

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 1



Key Paragraph, p. 8

“Later on, when Jeremiah saw a cartoon about a monkey playing basketball, he felt ashamed, like that monkey was supposed to be him somehow. And he knew then, the war was all around him. It was people and commercials trying to make him feel like he didn’t even matter, trying to make him feel like there was something wrong with being black” (p. 8).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph about why Jeremiah felt ashamed of the monkey playing basketball cartoon. When answering this question, consider the following:

- How does the media stereotype people?
- How do certain people in society stereotype others according to how they look or dress?
- Do you think this is the right thing to do?
- Have you ever been stereotyped?
- Do you know someone who has been stereotyped?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 2



Key Paragraph, p. 16

"I sighed and lay back on my bed. Some people had friends surrounding them all the time. Sometimes when groups of girls passed by me, giggling and holding hands, my stomach tightened. I wanted that. But I didn't want that. Marion says it's because I was born so long after everybody else. The twins, Anne and Ruben, were already ten by the time I was born—and my older brother, Marc, and my sister, Susan, were in graduate school...And this house—with all its empty rooms and quiet. Some days I walked through it slowly, touching the walls of my sisters' and brothers' old rooms, wondering what it would be like to grow up in a house full of people" (p. 16).

Writing Prompt

Write an informative paragraph explaining how growing up in a house with brothers and sisters is different than growing up without brothers and sisters living in the same house. When answering the question above, consider the following:

- How is it different to be raised with your siblings in the same house at the same time?
- How is it the same?
- What is your situation?
- Would you have changed anything? Why?
- What are the advantages to being the only one home?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 3



Key Paragraph, p. 29

“You know what it made me realize, Marion? That you wouldn’t always be there. That I can’t take anything or anyone for granted ‘cause there’s no guarantee” (p. 29).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph that explains why Ellie has difficulty trusting people. When answering the question above, consider the following:

- How do you think Ellie feels about having a mother that has left so many times?
- What did that do to Ellie’s trust level?
- Do you think it’s hard to trust someone again after they have hurt you?
- How can forgiveness help Ellie trust again?
- Is there a time in your life you were glad you forgave someone?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 4



Key Paragraph, p. 40

“‘They think you’re on a scholarship?’

Jeremiah shrugged and stared down at his plate. ‘Nobody said anything stupid’”
(p. 40).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph about why Percy students might assume that Jeremiah is on scholarship? When answering the question above, consider the following:

- How is this a stereotype?
- How would you recommend Miah to respond?
- Would you be offended if you were Jeremiah?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 42

“At Tech, some people treated him strange and some people treated him okay. His homeboys, the guys he’d grown up with, they were cool, had always been cool. But new kids, well, sometimes they just acted weird, like he was some untouchable god or something. He hated that” (p. 42).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph about why our culture often treats famous people differently. When answering the question above, consider the following:

- How are famous people different?
- How are they similar to everyone else?

In what way is Miah just a normal boy who happens to have famous parents?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 6



Key Paragraph, p. 58

“A long time ago, Anne used to talk about energy—how that was all love was—ions connecting across synapses of time and air. Don’t rationalize, she’d say. None of it will ever make sense. I leaned back against the wall and closed my eyes, not wanting to cry. Anne was right. None of it made any sense” (p. 58).

Writing Prompt

People can be prejudiced against different things. Some people can be bias against gay people. Some can be bias against black people. Ellie accepts Anne for being gay. **Write an explanatory paragraph about why you think it hurts Ellie’s feelings when her sister has a hard time with her being interested in a black boy?**

When answering the question above, consider the following:

- Do you think the person with the most integrity would love all people, regardless of their race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 7



Key Paragraph, p. 60

“Braun looked embarrassed. They had been sitting on the bleachers waiting for the coach to show up. Jeremiah grabbed the ball from Kennedy and started dribbling. ‘Not related to anybody,’ he said, moving the ball back and forth between his legs. ‘Shoot! You think I’d be at this tired school if my daddy was a filmmaker?’” (p. 60).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph about why you think Miah doesn’t want people to know his dad is a famous filmmaker? When answering the question above, consider the following:

- Have you ever wanted someone to *not* know who you are? Why?
- Do you think Miah should have told his teammates who he really was?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 8



Key Paragraph, p. 77

"I stared at his hand resting on the textbook. His fingers were long and brown. Slowly, his hand moved across the textbook page and underneath my name. He ran his finger across it, then tapped it lightly and winked at me" (p. 77).

Writing Prompt

Part of the craft of being a good writer is creating realistic characters. How realistic do you think Miah and Ellie are as characters?

Write an informative paragraph about why are Miah and Ellie realistic characters? Provide one quote that supports Miah as a realistic character. Provide one quote that supports Ellie as a realistic character.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 9



Key Paragraph, p. 84

"It was beautiful today, all warm and gold. The leaves had begun to change, and the trees up and down the block cast pretty shadows over everything. He loved October. Had always loved it. There was something sad and beautiful about it—the ending and beginning of things" (p. 84).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph about why Jeremiah loves October.

- Consider the following:
- What quotes from the reading support that fact that Jeremiah loves October?
- Do you agree with how the author has described the month of October? How would you describe your experience of this month? Be specific and concrete.
- Do seasons elicit different emotions?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 92

"We used to spend Sunday afternoons together, sitting and reading the *New York Times*. In the middle of an article, my father would frown and press his thumb against a paragraph. 'Listen to this crazy thing that's happening, Ellie,' he'd say, then slowly read, overemphasizing paragraphs he thought outrageous" (p. 92).

Writing Prompt

Ellie enjoys the ritual of reading the newspaper with her dad. **Write an informative paragraph that explains why rituals make our life fuller and more whole?** When answering the question above, consider the following:

- How do rituals create a happy route?
- Describe how rituals can bring family and friends together.
- Why are rituals special?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 11



Key Paragraph, p. 112

"If you come as softly/as the wind within the trees/. You may hear what I hear./ See what sorrow sees./ If you come as lightly/as threading dew,/ I will take you gladly,/ nor ask more of you" (p. 112).

Writing Prompt

Write an informative paragraph describe why this poem is important to the novel. When answering the question above, consider the following:

- What do you think this poem means?
- Why do you think this book is called *If You Come Softly*?
- Miah thinks the poem is about things and people coming and going. Do you agree?
- How does it help us in life if we know not everything is permanent?
- How does the poem help us appreciate those we love that much more if we know they won't be around forever?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
If You Come Softly, Day 12



Key Paragraph, p. 122

“Marion nodded, turned to the sink, and began washing breakfast dishes. She tucked one foot behind the other in a way that made my eyes fill up. She looked broken. Defeated. Lonely” (p. 122).

Writing Prompt

Write an informative paragraph explain how our actions have an impact on one another, whether we realize it or not. Provide an example from your own life, of how someone’s actions have impacted you. Then describe how Marion’ actions have impacted Ellie’s life. How do you think that makes Marion feel?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 13



Key Paragraph, p. 124

“Can I take your picture?’ a kid asked on morning. They had been sitting on the stairs, waiting for the bell to ring. There were other Percy kids around them, talking and looking over notes...Miah looked at Ellie. When she nodded, he nodded too, and the camera flashed on them...The morning moved on as if this moment, the moment of him and Ellie, had always been there. And always would be” (p. 124).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph about why it is significance when someone asked if he could take a photo of Ellie and Miah? When answering the question above, consider the following:

- Do you think that was foreshadowing anything?
- Why is it important to capture moments at a specific time.
- Or do you think the author just included it as another detail? Support your answer.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

If You Come Softly, Day 14



Key Paragraph, p. 136

“‘You don’t think there’s one white person in this world, Daddy,’ Miah said now, ‘somewhere—who’s different? Who gets up in the morning, looks in the mirror, and says, ‘I’m white so what am I gonna do with this—how am I going to use it to change the world?’” (p. 136).

Writing Prompt

Write an informative paragraph explaining responsibilities we *all* have in creating a more peaceful world? When answering the question above, consider the following:

- What can you do to help make the world a better place?
- Provide examples of people who are helping to make the world a better place.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
If You Come Softly, Day 15



Key Paragraph, p. 147

“What do you think happens to people when they die? You think they just go back to the dust or you think it’s something bigger?” (p. 147).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph about why those we love (both living and dead) helps us to add depth to our lives. When answering the question above, consider the following:

- How does love help us love whole lives?
- How does love help us live with integrity?
- What do you think happens to people when they die?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
If You Come Softly, Day 16



Key Paragraph, p. 156

“You could have told me sooner, you know. I feel like you’ve been lying—
‘but I haven’t been, Ellie. I just didn’t want to talk about them.’
‘Lies by omission.’ I turned away from him then...I hated being lied to. Hated it”
(p. 156).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph about why Jeremiah did not tell Ellie the truth about his parents sooner. When answering the question above, consider the following:

- What reasons did he have not to tell anyone about his parents?
- What are the pros and cons of Miah telling Ellie the truth about his parents?
- What does Ellie mean when she says: “lies by omission?”
- What would you have done?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
If You Come Softly, Day 17



Key Paragraph, p. 160

“Nelia took Ellie’s hand and placed her other one over it. She held it a moment. Jeremiah smiled. He loved his mama—so, so much” (p. 160).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph about why Jeremiah appreciates his mother’s loving gestures. When answering the question above, consider the following:

- In what way does her action have integrity?
- How should we treat people when we meet them for the first time?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
If You Come Softly, Day 18



Key Paragraph, p. 165

“I wanted to take tap, but it was full. But I never imagined it—that if I wanted to, I could be some kind of artist. Not until—not until I met you really” (p. 165).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph about why Ellie has considered being an artist. When answering the question above, consider the following:

- How can people change the way we view the world?
- How can others change the way we view ourselves?
- Who is your life has made a difference in impacting your views of yourself or the world?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
If You Come Softly, Day 19



Key Paragraph, p. 175

“This is my life at fifteen, I am thinking, staring down at my hands. Please world, stop this. I am only fifteen” (p. 175).

Writing Prompt

Write an explanatory paragraph about why Ellie is upset at the world.

When answering the question above, consider the following:

- What does she want stopped?
- Why does she say that she is only fifteen?
- Do you think if people accepted one another there would be less hatred and fighting and killing?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
If You Come Softly, Day 20



Key Paragraph, p. 177

“And if you come I will be silent
 Nor speak harsh words to you.
 I will not ask you why, now.
 Or how, or what you do.

We shall sit here, softly
 Beneath two different years
 And the rich earth between us
 Shall drink our tears” (p. 177).

Writing Prompt

Write an informative paragraph about why part of the poem is the title of this book. When answering the question above, consider the following:

- What do you think the poem means?
- What image comes to mind?
- Do you think Ellie visits Miah’s grave?
- What do you think Ellie’s experience is like at Miah’s grave?
- Was her life more complete with him in it?
- In what ways is he still in Ellie’s life?