

Literary Reading Work Sample Assessment

Middle School – For Classroom Use

Instructions

Read the following story carefully and **make notes in the margin** as you read.

Your notes may include:

- Comments that show you understand the story and your reactions to it.
- Questions you have that show what you are wondering as you read.
- Notes and observations on the **literary elements** (theme, character, plot, setting, narrator, characterization, tone, mood, etc.) and how the author uses them to create an impact.
- Notes and observations on the **literary devices** (figurative language, imagery, point of view, foreshadowing, flashback, symbolism, etc.) and how the author uses them to create an impact in the story.

Margin notes are optional, but they may add to your score for this assessment.

Student _____

Teacher _____ Class Period _____

Created by: Nicole Hilton and Alyson Drain, Reynolds

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It's Just the Legs

Roland Smith, Amy's Missing, 1996

It took me several days to get back over to Theodore's. I have never been around a disabled person and I was nervous about it. What were we going to talk about? I made the mistake of telling my parents about meeting Theodore. Now, every time I saw them they asked if I had been over to see him. I kept coming up with lame excuses. On the fourth day I even voluntarily pulled weeds and mowed the lawn rather than visit him.

"That's it!" I told myself as I pushed our rickety lawnmower back into the garage. "The next thing I know I'll be cleaning my bedroom and scrubbing the toilet." Before I changed my mind again I ran over to Theodore's and knocked on his front door. His mom opened it with a pleasant smile.

"I'm Pete from next door. Is Theo here?"

"Well, I'm glad to meet you, Pete," she said. "Please come in. Theodore's downstairs."

She led me through the kitchen and opened a door. I expected to see a set of stairs leading down to the basement, but it looked more like a small empty closet.

"It's a lift," she said. "Go ahead. And by the way, he doesn't like to be called Theo or Ted."

"Thanks for the warning," I said and stepped inside. "Just push the button." The floor jerked and I started down, ending up in a large daylight basement. I

Notes on my thoughts, reactions, and questions as I read:

stepped out of the lift, but saw no sign of Theodore.

The basement walls were lined with books all the way up to the ceiling. Aside from playing sports, reading was my favorite activity. I scanned the titles wondering if they all belonged to Theodore. And if the books were his, how did he reach the ones on the upper shelves? Most of the books were paperback novels, but a few of them were huge hardbacks with names like, *Inside the Criminal Mind* and *Homicide Investigative Procedures*. I doubted that those belonged to Theodore and wondered if his dad was a cop.

"You like to read?"

I nearly jumped out of my skin.

"Wheels don't make much noise on carpet," he said, with apology.

His comment made me squirm a little. I stared through the patio door so I wouldn't have to look at his thin, misshapen legs. I felt him glaring at me.

"You see something interesting out there?" he asked, angrily.

"Well, no I—"

"Look," he said, wheeling between me and the door.

"I don't give people very long to get used to the fact that I'm glued to this chair. You're embarrassed, but it doesn't embarrass me."

"I'm not embarrassed," I insisted.

"Really?"

"Well," I stammered. "Maybe a little bit."

He grinned. "At least you're half honest. Come on outside, I want to show you something."

I followed him to the patio door. It slid open automatically and he rolled through, then wheeled up to a picnic table. He motioned for me to sit down across from him.

"Okay," he said. "What do you see?" I looked at him. "I don't understand."

"What do you see?" he repeated. "You?" "Very good!" he said sarcastically. "What do I look like?"

I had no idea where he was going with this. He had unkempt red hair, thick glasses, brown eyes, and pale skin with a lot of freckles. "You look like a kid," I said.

"A normal kid?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

"It's because you can't see the wheelchair."

Now I understood what he was trying to prove. With the chair hidden behind the table he looked like any of my other friends. "You're right," I told him.

"It will take you awhile to get used to the chair," he said. "Imagine how long it took me. You want to arm wrestle?"

"What?" He had to be kidding. "Arm wrestle," he repeated, putting his elbow on the table.

"I don't think that's a good idea," I stammered. "I mean I've been working out and you—"

"Are you afraid I'll win?" "No."

"Then let's go." "Theodore, I'm not going to take it easy on you." "He laughed.

"Give it your best shot, neighbor."

I locked my hands with him and it was over almost before it began. I'm big for my age and pretty strong. I stared at him. No one had ever beaten me in arm wrestling.

"I thought you weren't going to take it easy on me?" "I wasn't taking it easy!" And I was telling the truth.

I tried twice more with my right hand and three times with my left. The results were the same. I lost.

"It's just the legs that don't work."

I rubbed my sore wrists. He was right. Everything else on him seemed to be working just fine, in fact, better than fine.

"So what happened to your legs?" I asked.

"Car accident. When I was a kid."

"I'm sorry."

"I've learned that it isn't the end of the world. Let's go back inside."

We found a plate of sandwiches sitting in the lift and wolfed them down as we talked.

Instead of going to school, Theodore had a tutor who came to his house three times a week.

"It's a lot less hassle," he said. "I'll be graduating from high school next year."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen." "A year older than me," I said in amazement. "Maybe I should get a tutor." "It has its advantages," he agreed.

A phone rang. Theodore reached down and pulled a cordless phone from a holster attached to his chair. "Hello? Yeah...sure. What's the license number?" He took a small notebook out of his shirt and wrote something in it. "And the make?" He sounded like a used car salesman. "Uh huh...yeah. It will take awhile. Yeah, okay. Bye."

He slipped the phone back into the holster. "I hate to cut this short," he said. "But something has come up."

I wanted to ask him what it was, but I decided against it. I figured he'd tell me if he wanted me to know. "That's okay," I said. But I was disappointed – I was actually beginning to relax and enjoy myself.

"Do you want to come back?" he asked. "Sure." "How about tomorrow?" "Okay."

"In the meantime," he said. "Do you want to borrow a couple of books?" "Are all these books yours?" I asked.

"Most of them," he said. I like mysteries. Detective fiction, things like that. Have you ever read any Chandler or Hammett?"

"I don't think so," I said, knowing full well I hadn't. The only mysteries I'd read were The Hardy Boys – all fifty-eight of them. After that mystery marathon I decided to stay away from mysteries for awhile.

"Good," he said as he pulled a couple of paperbacks off the shelf and handed them to me. One was called *The Big Sleep* by Ramond Chandler. The other was called *The Continental Op* by Dashiell Hammett.

"Hope you like these," Theodore said. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Demonstrate Understanding

1. Summarize the story in your own words.

Demonstrate Understanding

2. What did Theodore do to show Paul he was just like any other kid? Use evidence from the story to support your answer.

Develop an Interpretation

3. Describe how Pete changes throughout the story. What causes the change? Include evidence from the story.

Develop an Interpretation

4. Read the sentences in the chart below. Fill in the right side of the chart to explain what you learn about the two characters: Pete and Theodore.

Character	Sentence from the story	What I learned about the character
Pete	Now, every time I saw them they asked if I had been over to see him (Theodore). I kept coming up with lame excuses.	
Theodore	"I don't give people very long to get used to the fact that I'm glued to this chair. You're embarrassed, but it doesn't embarrass me."	
Pete	"I don't think that's a good idea (arm wrestling),...I mean I've been working out..."	
Theodore	"I hate to cut this short," he said. "But something has come up.."	

Analyze Text

5. In this story, Pete is the narrator. How would the story be different if the author wrote it from Theodore's point of view?

Analyze Text

6. What are the unstated themes or ideas in this selection? Explain the clues in the text that helped you decide on this theme.