



Spring2020 8th Grade ELA #2

Subject: English Language Arts

State: Ohio

Student Name:_____

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In this excerpt, the narrator talks about a family memory. The Abenaki are American Indian people from New England and eastern Canada. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.

Climbing the Ladder

by Joseph Bruchac

1. As I look at that photograph and the smile on my grandfather's face, I think of the day I climbed the ladder. The story of me and the ladder is a tale both my grandfather and grandmother told me so often that I feel my memory of it is completely my own.
2. My grandfather was never afraid of heights. I've heard it said, and even read it in a place or two, that the Indian people of the Northeast are born without a fear of high places, that it is something genetic. I don't know if I believe that. It might be more that non-Indians are taught, as children, to be afraid of so many things that might hurt them—sharp objects, fire, high places, wild animals, the woods, strangers—that they grow up scared of everything. Do this and don't do that.
3. There was little of "do this and don't do that" in my grandfather's growing up, from what he told me. If he stuck his hand in the fire, that fire would burn him. No need for any adult to teach a kid that. If he climbed a tree and fell out, then he'd learn on his own that high places were dangerous. Neither his father nor his mother ever struck him— or even shouted at him.
4. . . . In the Abenaki way you learn better by doing than by being told. People are allowed to make their own mistakes. In the Abenaki way, you never strike a child, for fear that a blow might break their spirit. It might take away their self-respect, make them sad and fearful, and teach them that it is right for those who are big to bully those who are small.
5. The self-respect that was nurtured by his parents was so much a part of my grandfather's upbringing, he would never allow anyone to tell him what to do —unless he felt in his heart that it was right for him to do it. His mother died when he was thirteen and his father remarried—marrying his wife's widowed sister. My grandfather left his father's home shortly after that, never to return. I once asked him why.
6. "I didn't like her," he said, referring to his stepmother.

7. "Why not, Grampa?"
8. "She jes' yelled at me," he said. "I told my father, if he ever needed help, all he had to do was ask and I'd do it. But I wasn't a-going to stay under the same roof with her."
9. And that was it. That same year he left home and went off to work. He worked first at the store of Seneca Smith and then as a logger in the woods. He was on his own, but not afraid to be there. That was just how he was with heights too.
10. There was this thing my grandfather used to do every now and then, even when he was eighty years old. He called it "checking the peak." He would go outside, look up at the roof of the house, and then declare, "I got to check the peak." He'd take the wooden extension ladder and place it against the south side of the house. That house rises up three stories and more. When you stand on the peak you can see Saratoga Lake, ten miles to the south, and the hills of Vermont, thirty miles to the east. That was what my grandfather would do. He would climb that ladder and then make his way up the steep metal roof to stand on the very peak, to walk along it with easy, balanced steps, and then lean against the brick chimney and look out. Checking the peak.
11. The autumn day I remember, the day my grandparents lodged so firmly into my memory by telling and retelling the story, my grandfather decided to check the peak. It was October and I had just turned three. . . .
12. My face intent and serious, I followed my grandfather as he took out the ladder that day. I was quiet. I had already learned that it was easier to go unnoticed when one was quiet. When my parents lived in this house, it had usually been safest for me to be unnoticed. My grandfather set the base of the ladder firmly onto the ground and stomped on the bottom rung with his foot. He shook it to make sure it was steady, and then went up. Even though he was over sixty, he moved as quick as a cat up that ladder. I watched every step to see how he did it. He reached the top and then went up the silver-painted roof to stand on the peak and look out, shading his dark-browed eyes with his left hand. Then he heard a sound. It was a little voice saying "Aaah!"
13. He turned and looked down to see me at the very top of the ladder, swaying back and forth a bit and looking out. There was so much to see from up there! I was happy.

14. "Aaah," I said again.
15. Another man might have yelled then or tried to grab me, but that was not my grandfather's way. Instead, in his calm, soft voice he just said, "Well, I'll be! Fergot my hammer. Got to go back down and get it. Sonny, you go first."
16. I started down the ladder, but before I had gone more than a rung or two, my grandfather was there with me. He was climbing down the ladder with his hands a rung above me and his feet two rungs below me. I had heard my grandmother talking to him so often about how he was "getting on in years" and needed "to be more careful." She was worried about him doing such things as climbing high ladders. I remembered that, and so I guessed that he must have wanted my help when he came down. I took it slow and was really careful.
17. But when we got to the bottom the strangest thing happened. Grampa forgot all about the hammer he'd needed. Instead, he just took that ladder, laid it down on the ground, and then sat there himself with one arm around me and one hand patting his chest. I put my hand on his shoulder to reassure him. I didn't know what "getting on in years" was, but I figured that must have been the reason for him being so upset. Whatever it was, I hoped he would recover from it soon.

1 According to the narrator, what is the main effect of the "do this and don't do that" method of parenting?

- (A) It makes children afraid of too many things.
- (B) It makes children afraid of meeting new people.
- (C) It makes children afraid of heights.
- (D) It makes children afraid of their parents.

2 Based on the first sentence in paragraph 5, what word best describes the narrator's grandfather?

- (A) independent
- (B) rebellious
- (C) selfish
- (D) solitary

3 Which sentence from the excerpt best explains why the narrator reaches the top of the ladder without being seen?

- (A) "My face intent and serious, I followed my grandfather as he took out the ladder that day."
- (B) "I had already learned that it was easier to go unnoticed when one was quiet."
- (C) "Even though he was over sixty,he moved as quick as a cat up that ladder."
- (D) "I watched every step to see how he did it."

4 Based on the excerpt, why does the boy say "Aaah" in paragraphs 12 and 14?

- (A) He is trying to get his grandfather's attention.
- (B) He is delighted at the view from the roof.
- (C) He is suddenly nervous about being up so high.
- (D) He is surprised by how much he likes the ladder

5 Which of the following best describes the grandfather in paragraph 17?

- (A) amused
- (B) annoyed
- (C) puzzled
- (D) relieved

6 Based on the excerpt, how does the narrator view his grandfather?

- (A) with respect and admiration
- (B) with fear and distrust
- (C) with concern and pity
- (D) with shame and anger

7 What does the word lodged mean as it is used in the first sentence of paragraph 11?

(A) lost

(B) stuck

(C) haunted

(D) Imagined