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ELA Grade 6 Unit 1 - Open Response - Print

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Excerpt from “The Making of a Scientist”
by Richard Feynman

We had the Encyclopaedia Britannica at home. When I was a small boy [my father] used to sit me on his lap and read to me from the Britannica. We would be reading, say, about dinosaurs. It would be talking about the Tyrannosaurus rex, and it would say something like, “This dinosaur is twenty-five feet high and its head is six feet across.”

My father would stop reading and say, “Now, let’s see what that means. That would mean that if he stood in our front yard, he would be tall enough to put his head through our window up here.” (We were on the second floor.) “But

his head would be too wide to fit in the window.” Everything he read to me he would translate as best he could into some reality.

It was very exciting and very, very interesting to think there were animals of such magnitude—and that they all died out, and that nobody knew why. I wasn’t frightened that there would be one coming in my window as a consequence of this. But I learned from my father to translate: everything I read I try to figure out what it really means, what it’s really saying.

Read the excerpt from “The Making of a Scientist,” in which the author describes an experience from his childhood that changed him. Write a short narrative about an experience in your life that caused you to change in some way. Be sure to:

- clearly establish the setting and introduce the characters using a first-person point of view
- use a personal narrative structure in which you briefly describe an incident, response, and reflection
- use descriptive language to help readers understand what the experience was like
- include transitions to connect the ideas and events in your story

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“Complaining”

Excerpt from *Wouldn’t Take Nothing for My Journey Now*
by Maya Angelou

When my grandmother was raising me in Stamps, Arkansas, she had a particular routine when people who were known to be whiners entered her store. Whenever she saw a known complainer coming, she would call me from whatever I was doing and say conspiratorially, “Sister, come inside. Come.” Of course I would obey.

My grandmother would ask the customer, “How are you doing today, Brother Thomas?” And the person would reply, “Not so good.” There would be a distinct whine in the voice. “Not so good today, Sister Henderson. You see,

it’s this summer. It’s this summer heat. I just hate it. Oh, I hate it so much. It just frazzles me up and frazzles me down. I just hate the heat. It’s almost killing me.” Then my grandmother would stand stoically, her arms folded, and mumble, “Uh-huh, uh-huh.” And she would cut her eyes at me to make certain that I had heard the lamentation.

At another time a whiner would mewl, “I hate plowing. That packed-down dirt ain’t got no reasning, and mules ain’t got good sense. . . . Sure ain’t. It’s killing me. I can’t ever seem to get done. My feet and my hands stay sore, and I get dirt in my eyes and up my nose. I just can’t stand it.” And my grandmother, again stoically with her arms folded, would say, “Uh-huh, uh-huh,” and then look at me and nod.

As soon as the complainer was out of the store, my grandmother would call me to stand in front of her. And then she would say the same thing she had said at least a thousand times, it seemed to me. "Sister, did you hear what Brother So-and-So or Sister Much to Do complained about? You heard that?" And I would nod. Mamma would continue, "Sister, there are people who went to sleep all over the world last night, poor and rich and white and black, but they will never wake again. Sister, those who expected to rise did not, their beds became their cooling boards and their blankets became their winding sheets. And those dead folks would give anything, anything at all for just five minutes of this weather or ten minutes of that

plowing that person was grumbling about. So you watch yourself about complaining, Sister. What you're supposed to do when you don't like a thing is change it. If you can't change it, change the way you think about it. Don't complain."

It is said that persons have few teachable moments in their lives. Mamma seemed to have caught me at each one I had between the age of three and thirteen. Whining is not only graceless, but can be dangerous. It can alert a brute that a victim is in the neighborhood.

Read the essay "Complaining." Explain the different ways the author reveals the grandmother's opinions about complaining over the course of the essay. Be sure to:

- clearly introduce the characters and the setting of the essay
- organize details from the story that show the grandmother's opinions
- use specific evidence from the text to support your answer