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Response Journal

Reflections: A Student Response Journal



*From the Mixed-up Files of
Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*
E.L. Konigsburg

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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Chapter 1

1. As one who insists upon comfort, Claudia chooses to run away to a “large place, a comfortable place, an indoor place, and preferably a beautiful place.” When we think of running away, most of us imagine running away to a different city or state, rather than a building, like Claudia’s art museum. Write a descriptive paragraph about a building you might like to run away to. Be sure to include at least four reasons for your choice.
2. Claudia chooses Jamie as her traveling companion because he can be counted on to be quiet, is occasionally good for a laugh, and has saved up a lot of money. Write down the name of the person you would choose to accompany you on such a journey; then list five reasons for your choice.
3. Would you say that you are “subject to a lot of injustice” in your home life? Describe why or why not.
4. One reason Claudia is running away is because she is “bored with simply being straight-A’s Claudia Kincaid.” What bores you most about the way you and your life are now? Other than running away, what could you do to make things a bit more exciting or interesting?
5. Claudia intends to return home after everyone has “learned a lesson in Claudia appreciation.” What do you think of this strategy? If you ran away for a short time, do you think your family would appreciate you more once returned? Explain your answer in a paragraph or two.

Chapter 2

11. Does it surprise you that Jamie, who shares none of Claudia's complaints about life in the Kincaid household, so readily agrees to run away with her? Do you think most kids imagine running away at some point in their childhood, regardless of their circumstances? If so, why? Explore these questions in a paragraph or two.
12. Plan your escape! In the form of a detailed list or a few paragraphs, write out the plan you would use if you were to run away next week. Make sure to cover the following questions:

Which day of the week would you choose—and why?

Would you leave during the night or during the day? Explain why.

When and what would you pack? What would you pack in so as to arouse the least amount of suspicion—an instrument case, a gym bag, something else?

Would you walk, bike, or take public transportation like the Kincaids? Explain your choice.

What would you do to stall the possibility of anyone noticing that you're leaving and trying to stop you?

Chapter 4

22. Jamie's brilliant at thinking quickly: when a museum worker catches him coming out of a bathroom stall as if from nowhere and asks where Jamie came from, Jamie smiles, nods, and says, "Mother always says that I came from Heaven." The excuse is so great because no one's going to tell a young boy that, no, he *didn't* come from Heaven, he came from a bathroom stall so soon after the museum opened that it seems highly suspicious. Write out three more conversation-stopping excuses you could use in Jamie's situation—ones pretty much guaranteed to confuse or astonish the museum worker into silence and let you go on your way before the worker realizes something's fishy.
23. Over her traditional breakfast of cereal and pineapple juice, Claudia scolds Jamie for his less conventional breakfast: a cheese sandwich. She stresses "the need to eat properly"—"properly" meaning "[b]reakfast food for breakfast, and lunch food for lunch." Jamie grumbles about her narrow-mindedness.

Imagine that, to settle the point once and for all, Jamie and Claudia decide to write persuasive paragraphs defending their respective positions (Jamie's, that we should be allowed to eat lunch or dinner food for breakfast if we feel like it, and Claudia's, that we should not). They'll need to back up their arguments with good reasons, because—in this pretend scenario—they'll be handing them to a stranger to judge whose argument is strongest and, as a result, who is right. First, write Jamie's paragraph. After you've argued as well as you can for his opinion...write Claudia's.

24. In relating the Kincaids' story to Saxonberg, Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler says, "This was New York. *Crowded* was part of the definition of New York." What five adjectives would be "part of the definition" of the town or suburb you live in?

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34. Claudia and Jamie discuss the fact that neither of them is at all homesick, even though their parents are not bad people and, for the most part, treated them well. They decide that homesickness happens when “you’re not very sure of yourself” or “not very well trained.” Do you agree with their conclusion? Explain your answer.
35. If you were to run away, what, if anything, do you think you might become homesick for—and why? If you honestly think you wouldn’t miss anything about your home or family, explain why you wouldn’t.

Chapter 6

36. As Claudia, write a diary entry about the clue you and Jamie have unearthed and why it is so important to you to solve the mystery of the statue before returning home.
37. If you were the Museum Head, what would you think upon receiving Claudia and Jamie’s letter, with all of its typos and errors? If the letter contained no such errors, would you be more inclined to take it seriously? Explain your answer.