

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Child of the Owl, Day 1



Key Paragraph – 3

“I can’t remember when Barney’s story began, but all my life I’d heard this story about how this little girl and her father were going to hit it big one of these days, either in his gambling or in one of his real-estate deals that one of his drinking buddies was going to get up—Barney was always their bosom buddy till the deal fell through.”

Writing Prompt

Casey and her father moved all over California but now Casey will move to the Bay Area to live with her aunt and uncle. **In two explanatory paragraphs re-tell Casey’s story. Explain the setting and the plot. Include a description of her mother and father. Describe the events from today’s reading. Include three reasons why Casey is going to live with her aunt and uncle in the Bay Area.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Child of the Owl, Day 2



Key Paragraph – 17

“It wasn’t much better when I hit *Chez Phil the Pill*. There wasn’t one cheap piece of furniture or painting in the place but it was all kind of, I don’t know, kind of impersonal. Like it had all been ordered out of a Sears’s catalogue because that was what every other lawyer of fifty thousand a year ordered from San Francisco to Bangor. But the only difference between Phil’s stuff and the stuff in the cheap furnished rooms where Barney and me lived was the price tag, not the taste. Instead of ordering the twenty-dollar dresser like you’d find in one of our rooms, Phil ordered the two-hundred-dollar dresser. Not because he liked it, but because it had the right price tag.”

Writing Prompt

Phil is very different from Barney and doesn’t seem to be fond of Casey. Create a biographical about “Phil the Pill.” **Write two informative paragraphs that explain Phil’s behavior and career choices. Describe his lifestyle and his personality. Use three examples from the text to support your description.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 3



Key Paragraph – 37

“I walked into an old, dim hallway and climbed up the wooden steps. As I turned an angle on the stairs, I saw light burning fierce and bright from a window. When I came to it, I looked out at the roof of the Chinese school next door. Someone had thrown some old 45’s and a pair of sneakers down there. If I were some kind of kid that felt sorry for herself, I would almost have said that was the way I felt: like some piece of old, ugly junk that was being kicked around on the discard pile while Barney was getting better.”

Writing Prompt

Casey moves into Paw-Paw’s apartment in a new neighborhood. **In two explanatory paragraphs describe the inside of Paw-Paw’s apartment and the neighborhood in which she lived. Use sensory details -such as sights, sounds, and smells- to help the scene come alive. Provide three detailed descriptions. Speculate how Casey might have felt moving into this new and strange environment.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 4



Key Paragraph – 56

The simplest thing would have been to go to Paw-Paw and ask her to help me, but for one thing I never said I wanted to learn Chinese. I was an American and I couldn't see any good reason to learn a foreign language. And then too, it hurts your pride when you think you are smart and you have to do things that make you feel dumb."

Writing Prompt

Casey struggles in her Chinese class and feels even more frustrated when her teacher accuses her of cheating. **In an explanatory paragraph, write about a time when you struggled to learn something new. Explain the situation and how you felt when you were learning? What did you tell yourself to keep you going? What was the result? How did you feel after you learned it? What advice would you give Casey?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 5



Key Paragraph – 72

“I don’t know why, but I began to cry, softly at first, the tears just slipping out of my eyes no matter how hard I tried to close them, and then because it got harder to breathe, I began to sob. I tried to hide my face in my pillow to stop the sounds, but I couldn’t. Paw-Paw had the sense to leave me alone for a moment and not touch me, ‘What’s wrong, girl?’”

Writing Prompt

Casey meets with Barney and discovers that she will not be traveling back with him. **In an explanatory paragraph, explain why Casey is crying. What are the circumstances of her life that are making her so unhappy at this moment? Include three reasons to support your answer. Evaluate your paragraph using the checklist you created in the Write Ahead lesson today.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 6



Key Paragraph – 75

“ ‘Some things you can’t count in coins. The Owl, Spirit gave it to our family.’ She paused and I had the feeling that she was lost somewhere inside herself groping for the right words. ‘American owls are supposed to be good and wise but Chinese owls are supposed to be evil—though most Chinese don’t know that anymore. Even many of the old ones have forgotten, as they have forgotten many things. Those Chinese owls, many have no sense of family. Many make fun of their parents and when the parents grow too old, the young owls push them out of the nest. Some even eat their poor old parents. And they steal people’s souls.’ ”

Writing Prompt

In an attempt to comfort Casey, Paw-paw tells her a story about three owls. **In one explanatory paragraph, re-tell the story of the owls and the walkers. Describe three of the most important events in detail. In a second explanatory paragraph, describe how this story might relate to the lives of the people in the book.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 7



Key Paragraph – 101

“Stories don’t exactly replace a gas heater; yet some stories can lift you up out of where you are so the cold doesn’t seem important anymore. And the story of the owls wasn’t even very pleasant—I mean, who wants to go around eating up other people and catching souls? But it was like there had always been this person inside of me that I had never been able to name or describe—a small, feathery me lost inside this body—and now I not only knew her name but I could tell part of her story.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are a news reporter, writing stories about the events in San Francisco’s Chinatown. **Write an informative news article about an ancient owl charm made of jade. In your news story, write an explanatory paragraph that describes the charm looks and the owner of the charm. Provide the details of the story behind the charm. In a second paragraph suggest how the story might be applicable to the lives of people living in 1960’s Chinatown.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 8



Key Paragraph – 108

“When I finally got to see the movies, they were completely different than I thought. I could see why Jeanie had like them. For one thing, the Chinese were actually people who could be brave or sad. They had subtitles in English too, which was good. It was something to see Chinese do more than be the sidekick to some white guy in a fight, or see the Chinese actually win. I mean, I almost felt like crying when I saw it: a kind of bubbling feeling deep down inside that had me almost cheering and crying while this Chinese mother led her three sons in beating up the bad guys. And it was even better when I saw the Chinese girls fighting.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are a reporter; write an informative article for the local news story about one of the Chinese movies playing at the Chinese Globe Theater. **In an informative paragraph describe the characters from today’s reading. Provide three reasons why this film speaks to young Chinese people. From today’s reading, include a quote from Casey as a film critic.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 9



Key Paragraph – 118

“Even in Paw-Paw’s club, the women and men sat more or less separately. The women sat gossiping loudly about their friends still living or dead while the men sat on benches, a piece of paper spread out before them with grids on it and a blue line through the middle. Paw-Paw told me they were playing Chinese Chess. Instead of chessmen, they moved little disks, each of which had a character on it—like a chariot or general and so on. Men stood around the players kibitzing or grunting ‘*Hou*’ when someone made a good move.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are a reporter. Write a human-interest story on Chinese social clubs, focusing on Paw-Paw’s social club. **In an informative paragraph, explain where the club is located, what people do at the club, describe the type of people at that socialize there, and when people meet. In a second informative paragraph explain the purpose of the social club and why it is important for members to have this community.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 10



Key Paragraph – 135

“Sheridan went back to his aimless wiping of the counter. ‘You know it. But I think it was always harder on him. Me, I wasn’t smart like him so I never expected nothing but shit jobs. But him, he and Jeanie always aced everything and then they got married right away. Real cute. Went around to all the same offices and it was always the same story. The boss’d offer her a job but not him.’”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are a human-interest reporter and write a story about Casey. In an explanatory article, explain why is Casey in Chinatown? **In one informative paragraph, describe what has happened to her father and her mother? In a second informative paragraph, explain what information she is looking for? End the article by summarizing what information she found out so far?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 11



Key Paragraph – 158

“Paw-Paw glanced at me. Then she turned her eyes back to the pot and went on scrubbing. I went back into the other room and sat down on the bed and tried to read my arithmetic book, only the numbers kept on blurring. Paw-Paw came out a moment later, wiping her hands on a dishtowel. She sat down on the bed beside me. ‘When I came in and I saw you with your head lying on the table and the stove door open, I thought you were dead. I thought I’d lost you.’”

Writing Prompt

In today’s reading Casey turns on the oven despite Paw-Paws warning that the pilot light. Imagine that the pilot light might go out and they would both be at risk of dying of asphyxiation. Imagine the pilot light *had* gone out. **Write explanatory paragraph describing how Casey almost died. Introduce the setting, include two characters, and describe the conflict clearly.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 12



Key Paragraph – 167

“A lady waddled up next to me—a fat, round lady, her hair cut short and curled tightly around her head. Her pasty jowls sagged and her buckteeth, one of which was gold, showed all the time. With her bulging shopping bags in either hand, she took up enough space for three people. The clerk ladled some sliced abalone and asparagus into a cardboard container. He dipped the ladle with a languid air—like you’d expect from some rich lady reaching into her box of chocolates. And when the clerk finished with the first customer, she started rattling off an order in Chinese.

‘I think I was next,’ I said.”

Writing Prompt

In Chinatown, Casey feels like a tourist or the odd one out. **In an explanatory paragraph describe why Casey feels like the outsider. Provide three examples that demonstrate Casey is the foreigner. Include one lesson Casey has learned through this experience.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 13



Key Paragraph – 176

“From the way his face flushed, I was sure I was right. He looked embarrassed and angry at the same time. ‘All we got is two I tell you and you’re lucky to get these.’”

Writing Prompt

The take-out restaurant refused to sell Casey two more bean cakes. Pretend Casey reported this discrimination to a police officer. **As a police report, write an informative paragraph that describes this situation. Include the time, date, and location. Provide a detailed description to explain the story. Finish the police report by noting Casey acted with integrity by opting not to make a scene in the take-out restaurant.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 14



Key Paragraph – 200

“ ‘I think she know thief. She not like to hurt her friends. She maybe hope to take care of it on her own when she get out.’ Mr. Jeh set his cup down firmly. ‘Gilbert not really bad boy.’ He gruffed. ‘Just wild. No discipline at home. Too much eat, plenty of clothes, plenty warm home. Take everything for granted and always want more. I feel great shame.’ Having come to a decision, Mr. Jeh slowly pushed himself up from the chair. His shoulders and arms were still strong and limber even if his legs had turned thin and brittle despite all the exercise he gave them. ‘Many thanks for tea. I go now. I got some visits to make.’”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are Casey. Write a second police report to explain the burglary. **In an informative paragraph describe what happened in a sequential order. Provide a detailed explanation of what happened first, second, and third. In a second paragraph, describe what the burglar stole and explain why this was a significant loss to the family.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 15



Key Paragraph – 215-216

“I turned back to look at the store for a moment, feeling some satisfaction that I could at least recognize some of the things in the window there. And that was when I saw the Listener—the one who refused to enter heaven until everyone else was saved—over in one corner on the lowest shelf. The statue was a small one and since it was surrounded by bright green-and-blue ceramic parakeets, it was easy to miss. The Listener was fine, white porcelain and made as if she were sitting with a lotus in her hand, but it was her smile that got me. It was a smile of longing, a smile of sadness, a knowing smile, a patient smile. It must have been the way the Owl Spirit smiled. I leaned closer to look at her better and saw my reflection on the window, floating ghost-like around the solid statue with the reflection of the neon signs—as if my face were turning into a mist of lights surrounding the statue. And the smile of the statue—the smile of the Owl Spirit—was the smile on my own face.”

Writing Prompt

Pretend you are Casey and that you have just returned home from your quest with Mr. Jeh for the missing charm. While you didn’t find the charm or the thief, you certainly learned a lot about Chinatown, it’s history, Chinese culture, and yourself. **In an explanatory paragraph reflect on what you learned today. Explain how you found yourself relating to the listener in the window. Describe how your smile is similar to the smile of the Owl Spirit and the smile of the Listener all at the same time.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

Child of the Owl, Day 16



Key Paragraph – 230

“We set off after the Pachinko, hurrying to get closer to him before he got to Grant, where we might lose him in the swirling mobs. As it was, we almost lost him at the light. He ran across the crosswalk on a yellow light and by the time we got to the corner, the cars were already starting across the intersection.”

Writing Prompt

In today’s reading, Casey Booger, and Mr. Jeh were spying and following Gilbert through the city. Pretend you are a bystander witnessing this event without any context to the situation. **Write an explanatory paragraph to describe your observation on the series of events. Explain how you noticed the group spying. What caught your attention? Provide detailed descriptions on each character. In a second explanatory paragraph use your imagination to provide a reason why you think the group was following this man.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 17



Key Paragraph – 241

“I felt real funny when he said that. The closest thing to it was when Barney and me had once stayed in this old boarding house with floorboards so rotten that with each step I thought the floor would fall apart in dust and splinters. But this was a lot worse because everything, just everything, had crumbled. ‘Oh, Barney.’ I found my hands balling into fists. ‘Barney, why couldn’t it have been your friend? That would have left me something.’ I caught Talia looking at me. I turned away quickly. The tears were starting to slip over the corners of my eyes and I didn’t want any of them to see.”

Writing Prompt

Casey has to choose how to deal with Barney’s betrayal. Pretend you are Casey, sitting on the bench alone in the square trying to figure out how you are going to deal with this situation. **In an explanatory paragraph, describe how you will deal with Barney? Will you forgive him? Will you involve the police or teach him a lesson another way? Will you ever speak to him again? Provide three reasons to support your answer. (Remember: Casey has reacted with integrity in many difficult situations. How would she handle this situation with integrity?)**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 18



Key Paragraph – 260-261

“‘Sure I know that. But some Chinese still know how to look deep inside themselves and I’m gonna be one of them.’ I put my hands on Paw-Paw’s shoulders. ‘I’m a child of the owl.’”

Writing Prompt

Prologue part one: In today’s reading, Casey took a big step in growing up. She told Barney that rather than run away like he had, she intended to stay and look deep within herself in order to be true to who she really is. Pretend you are Casey. **Write the prologue to this story some ten years later. In an explanatory paragraph describe how surviving Barney’s betrayal changed you for the better. Provide three reasons to support your testimony.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt
Child of the Owl, Day 19



Key Paragraph – 275

“And I thought to myself, I didn’t have to be just like a Chinese owl. I could be like an American one too—I mean, I could be as wise as an American owl—I already felt a lot older and wiser than anyone else my age. I put my elbows on the table, nursing the teacup between the fingertips of both my hands. At first I only let myself sniff at the jasmine tea, knowing that the tea is never sweeter than just before the first taste. And finally, I sipped it, knowing that spring was here.”

Writing Prompt

Prologue part two: Casey continues to live with Paw-Paw. Add to your prologue. **In an informative paragraph, explain how the two of you managed to look out for each other over the years. What happened to the charm? Explain how you managed to financially get by? Were you able to find a way to live successfully in both the American and Chinese worlds? What did you do after high school? Are you two still together? Are you both happy? Include an update about Barney.**