

Sample Literary Essay #1

A Literary Essay About “Eleven” by Sandra Cisneros

Children are often intimidated and fall silent when in the company of adults and they use coping strategies to deal with their inner frustration. In “Eleven,” the main character, Rachel, states, “...if I was one hundred and two I’d have known what to say when Mrs. Price put the red sweater on my desk.” Throughout “Eleven” Rachel frequently feels intimidated by Mrs. Price. Many times she becomes silent and tries to cope with her frustration.

In the beginning of “Eleven,” Rachel feels intimidated and is silenced by Mrs. Price. An example of this is when Mrs. Price says, “Of course it’s yours. I remember you wearing it once (the sweater).’ Because she’s older and the teacher, she’s right and I’m not.” Rachel is frustrated when Mrs. Price demands that she put the sweater on and does not allow her to explain that it is not her sweater.

Rachel, while still silent, attempts to cope by thinking about happy thoughts. She thinks about her birthday dinner that evening. She also thinks about the birthday cake Mama is making and everyone singing happy birthday. As I read I viewed her frustration and found another place in the text when this happened. “I squeeze them (eyes) shut tight and bite down on my teeth real hard and try to remember I am eleven, eleven.” This shows me that even though she is close to tears in frustration, she still tries to think about the happy family time that will happen later that day.

A few moments later, Rachel is intimidated even more when Mrs. Price says, “You put that sweater on right now and no more nonsense.” Rachel is still frustrated and tries to cope when she tells Mrs. Price that it is not her sweater. Another example of this is when Mrs. Price replied loudly, “Now!” Rachel is silenced again by an adult and now she’s feeling that she doesn’t even want to be eleven, while fighting back tears.

As you can see from Rachel’s experience, children are often intimidated and silenced when in the company of adults. In families and in school, children are silenced many times by older family members or schoolmates. As a reader I really empathized with Rachel and her struggle to communicate with Mrs. Price. Not all of us are as lucky as Rachel to have such great coping skills. I admired how she was able to control her frustration and her tears, so that she would not be further humiliated by her teacher and even more embarrassed in front of her peers. Schools and communities everywhere should reach out and teach adults that they need to be aware of the power they have, which can cause children to feel intimidated and fall silent.

Adapted by Katherine Casey for Marysville School District, 2010, from the work of the Hackensack Literacy Initiative, 2007.

Literary Essay Structure

Introductory Paragraph:	<p>Theme or big idea statement (general, broad statement without an “I” voice) Audience needs to know where this essay is going – “Children are often intimidated and fall silent when in the company of adults and they use coping strategies to deal with their inner frustration.” Quote the relevant text that supports your statement - In “Eleven,” the main character, Rachel, states, “...if I was one hundred and two I’d have known what to say when Mrs. Price...” Statement connection (your opinion based on the text) - Throughout “Eleven” Rachel frequently feels intimidated by Mrs. Price. Many times she becomes silent and tries to cope with her frustration.</p>
2 nd Paragraph: (body)	<p>First specific point that connects to the statement – In the beginning of “Eleven,” Rachel feels intimidated and is silenced by Mrs. Price. Quote the relevant text that supports your statement (use transitional phrases) - An example of this is when Mrs. Price says, “Of course it’s yours. I remember you wearing it once (the sweater).’... Explain how the relevant text supports your statement - Rachel is frustrated when Mrs. Price demands that she put the sweater on and does not allow her to explain that it is not her sweater.</p>
3 rd Paragraph: (body)	<p>Second point that connects to the statement – Rachel, while still silent, attempts to cope by thinking about happy thought. She thinks about her birthday dinner that evening... Quote the relevant text that supports your statement (use transitional phrases) - As I read I viewed her frustration, I found another place in the text when this happened. “I squeeze them (eyes) tight” Explain how the relevant text supports your statement - This shows me that even though she is close to tears in frustration, she still tries to think about the happy family time that will happen later...</p>
4 th Paragraph: (body)	<p>Third point that connects to the statement – A few moments later, Rachel is intimidated even more... Quote the relevant text that supports your statement (use transitional phrases) - Mrs. Price says, “You put that sweater on right now and no more nonsense.” ...Another example of this is when Mrs. Price replied loudly, “Now!” Explain how the relevant text supports your statement - Rachel is silenced again by an adult...</p>
Final Paragraph:	<p>Restate the statement, connecting it to the character - As you can see from Rachel’s experience, children are often intimidated and silenced when in the company of adults. Connect the statement to the real world – In families and in school, children fall silent many times by older family members or schoolmates. Support the statement with a personal connection - As a reader I really empathized with Rachel and her struggle to communicate with Mrs. Price. Call to action! Show the issue matters to the real world - Schools and communities everywhere should reach out and teach adults that they need to be aware of the power they have, which can cause children to feel intimidated and fall silent.</p>

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Sample Literary Essay #2

A Literary Essay About “Eleven” by Sandra Cisneros

When students are bullied by classmates and teachers, they start losing their joy, their confidence – they lose themselves. Many people read Sandra Cisneros’s essay “Eleven” and think it is about a girl who has to wear a sweater she doesn’t want to wear. Instead, it is a story about a girl who struggles to hold onto herself when she is challenged by people who have power over her.

When Rachel’s classmate betrays her, Rachel begins to lose herself by losing her voice. One day Rachel’s teacher ask who owns a stretched out, itchy red sweater that was left behind in the coatroom. Sylvia Saldivar puts Rachel in the spotlight when she says to Mrs. Price, “I think the sweater is Rachel’s.” Sylvia is challenging Rachel, which makes Rachel feel lost. Sylvia’s betrayal is made worse when Mrs. Price agrees with Sylvia and puts the red sweater on Rachel’s desk. Being challenged by both Sylvia and Mrs. Price causes Rachel to start to lose herself by losing her ability to defend herself. “When I open my mouth nothing comes out.”

Rachel loses herself even more when Mrs. Price claims to have seen Rachel wearing the sweater saying, “Of course it’s yours... I remember you wearing it once.” Rachel protests, trying to tell Mrs. Price it is not hers, but Mrs. Price does not believe her. Rachel reacts to Mrs. Price’s actions by escaping into her imagination where her family loves her, daydreaming of her birthday party. She daydreams about getting her power back. “In my head I am thinking how long till lunch time, how long till I can take the red sweater and throw it over the school yard fence, or leave it hanging on a parking meter, or bunch it up into a little ball and toss it in the alley.” Because she is challenged by people who have power over her, Rachel is forced to lose herself into her imagination.

Rachel completely loses her composure when Mrs. Price forces her to put on the sweater. “That’s when everything I’ve been holding in this morning, since when Mrs. Price put the sweater on my desk, finally lets go, and all of a sudden I’m crying in front of everybody.” She doesn’t feel special like it’s her birthday. Instead she feels humiliated and betrayed by Sylvia and Mrs. Price. School is no longer a place where she can learn. Rachel is so upset she wishes she could become invisible by running away like a tiny, tiny balloon.

In “Eleven” Rachel is betrayed by her teacher, Sylvia Saldivar, and her entire class because they did not come to her defense. The bullying causes Rachel to lose voice and her composure, to be unable to concentrate on learning, and to wish she could escape to be surrounded by her loving family or to a place where she could regain her power. “Eleven” helped me realize that bullying is not just done by students, teachers can bully children, too. Unfortunately, people like teachers and popular students in positions of power humiliate many students. Schools spend a lot of time talking about student bullying. It is time to raise awareness about teachers bullying students, too, so that students can feel safe and learn at school.

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