

Heartland Writing Prompts

Warm up/Pre-Reading Suggestions for *Heartland: A Memoir*.....

- As a warm-up, consider having the class view this Frontline video about growing up poor in America.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/poor-kids/>

Write responses to these questions:

1. What has money meant in your household growing up? Was it extremely hard to come by or were you fortunate enough to have more than just your necessities granted to you? There is no right or wrong answer. Reflect and write about the significance of money during your upbringing.
2. As you are maturing, what do you envision as the significance of money in your adult household? Do you hope to provide the life your parents have? Or do you hope to be able to earn far more than your parents were able to? Discuss your vision of your financial future.

Short Essay Response Questions:

Part 1 (Pgs. 1-84)

1. On page 3, a saying is presented: “The crop depends on the weather, dudnit? A good seed’ll do’er job’n’sprout, but come hail’n’yer plumb outta luck regardless.” Interpret the message of this quote.

(Translation: The crop depends on the weather, doesn’t it? A good seed will do its job and sprout, but come hail, and you’re out of luck regardless.)

2. Briefly discuss two factors in the author’s mother’s (Jeannie) young life that set her up for difficulties?
3. Explain three examples discussed that reflect the difficulties about being poor.
4. How did American Society explain away why some whites were/are poor?
5. Describe the parenting styles of Sarah’s parents? Did you feel sympathy for Sarah when reading her recollections of her parents’ treatment towards her? Explain.

6. *****This link provides an explanation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.
<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-4136760> Read it carefully, and explain your understanding of the significance of this model/theory. Discuss how its explanation of needs relates to the way Sarah's ancestors functioned in their world. (See page 61 for starters.)
7. On page 81, Sarah discusses the value of the type of parenting she received from her father. She then says, "What you don't transmute, you will transmit." Define transmute and transmit, and explain what she meant by the above quote.
8. Sarah's grandmother (Betty) and her father (Nick) had near death experiences. What happened to each of them, and how were they each compensated for their hardships? Do you think someone more wealthy, who endured these dangers, would have been granted a more concerned outcome?

Part 2 (Pgs. 85-167)

1. As you are reading through these two chapters, highlight examples of ways in which "her people" were considered "the others" (outsiders). Discuss one example.
2. Discuss at least one occurrence that made suburban and urban folks lives easier at the expense of Sarah's people.
3. Explain the point regarding America's future economy as discussed on the top of page 103.
4. Explain the difference in what the material goods she discussed represented for the more fortunate vs. the less fortunate on pages 104-105.
5. Find and discuss five different hardships endured by Sarah's family members. Present the name and relationship the individual has to Sarah and summarize the circumstance that kept the person trapped in a life of poverty.

Part 3 (Pgs. 168-288)

1. Take a look at this link that briefly defines the meaning of the "American Dream."
https://www.google.com/search?q=definition+of+the+american+dream&rlz=1C5CHFA_enUS916&oq=Definition+of+the+American+Dream&aqs=chrome.0.0l8.6769j1j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

In your own words, create an explanation of your understanding of what the idea of the “American Dream” means.

2. Being a homeowner has/is an important goal for many Americans. What did a home mean for Sarah’s parents? What about some of her other relatives?
3. Discuss two examples, from anywhere mentioned in this memoir, circumstances that made “her people” at a distinct disadvantage to be able to strive to achieve some of the components of the American Dream.
4. What explains Sarah’s desire to excel in high school?
5. What challenges did Sarah face, in college, as result of her upbringing? What were some ways in which she experienced commonalities with her college peers?
6. There is a common saying that says ‘money can’t buy you happiness.’ Explain the wisdom in this statement.
7. On the flip side, what does not having money “buy” a person, a family, etc.?
8. Sarah Smarsh states that America “has failed its children.” Do you agree? Feel free to give some examples from your own experiences.

Closing Reflections and Writings
About *Heartland A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth*

1. Has your awareness about poverty in America changed as a result of studying this memoir? Please explain.
2. How will earning a college degree help you succeed in America?
3. What are your career and financial life goals? Hopefully, these plans leave you with hope for your future. Discuss your thoughts.