

**Freshman Common Reading
Book Discussion Group**

***The Glass Castle*
by Jeannette Walls**

Teaching Ideas

“Children begin by loving their parents; as they grow older they judge them; sometimes, they forgive them.” ~Oscar Wilde

**Debbi Mercado
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The Glass Castle Ideas from Our Book Discussion Group in CIELO

Stretch Program Ideas

Ethnography

- Have a meal with a family of another ethnicity and write about the scene, the interaction and the food
- Visit a thrift store and a mall and discuss your observations of the differences/similarities between these scenes.
- Visit an ethnic grocery store that is not part of your own culture - write about the scene, people, food, etc., and about how it feels to be "other"

Seeing and Hearing Texts

Wonderful images in these books related to materialism and food:

Hungry Planet: What the World Eats by Peter Menzel and Faith D'Alusio

http://www.amazon.com/Hungry-Planet-What-World-Eats/dp/0984074422/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1303025860&sr=1-3

Material World: A Global Family Portrait by Peter Menzel, Charles C. Mann and Paul Kennedy

http://www.amazon.com/Material-World-Global-Family-Portrait/dp/0871564300/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1303025910&sr=1-1

Letter to the Author

Discuss with students the genre of "memoir" and the idea of reliable narrator, then have them write a letter to the author in which they question/doubt some of the scenes in the book (a la Peter Elbow's Believing/Doubting Game).

University 100 Ideas

- Distinguish between and write about needs vs. wants
- Keep track of what they spend on a weekly basis and analyze how much is spent on "needs" vs. "wants"
- Have a class contest to see who can change their spending habits the most over a defined period of time - write about it
- Discuss the mentors or outside role models that the Walls children encounter in the book. Have students reflect on the importance of having a mentor and think about who has been pivotal in their life, either as a mentor or role model.
- Have a Socratic Seminar about the value of non-conformity. Do schools, teachers, employers, or even parents, encourage or value non-conformity? How has this affected you?

Have a contest to build a model structure or "space" using only discarded materials (we'd have to have rules and define "discarded")

Have students rewrite one of the pivotal scenes in the book from the point of view of another character. Think about: How did Lori and Brian feel about Rex? How do they remember Jeannette falling out of the car or the U-Haul ride? Was there any method to Rose Mary's

madness? Was Rex a bad man, or just a prisoner of his alcoholism? Have students imagine what is going on inside the others' minds.

Other Campus Activity Possibilities

How might we tie the book to the ideas of sustainability, waste, consumption and trash on our campus? Would one of the disciplines be more disposed to analyzing food waste on our campus? It would be interesting!

Being resourceful - consider recycling clothes – have a Project Runway fashion show/tea/contest. Have models wear the outfits they have put together from thrift shopping; have a dollar limit, receipts required?

Freewrite Prompts or Discussions

How reliable is memory? Do you and your siblings remember events from your childhood the same way? If not, why do you think this is so?

What is your first memory?

Will you raise your children the same way your parents raised you? Explain.

How much do you think the Walls children helped each other survive their circumstances?

Do you think that difficult family circumstances bring siblings closer together or push them apart? Explain.

Consider a time when you did something that would have resulted in severe consequences had you been caught. How did this affect the way you felt about taking risks?

Links, articles, videos

CSUN Freshman Common Reading Program – Teaching Materials by Ronit Sarig

<http://www.csun.edu/afye/Glass-Castle-Workshops.html>

Walls, Jeannette. “Truth and Consequences: why memoirists don’t always have the last word.” *Publisher’s Weekly* 252.37 (2005): 74. *General One File*. Web. 22 Apr. 2011.

“Conversations with Famous Writers”

<http://conversationsfamouswriters.blogspot.com/2005/10/jeannette-walls-glass-castle.html>

Interview in *The Gothamist*

http://gothamist.com/2005/05/27/jeannette_walls_author_the_glass_castle_gossip_columnist_ms_nbccom.php

Video : Jeannette and Rose Mary Walls

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lW0XVno-0gM>

McGrath, Tom. “Bad Parents.”

http://www.phillymag.com/articles/bad_parents/

“Helicopter Moms vs. Free-Range Kids.” *Newsweek*.

<http://www.newsweek.com/2008/04/20/helicopter-moms-vs-free-range-kids.html>

“Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior.” *Wall Street Journal*.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704111504576059713528698754.html>

Ferris, Lucy. “Sharpening Teeth.” *The Southern Review*.

http://lucyferriss.wp.trincoll.edu/files/2010/11/TSR_Ferriss.pdf

More Ideas:

Essay or Discussion Questions and Freewrites *The Glass Castle*

Jeannette Walls has said, “We didn’t have food, but at the same time, we were luckier than other kids.” In what ways do you think they were “luckier”? Do you think if you were Jeannette, you would be able to say the same thing?

Jeannette Walls has said, “Some people think my parents are absolute monsters and should’ve had their children taken away from them. Some think they were these great free-spirited creatures who had a lot of wisdom that a lot of parents today don’t [have].” What do you think? Should the kids have been taken away? What then? What would they have lost?

Jeannette Walls has said in interviews that because she had so little as a child, she really appreciated things when she finally got them. She also said, “When I got to college, because I was paying for all of it myself, I knew why I was there. I knew how much each course was costing me. There was no way I was going to miss a class; I was going to get my money’s worth.” Do you think that parents should give their kids less so they appreciate things more? What about college? Would you appreciate it more if you were paying for it? If you *are* paying for it, do you think you treat the privilege differently than friends who are not?

Jeannette Walls has said that people in all walks of life have written to her to say that even though her story is “so weird and so bizarre,” they can relate to it in some way. What does this say about families? In what ways did each of you relate to the story? If you could not relate to the story, explain why not.

Make two lists of as many adjectives as you can think of in the time allotted – one that describes Rex, and the other that describes Rose Mary. You must have an equal number of positive and negative adjectives for each. Discuss whether or not this changed your view of Rex or Rose Mary. Ultimately, what is your opinion of each?

In interviews, Jeannette has discussed scenes in the book in which she did something that could have gotten her in serious trouble (shooting at Billy Deal, for example). She said, “I was very lucky, I was lucky that I didn’t kill them and I didn’t actually shoot Billy Deal and I didn’t shoplift.....All kids get into trouble, but for kids from my socio-economic group, if you get into

trouble it is so hard to get back on track.” Do you think this is true in our society? What do you think kept the Walls children from getting into serious trouble?

Jeannette Walls claims that “...despite our economic standing, Mom was a bit of a snob and always made us feel superior to everyone else. She would never describe us as poor. She would say we just had a very serious cash-flow problem.” Is Mom’s optimistic outlook admirable or not? Why?

Jeannette Walls has said, “If I had lost my belief in my father, I would have lost my belief in the future.” What do you think she means? Why do you think she defended her father longer than anyone else in the family? Did he deserve this loyalty?

One anonymous reviewer of *The Glass Castle* said, “The true purpose of this compelling tale is to remind us that no one is doomed by the accident of his or her birth.” Do you think this is true? How would you change this quote to accurately reflect reality?

Is there value in nonconformity? Do we live in a society that encourages being different? Make a list of the ways in which Rex and Rose Mary did the unexpected. Discuss a time when you wanted to do something *different* but decided to conform instead.

Hilary Rodham Clinton has said that “Every child needs a champion.” Who were some of the champions, mentors or role models that inspired the Walls children? Who has been pivotal in your life?

Bob Dylan once wrote.....

“A man is a success if he gets up in the morning and gets to bed at night and in between does what he wants to do.” Although it seems a stretch to use the word “success” in any discussion of the Walls’ lifestyle, using Dylan’s definition, could we say that Rex and Rose Mary were a success? How do you define success?

Consider the scene in the book when the Walls family gets stuck in the desert after Jeannette encourages Rex to push the limit of their rickety car by going 100 mph. The car has broken down and Rex and Brian are under the hood trying to diagnose the problem. As time drags on, Jeannette notices buzzards circling overhead and begins to think about “that ingrate Buster,” the wounded, angry buzzard that Rex had dragged home to Battle Mountain. She never liked Buster, but begins to see him in a different light, saying: “Maybe I should have cut him some slack. With his broken wing and lifetime of eating road kill, he probably had a lot to be ungrateful about. Too much hard luck can create a permanent meanness of spirit in any creature (120).” It’s an interesting moment in the book for Jeannette to make this observation.

- Do you think she is really thinking about Buster, or is she thinking about Rex, herself, or her entire family?
- How is it that Rex, or any of the Walls, do not develop a “permanent meanness” or bitterness after a lifetime of “hard luck”?
- What makes some people more resilient to the stresses of life?
- If we could identify, bottle and sell one ingredient from the Walls’ family personalities that accounts for this resilience, what would it be?

In one interview, Jeannette Walls talks about “luck.” She says, “Luck is the hand you’re dealt, and we’re all dealt different hands, and life is the way you play it because you can get a crappy hand and play the heck out of it or you can get a wonderful hand and just misplay it terrible. So many people have wonderful hands that they just don’t do anything with.” How do you think you are playing your hand?

How reliable is memory? Do you and your siblings remember events from your childhood the same way? If not, why do you think this is so?

What is your first memory?

Will you raise your children the same way your parents raised you? Explain.

How much do you think the Walls children helped each other to survive their circumstances? What role did each of them play?

Do you think that difficult family circumstances bring siblings closer together or push them apart? Explain.

Do you think Rex and Rose Mary were abusive or neglectful? What is the fine line between the two?

Would the kids have been better off in foster care? To answer this, do some research on the foster care system and use evidence from your research to support your answer.

Consider a time when you did something that would have resulted in severe consequences had you been caught. How did this affect the way you felt about taking risks?

What do you think Plato meant when he said, “Necessity, who is the mother of all invention? How can you relate this to *The Glass Castle*?

Text-Based Argument Essay #2
***The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls**

DUE DATES FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT: Finish reading book by March 1.

Begin Blogs	Tuesday, March 1 (in class)
Socratic Seminar	Thursday, March 3
Letter to the Author	Thursday, March 10 (post to blog)
Working Thesis Statement	Thursday, March 10 (post to Moodle)
First Draft Workshop – Peer Review	Tuesday, March 15 (bring 4 copies)
250-Word Peer Review for 2 classmates	Wednesday, March 16 (upload to Moodle)
One-page plan to address peer comments	Thursday, March 17 (upload to Moodle)
Second Draft Due – bring one copy to class	Tuesday, March 22 (upload to Moodle)
Final Essay Due	Tuesday, March 29 (bring to class)

Requirements:

- A clear thesis statement and introduction which establishes for your reader the point you wish to make about the book.
- A **very brief synopsis** of the book (2-3 sentences)
- An analysis supported by examples from the text, properly quoted (or paraphrased) and cited; Works Cited must be included.
- 4-6 FULL pages, Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced, 1” margins
- Your essay must have a title other than the book title; it should reflect your thesis.
- You will also keep a blog related to your experience in reading this book – the requirements for this part of the assignment will be given to you separately.

For your text-based essay, you will analyze a single element of the story, using examples from the text to support an assertion about that aspect of the book. Such elements may include a social, political, or financial issue, a theme, a cultural attitude, the author’s point of view, or a conflict in the book. In other words, you will discuss the author’s story and argue your interpretation of some element of that story.

In order to demonstrate your point, you must use evidence from the text which gives examples of what you mean; please **use at least five appropriate and relevant quotes from the text**, properly introduced, quoted and cited with the page number from the book.

Below are several topics you may draw upon in developing your thesis **about the book**. If you have your own idea, you are welcome to use it, BUT please do check with me before proceeding.

Parenting Style	Nature vs. nurture	Forgiveness
Alcoholism	Poverty/Social Class	Child Neglect
Resilience	Self-reliance	Bullying
Nonconformity	Materialism	Luck

How to approach this assignment:

1. Your first task is to determine your main point about the book. Use your blog to explore at least 10 favorite quotes from the book, reflect on events, draw comparisons to your own life or the lives of friends, brainstorm, freewrite and use ideas gathered by class discussion and supplemental articles. From this you will write your working thesis.
2. Gather examples from the book. Make sure to annotate the book as you read – write your reactions in the margins, question, agree with or get mad at what you are reading! Draw connections to the outside world and your own experiences. At the end of each chapter, use blank space on the page to record important events from that chapter so that you can find and refer to them easily when writing.

3. If you find examples in the book that contradict your point, this may mean that you need to revise your thesis statement to accommodate this evidence.
4. If you use quotes from outside articles that we have read or that you have found on your own, they must be properly cited and included in your Works Cited

All essays must be uploaded to Turnitin. Do not use Wikipedia, Cliff Notes, SparkNotes or any other “Notes” for this assignment – they will be detected by Turnitin.

Blog Assignment

***The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls**

As a means of invention for this essay, you will be maintaining a blog of your reactions and ideas related to *The Glass Castle* on Tumblr.com. Your blog entries may be everything from a passing thought about the book, to reflections on quotes or scenes from the book, to letters or notes to the author, or responses to questions that I pose to you.

The initial purpose of the blog is to uncover a theme, issue or aspect of the book that you wish to explore in your text-based essay. By March 10, you should have a thoughtful and insightful position or claim about *The Glass Castle* that you will use as the basis for the thesis statement in your essay....and from that point on, everything you post to your blog should serve to further develop that position.

Once you have discovered your thesis, in addition to writing about it, you may want to post photos, links, song lyrics, articles, videos or any other media that relates to and helps to develop your main idea. Just as your paragraphs contribute to the development of the thesis in your essay, so should your blog entries contribute to your main idea about the book explored in your blog.

You will be required to post to your blog at least twice a week, but you may post more. The more you write, the better your writing will become and the more you will have to say in your essay. You are expected to use professional/academic language and remember that a blog is a public document.

Your blogs will be graded according to the attached rubric. Note that you should use the entire blog toolbar, meaning that you should attempt to post a variety of media: text, photos, quotes, links and videos.

In addition, by the end of your journey related to *The Glass Castle*, I hope you will have discovered some social, political, financial or civic problem that you want to research for your third essay, and that you may continue exploring on your blog for extra credit.

(Blog Assignment continues on next page)

Important Dates for This Assignment:

Create, design, and name your blog	Tuesday, March 1 (in class)
First post (see Moodle for prompt)	Thursday, March 3
Write and post a letter to Jeannette Walls	Thursday, March 10
Post your working thesis statement	Thursday, March 10

Continue to post at least twice a week to the blog – this may include responses to questions that I ask you to respond to.

A grade will be assigned to your blog as of March 29, the same date that your text-based essay is due. You may continue blogging through the end of the semester for extra credit, but you will receive a grade for the portion related to *The Glass Castle* as of March 29.

Homework – Preparation for Socratic Seminar

Please bring this completed form **and** *The Glass Castle* to class on Tuesday.
These are your “TICKETS” to class on that day.

On Tuesday, we will have a Socratic Seminar to continue our discussion of *The Glass Castle*. The purpose of a Socratic Seminar is to question everything - to look at issues with a critical eye. During this session, **you** will do all the talking – I will be here simply to pose questions, facilitate your discussion and keep things on track. Since one of the goals of this session is to hear everyone’s thoughts, everyone should speak at least once. The following questions and exercises will help you to prepare.

1. What is the meaning of “nonconformity”?

(Socratic Seminar continues on next page)

List some examples of nonconformity from the book.

Page	Specific passages from the book (quote)	How is this quote an example of nonconformity? How does it differ from an ordinary life?

2. Identify at least 5 social issues in *The Glass Castle*. A social issue is relevant to and affects a large group of people or an entire society, not just an individual. Choose topics you find controversial, interesting, or worth discussing. List them here.

3. Choose two of these issues to closely examine on your own. Label at least 5 passages (with page numbers) from the book that are relevant to each of your two issues and be prepared to offer them as support for your ideas.

4. Write at least 5 open-ended questions (require more than a yes/no answer) that are raised about your social issues that you can discuss with the class. Also, write what you know about these topics from personal experience (use your journal or a separate sheet of paper).

Adapted from: http://www.westlake.k12.oh.us/WhsTeachers/MillerLa/Social-Issues_files/Summer%20Reading/Social%20Issues%20in%20The%20Glass%20Castle.pdf

Reading Assignment with Persuasive Essay Prompt

Should People Be Required to Obtain a License Before Becoming Parents?

By Bobbi Leder, OpEd News, September 7, 2009

We have to obtain a license before getting married and driving a motor vehicle, yet we aren't required to get a license to become parents. How does that make sense when raising a human being should be the most important job in the world? It seems that having children isn't always a decision that is well thought out, and in some cases it just happens by accident. Some people choose to bring life into the world knowing full well they are not capable of taking care of that life – I guess they assume the government, teachers, or family will pitch in and do their job for them.

Of course, there are extremely responsible and loving parents out there, and there are people who would make wonderful parents, but for reasons beyond their control, they won't ever achieve

that goal. But I'm talking about people who have children and raise them irresponsibly, which inevitably affects not only society, but scars those children for life.

I know only a few people who have had children for the right reasons; I also know a few who have had children to save their marriage – which is a horrible burden to place on a child. I'm sick of watching the news and learning about people abusing their kids, neglecting them, and leaving them in cars (during the sweltering heat) with the windows rolled up. I just don't understand why these people have children. Having a child is a gift, and parents should treat their children as such. Raising a human takes patience, love, education, compassion, sympathy, and time. If you don't have the time or the desire to spend your weekends reading to your child, teaching them how to ride a bike, going to the zoo, cleaning up dirty hands, or helping with homework, then don't do it.

There are so many unwanted, neglected and abused children and it saddens me that they were brought into the world by irresponsible people. Often these children grow up with low self-esteem and wind up falling into a life of crime. I know there are also children who go through adversity and wind up better human beings for it; they go on to become psychologists, teachers, and social workers. They go into politics to help change the world, and they become successful in whatever field they choose – but that is not the norm. Go into any inner city where kids are growing up with one parent who they rarely see and another one who left years ago and never contacts the kids – see how successful those children become when they turn into adults. Chances are they will just repeat the cycle and wind up becoming what they loathe most: their own parents.

Why is it that when we adopt, we have to go through strict tests to make sure we are going to be fit parents, yet when it's a biological child no tests are required? The government should make sure that people have the resources, the knowledge, the proper housing (one where there is no mold), and the time to take care of children before being allowed to become parents. Shouldn't a license to become a parent be just as important as a license to drive a car?

Article condensed from http://www.opednews.com/populum/print_friendly.php?p=Should-People-Be-Required-by-Bobbi-Leder-090902-457.html

- **In your introduction, *briefly* identify the author's main points.**
- **Then, in a persuasive essay, discuss your position on whether or not people should be required to obtain a license to become parents. Use your own readings, observations and experiences to support your argument. *Remember that to be successful in this essay, you must have a solid thesis, good reasons and NOT be repetitive.***