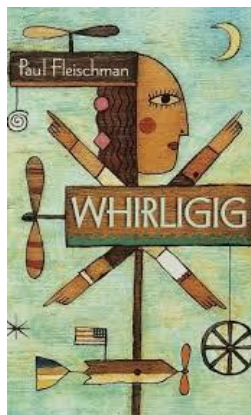


Whirligig

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Genre Fiction

Synopsis Brent Bishop discovers the meaning of accountability when his drunken action causes the death of Lea Zamora. As a part of his retribution, Lea's mother asks him to construct, in four geographic corners of the country, four whirligigs resembling Lea. During the process Brent experiences a cleansing transformation. This book addresses controversial issues of interest to many adolescents and includes scenes and language that reflect mature content. Before handing the text to a child, educators and parents should read the book and know the child. California author.

Themes Responsible Decision- Making

Protagonist Male, Adolescent

Note Over the years, these books have been published in multiple editions. The page numbers in your book may be different than the ones on the lesson plan.

More Information www.scu.edu/character



Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 1



Key Paragraph – 6

“ . . . With the room now prepared, Brent set about dressing. It was May and no longer rib-rattling cold. He considered a large collection of t-shirts, weighing the logos, color and condition. To impress without risking being made fun of was his mission, the latter especially important in the case of a party at Chaz’s. Especially when you hadn’t actually been invited.”

Writing Prompt

Today’s reading places Brent in his “ordinary world.” Write a paragraph or two that introduces Brent in your own words. Explain the situation he finds himself in and the events leading up to this situation. Highlight what he concerns himself with. Use examples from today’s reading to back up your assertions. Conclude by evaluating whether or not these are the things that should concern him.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 2



Key Paragraph – 17

. . . He realized that he really didn't care where he was going. Why should he? His life was a house that had burned down to the ground. What was there to go back to?

He drove on, weaving slightly, aware that every car but his had a destination. He felt spent, emptied of all will. He was beyond tantrums. Instead, a measured voice began broadcasting within him, soft and unexpected, like a warm wind out of season.

"There's no need to go home," said the voice. "No need to go back to school on Monday. No need to go there ever again."

Writing Prompt

Brent is experiencing cutoff - the point one reaches where the consequences of one's actions no longer seem to matter. He is blinded by his emotions, denying his ability to reason. Write a conclusion to the chapter that follows from and reflects on what Brent is currently experiencing. Try to understand the situation from his viewpoint. Use precise words telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 3



Key Paragraph – 25

“That thoughts are powerful. That they’re the seeds of events. That by thinking something, we can help make it happen.”

Writing Prompt

Alexandra is asking Steph to visualize herself finding a boyfriend. She is asking her to imagine changing herself and also to visualize her ideals. Reflect on Steph’s situation and think of a change you would like to make and a goal you would like to realize. Visualize yourself changed and your goal obtained. Then write a paragraph that explains the change you would like to make. Record the steps, in detail and vividly, that will be necessary for you to take. How will you or your life be different once this goal has been achieved?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 4



Key Paragraph – 27-28

"Great!" she said. "But you wouldn't want to skimp on details, would you? I mean, we're deciding your future here. You don't want the standard L.L. Bean WASP boyfriend, in plaid or navy. You want someone designed for you."

Writing Prompt

Write narrative about your ideal life. Try not to think about material things, like having lots of money. Rather, visualize yourself being completely content in what you are doing for yourself and for others. What factors in this visualization make you feel that way? The people you are connected to? The important work you are doing? Your hobbies? Your family? First, write a descriptive paragraph with well-chosen details and structured events that brings your visualization to life for you and for the reader. Through word choice, paint a vivid picture for the reader.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 5



Key Paragraph – 39

“Miss Gill spoke for a while. When it came time to discuss restitution, Brent saw his father shift nervously. The Zamoras hadn’t sued; apparently they were content with the insurance company’s payment. His father had brought his checkbook just in case. Brent spied the silver pen beside it in his jacket’s inside pocket, stationed like a butler awaiting command. Miss Gill reviewed the various possibilities: a written apology to each family member, service to a charity of the Zamoras’ choice, service to the Zamoras themselves. Whatever it might be would have to be agreeable to both parties.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are the judge and write what a short narrative on what you think would be acceptable restitution? State what you think Brent ought to agree to. Give the details and terms of the service. Then provide a justification with evidence from the book for why your plan is just. Be specific so as to avoid any misunderstandings by the reader. Take into consideration Brent’s, the Zamora’s, and Brent’s parent’s viewpoints.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 6



Key Paragraph – 41

“This is my only request. That you make four whirligigs, of a girl that looks like Lea. Put her name on them. Then set them up in Washington, California, Florida, and Maine—the corners of the United States. Let people all over the country receive joy from her even though she’s gone. You make the smiles that she would have made. It’s the only thing you can do for me.” She exhaled. “That’s what I ask.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend that you are Miss Gill. As the mediator, you need to put the agreement into writing. Write a formal narrative letter to Brent in which you outline what has been agreed to. Be specific about what he is to do it, where he is to do it, and why he is to do it. Wish him well and close with some encouragement. A narrative letter tells a story within it. With sympathy yet formality, explain the reasoning behind these requests. Refer to the text to help with your reasoning.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 7



Key Paragraph – 54

“Back on the ground, he stared up at it. The harp player was just over a foot tall and seemed much smaller from a distance. Brent awaited a breeze until his neck ached. When it came, the figure felt it first. It swung on the dowel like a weathervane. The arms lifted, then trembled. Then spun. He felt the breeze. The arms gained speed. His smile widened. The phrase, ‘the breath of life’ traveled through his mind. He watched, mesmerized. Then he ran for the camera.”

Writing Prompt

Brent learned a lot about building whirligigs in this chapter. Many of the things he learned came out of his mistakes. Pretend you are Brent. A narrative letter tells a story within it. Write yourself a brief letter to remind you of the things to be sure to do next time (as well as the things not to do) so as to avoid making the same mistakes twice. Set your observations in a clear sequential order. Remember you are telling a story so write your letter following your experiences.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 8



Key Paragraph – 62

“I got off the boat and walked down the pier. I came to the wooden marching band. I stopped and looked. There was a trumpet, trombone, clarinet, and drum. Birds don’t live alone, I told myself. They live in flocks. Like people. People are always in a group. Like that little wooden band. And whenever there’s a group, there’s fighting. If the people in a group get along, maybe they make good music instead of arguing, like Willie Colon’s band. But usually not. That’s how life is. I stared at that marching band. Then I got in the car and drove home.”

Writing Prompt

The narrator implies that he learned a lot about the value of his life by visiting the sea, viewing the “shearwaters” and staring at the marching band whirligig. Pretend you are the narrator. Write a letter to your wife, Constancia. Tell her how you had been feeling before you took this drive today. Tell her what you did, where you went and what you saw. Then explain to her how these experiences have changed your outlook and understanding about life and how it will affect the way you live the rest of it. Remember your audience. You are writing to your wife. Consider your word choice and your tone. Use description and reflection to develop your experiences.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 9



Key Paragraph – 70-71

“Brent suddenly thought back to Miss Gill, the mediator in Chicago, and her saying that the effects of an act traveled far beyond one’s knowledge. He knew she’d meant harmful acts, like his. He saw now that the same could be said of good deeds, such as a teacher’s years of inspiring. Everything we did - good, bad, and indifferent - sent a wave rolling out of sight. He wondered what his own accounting, generations later would look like.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you Brent and are keeping a journal which later will turn into an autobiography. In your journal entry for today, reflect on the realization you came to today: the broader meaning of what Ms. Gill told you before you left: “The effects of an act travel far beyond one’s knowledge.” Explain that you want to make a lasting positive difference in the world. Describe the situation which led to this quote being said, try to include multiple viewpoints (yours and the person who said the quote), and Brent should remain as the narrator.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 10



Key Paragraph – 74

“Despite the difficulties, the whirligig was absorbing, blocking everything else from view. The characters from his first life—allies, enemies, potential girlfriends—who’d once loomed like giants were now barely visible, distant figures disappearing over the horizon. He still noticed the cars he’d lusted after and heard snatches of songs linked to that era. His reactions felt distanced and ghostly. He had no desire to revive that life. It had all been crumpled in the crash. He no longer gave any thought to his clothes. He was an outcast, part of no group, and no longer had anyone to impress. Only when the wind blew did he feel watched by Lea, looking down at his work.”

Writing Prompt

Brent is beginning to realize what this adventure entails. Pretend you are aware of all the details of what Brent has experienced up to this point. Give your encouragement and advice in response to his request. You may want to point out for him the ways in which he has already positively changed from the Brent you met at the mediation meeting. You may also wish to address his need to forgive himself and to see himself as part of the rest of the world, rather than an outcast. Finally, you may wish to remind him about the meaning of courage, specifically the part about considering your own heroic journey, ***“in which we live for purposes bigger than ourselves and our wants and needs.”*** Remember your audience. Brent sought you out as an ally. Keep the letter positive in tone, but don’t go easy on him either.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 11



Key Paragraph – 84

“ANNOUNCER: *Do you remember Coach Mintz’s exact words?*

ME: *You bet, Bob. ‘The harp player plays her harp. Then she rests. Then she plays again.’ He said he thought it was an excellent idea to have a picture of the whirligig on the wall, to remember this. Then he looked at my mother and he said, ‘After speaking with Tony, I believe he’s ready for a rest.’”*

Writing Prompt

Write a parable around the idea, “Rest gives strength to activity.” A parable is simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. This lesson should affect your main character just like it affected Tony. Be sure to include structured event sequences with a smooth progression through the events. Identify the problem, which lead you to the lesson learned. Use dialogue and descriptions to build up the characters and events.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Whirligig, Day 12



Key Paragraph – 88 and 91

“ ‘That’s what the Lord God said to Cain!’ He wiped his face with a handkerchief and turned. Brent quickly retreated into the station, the man’s words burning in his brain. Being a stranger in a strange land had suddenly lost its appeal.”

And

“He woke to the sound of his neighbor’s TV, which had been blaring ever since Brent arrived. He turned on the radio to drown out the noise. The station it was tuned to was playing Dixieland. Brent had rarely bothered with jazz. It was unintelligible, a foreign language. He lay back and listened, tried to follow the trumpet’s line, then the clarinet’s then began flipping through the whirligig book, came to the drawing of the marching band—and knew he’d found his next project.”

Writing Prompt

Brent is beginning to realize that he cannot remain an outcast. In a quest narrative the character must achieve a goal. In a short quest narrative, explain how Brent is finding the importance of being a part of society again. Use examples from today’s reading that suggest he is getting closer to doing so. (HINT: Consider the woman in the seat next to him, the preacher, the whirligig he has chosen, and the note he wrote to Trisha.)

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Whirligig, Day 13



Key Paragraph – 97

“The children didn’t appear the next day. The following day, four of them returned. He took a break, went swimming with them, and learned from a little boy that the ridged, orange shells were called lion’s paws and that the birds diving into the water were terns. He didn’t mind apprenticing himself to a third-grader. In gratitude, he let the boy drill holes in a long finger of plywood.”

Writing Prompt

Good writing requires that the reader make inferences. Write a paragraph in which you infer why the children are so important to today’s reading and this part of Brent’s journey, paying particular attention to the fact that while the children learned from Brent, he also learned from them. In addition to what’s on the surface - lion’s paws and terns - what else do you think Brent learned from these children? Be sure your paragraph has an evidence and reasoning to support your inference.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 14



Key Paragraph – 104

“Talk like that was a change for her. Until lately she’d always answered, ‘like Jesse Owens’ or ‘like Joe DiMaggio.’ She was an amazingly positive person for someone who’d been in Auschwitz. I took her hand and stealthily looked, for the thousandth time, at the place on her wrist where her number had been tattooed. She’d had it removed, and seemed to have done the same with her memory of that time. She never brought it up and wouldn’t answer my questions.”

Writing Prompt

Jenny’s grandmother is a survivor. She has survived the Holocaust and is now battling to survive cancer. Use Jenny’s grandmother’s story to write a parable. Though she has experienced loss, horror, and tragedy, she has not given up the fight to live. This will be the lesson learned in your parable. You will add another lesson to your parable after the next reading. Be sure to include structured event sequences with a smooth progression through the events. Identify the problem, which lead you to the lesson learned. Use dialogue and descriptions to build up the characters and events.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Whirligig, Day 15



Key Paragraph – 108

"Grandma, listen! I'll call my father. He'll stop by on his way home. What do you need?"

"This he can't bring me. First help me dress."

Writing Prompt

Jenny's grandmother has demonstrated that equally important to being human is allowing oneself to be helped. Add this lesson to your parable from your previous reading. Offer advice to your reader on what it means to be human. Convince your reader that in receiving help, people will find their way back into the world of the living. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 16



Key Paragraphs – 114 and 41 and 38

"People are not all Hitler, *Kindela*. People are very good also, like the one who made this wind toy to give happiness to everyone who passes. People are good—even some Germans. When the bad memories came back in my head, here I walked to remind myself of this. This, not the other, I want to remember when I think my thoughts before I die. This I tell you, who have the permit for learning. I'm old. I have the permit for teaching."

And

"This is my only request. That you make four whirligigs, of a girl that looks like Lea. Put her name on them. Then set them up in Washington, California, Florida, and Maine—the corners of the United States. Let people all over the country receive joy from her even though she's gone. You make the smiles that she would have made. It's the only thing you can do for me." She exhaled. "That's all I ask."

And

"We're meeting today," said Miss Gill, "to apologize, and to understand, and to atone." Her voice was hopeful rather than accusing. "We never know all the consequences of our acts. They reach into places we can't see. And into the future, where no one can."

Writing Prompt

The quotes above come from people who have either affected or been affected by Brent's journey. Pretend you are Brent and writing an autobiography. Choose one of the quotes above. Write a paragraph or two that explains the story behind the quote and your connection to it. How has it impacted your life or how does this quote show you impacting others. Describe the situation which led to this quote being said, try to include multiple viewpoints (yours and the person who said the quote), and Brent should remain as the narrator.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Whirligig, Day 17



Key Paragraphs – 120 and 125

“ . . . But in his mind there materialized the notion of a whirligig all his own, its plan found in no book in the world, its ingredients his remaining scraps and whatever he could scavenge, as the campground owner had. Surely there would be wood on the beach. He emptied his pack so as to use it as a carrier and marched toward the water.”

And

“ . . . Maine summers, like dawn colors, were brief. Darkness and winter predominated. Lea’s life had been similarly short. But his clacking, flashing, jingling memorial would give off sound and color all year, holding back the tide of death. It was a kinetic gravestone, painted in ever-blooming greens and yellows and reds. Lea would not be swallowed up.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are Brent, having no whirligig book to record his notes in, and having no set of directions to follow. Write your own description of the whirligig, using as much detail as possible. Or write your own set of step-by-step instructions for building the fourth whirligig in Lea’s image. Be detail-oriented so that someone reading it later would be able to recreate your masterpiece. Anticipate their misunderstandings.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Whirligig, Day 18



Key Paragraph – 131-132

“He built a fire and cooked himself some oatmeal, peering into the flames. The guilt hadn’t magically vanished overnight. Four whirligigs wouldn’t accomplish that. He knew it would reside in him like the ashes after a fire, unconsumed. But something had changed. He felt oddly buoyant. He discovered as well that a new view lay before his mind’s eye. He saw himself returning to Chicago and to his parents. Delivering the photographs. Starting at a new school in the fall. These had been beyond the horizon until now. He began readying himself to meet them. He felt that he was up to it.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are Brent. Write a letter to Ms. Gill or to Mrs. Zamora, telling her that you have completed the request. Recount for her the places you have been and the people you have met. Briefly explain the lessons that you learned along the way. Spend a little more time explaining your revelations and future vision that followed your unburdening to the artist in Maine. Tell her your plans for the future. And thank her for her guidance and the opportunity to “apologize, understand, and atone.” Think about your audience. Your tone and word choice may be different depending on to whom you address the letter.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Whirligig, Day 19-20



Final Product: Pretend you are Brent and that you have just completed the final draft of your memoir about your circular journey from Chicago to the four corners of the United States and back again. Write a business letter to the potential publisher of your memoir to accompany the manuscript. In it, introduce yourself and then explain the context of the tale you have written. How did you happen upon this journey? Who did you meet along the way? Discuss the most important thing you learned on your adventure, and suggest what you hope readers will get out of your memoir. Close as you see fit. Be sure to revise after your first draft, trade with a partner, and edit your final copy.