keet is still a kid, even though he tries to act older. When someone has knowledge of child abuse, one can help the victim by reporting it to the proper authorities.

Pretend you are Tomi. **Write a confidential narrative letter of complaint to child protective services and the police. Explain the problem: What you heard today over at the Wilsons' house. Discuss the problem: How this is not the first time a gun has gone off and also how the treatment of his son might have adverse effects. End with a solution. How can the authorities help Keet and perhaps guide Mr. Wilson to be a better parent? Remember, Mr. Wilson would be pretty angry with your family to find out you had written this letter. So ask the police to keep the source to themselves.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 9



Key Passage, p. 117

"I glanced around the ridge. Someone could have seen. There were houses up there. Someone could have watched Grampa waving the flag. Billy hurried behind us, trying to hide the white cloth, hide the red sun. In the distance, planes whined and groaned" (p. 117).

Writing Prompt

In the middle of a crisis that will shake the planet, Tomi has to deal with a personal dilemma – how to handle the consequences of Grampa's actions. What will happen, and how will the family react? To any observer, Grampa's actions will seem traitorous, no matter what his motivation.

Pretend you are Keet Wilson. **Write a letter of complaint to the police about someone flying a Japanese flag during the bombings today. Explain the problem. Then discuss its implications. End with a solution. What should be done with Grampa and his family?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 127

“The memory of the gentle cooing of thirty-five silky-feathered pigeons slowly died away, faded away, blew away... and finally, in silence flowed down into the earth forever” (p. 127).

Writing Prompt

Like all people of Hawaii, Tomi and his family are now living under martial law. This gives full authority to the military to act as they see fit. Though the officers are doing what they feel best, they do not treat the Nakaji family with justice. How should Tomi deal with this situation?

Enough of this anonymous letter writing. **As Tomi, write an open narrative letter of complaint to the people of Hawaii. Tell how the military officers came to your house today, and what they made you do. Discuss the problem: That your family is completely loyal to America and that the birds were racers, not messengers. Also, point out that your father is now in danger, even though he is an innocent fisherman. Provide a solution.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 11



Key Paragraph, p. 133

“‘We have been *disgraced*,’ he said in Japanese, making me jump back. I couldn’t tell if he was awake or if he was dreaming. He fell silent again, and I went back to bed” (p. 133).

Writing Prompt

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, racial tensions between Japanese Americans and other Americans disintegrated. People of Japanese descent were discriminated against, bullied, and sent to internment camps. Japanese-Americans were bitter over their treatment, as the vast majority was loyal to the United States. Many were also angry at their ancestral homeland for attacking the U.S. in such a blatant and violent manner, without a declaration of war.

Pretend you are Tomi. **Write a letter of complaint to Emperor Hirohito. Explain what has happened to your family. Discuss how his actions have shamed your family. Include an explanation of how your dad has taught you that you cannot use violence and maintain your honor at the same time. Suggest a non-violent solution to Japan’s conflict with the United States.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 12



Key Paragraph, p. 147

"I walked toward them with Red warm in the crook of my arm. Off to the right was a big, freshly dug hole. A long, sloping ramp with crude stairs chopped into the dark dirt ran down into it. Most of the hole was covered on top by pieces of lumber laid across it, like a roof" (p. 147).

Writing Prompt

During World War II, it was not uncommon for combatants to bomb civilian areas. Therefore, many families built homemade bomb shelters in their backyards. Though the Davis' probably never used theirs, they would have felt safer having access to a shelter in case the Japanese attacked again.

Pretend you are Billy. Based on what you know about bomb shelters, and what you can imagine, **write a technical document instructing the Nakaji family on how to build one of their own. What are the steps they need to take to complete it? What supplies should they keep inside? Be specific: include measurements for width, length, and depth.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 13



Key Passage, p. 163

“‘That belong to your ancestor,’ he said. ‘Long time ago. Nobody since then bring disgrace or shame to the name of this family.’ He paused a moment, watching me, letting his words settle. ‘My country,’ he went on. ‘My *country*, Tomikazu... they... they...’

Grampa turned away, pain carved in his face.

‘This island,’ Charlie said to Grampa, his voice kind. ‘This territory, Joji-san, this is your country now. You couldn’t help what happened. Forget it, already. Wasn’t your fault’” (p. 163).

Writing Prompt

To Grampa, the *katana* represents the honor of his family. As Tomi tells his friends, he is lost and confused because he feels that his country has somehow damaged that honor. He hides the *katana* to protect the very thing it is supposed to symbolize.

Pretend you are Tomi. **Help Grampa write a short narrative note to include with the *katana* that will explain its importance and significance to anyone who might find it there in the woods. Anticipate any misunderstandings people might have about the sword’s meaning. Explain away their fears.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 14



Key Paragraph, p. 181

“Sometime later I was awakened by a kick. A flashlight with a blue-painted lens burned into my eyes. A bayonet poked at my throat” (p. 181).

Writing Prompt

By swimming to Sand Island, Tomi has broken a long list of martial laws. He has entered restricted territory, seen an enemy prisoner without permission, and violated curfew by staying out after dark. Now, what will he say to the soldier who has found him?

You get to be the author. **Write at least 3 narrative paragraphs about what will happen now be sure to include the dialogue between Tomi and his interrogator. What will they ask of him? How will Tomi answer? Will he tell the truth or make up a story? Will they believe him? Will Tomi be the next inhabitant of Sand Island?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 15



Key Passage, p. 188

"I lay back down, my head spinning. Brave? Mama had a husband who had been shot and arrested, a son who didn't think, and who had almost gotten himself killed, an old man who couldn't work anymore, and a five-year-old who was afraid just to go outside. Who was left to keep us going?

And Mama was calling *me* brave.

What a joke" (p. 188).

Writing Prompt

Although it has taken time, Tomi has finally recognized Mama's strength and bravery. Despite the obstacles he mentions, she is holding the family together. Even though they have little income, and are in danger of arrest, she finds the time to comfort her family, as well as Sanji's wife and daughter. Mama is the calm center of the Nakajis; she truly shows that Courage Requires Fortitude, and Tomi respects that.

Mama needs Tomi to be strong at home. **Pretend you are Mama. Write a short two paragraph narrative note to leave on the kitchen table that lists and describes at least three things Tomi can do to contribute as the acting "man of the house."** Are there chores he can do? Actions he can take? Ways he can make the family feel stronger and closer? Make sure you include what should Tomi do to emulate Mama's courage.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 16



Key Passage, p. 202-203

“On the next pitch Tough Boy got his sweet one.

Tock!

I loved that sound, just like on the radio. That ball was gone, gone gone...all the way to the street. Maxey came home, Billy came home, and Tough Boy didn't even bother to run to second. The game was over.

We went crazy” (p. 202-203).

Writing Prompt

This game, the last the two teams would probably ever play, was challenging for both sides. The Kaka'ako Boys faced a formidable foe in Billy. The Rats had to deal with wild pitches from the Butcher, as well as an opposing team that cheated. However, in the end, the Rats were rewarded for playing a clean game, and gained the respect of the Kaka'ako Boys because of it.

Pretend you are Ichiro, the leader of the Kaka'ako Boys. **Write a three paragraph narrative letter to Billy, the Rats' leader, explaining to him what you thought of the game and the Rats. Apologize for your un-sportsmanlike activity during the game, and explain why you initially accepted help from the punks on the sideline. Tell him what made you change your mind about the Rats, and help them on the streets. How have the Rats earned your respect? What kind of relationship would you like to have with Billy and his friends in the future?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 17



Key Paragraph, p. 217

“Watch it!” the man said. There were *two* of them, both huge. And hanging between them, looking like some old jacket on a hanger, was Grampa. Each man had a hand under one of his arms. Mama was trying to pull Grampa back. The first man knocked her hand away” (p. 217).

Writing Prompt

During WWII, Japanese-Americans were arrested on little pretext. Though it has been months since the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Grampa is only now being taken into custody. What do you think motivated the arrest? Often, orders to arrest are handed down from above. **Write a two narrative paragraph memo ordering the arrest of Joji Nakaji. Give the order. List the charges. Provide directions for what is to be done once he is in custody.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 18



Key Passage, p. 225

“It means if you tell *anyone* about this sword and someone takes it away from me because of what you said, I’m going to make you pay for it...and not in money.’

Keet laughed again. ‘Yeah? You and whose army, shrimp?’

I stepped back out into the clearing, into the sunlight. ‘Me and *this* army,’ I said (p. 225).

Writing Prompt

Tomi has finally chosen to stand up to Keet. It is clear that Keet feels the need to torment Tomi, but is unwilling to do it openly. Tomi wants to hold up his family honor, but is aware that his mother and sister depend on Keet’s family for work and shelter. What should he do now?

Write a 2 or 3 paragraph narrative proposal for peace to give to Keet. The project is to maintain peace and cooperation between your families. While no materials are required, there are things the two of you must agree to do and not do. What is your peace plan? Suggest a way that Keet might reply or signify to you that he accepts your proposal for peace.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 19



Key Paragraph, p. 244

“As I followed Mari and Kimi with their two cans of eggs back down from the chicken coops, I decided that tonight I would take out the *katana* and carefully rub away any spots of rust I found on the blade. Then I would run the oilcloth over it and let Kimi hold it. I would tell her where it came from, and why we needed to protect it and keep it clean, and what it stood for. I would tell her that Papa and Grampa would be so proud of her when they came home and found out that she knew all about why we still had it after all these years” (p. 244).

Writing Prompt

Tomi is now ready to assume responsibility as the male head of his household. He is getting a job, helping his mother run the house, getting an education, and taking care of his little sister. In addition, he is the caretaker of the family honors and traditions, as symbolized by the *katana*. His heroic journey may not end here, but his childhood has come to an end.

Pretend you are Tomi. **Write a 2 or 3 paragraph narrative stating exactly what you want to say to Kimi about the *katana* and its significance. She is only five, so speak in a way that she can understand. Be sure to tell her where the *katana* came from, why you need to protect it and keep it clean, and what represents to your family.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Under the Blood-Red Sun, Day 20



Key Paragraph, p. 245

“In 1945, after World War II ended, all Hawaii Japanese who had been interned or relocated were released and allowed to return to their homes in the islands. Unfortunately, many of them had no homes to return to, all their earthly possessions having been taken from them. In the 1980s, forty years after the fact, the United States government finally acknowledged that it had made a mistake, and agreed to pay each of the survivors \$20,000 in reparations” (p. 245).

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are Tomi Nakaji. You have just written your memoir, titled, *Under the Blood-Red Sun*. **Write a five paragraph narrative letter to the potential editors of your memoir, convincing them to publish it for you. In it, introduce yourself and then explain the context of the tale you have written. Discuss the most important thing you learned on your adventure, and suggest what you hope readers will get out of your memoir. Tell the editor what happened to your family after the war, and how World War II affected you, your family, and your best friends. Close the letter how you see fit. Be sure to revise after your first draft and edit your final copy.**