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ISBN 978-1-60389-545-3

Item No. 201480

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.

P r e - R e a d i n g

1. Think about the Vietnam War for a few minutes. Then, make a list of at least 10 words or phrases that you associate with the Vietnam War.
2. Do some research about the country of Vietnam, focusing on one of the following topics:

Religion

Foods

Arts (music, dance, painting, sculpture, etc.)

Family Life

Agriculture

Population

Means of Government

Then, write a brief essay about that aspect of Vietnamese culture. For example, what role does religion play in the everyday life of Vietnamese people? What size is the typical Vietnamese family? Remember you only have to choose one topic; do not write a separate essay for each topic.

3. You may have heard some people say that there was no reason for the United States to become involved in the Vietnam War. If you haven't already found the answer in your previous research, look for some more information concerning why the U.S. joined the war in Vietnam. Then write a short essay of no fewer than three paragraphs that explains the United States' involvement in the war.

Response Journal

10. Perry says that Peewee “agitates” Johnson. Perry has already warned Peewee to leave Johnson alone because Johnson is so big and tough.

What advice would you give Peewee about his relationship with Johnson? Write a letter to Peewee in which you advise him on how to deal with Johnson.

11. One of Perry’s teachers at Stuyvesant High School told him that he was “just an observer in life.” Do you consider yourself another “observer of life,” or are you a more active participant in life? If given a choice, would you like to stand back and watch something happen, or would you rather be a part of the action? In at least two paragraphs, explain whether you consider yourself an observer of life or a participant in life. Make sure you use specific examples to support your ideas.
12. Perry’s English teacher, Mrs. Liebow, says that “not giving in” is what “separate[s] heroes from humans.” Think, for a moment, about your own definition of a hero. What, in your opinion, does it take to be a hero? What characteristics does a hero have? How is a hero different from other people? In a well-formed paragraph, explain what you think it means to be a hero.
13. We get very little information about what Perry looks like. Draw a picture of him. Then, write a paragraph describing Perry’s physical attributes and why you think he looks the way you have drawn him.

Chapter 10

33. To hear Perry describe how he joined the Army, it is almost as if he had no choice. In reality, the draft was an integral part of the war effort in the Vietnam era. Any male over the age of 18 was subject to being sent overseas to fight. The only ways to avoid serving were to be physically or emotionally unfit, go to college, or go to live in a foreign country like Canada. College was not an option for Perry, so he signed up for the Army. The money he earned as a soldier would help his family back home, too. Many other young soldiers in Vietnam, however, were not at all eager to join the armed forces.

Do you think that the federal government should have the right to draft young men into the armed services, even if those men are forced to go against their will? If young men are subject to the draft, should young women have to sign up, too? In a letter to a local congressman, explain your opinion about the draft system.

34. Perry is obviously very close to his brother, Kenny. In your family, with whom are you the closest? In a paragraph or two describe your relationship with your favorite family member.

Chapter 14

42. When the men of Alpha Company see what the Viet Cong have done to the village, they experience so many different emotions that they don't know which is the strongest: their shock, their anger, or their sadness.

Imagine that you are on a television talk show and the topic for the day is "Overwhelmingly Mixed Emotions." Write a transcript of your part on the TV show in which you describe a time when you experienced emotional overload.

43. Write a communiqué, or military report, to Army headquarters in which you describe the scene at the village after the Viet Cong attack.
44. It is only a twist of fate that prevents Perry from being shot by a Viet Cong soldier. Imagine that you are Perry, having just missed being killed. Now, write a poem that reveals how you feel about coming so close to death.
45. After he comes face to face with one of the enemy soldiers, Perry starts to re-evaluate himself. He says he is "hoping to find something more than the kid (he) was." In effect, he wants to find out what kind of man he is. If you had to describe yourself to someone who did not know you, what kind of person would you say you are? What do you consider your strengths? What are some of your weaknesses? Write a letter of introduction to a stranger. In this letter, describe the kind of person you are.