

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 1



Key Passage, pg. 7

“Mrs. Gibbs died first – long time ago, in fact. She went out to visit her daughter, Rebecca, who married an insurance man in Canton, Ohio, and died there – pneumonia – but her body was brought back here. She’s up in the cemetery now – in with a whole mess of Gibbises and Herseys – she was Julie Hersey ‘fore she married Doc Gibbs in the Congregational Church over there. In our town we like to know the facts about everybody”

Writing Task

This story is written as a play and it is about a typical American town. In today’s reading, the Stage Manager gives the audience far more information than it really needs. As he says, “In our town we like to know the facts about everybody.”

During this novel, you’re going to be writing a monologue (a long speech or lecture) about your town, city, or neighborhood. Begin today by writing two paragraphs describing the main street of your town, city, or neighborhood. Include major landmarks, retail and other businesses, billboards, landscape, etc. Be descriptive – your audience should be able to draw a map based on your description. If possible, read your description to a partner.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 2



Key Passage, pg. 15

“Children! Now I won’t have it. Breakfast is just as good as any other meal and I won’t have you gobbling like wolves. It’ll stunt your growth, - that’s a fact. Put away your book, Wally”

Writing Task

Mrs. Webb’s attitude about mealtime is a very traditional one for her time. Every family has different rules, traditions, and customs when it comes to sharing a meal.

To add to your monologue, write two paragraphs describing a meal at your home. You may choose to describe a special holiday meal or just a regular everyday meal. Who is at this meal? What kind of food is being served at the meal? Who does the preparing and cooking? Where does everyone sit? Is it at a table in your dining room? Or do you have your meal around a kitchen table? Maybe it’s on the couch in front of the TV? What is the mood at the meal? Is it hurried and rushed like the Webb breakfast? Or is it relaxed? Tense? Fun? Do you always eat together, or does everyone eat on their own schedule? Are there any rules at your table? Is there conversation? Is any music played? If possible, read your paragraph out loud to a partner and compare differences and similarities.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 3



Key Passage, pg. 25-26

Well, I dunno.... I guess we're all hunting like everybody else for a way the diligent and sensible can rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome can sink to the bottom. But it ain't easy to find. Meanwhile, we do all we can to help those that can't help themselves and those that can we leave alone.

Writing Task

The section we read today reveals a lot about the people who live in Grover's Corners. We hear about their religion, politics, interests, and work ethic. What are people like where you live? We live in a much larger and diverse community (with multi-ethnic components), which can make it seem challenging to describe all the people in your area. In addition, people are more likely to move often in larger cities, thus you may not have had the opportunities to get to know people. Focus on those with whom you have regular contact when responding to questions about religion, politics, interests and work ethic. This will allow you to provide a more in-depth perspective about their lives.

Write a two paragraph narrative essay describing the people you would see walking down a street in your community. Write as if you're the Stage Manager, objectively describing people as you see them on the street. What do they look like? Dress like? How do they act in public? What kinds of jobs do people have in your community? What do people in your community care about? Is your community diverse (different ages, ethnicities, etc.), or would you see a pretty homogeneous (similar and common) population in your area? Be very descriptive with specific details. If possible, read your story out loud to a partner.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 4



Key Passage, pg. 33

Y'know – Babylon once had two million people in it, and all we know about 'em is the names of the kings and some copies of wheat contracts... and contracts for the sale of slaves. Yet every night all those families sat down to supper, and the father came home from his work, and the smoke went up the chimney, - same as here. And even in Greece and Rome, all we know about the *real* life of the people is what we can piece together out of the joking poems and the comedies they wrote for the theatre back then.

Writing Task

The Stage Manager points out that ancient societies are known by the artifacts (cultural or historical objects) that have survived them. He also talks about what they should leave for future generations in a time capsule in Grover's Corner.

What artifacts represent your community? Write a three paragraph narrative essay describing at least three things you would place in a time capsule of your community. Describe each of the three items in vivid detail. Also, explain the significance of each item and why you chose it. How would these items represent your community? If possible, read your essay out loud to a partner.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 5



Key Passage, pg. 41

I guess I know more about Simon Stimson's affairs than anybody in this town. Some people ain't made for small-town life. I don't know how that'll end; but there's nothing we can do but just leave it alone. Come, get in.

Writing Task

Simon Stimson, the town drunk, is the scandal of the town. No one is sure what will happen to him in the future, and many are worried about him. He doesn't necessarily cause any trouble – even the police ignore his public drunkenness – but everyone wonders about his future.

In Grover's Corners, drinking all the time is a scandal. What would be scandalous or shameful behavior where you live? Who is the subject of constant gossip? Write a two paragraph narrative about a person – factual or fictional – who would be considered disgraceful in your community. Describe the person in detail. What does this person do that is so morally reprehensible? Why do you think the person chooses to be this way? Do you think it is appropriate to gossip about this person? Would you want to help this person and give him or her advice, or would you not want to get involved? Remember, you can make up a person or describe a real person. If you choose to write about a real person, change the person's name. You may be reading your monologue out loud and others do not need to know about this person's private business.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 6



Key Passage, pg. 53

I declare, Frank, I don't know how he'll get along. I've arranged his clothes and seen to it he's put warm things on, - Frank! they're too *young*. Emily won't think of such things. He'll catch his death of cold within a week.

Writing Task

For the young people in Grover's Corners, marriage is the usual rite of passage young people undertake after high school. Different times and different communities have different traditions of what young people do after high school. What is considered "normal" for people who have just graduated high school to do in your community?

Write two paragraphs that describe a rite of passage that young people in your community often experience. Think about your friends, family members, and classmates. What do most people do when they finish high school? Do they go away to college? Get a job? Get married right away? Move out of their parents' homes? Perhaps a ceremony that represents a major transformation, such as becoming transitioning into adulthood, might be common amongst young people in your community or family *before* they finish high school, like a *quinceañera* or a *bar mitzvah*. Be sure to describe the details of the experience. Is it prevalent in your community to have a specific ceremony, party, or event that accompanies this rite of passage (like a wedding ceremony and reception)? If possible, read your story out loud to a partner or small group.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 7



Key Passage, pg. 66

EMILY:

I always expect a man to be perfect and I think he should be.

GEORGE:

Oh... I don't think it's possible to be perfect, Emily.

EMILY:

Well, my *father* is, and as far as I can see *your* father is. There's no reason on earth why you shouldn't be, too.

GEORGE:

Well, I feel it's the other way round. That men aren't naturally good; but girls are.

EMILY:

Well, you might as well know right now that I'm not perfect. It's not as easy for a girl to be perfect as a man, because we girls are more – more – nervous. – Now I'm sorry I said all that about you. I don't know what made me say it.

Writing Task

Clearly, George and Emily believe that boys and girls are different, and have separate roles in society. Men and women in Grover's Corners play different roles in society. From what the Stage Manager has shows us, men work to support their families, and women run the homes and raise the children.

Write a three paragraph narrative essay for your monologue in which you describe typical gender roles in your community. Besides the obvious biological differences, how are men and women different? How are men and women treated differently in your community? Are the expectations for boys and girls the same? Do different standards of behavior exist for boys and girls? Are men expected to be the sole supporter of the family and are women expected to stay home and take care of the children and household duties? Do you agree with these gender roles? If you agree, explain why. If not, what do you think would be better? If possible, read your essay out loud to a partner or small group.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 8



Key Passage, pg. 68

Two strawberry ice-cream sodas, yes sir. Yes, sir. There are a hundred and twenty-five horses in Grover's Corners this minute I'm talking to you. State Inspector was in here yesterday. And now they're bringing in these auto-mobiles, the best thing to do is to just stay home. Why, I can remember when a dog could go to sleep all day in the middle of Main Street and nothing come along to disturb him.

Writing Task

Change is inevitable. In other words, it's going to happen eventually. Change comes to small towns and big cities, apartment buildings and farms, schools, churches, and families of all sizes, ethnicities, and economic status. The Stage Manager, as Mr. Morgan, seems to imply in the above key passage that change is a bad thing. Sometimes, though, as we know, change is positive and necessary, not just for people of integrity and even more so for people who have had major or severe challenges that have brought about negative consequences.

In a two paragraph narrative essay, describe a positive change that you have witnessed or would *like* to witness in your community. What makes this change a good one? Why do you think this change is necessary? How does, or will, this change affect you and your family? Do you think this change will enhance the integrity of your neighborhood? If possible, read your thoughts out loud to a small group.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 9



Key Passage, pg. 82

The cottage, the go-cart, the Sunday-afternoon drives in the Ford, the first rheumatism, the grandchildren, the second rheumatism, the deathbed, the reading of the will, - Once in a thousand times it's interesting.

Writing Task

In the above paragraph, the Stage Manager outlines a typical life for a typical couple. He indicates that the pattern of life is predictable, and almost the same for everybody in Grover's Corners.

In a two paragraph essay, describe the general details of a typical life of a person in your neighborhood. In the first paragraph, list the major life experiences that most people will encounter in their lifetimes. Be specific—don't just say people will "get sick" or "have fun." In the second paragraph, be even more specific and give details of someone close to you who is considerably older, thus having had the time of experiencing more due to living longer than someone close in age to you. If possible, share your story by reading it out loud to a small group.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 10



Key Passage, pg. 86

“Yes, beautiful spot up here. Mountain laurel and li-lacks. I often wonder why people like to be buried in Woodlawn and Brooklyn when they might pass the same time up here in New Hampshire.”

Writing Task

The Stage Manager describes the Grover’s Corners cemetery as a place of beauty and quiet. He wonders why other people would want to be buried in city cemeteries, because New Hampshire is such a perfect, beautiful place.

In a two paragraph essay for your monologue, describe the place near your community where you would like to eventually be buried or laid to rest. Of course, it is hoped for and expected that you will only be buried after living a long, happy, and productive life full of integrity, love, and compassion. Do you want to be buried, or perhaps cremated? This could be a traditional cemetery in your neighborhood where other family members are buried or a different place. Describe all of the sights and sounds of your final resting place. Why is this place special to you? Why would you want your earthly remains to spend the rest of eternity in this place? If possible, share this story by reading it out loud to a small group.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 11



Key Passage, pg. 96

EMILY

Live people don't understand, do they?

MRS. GIBBS

No, dear – not very much.

EMILY

They're sort of shut up in little boxes, aren't they? I feel as though I knew them last a thousand years ago..."

Writing Task

In Thornton Wilder's vision of death, the souls of the dead remain in the cemetery, silent observers of life. Though they know what is going on with the living, it seems that they don't have much interest in them. They both envy and pity the living.

Every culture, religion, family, and individual has a different opinion on what happens after you die. Write a three paragraph essay that explains your personal view of the afterlife. Do people go to heaven or hell? Do our souls live on as ghosts? Do we become reincarnated as something or someone else? In Mexico, those who have died are celebrated, honored and revered every Halloween with a tradition known as Dia De Los Muertos (or Day of the Dead). Do you have a similar ritual? How do others in your life choose to remember loved ones who have died? What do you believe will happen to you after you die? If possible, read your story out loud to the class.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 12



Key Passage, pg. 99

That's not the only reason why you shouldn't do it, Emily. When you've been here longer you'll see that our life here is to forget all that, and think only of what's ahead, and be ready for what's ahead. When you've been here longer you'll understand.

Writing Task

Against the advice of the other dead people, Emily chooses to go back and relive a day in her life. She doesn't choose the happiest day, nor does she choose an unimportant one. She chooses to relive a favorite childhood memory – her twelfth birthday.

If you could go back and relive one day, which would you choose? Write two paragraphs describing your favorite day from your past, and explain why you would relive that day if you could. What made it a happy day? Was it a special day, like a holiday or a birthday? Were family and friends with you? Or were you by yourself? Was there a special place, food, or music associated with this day? How could you recreate this day for yourself in the future? If possible, read your story out loud to the class.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 13



Key Passage, pg. 108

I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Take me back – up the hill – to my grave. But first: Wait! One more look.

Good-by, Good-by world. Good-by, Grover's Corners... Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking... and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths... and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you."

Writing Task

In one of the most immortal passages in American literature, Emily says goodbye to the world. She mentions the everyday, mundane things that she will miss. Notice: nowhere does Emily mention a favorite possession or an exciting activity.

For your monologue, write two paragraphs about the little things that make your life worthwhile. These are the things that make your life important. What or who would you miss if you left your life today? Mentally examine and visualize an ordinary day in your life, and think of the small things you take for granted. Do you take anyone for granted? If so, who? What are the sights, sounds, and places that make your life worth living? What are the best parts about your community? What aspects of life give your community and your life integrity? If possible, read your story to the class.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Our Town, Day 14 & 15 – Final Writing Task



Key Passage, pg. 4

The sky is beginning to show some streaks of light over in the East there, behind our mount'in.

The morning star always gets wonderful bright the minute before it has to go, - doesn't it?

Well, I'd better show you how our town lies. Up here – is Main Street..."

Final Writing Task

The Stage Manager tells us, more or less, about a typical day in Grover's Corners. He includes Daily Life, Love and Marriage, and Death. Many times, he uses monologue to tell us about Grover's Corners, its citizens, its happy events, and its tragedies. By the end of the play, the audience understands the community and is interested in its authors.

As a Stage Manager of your own play, write and perform a monologue describing life in your community. Describe what life is like in your community; tell us about daily events, rites of passage, and attitudes toward death. What gives your community its integrity? It might help to follow the checklist below.

1.	☐	Lay out your writing prompts from days 1 to 13.
2.	☐	Choose your best ten paragraphs.
3.	☐	Put your paragraph from day 1 on the top – this will be your introduction.
4.	☐	Put your best ten paragraphs in logical order. • This might be chronological – how they happened in your life. • You might use the order of <i>Our Town</i> – Daily Life, Love and Marriage, Death. • Or, put them in an order that flows for the reader.
5.	☐	Write a short closing paragraph for your monologue. Be sure to say goodbye or good night to your audience, just like the Stage Manager.
6.	☐	Now, write a rough draft by putting all of your paragraphs together. Be sure to use the first person ("I") throughout your monologue.
7.	☐	Exchange rough drafts with a classmate and edit them.
8.	☐	Type or neatly write a final draft.
9.	☐	Practice reading your monologue out loud. If possible, memorize it.
10.	☐	Perform your monologue for the class.