

English Samples

Grade: 8
State: NA



Daybreak
by
Galway Kinnell

On the tidal mud, just before sunset,
dozens of starfishes
were creeping. It was
as though the mud were a sky
and enormous, imperfect stars
moved across it as slowly
as the actual stars cross heaven.
All at once they stopped,
and as if they had simply
increased their receptivity
to gravity they sank down
into the mud; they faded down
into it and lay still; and by the time
pink of sunset broke across them
they were as invisible
as the true stars at daybreak.

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Standard: 1.6 Understand and analyze story elements, (e.g. setting, plot, characterization, character’s motivation, theme, conflict/resolution, dialogue, symbols, mood, tone, and point of view.)

Which of these is an important theme in “Daybreak”?

- A. The nature of life is change.
- B. Gravity takes away freedom.
- C. Ocean tides are a powerful force.
- D. The beauty of the stars is inspiring.

Distractor Rationale:

- A. Key
- B. Gravity is mentioned in the poem, but it is not a main theme.
- C. Although the poem is about the water’s edge, the tides are not emphasized.
- D. There is implied beauty in the scene of the poem, but it is not a main theme.

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Standard: 1.7 Recognize how language is used for meaning and effect* in literary texts (e.g., literary devices, figurative language) and in informational texts (persuasion, bias)

The **main** comparison in “Daybreak” is between

- A. sand and water.
- B. light and dark.
- C. day and night.
- D. land and sky.

Distractor Rationale:

- A. Both sand and water are mentioned, but they are not compared.
- B. There is a change from light to dark, but it is not a main comparison.
- C. Sunset and sunrise are mentioned, but day and night are not.
- D. Key

Julia Under the Stairs

by
Verna Safran

When Julia's little sister, Ellie, was born, her mother said to Julia, "Now you will have to share." As Ellie got older, Julia had to share her dolls and her toys. She had to share the conversation at the dinner table. She even had to share her room.

When Grandma came to visit, she noticed that Julia was becoming cranky and bossy and that her usual smile was missing. When Ellie tried on Julia's hat, Julia tore it off Ellie's head and pulled her hair.

That evening, Grandma sat with Julia on the couch. "Sharing is not always fun, is it?" Grandma said. Julia frowned. "No," she said. "Especially your clothes, your playthings, and your room," said Grandma. Julia made a sour face. "I wish I had a place in this house that was all mine, where nobody else could go," she said.

"That's a wonderful idea!" Grandma said. "Let's go look for one." They looked in the living room. But that was where the whole family played games or talked or sang songs at the piano, sometimes all at once.

Julia crept under the dining-room table. The tablecloth made a nice hiding place, but that space would be good only between mealtimes.

They went down to the basement. They looked in the laundry room, but that was filled with laundry and an ironing board. And a cat. They were about to go upstairs again when Julia noticed an empty space under the basement stairs. "Here!" Julia cried. "What about this?"

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Grandma nodded. “We’ll ask your mom about it tomorrow,” she said. The next morning, Julia asked her mom if the space under the basement stairs could be her very own castle. “I don’t see why not,” said Mom.

The space under the stairs was like a little room. Mom hung up a sheet to make it more private. Julia said, “If you didn’t know I was in here, you would never know I was in here.” Then Julia decided to put her favorite things in her special space. She brought in three books, two dolls, her toy stove, her box of clay, and her suitcase filled with dress-up costumes.

As Julia was arranging her things, her sister picked up the edge of the sheet and tried to walk in. “You have to knock on the stair first and ask permission,” Julia said.

Ellie knocked. “You can’t come in now,” said Julia. “I’m busy.” She read one of her books and made some dishes out of clay. But after a while, Julia thought it might be nice to have company. So the next time Ellie knocked, Julia said, “Come in. I’m having a tea party.” She invited Grandma, too.

Grandma had to scrunch down to fit in Julia’s little room, but she found it quite cozy sitting on a cushion on the floor. Then Julia poured imaginary tea for Grandma and Ellie, and also for her dolls and her teddy bear.

Ellie served everyone an imaginary cake she had made. Grandma said the cake was delicious, and there was just the right amount of sugar in the tea. And after that, sometimes Julia shared her room under the stairs . . . but only when she wanted to.

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Standard: Demonstrate an understanding of main idea, events, and supporting details; recall facts, summarize.

This story is *mainly* about

- A. a girl who finds a way to be happier at home.
- B. a younger sister who bothers her older sister.
- C. a girl who learns more about her grandmother.
- D. a grandmother who teaches a family how to share.

Distractor Rationale:

- A. Key
- B. The younger sister is not the main character of the story.
- C. This is not the main idea of the story.
- D. The grandmother does implicitly teach a lesson, but it is a lesson in problem solving rather than in sharing.

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Read this paragraph from the story.

As Ellie got older, Julia had to share her dolls and her toys. She had to share the conversation at the dinner table. She even had to share her room.

The underlined part **most** likely means

- A. give away toys.
- B. eat healthy food.
- C. take turns talking.
- D. stop making messes.

Distractor Rationale:

- A. The words “at the dinner table” establish a context that does not support this answer choice.
- B. As the entire paragraph is about Julia having to share with her sister, this choice is inconsistent with context.
- C. Key
- D. As the entire paragraph is about Julia having to share with her sister, this choice is inconsistent with context.

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How does Julia change from the beginning to the end of the story? Explain your answer. Use details and/or examples from the story in your answer.

Rubric

2 points total

1 point for a text-based explanation of how Julia changes.

1 point for an example that effectively supports the explanation.

Sample 2-point response:

At first Julia is mad. She doesn't like sharing with her baby sister. But then her grandma helps her make a special room all for her. After that Julia feels better.

Sample 1-point response:

In the beginning, Julia is sad and mad. But by the end of the story she is happy. She has a tea party.