

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 1



Key Paragraph, p. 10

“You’ve seen too many movies,’ Mr. Shilling said.

“Who else has a psychiatrist, Lisa, in your class?’ Her mother wanted to know”
(p. 10).

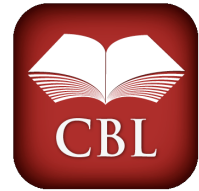
Writing Prompt

Lisa is clearly asking for help. She knows something is wrong with her and wants to talk to someone who will understand and “know what to do.” Lisa’s parents should respond with concern. How does each parent respond? Why do you think they react this way? Are they taking her concerns seriously? What happens when you share something very important and you know the other person is hearing you, but not really listening? How can you get them to listen to you and help you?

In a two-paragraph narrative essay, respond to the questions above. The first paragraph will focus on Lisa’s dilemma with her parents and the second paragraph should examine your own personal connection when you felt like the person you sought help from did not give you what you needed. Six to eight sentences per paragraph is required in order to fully respond to the questions with depth and detail.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 2



Key Paragraph, p. 21

“When she was in school, we began being able to tell when Lisa was having a black day, as we began to call them, and when she was having a fairly good bright day” (p. 21).

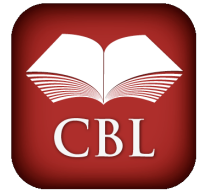
Writing Prompt

In today’s reading, Betsy thoroughly describes Lisa’s emotions, attitude, style of dress, and overall mood. She paints a clear picture of what it’s like for Lisa, and for those around her, to experience this form of mental illness. So far, Lisa’s parents and the school have let her down. In other words, they seem to be in denial about what is happening to Lisa and they are not getting the help she needs. Her friends are the only ones who seem to notice that she needs serious intervention.

In a three-paragraph narrative essay you will examine a few perspectives. In the first paragraph, describe a bright and dark day for Lisa. Be very specific in your description. You may need to refer to the text. In the second paragraph, compare your good and bad days to Lisa’s. How are they different and how are they similar? In the third paragraph, express how you feel about the adults not being responsible and attentive towards the care of Lisa?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 3



Key Paragraph, p. 38

“‘We have to convince Lisa’s family that she’s in real danger,’ M.N. said after a moment. ‘We’ll go to her house and tell her parents what’s happening in school, and that Lisa wasn’t kidding, after all. They can’t help but be upset and they’ll have to get some professional help for her’” (p. 38).

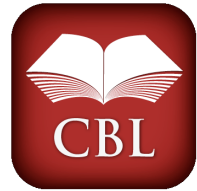
Writing Task

M. N. and Betsy want to help Lisa. They now realize how serious of a problem Lisa has. They feel like it’s up to them or she won’t get the help she needs. M.N. and her ever-positive attitude, believes that she can convince Lisa’s parents that she needs professional help.

In a two-paragraph narrative essay, state what you think M.N. will say to the Shillings in the first paragraph. In the second paragraph, what would you say to them if given the opportunity?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 4



Key Paragraph, p. 44

“Furthermore, she didn’t appreciate the fact that I, a presumptuous sixteen-year-old child, should come to tell her about her own family and how to run it, thank you very much...”

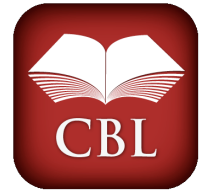
‘Mrs. Shilling is nothing if not a plainspoken woman,’ M.N. said with a mean sort of smile. ‘Anyway, she knows her family well enough to take care of it, she said. Hadn’t she just spent God knows how much money sending Lisa away for six whole weeks to do nothing but laze around in the sun dreaming?’” (p. 44).

Writing Prompt

Write a two paragraph narrative essay by answering the following questions: What is the inference Mrs. Shilling is making in the key paragraph? Does she really know what is going on in her family? What do you think went through Mrs. Shilling’s mind when she found out that Lisa repeatedly poked holes in her hand? What does she think when Lisa has her drastic mood swings? What is she thinking when Lisa wears clothes that reflect her extreme happiness or harrowing sadness? What does Mrs. Shilling think when Lisa tells her she needs help? Why would her parents let her go on a rest for six weeks all by herself?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 48

“‘Betsy,’ Lisa said, ‘*that’s* what scares me the most. I already know what’s happened. What I don’t know is what’s coming next. I can’t turn anything off. I tried to, in Florida. But now it’s here and almost comfortable, if you know what I mean. Familiar. I even like it a little, though it scares me. About the only thing I can think to do is sink into it. Sink in and let them take me away when the time comes.’ She said this without bitterness, without fear, like a weather report on the telephone: flat, emotionless, distant” (p. 48).

Writing Prompt

In today’s reading, Lisa seems very receptive to Betsy and M.N.’s desire to want to help her. Lisa even empathized with them when they told her that her parents and Dr. Bernstein were not very supportive and seemed very hesitant in wanting to help Lisa.

In a two-paragraph narrative essay, respond to the following questions: Lisa said she already knows what’s happened. What do you think she means by that? What does Lisa mean when she says she does not know what’s coming next? What is she comfortable with and feels she likes “it” a little? How is Lisa handling her mental illness? Why would she talk about being taken “away when the time comes”? Why do you think her friends are enough to sustain her spirit? Should they be doing more? Why or why not?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 6



Key Paragraph. p. 61

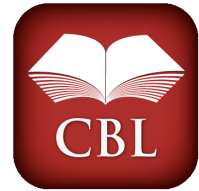
“I guess Elizabeth has something we don’t,’ I said. ‘It certainly grabbed Lisa. We can’t afford to lose her now because she seems sort of cold. We don’t need her. Lisa does. So,’ I said smiling, ‘smile’” (p. 61).

Writing Prompt

Betsy was trying to be mature and objective in her attempts to reason with M.N., after their conversation with Elizabeth. **In descriptive detail (provide 2 quotes from the novel) about why M.N. is mad at Elizabeth. What do you see as positive personality traits in Betsy? What about M.N.? What do you think Betsy instinctively knows about Elizabeth? Formulate your response in two narrative paragraphs.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 7



Key Paragraph, p. 73

“By that time, M.N. was crying, sort of shaking and just letting tears streak down her cheeks. She sat on the couch, her arms at her sides, crying right along with Lisa” (p. 73).

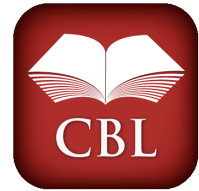
Writing Prompt

In the paragraph following the Key Paragraph (you may need to refer back to the novel), Lisa abruptly stops crying. Why? What does she do? How does she come across now? (What is Lisa thinking and what is she feeling?) Have the roles of the patient been reversed? Or, are they in this together? What did Lisa ask M.N. to do?

Answer these questions in a one-paragraph (6-8 sentences) narrative response. Be specific and detailed. Quote the author where appropriate.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 8



Key Paragraph, p. 81

“‘Lisa!’ called her father furiously.

‘No!’ she shouted back. ‘I want help! I need help! I need it! Do something for God’s sake! No, do it for *my* sake!’” (p. 81).

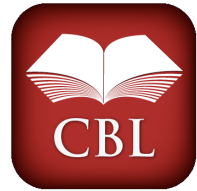
Writing Prompt

Lisa is visibly upset and pleads, again, to her father for help. Shouldn’t this be enough for her parents to see that she has a problem and is not just seeking attention? Why do the Shillings keep denying Lisa’s illness? Do you think that they value the image of maintaining the perfect family more than the health and well-being of their daughter? Why do you think they wouldn’t, at least, ask more questions about how she acts at school? Lisa’s friends and now adults have spoken to Mr. Shilling, but no one seems to be able to help him understand that everything is not perfect. Should Mr. Milne and Mr. Fickett have approached him differently or did they not even have a chance, since it appeared that Mr. Shilling was going to believe what he wanted to believe?

Structure your responses to the questions in a two paragraph narrative essay.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 9



Key Paragraph, p. 93

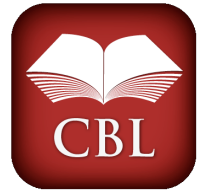
“For another example, one afternoon we were sitting at my house, talking about something our social sciences’ teacher had brought up that day, about one’s image of oneself and the image received by people looking at you. His point was that each of us was guided, to some degree, by what others thought of us, as well as by what we thought of ourselves. Lisa disagreed” (p. 93).

Writing Prompt

Do you agree that we are influenced by others’ perceptions of how they see us? Is the image we have of ourselves different from how others view us? Do we sometimes try to change who we are because we want to impress others and we are worried that if they see us as ourselves they will be disappointed? Are we also at the mercy of what society thinks? In other words, if the media promotes being young and beautiful as requirements for attaining success and happiness, do we then try to find ways to maintain a youthful appearance and become overly concerned with our looks in order to be valued? Should we just conform to our own standards in how we present ourselves, or is it acceptable to also be influenced by outside opinions? **Incorporate your answers into a two-paragraph essay.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 104

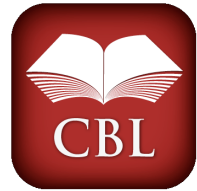
“That the next time, when I go—nuts, you won’t try to handle it by yourselves. Neither you nor M.N. nor Elizabeth. I want you to call the police” (p. 104).

Writing Prompt

Lisa clearly wants to be responsible for her actions the mental illness has caused. What else does this request about wanting to involve the police say about her as a person? As noted in previous readings, she has repeatedly asked for help because she is aware that something is wrong with her and she is not able to see it coming or control it when she has one of her outbursts. **In a two paragraph narrative response, describe Lisa’s strengths and whether or not you believe she is handling her illness in a good way. In the second paragraph, describe your strengths. Are they similar to Lisa’s?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 11



Key Paragraph, p. 116

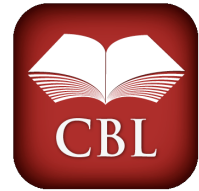
“‘Are you mad?’ Mrs. Shilling answered. ‘There’s nothing at all wrong with Lisa that a little discipline won’t cure. She’s simply a spoiled selfish girl who is showing off for some absurd reason. We have no intention of letting her ride roughshod over us’” (p. 116).

Writing Prompt

Who is the one that is “mad?” (“Mad,” in this context, is synonymous with the word “crazy.”) How is it still possible that Mrs. Shilling does not see that her daughter has a very serious, possibly life threatening, problem? Mrs. Shilling goes on to state that her daughter is spoiled and selfish and that she is taking advantage of them. What do you think Mrs. Shilling is thinking? Is she a stable person? What do you predict her childhood was like? **Respond in a two-paragraph narrative essay.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 12



Key Paragraph, p. 122

“And then I wondered what was going on. It had to be something about Lisa, but what? I gave up trying to guess, because I had recently begun to suspect that every time you expect one thing from life, something else usually happens. There was no point in being constantly disappointed” (p. 122).

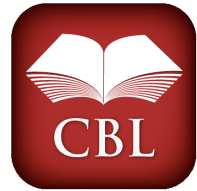
Writing Prompt

In the key paragraph, Betsy was questioning what was going on with Elizabeth, who had not been in school for the past two days. Elizabeth called Betsy on the phone and asked her to come over for dinner. M.N. was going to join them. Do you agree with Betsy that when you have expectations that something will happen, something else usually happens in its place? Is it always something that you did not expect? When Betsy stated that there’s “no point in being constantly disappointed,” that implies that it’s usually negative. Is that always the case? Reflect on your own life and provide detailed examples of situations where something happened that was not what you expected. Was it good or bad? How did you feel and react? Did you learn anything from the experience? When this happens do you feel constantly disappointed or are you able to see it from a more positive perspective?

Compose your response in a three-paragraph essay.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 13



Key Paragraph

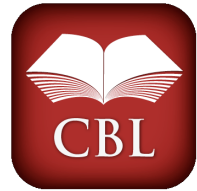
“Anyway it wasn’t difficult for him to remember when I was sick. And he agreed that Lisa should have help now, even if her own family is unwilling to give it to her. I’ll pay him back, of course, as soon as I can” (p. 128).

Writing Prompt

We find out that Elizabeth use to see Dr. Donovan for an undisclosed illness. He was able to treat her with success. Now she wants him to give Lisa the treatment she needs in order to get better. Elizabeth’s father offered to pay for Dr. Donovan’s services, and Elizabeth wants to pay him back. What does this tell you about Elizabeth’s character? Describe her personality. She appears to have chosen a life of high moral and ethical values. Do you know anyone, including yourself, who shares these same principles? Would you do the same for a friend? **Respond in a 2-paragraph essay.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 14



Key Paragraph, p. 138

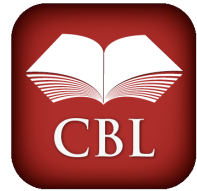
“We ran through the lobby like three idiot children and burst through the doors. There is a little park on the side of the hospital, and we scrambled to reach it, all three of us holding hands and laughing, and crying, and giggling, and acting like three-year-olds together. And we didn’t stop. We fell about in the grass, and rolled over each other, and shrieked and hooted and hollered and hit each other and then started all over again. And to think, I remembered, that the *patient* was still *inside*” (p. 138).

Writing Prompt

Betsy, M.N., and Elizabeth are ecstatic beyond what mere words can describe at the prospect of Lisa being cured. They have witnessed firsthand how debilitating mental illness can be. The girls have tirelessly tried to help Lisa with her sickness and they also enlisted the aid of their parents, Lisa’s parents, and school personnel in earnest attempts at getting her the help she needs. They have finally succeeded and are overcome with relief and joy. Though they may seem few and far between, we have all experienced unbelievable happiness, elated surprise, or just a huge feeling of relief.....as if the stress has disappeared. Describe in descriptive detail what the situation was like and what the end result did for you and others who were involved. Were you thankful? Did other people contribute to make it special, profound, memorable? Did this time involve something negative that ended up being something positive? Was your situation already a happy one, but it became even better as a result of what someone else may have done? **Think this over carefully, outline your thoughts, and formulate your experience in a three-paragraph narrative essay.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Lisa, Bright and Dark, Day 15



Key Paragraph, p. 141

“‘Poor M.N.,’ Elizabeth laughed. ‘You’ve had a chance to study everything but the patient’s mind. I hate to think of all that reading and no primary source available to you. Maybe Neil could send bulletins’” (p. 141).

Writing Prompt

Why is Elizabeth making fun, again, of M.N.? One of the girls had firsthand knowledge of mental illness because of her experiences. Another read extensively on mental illness and observed Lisa attentively. The other was the very compassionate, understanding, and nurturing towards Lisa and the other two girls. **Between Betsy, Elizabeth and M.N., who do you think has the most knowledge and understanding about mental illness? Explain your response in descriptive detail in a 2-paragraph final essay.**