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THE ENGLISH SCHOLAR
WRITING CENTRE

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STUDENT ASSESSMENT

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INSTRUCTIONS

THIS ASSESSMENT IS USED SOLELY FOR THE PURPOSE OF DETERMINING THE CURRENT WRITING AND ANALYSIS LEVEL OF EACH STUDENT.

READ INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY

1. Read the short passage, and write a well developed essay on one of the following topics.

A. The values of Marco, the father, are different from those of his daughter Mary. In multi-paragraph essay form and with reference to the story, discuss this contrast in values.

OR

B. The father desires a closer relationship with his daughter. In multi-paragraph essay form and with reference to the story, discuss the degree of success he achieves in forming this relationship.

Nature Lessons

by Nancy Lord

Marco's daughter, Mary, has come from Los Angeles to visit him in Alaska.

1 An owl hooted, and Marco walked back behind the garden and down toward the spring to look for it. It was a great horned, sitting at the top of a dead spruce. Silhouetted against the night sky, its ear tufts fanned as it turned one way and then the other. Watching it filled him with a sense of reverence. It was these moments, these encounters with God's other creatures, that he valued most about living in the woods. It was this he wanted Mary to know, this that was important, this that had value. He turned quietly and started back, thinking of how he would lift her, bundled in covers, and carry her gently to the tree. Half-asleep, misted with dreams, she'd listen with him, setting her own internal rhythm to that of the patient bird. Smoothing her brow with his hand, he'd draw her eyes open.

2 Passing the garden, he slowed his step. He'd scared her once today, tiptoeing through the cabin. He couldn't risk it again. These things took time. He sat down against the woodpile; the owl kept calling, again and again, at the same intervals. It was only the first day. He watched the sky deepen until, at last, silence met the dark.

* * *

3 Marco held the can of tomato sauce while Mary finished spreading the dough in the pan. It was hard for her, to push and stretch the dough without tearing it, and Marco could see that she was getting frustrated. She would do it, though. He liked her persistence.

4 "Mary Alicia," he said.

5 "What?"

6 "Nothing. I just like saying your name." He had taken to calling her by both her names, and she hadn't objected, although he knew she never used her middle name back in L.A. He'd never liked the name Mary; it had been Anna's choice. "Have you ever thought of spelling your name differently?"

7 Seriously intent on the pizza, she gave him a quick look to see if he was kidding. "Like what?"

8 "I once knew a woman whose name was Merry. M-e-r-r-y. She was a very joyful person. When she came into a room, it was almost like hearing bells ring, Christmas bells."

9 "I know a girl named Noelle." Mary pushed the finished pan across the table to him, and he handed her some mushrooms to slice. She was looking more relaxed, at least, taking on some of the tempo and character of the bush, fitting to its walking speed and raggedness. With her hair in ordinary pigtails and a dusting of flour on her shirtfront, she looked right at home. Marco was amused, too, by the faint orange glow at each corner of her mouth, left by a glass of Tang. It made her look like she was smiling.

10 The mushrooms were a benefit of all the rain, unseasonable for June. Bad weather had kept them indoors more than Marco had expected, had prevented them from doing all the things he'd planned. Still, one day they hiked to a trout stream and caught some fish. Other days they collected edible plants. Mary turned out to be an aggressive weeder, and the garden had never looked so good.

11 It nagged at Marco, the sense that Mary was indulging him in his activities rather than enjoying them herself. She never complained or resisted, but she never embraced anything they did with any degree of enthusiasm. It seemed a passive sort of cooperation, like the dutiful scout march of the first day. When they were done cutting wood or picking nettles, he felt an unspoken sigh of relief. She didn't protest the rain, content enough to curl up inside with her tapes or the radio or some puzzle books she'd brought along. Marco thought of prisoners or hospital patients, people who did the best they could while waiting for their day of release.

12 Mary laid the mushroom pieces down evenly over the cheese. She sighed. "It's not exactly Pizza Hut's."

13 "You bet it's not," Marco said. "Moosemeat's too much of a delicacy for Pizza Hut."

14 Mary picked up a piece of mushroom from the table as though she were going to eat it, then put it back down. "I like pepperoni the best." Then she told him, again, the whole long list of foods she would eat as soon as she got home. "...And a big glass of Pepsi, with lots of ice cubes. And a hot fudge sundae." She smacked her lips.

* * *

15 Marco sat stiffly, watching the country roll by. It was far too short, two weeks. He never saw another owl, one to share with her. And they never saw a moose. He couldn't seem to hold her attention with the small flowers or the places on the trees where porcupines had eaten the bark.

16 Mary tossed in her seat, swinging her pigtails, trying to see everything in the train at once. "Look at that woman," she whispered noisily to Marco. "I like her glasses. If I had to get glasses, I'd get them like that." The favored glasses had curved earpieces and a sort of plaque announcing the designer's name. Mary turned around to follow a conversation behind them, half-standing to see; her hands jerked in her lap.

17 Marco couldn't help smiling. She was like a speed freak, all movement and mouth. He'd seen the same transformation in other people—even in himself, to a degree. After the stillness of the bush, being with a crowd in a changing landscape was a sort of sensory overload. The colours all looked brighter; the chaos and variety overwhelmed.

18 "I can hardly wait," she said. "You'll buy me a double-scooper, won't you?"

19 "Whatever you want."

20 “I want one butter pecan, and one mint chocolate chip. Or maybe walnut fudge. I don’t know. I can’t decide. What are you going to have?”

21 Marco rubbed his chin. “Chocolate?”

22 “Two scoops of the same?”

23 “Probably. I like chocolate.”

24 “Are you a chocoholic?”

25 “I doubt it.”

26 Mary pulled her pad of paper from her bag and began writing down ice cream flavors. Then she flipped the page back and drew a picture of a big fish standing on its tail. “You haven’t been to Sea World, have you?” she asked. She had already mentioned, several times, that she was going there in August, with her mother.

27 Marco wanted to say “Don’t bother with Sea World. Stay with me and I’ll show you some real orcas, not ones that balance balls on their noses.” He didn’t, though. He was learning that, impossible as it seemed, there were people who preferred to see the ones in tanks. Instead he asked, “What will you tell people about your trip up here?”

28 Mary made an exaggerated show of thinking, much as she had that first day when they talked about the earth’s tilt and the planets. “I’ll talk about hiking on the trail”—she bobbed her head, dipping one shoulder and then the other in an imitation of a fast walk—“to get there and all the different things we ate. I’ll talk about how you shot a bear and once floated down a river all alone for a month without seeing anyone.”

29 Marco was struck by the choices of the bear encounter and the river trip, both of which happened well before her arrival and that she’d only heard about.

30 “People will think I shot the bear while you were here. Is that what you want them to think?”

31 She laughed. “No way. I’ll say we ate the meat that you put in jars, from when you killed bear before.”

32 “Even though you didn’t like it?”

33 “I won’t say I *liked* it.”

34 “What other things will you say that you did?”

35 “Oh, I don’t know.” Mary slid back on the seat. “I’ll say I was with my *dad*.” She put both of her hands around Marco’s arm and squeezed tightly, snuggling against his side.

36 Marco reached to cover her small hands with his free one. Before he could, she let him go and

turned, bouncing, to look at something in the back of the car. Marco stared at the rough hand that he held open before him and then, because he could think of nothing else, laid it down on his arm where hers had been.

USE THIS SPACE FOR PLANNING

[illegible]

Blank lined paper for writing.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

