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Parrot in the Oven
Victor Martinez

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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 – The Baseball Glove

1. Nardo and Randy are working as busboys for the Bonneville Lakes Golf and Catering Service. They dare each other to take off their busboy jackets, buy a ticket, and ask a girl to dance. Nardo, risking his job, agrees to fulfill the bet. How would you respond to a friend's bet in a similar situation?
2. Nardo's grandmother believes her grandson has a sixth sense that warns him when trouble is near. To what extent do you believe that some people have special abilities or a "sixth sense"?
3. Even though he is old enough to work to help support the family, Nardo is chronically unemployed. Manny writes,

"Whether one tried threats, scoldings, or even shaming, which my mom tried almost every other day, nothing worked."

Write a letter from Nardo to his mother explaining to her why he is not working.

4. Manny describes his father as a man who "was always zeroing in on things he wanted to be disappointed in, and when he found one, he'd lose a curse quicker than an eyeblink."
Write about someone you know, have read about, or seen on television who also seems to look for problems in life. What advice would you give to a negative person?
5. Manny describes his grandfather as a man who "worked like a man trying to fill all his tomorrows with one solid day's work."
Why do you suppose some people work so hard?

Chapter 2 – Rico’s Pool Hall

9. Dad and Mom frequently fight about whether or not to get welfare. Their opinions on the subject are well known to Manny because whenever the subject is mentioned, his parents have the same argument. Think about an often discussed topic in your household. How do you feel when you must repeatedly listen to the same arguments about this topic?
10. Dad believes that,
...people were like money. If you were a million-dollar person, you had a grip on things, a big house maybe, and a crowd of suckers you could push around. You could be a thousand-dollar person or a hundred-dollar person—even a ten-, five-, or one-dollar person. Below that, everybody was just nickels and dimes. To my dad, we were pennies.

Using the same analogy to money, what kind of person do you think you are in the opinion of your parents? How do you feel about that?

11. In the following paragraph, Manny describes how his parents behave when they are worried. What do you do when you feel stressed or worried?
- I always wondered why he got so tossed around by things, why he’d roughen his voice and tire himself out complaining. Mom was more quiet. Whenever she worried about something, she’d bite her nails and look up at the sky; not like she was staring at the clouds, but like the whole sky was the most marvelous sight she’d ever seen.
12. Manny is confronted by the Garcia brothers. Manny is afraid of Stinky Garcia, so he takes the abuse instead of fighting back. Do you approve of the way Manny handles himself with the Garcia brothers? What advice might you give him?

Chapter 4 – The Bullet

21. Mom drags Manny to Rico's Pool Hall to look for Dad. He knows that she wants him to go home with her, but instead he steps up to the bar and stubbornly demands another drink. Write about a time in your life when you stubbornly refused to do the right thing. Why do you suppose people act this way?
22. Dad calls Manny *el perico* because Manny reminds his father of the parrot in the Mexican saying who "complains how hot it is in the shade while all along he's sitting inside an oven." Dad is saying that Manny is too trusting. Do you have a nickname? In what sense does your nickname describe your character?
23. When Mom realizes the police are coming, she rushes back to the house and grabs the rifle out of Dad's hands. She seems to be more frightened of the police than she is of Dad's temper. Why do you think people sometimes fear the police?
24. The officer goes into the bedroom of the Hernandez home and finds the rifle under the bed. Based on your knowledge of proper police procedure, do you think he had any right to search the home looking for the gun?
25. Dad is very upset when the police decide to take his rifle. He seems to be more upset about the loss of the rifle than he is about being taken into custody by the officers. Why do you think he behaves this way about a material possession?

Chapter 6 – The Rifle

35. Magda is unhappy with her job. She believes her boss “gets a big bang out of showing how he’s got me under his thumb.” Have you ever know anyone in authority who behaves in this way? Why do you suppose people act like that?
36. In this chapter we learn that Dad spends one hundred and fifty dollars on a lawyer to get his rifle back. Mom thinks that is “the stupidest thing she ever heard.” Write a letter from Dad to Mom explaining to her why he spends the money on the lawyer.
37. PEDI does not like to be separated from Magda, so Manny lies to her when she asks for Magda. But PEDI is not easily fooled, and she accuses Manny of being a liar. Write about a time you may have witnessed someone lie to a child. Do you think fooling a young child is ever justified? How might you have handled a similar situation?
38. What advice would you give to Dad concerning the storage of his rifle?
39. In the following passage Manny describes how he feels after he nearly shoots PEDI with the rifle.

My muscles felt weak and droopy. I thought I was going to pass out, but then I heard her crying, and when I speeded over to her, her mouth was fluttering. Tears sprouted from her eyes and leaked down past her ears, but this only made me laugh; my heart felt like it was being squeezed between two hands; joy and grief pressing and unpressing.

Write about an experience from your life when you felt both joy and grief at the same time.