

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 1



Key Paragraph page 9

"It was my job to start the fire for the morning tea. I hurried into my trousers and shirt and went outside to bring in rice stalks and coconut shells to fuel the fire. The pale sunlight was tangled in the branches of the great mango tree in the village and the object of much veneration. My grandmother said its great pools of shade attracted spirits that lounged about under the green canopy. We were forbidden to get too close to the tree lest we interfere with the spirits, but when my grandmother wasn't looking Thant would scramble up the trunk like a monkey and steal the fruit."

Writing Task

Review the theme: Integrity

Having integrity means following moral standards of behavior. Many of these moral standards are the same among all cultures and peoples, such as honesty. Other standards are unique or special to specific cultures.

Informational Writing Assignment:

Pretend you work for a publishing company that produces travel books. You are assigned to write the culture section of a travel book on Vietnam. Describe in detail the culture of Vietnam based on today's reading. You may want to keep in mind:

Old ways vs. new ways in Vietnamese culture and religion

Cultural differences between males and females

Government influences on the lives of its citizens

Holidays

Any other things you learned about the culture in Vietnam

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 2



Key Paragraph page 17

“The whole village had been called together and told that the government had closed the temple. My grandmother had muttered under her breath that temple was the property of the village and that the gods would destroy the government for closing it. My father and mother had tried to hush her, but not before the officers had heard her. Since that time they had never ceased to watch her.”

Writing Task

Review the theme: Integrity

Having integrity means following moral standards of behavior. Many of these moral standards are the same among all cultures and peoples, such as honesty. Other standards are unique or special to specific cultures.

Informational Writing Assignment:

Pretend you work for a publishing company that produces travel books. You are chosen to write the culture section of a travel book on Vietnam. Describe in detail the culture of Vietnam based on today's reading. You may want to keep in mind:

Religious beliefs and practices

What they eat and what things they use everyday

Any other things you learned about the culture in Vietnam

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 3



Key Paragraph page 27

“Our journey to Go Cong will take us two nights of walking,” our father said. “We have no papers from the government giving us permission to leave our village, so we must travel when it is dark.”

Writing Task

Review the theme: Integrity

Having integrity includes always being honest and upright. Sometimes, however, specific situations require discretion. For example, Mai and her family are escaping Vietnam illegally. They are hiding and willing to lie to the police. Does that mean they are acting without integrity? Consider the reasons they are escaping to contemplate this question.

Informational Writing Assignment:

Mai’s family is leaving Vietnam because they fear their government. Choose a character from the book so far. Pretend to be that character and write a letter to a relative in another country. Describe the problems in Vietnam and why you want to leave. Explain the injustices that the Vietnamese government put on its people.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 4



Key Paragraph page 39

The man dropped his hand and stood staring at Kim while she played. The music sounded to me as if it ought to be played in pleasant gardens where there were fountains. When Kim finished, she put the flute back into its case and handed to the man. He shook his head indicating that she should keep it. But, he was embarrassed by being caught in a kind act, and when he turned away, his voice was very rough. "Come with me he ordered."

Writing Task

Review the theme: Integrity

Having integrity means caring about others. It means doing good things for people. Remember that: "Who you are when you think no one else is looking is who you really are." The man in the key paragraph showed some integrity by letting Kim keep her flute. Think about others ways people can show integrity by thinking about and helping others.

Informational Writing Assignment:

Pretend you are Mai. You are thinking about the friends you left behind in your village. You want to give them advice if they decide to escape Vietnam as well. Write a paragraph telling them what to expect along the way to Ho Chi Minh City. Also tell them what kinds of things they should bring with them and what they need to leave behind.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 5



Key Paragraph p.42-43

“ . . . For the first time Kim’s mother spoke. “They are no better than murderers to send us off in such a boat. The first wave will crush it.” She looked in the direction of the wharf as though she were considering making her way back with Kim. A moment later the anger disappeared and the look of despair that had been on her face since we had first seen her returned.”

Writing Task

Review the theme: Integrity

Often, the true test of a person’s integrity is seeing what they do in desperate or stressful circumstances. Sometimes people who you thought had integrity do selfish things. On the other hand you may be surprised when someone you did not expect does heroic things in such situations. The integrity of Mai and her family, along with the other passengers on the boat is tested to the extreme.

Informational Writing Assignment:

Pretend you are a news reporter. You are assigned to write about the conditions on the boats of refugees from Vietnam.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 6



Key Paragraph page 55

“Bac Si Hong saw that our mother was shy in the presence of so many strangers and tried to make her more comfortable by asking about our village. At first our mother was embarrassed to be speaking with a *Bac Si*, who was educated, but after a while she forgot her embarrassment in the pleasure of speaking about our village. Speaking about it brought it closer.

Writing Task

Review the theme: Integrity

Often, the true test of a person’s integrity is seeing what they do in desperate or stressful circumstances. Sometimes people who you thought had integrity do selfish things. On the other hand you may be surprised when someone you did not expect does heroic things in such situations. The integrity of Mai and her family, along with the other passengers on the boat is tested to the extreme.

Informational Writing Assignment:

Pretend you are a news reporter. You are assigned to write about the conditions on the boats of refugees from Vietnam, as **well as how the refugees are handling the situation.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 7



Key Paragraph page 62

"The next day there were many sick passengers. An old couple from the city, unused to the heat, developed bad cases of sunstroke. There was dysentery, and the tiny space at the back of the boat, curtained off for a toilet, was always in use. Kim's mother had ordered the drinking water boiled, but no one paid attention to her order. It was too much trouble, Le Hung said, and there was not enough fuel for the stove. *Bac Si Hong* told us to drink nothing but tea."

Writing Task

Review the Theme: Integrity

Integrity is valuing the mind, body and spirit in oneself and others. It means thinking things through and considering consequences to self and others. In making their decision to leave Vietnam, Mai's family had to consider all the pros and cons of each option.

Informational Writing Assignment:

In two paragraphs discuss the pros and cons of escaping from Vietnam. Organize it so that one paragraph outlines the pros of escaping and the second paragraph outlines the cons.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 8



Key Paragraph page 75

"Captain Muoi wanted to question the boy, but Kim's mother said "No!" in so strong a voice that the captain retreated without another word. At last the boy fell asleep, but it was a restless sleep. Several times during the night he woke the whole boat with screams that sounded as if ten thousand devils were after him. We didn't dare think about what nightmares he was having--or worse, that they might not be nightmares at all but memories."

Writing Task

Review the Theme: Integrity

People who have integrity are people of good character. Character is shaped as people make choices throughout their lives. How they respond to the experiences in their lives and the courses they take determine who they are. The characters in the novel Goodbye, Vietnam are gaining many experiences in a short amount of time.

Informational Writing Assignment:

Pretend you are a news reporter. If you were to board the boat that Mai and her family and the other passengers are and interview them, write a news story based on what they would say has happened and what their experience has been like aboard the boat recently.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 9



Key Paragraph page 80

"My grandmother rocked back and forth moaning softly to herself. "They will come and find us," she cried. "They are waiting out there for us. We are lost."

Writing Task

Review the Theme: Integrity

Having integrity means having respect for yourself and others. When you have integrity, you consider the effects of your actions on other people. People who have integrity are able to sympathize with others.

Can you sympathize with Mai's grandmother and the other passengers? Can you feel their fears and frustrations, along with their hopes and joys? Goodbye, Vietnam is a fictional story based on real historical circumstances. The author, Gloria Whelan is not Vietnamese. Neither was she a refugee of any kind. She had to do research to learn about the real circumstances of the people her characters represent.

Informational Writing Assignment

Using the article about "Vietnamese Boat People" included in the Background section of this lesson (you may find it useful to do your own research as well), compare and contrast Gloria Whelan's portrayal in Goodbye, Vietnam of these historical circumstances with the information about real Vietnamese refugees in the article.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 10



Key Paragraph p. 86

"It is my duck and I chose to give it to all of the others. It will be added to the rice and everyone will have a taste. . . .everyone was impressed."

Writing Task

Review the Theme: Integrity

The Festival of Tet brought out the best in the people on the boat. They were happier and kinder than they were before. Sharing traditions and special occasions with each other can make people more united and selfless. Grandmother was very generous to give her duck to all the passengers. It was a sacrifice she didn't have to make, but she wanted to. Having integrity means being consistently good and always trying to do the right thing.

Informational Writing Assignment

Read the article on the "Tet Festival in Vietnam" included in the "Background" section of this lesson. Explain what information you already knew about the Tet Festival from reading the novel thus far. Then describe some of the traditions involved in the Tet Festival that the people on Mai's boat were not able to do because of the circumstances of their escape.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 11



Key Paragraph page 87

“Loi swung the net the bamboo pole that held the net toward the boat, but just as the turtle was within reach, the tip of the pole, bent by the weight of the turtle, cracked, and the net fell in the water. In a second Loi was over the side of the boat and holding on the turtle. I screamed for help. Someone threw a rope, but instead of tying it around himself, Loi wrestled it around the struggling turtle. “Pull”, he shouted.

Writing Task

Review the Theme: Integrity:

Loi showed integrity by risking his own safety so that the others on the boat could eat. He used his skill of fishing to catch the sea turtle so everyone could have food. In Vietnam, the government was afraid of people who had special skills like Mai's father. They want people to depend on the government and not to be self-reliant. However, people who have skills can help others like Loi and Mai's father did.

Informational Writing Assignment:

- a. Pretend you are Loi. You want to teach others your skill of fishing. Following the description of how Loi caught the sea turtle on pages 87-89, write a step-by-step how-to guide on how to make a fishing net and how to use it to catch food. Include a drawing of the net.
- b. Think of a skill you have that you could teach others. Write another step-by-step how-to guide on how to do that skill.

Tips:

Look up or find an instruction manual for examples of how to format your guide.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 12



Key Paragraph page 105

"Kim was not looking at the shore but at a barge that was approaching us. On it were men in uniform. "Policemen," Kim said in a frightened voice. I tried to convince her not to worry. "Policemen here," I said, "will not be like the policemen in Vietnam."

Writing Task

Review the Theme:

Why would Mai say that policemen in Hong Kong will not be the same as policemen in Vietnam? Perhaps she believes that because Hong Kong is a country with more regard for human rights than Vietnam is, its people, especially policemen, are people of integrity?

Informational Writing Assignment:

Write a description of Hong Kong from the perspective of the refugees on Mai's boat. Compare and contrast Hong Kong from Vietnam as described in this novel.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 13



Key Paragraph page 112

"It took us a while to find Kim and her mother. *Bac Si* was happy to see us. "I've been looking everywhere for you. There are so many sick people here. They tell me I cannot help, but I will not see people sick and do nothing. I will do what I must, but I must do it secretly. I am afraid to leave Kim alone. Not everyone in the camp can be trusted. Could Kim stay with you for a little while?"

Writing Task

Review the Theme: Integrity

Integrity is valuing the mind, body and spirit in others and ourselves. Integrity means being honest to yourself and others and doing what is right. It means thinking things through and considering consequences to self and others. Core values guide and are evident in thought, speech and action.

Informational Writing Assignment:

Consider the characters in *Goodbye, Vietnam*. Choose two or three characters from the book and explain ways in which they acted with or without integrity. Would you have done the same as them? Explain.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Goodbye, Vietnam, Day 14



Key Paragraph page 134

“... One of the doctors was a volunteer from the hospital in America. He wrote to his hospital and asked them to help sponsor me so that I could come to America. I could not go back to your camp because of the official, who would have reported me, but through the doctors I learned that you were going to America and when you would leave, and here I am!”

Writing Task

Review the Theme: Integrity

Integrity is valuing the mind, body and spirit in oneself and others. It means thinking things through and considering consequences to self and others. Core values guide and are evident in thought, speech and action.

In the novel Goodbye, Vietnam, many of the characters show love and integrity toward each other despite their harsh circumstances. In contrast to their integrity is the terrible treatment they suffered at the hands of their government. Think about what the characters suffered throughout the book and how they handled these situations.

Informational Writing Assignment

Pretend you are a newspaper reporter. Write a newspaper article about the struggles of the Vietnamese refugees from Mai's boat. End the article by explaining how the refugees overcame their struggles by helping each other. Be sure to include:

- a headline
- many facts and details about the boat trip and the camp in Hong Kong
- a quote from at least one of the characters
- transition words (i.e.
- use formal newspaper language

Tips:

Remember this is an informational article, not an opinion piece. Look up real news articles to help you get an idea of the style of writing and type of language used.