

Name: _____

Date: _____

6B- _____

Reading: "Dear Future..." and "On turning 10": SAMPLE Short Answers

Short Answers: Directions: Use the sample short answers below to help you write your own short answers. Notice the form: **Topic Sentence** (Main Idea; Inference; Echo question); **Detail #1; Detail #2**. These answers are longer than necessary. I've given extra details so you see the range of possibilities...

"Dear Future: Does It Get Any Better" by Nicholas Montemarano

1. **Character Change:** How does James' attitude about the future change over the course of the story. Use **two** specific details / quotes from the text to support your answer.

James' attitude about the future is pessimistic at first, but over the course of the story he becomes more optimistic. For example, when James first arrives at the church book sale, he says, "The future is bright. At least that's what Mom is always saying. But it doesn't seem particularly bright right now, in this cold, musty church basement." He's upset that he's shopping with old people in a messy church; that he doesn't fit in at school; that getting older means "someday something won't turn out all right"; that his parents sold their house; and that his father is unemployed and depressed. However, after reading Annie's diary and talking to his parents, James eventually feels better. In fact, he looks forward to the future, saying, "In some dear future, I would like to remember this day. And miss it."

2. **Setting + Theme:** How does James' description of the bookstore in the beginning of the story relate to the theme of the story? Use **two** specific details / quotes from the text to support your answer.

James' description of the bookstore reflects the theme of growing up because the church store symbolizes old age and old people. For instance, James describes the store: "Whatever organizational logic there might have been in this place has given way to chaos..." James fears that he, like the store, will encounter the same kind of chaos as he gets older. Then James describes the books: "Some books, when I pick them up, disintegrate in my hands. Spines crack, brittle pages fall out." James associates the books with old people, having spines ready to crack and the "brittle pages" of their lives — maybe the "stories" of their past — threatening to "fall out."

3. **Making inferences:** James notices his mother blocking the aisle, reading, and shares his feelings: "I am relieved that she has lost herself completely in her book." Why do you think James feels this way? Use **two** specific details / quotes from the text to support your answer.

James is probably relieved because he believes his mother needs to escape from the stress of being an adult. More specifically, he knows his mother works very hard as a realtor. She frequently takes work calls and multitasks. The reason she works so hard is because her husband, James' father, has lost his job, which seems to have led to his depression. Between having an out-of-work, depressed husband and working so hard, James' mother deserves to lose herself in a book every once in a while.

(over)

4. **Author's Craft:** How does the author's reference to Ray Bradbury's novel *The Night* add to this story? Use **two** specific details / quotes from the text to support your answer.

The author's reference to *The Night* contributes to the theme and it characterizes James. In particular, James says the book is about the end of childhood, which is one of the themes of "Dear Future..." Secondly, when James blurts out his insights in class, his teacher and his classmates hurt his feelings by laughing at him. This reveals James' sense of insecurity.

5. **Author's Craft:** After reading A's journal, James shares his thoughts with the reader:

...Written beside the address is a note: "If found, please return."

My first question is: What happened to A?

My second question is: How did her journal end up here, in this church basement, in my hands?

My third and fourth and fifth questions are: Did she lose it? Did she throw it away?

If so, why?

My sixth question is: How can I get it back to her?

What mood does the author create here? Use **two** specific details / quotes from the text to support your answer.

The author creates a suspenseful mood in two ways after James reads A' journal. First, the author creates a sense of mystery by posing a series of questions that might provoke the reader to pursue answers. Second, the author speeds the reading process for the reader by shortening the length of his sentences and paragraphs. This allows the reader to race through James' internal monologue at the same panicked pace of James' anxious thoughts.

6. **Making Inferences:** When James speaks with Annie, she asks him how he's doing at the moment, and James replies, "To be honest, today started off awful... But it's better now." Why does James say this? Use **two** specific details / quotes from the text to support your answer.

James says this because Annie's journal has given him a new perspective on growing up. His day was awful because his father is unemployed and depressed; his mother over-works herself and needs a break; he feels self-conscious at school; and he worries that the end of childhood will mean things won't always "turn out all right." However, now that he's read Annie's journal and talked to her on the phone, James realizes he's not alone with his anxiety about growing up. Like James, the younger Annie had problems: Her mother was sick, she was bullied at school, and her crush didn't like her. Plus, she wrote to escape, and James reads to escape. Older now, Annie tells James she's "happy enough" because she understands that "no one's happy all the time..." This reassures James that he can deal with the problems of young adulthood.

(next)

7. **Theme:** A. At the end of the story, during the family dinner, the author seems to provide an explicit statement of one of the theme messages of the story. Quote this explicit theme message below:

“When you’re happy, you want to make it last forever. And when things are difficult, the urge is to hurry up and get happy again. Hard times are part of life. What matters is how you get through them and who you get through them with.”

B. Now, name **two** examples of how James’ mother illustrates this theme. For each, explain why you think it illustrates the theme message.

James’ mother illustrates the theme message in two ways. First, she goes to the church bookstore because reading helps her escape from her troubles. Trying to make her happiness “last forever,” while at the same time “getting through” her problems, James’ mother gets so immersed in the book that she blocks the aisle. Furthermore, when her husband loses his job, James’ mother doesn’t give up; instead, she gets a job as a realtor and works doggedly to do well in her new career. Even though she works so hard to support her husband and son, she claims she’s most thankful for “her guys,” proving that she has hard times, but she knows how to get through them, and she values the people she gets through them with.

“On Turning 10” by Billy Collins

1. **Character:** In Stanza 1, which poetic device does the speaker use repeatedly, and what does this tell you about the speaker? Use **two** specific quotes from the text to support your answer.

The speaker of the poem repeatedly uses metaphors that suggest he is worried about getting older. For example, he compares turning ten years old to coming down with “a kind of measles of the spirit” or “a mumps of the psyche.” These metaphors suggest that the speaker sees aging as a disease that affects him not physically, but psychologically.

2. **Character:** In Stanza 2, the speaker says, “You tell me it is too early to be looking back, / but that is because you have forgotten / the perfect simplicity of being one / and the beautiful complexity introduced by two.” Here, the speaker addresses his audience with the term “you.” To whom is the speaker talking, and why do you think his listener has given him this advice: “...It is too early to be looking back”? Use **two** specific examples from the rest of the poem to support your answer.

The speaker seems to be talking to someone older than he is, probably a parent, who has given him advice on growing up because the speaker has shown signs of being anxious about getting older. For instance, since turning ten years old, he says, “... Now I am mostly at the window / watching the late afternoon light. / Back then it never fell so solemnly against the side of my tree house.” Following this, he says, “This is the beginning of sadness...” Both statements suggest the speaker’s age is darkening his perspective on life.

(over)

3. **Theme:** Writers establish their themes using various methods. **Juxtaposition** is a poetic device that occurs when a writer puts two opposite subjects, ideas, images, or people (etc.) next to each other. For example, the British author Charles Dickens is famous for his opening line in the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*:

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom,
it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of
incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was
the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us,
we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all
going direct the other way...*

This naturally invites readers to compare the juxtaposed items and maybe even draw conclusions about them.

In stanzas 3 and 4, Billy Collins uses juxtaposition. What does this juxtaposition tell you about the speaker's attitude toward **growing up**? Use **two** specific quotes from Stanza 3 and 4 to support your answer.

Billy Collins' juxtaposition suggests that the speaker is on the border between childhood and young adulthood. The poet's juxtapositions are made up of innocent references to childhood like a tree house, a bicycle, sneakers, an imaginary friend, and "the first big number." However, he contrasts these innocent references with serious, more adult ideas like sitting at a window observing the "solemn" light of late afternoon, "the beginning of sadness," and "saying goodbye." By putting these details next to each other, Billy Collins strengthens the idea that this boy is a "tween," somewhere *between* childhood and adulthood.

4. **Character Change:** In the Stanza 5, the poet uses a metaphor to conclude his poem. What does this **metaphor** tell you about the way the speaker has changed since he was younger? Use **two** specific quotes from Stanza 5 to support your answer.

The metaphor in Stanza 5 suggests that the speaker feels he's become vulnerable since he was younger. When he was a little boy, the speaker had nothing under his skin but light. He says, "If you cut me I could shine," suggesting he felt invincible, or unable to get hurt, or simply just innocent as a child. However, he contrasts his childhood to being ten years old: "But now when I fall upon the sidewalks of life, / I skin my knees. I bleed." Metaphorically, he compares walking on a sidewalk to general life experiences, suggesting that his "falls," or his mistakes, hurt him now. At ten years of age, he's no longer invincible; he's vulnerable. His mistakes and missteps bring real consequences. He feels childhood doesn't protect him from harm anymore.