

## 7th Grade Literary Essay ‘On-Demand’ Assessment Writing Prompt

### Note

- During ‘on-demand’ assessments students should be at their regular writing seats and supplied with paper. Students should also have access to additional pages if needed.
- Teachers can post the prompt and read it aloud.
- Students independently read the passage.
- Give students 50 minutes to write their literary essay. (One class period)
- Do **not** give the students a checklist during the pre-test, **only** during post-test.

### Narrative Writing Prompt

After reading the passage, *All the Cats in the World* by Sonia Levitin, see how the author revealed themes throughout the story or novel. Craft a claim that argues for the validity of one of the themes. Construct a **literary essay** that logically presents the reasons and evidence in support of the claim. Include an introductory paragraph and concluding paragraph that acknowledges alternate or opposing claims about the theme(s). You will have only 50 minutes to write your literary essay, so you will need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in one sitting.

# All the Cats in the World

by Sonia Levitin

Do you know someone who feeds an animal that doesn't belong to him or her-like birds, or squirrels, or deer, or even stray cats? What do you think prompts-or causes-a person to do such an act?

In the story you are about to hear, you will meet a lonely old woman named Mikila. Yes, she is lonely, but there is one thing that brings Mikila comfort. Every day she climbs the rocks at the seashore to feed the cats. One day the lighthouse keeper begins to make fun of Mikila and her cat-feeding habit. Does she quit? Does she continue? You'll find out. And you'll also find out what valuable lesson Mikila learns.

Down by the seaside, among the rugged rocks and cliffs and in the shadow of an old light-house, lived many, many cats of different kinds and different colors. All were wild. They howled in the night.

Some had been left by thoughtless people. Others had strayed from their homes. Many had been born right at the water's edge, so this was the only home they had ever known.

Now, it happened that two old women, noticing the cats, began to feed them. Soon they came every morning, just after dawn, with sacks full of food-liver scraps, fish heads, and bread crusts. The two women, Nella and Mikila, were good friends. They were still quite nimble and strong. They would clamber down among the rocks, calling, making certain that every cat got its share.

"Ah, Mittens," Nella or Mikila would say, "Here is your breakfast. Good morning, little Tabby, Tiger, and Freckles." After each cat had eaten and licked its whiskers and paws, up the rocky path the women climbed, slower now and hot from the morning sun, talking as good friends do.

One day poor Nella died, and Mikila was left all alone. She wept bitterly. She went to the church to pray.

Late in the afternoon she remembered the cats. She had not fed the cats!

Weary and sad as she was, Mikila hurried to the fishmonger, the butcher, and the grocer, and for a few pennies she gathered the scraps for her cats.

She arrived at the cliffs, hot and out of breath. When the cats saw Mikila, they emerged from behind the rocks meowing, their tails held high. "Where were you?" they seemed to say reproachfully. "We were hungry. Why did you fail us?"

"I did not fail you, my little ones," Mikila said, as though they had really spoken. "Our friend, Nella, is no more on this Earth. But you will not go hungry, as long as there is a breath in Mikila's body."

Suddenly Mikila heard gruff laughter. She looked about, startled. Partway up the slope, on a long, flat rock, a bearded old man sat looking down at her.

"Woman!" he called. "What are you doing with that sack of food?"

"I'm feeding the cats!" shouted Mikila.

"What does it look like to you?"

"It looks like a foolish woman," replied the man rudely, "meddling where she doesn't belong."

"I belong here as well as you!" retorted Mikila.

"I belong here well enough," called the man, "for I am the keeper of the lighthouse."

"Then keep your lighthouse," shouted Mikila, "and leave me alone!"

Still the old man watched. By and by he called down, more curious than rude, "Woman, pray tell me, are you so rich that you can afford to feed these filthy creatures?"

Mikila retorted, "I manage with a few pennies a day, buying leftovers from the shops. Is it any business of yours?"

Angrily she left, determined to bring even more scraps tomorrow. She would show that old man-what did she care that he thought her foolish?

The next day Mikila's sack was heavy as she went down to the sea, calling, "Tina, Bennie, and Spots! Here Tabby, Minnie, and Puff."

Again she heard harsh laughter from up on the ledge.

"Old woman!" the man called down. "Aren't you afraid, at your age, to climb those rocks? You could fall and break your legs!"

"I'm not afraid!" She laughed and thumbed her nose at him.

It rained the next day, and Mikila yearned to stay home. But the old man might think she was afraid, so she covered her head with a kerchief and went as usual to feed the cats.

This time the man was not there. But Mikila heard the deep bellow of the foghorn, and she saw the broad beam of light coming from the lighthouse. She knew he was tending to his job.

Just as Mikila finished, the old man appeared at the top of the ridge, followed by a pet goat. He did not come down, for the rocks were wet and slippery, but called out, "Old woman! How stubborn you are to come out even in this bitter weather! I have never seen such a one as you!"

"I am not stubborn, I am faithful!" Mikila shouted.

The old man shook his head, laughing, and disappeared inside the lighthouse.

Mikila walked away slowly, her feet sinking into the wet sand. Her clothes clung to her body, and she shivered. At home, a hot bath, and she shivered. At home, a hot bath and a cup of tea did much to restore her spirits, but she felt very tired and began to sneeze.

The next morning Mikila's throat was sore. Her head hurt. Surely the cats could manage without her for just one day she thought.

Then she remembered the old man's rude laughter and her talk about being faithful.

"One who is faithful does not give up so easily." She grunted and groaned all the way down to the shore.

As before, the old man sat upon the rock shelf, and when he saw Mikila, he called down, "Old woman, tell me one thing. Why do you feed these cats?"

"BECAUSE THEY ARE HUNGRY!" Mikila shouted.

"Hungry!" The man held his sides with laughter. "Hungry! Ha-ha-ha! That's a good one! Don't you know there are millions of hungry cats in the world? Can you feed all the cats in the world?"

Mikilia did not answer. Wearily she gathered up her empty sack and went home, weeping.

\*\*\*\*

That night Mikila's bones ached. Even hot tea did not help. For three days and nights she lay sick with fever. The old man's words echoed in her head: "Woman, you are wasteful and stubborn and foolish." She thought, "It is true. I can never feed all the hungry cats in the world. I am tired and sick. Most of all, I am sick and tired of being taunted by the terrible old man. I will go no more to feed the cats." She lay in her bed grieving.

At last she slept deeply, and on the fourth morning she woke up feeling strong-not only strong, but determined; not only determined, but angry!

She got up in haste, pulled on her clothes, snatched up her sack, and hurried to gather food for the cats.

As she hustled, Mikila planned what she would tell that rude old man. He was the foolish one, the stubborn one, the stupid one. Couldn't he see what he did every day in his lighthouse was exactly the same as feeding the cats?

She could hardly wait to catch him on the ledge and shout up, "Why do you bother to send a beam from your light- house? You can't save every ship in the ocean. You can't guide them all safely to shore. Why do you even try?"

As Mikila picked her way down the rocky path, she called, "Come, Tiger, Mittens, Freckles, Puff. Oh, my poor little ones. Mikila is here."

She expected to see the cats shivering, half dead from hunger. But instead they leaped nimbly out, playfully rubbing against her legs.

"Ah, my dear ones," Mikila exclaimed, "how I have missed you! But-you look well fed. How can it be?"

Now Mikila saw the old man's goat licking salt from the rocks, and in the next moment there was the old man himself. He stood bent toward the shyest of the cats, feeding it from a sack of scraps.

"What are you doing?" cried Mikila in surprise.

He turned and stammered, "I-why-I-what does it look like to you, old woman?" Mikila stared at him until his face grew very red and he looked away out to sea.

"Are you so rich," she taunted, "that you have money to waste on these filthy creatures?"

The old man shuffled his feet.

Mikila folded her arms and asked, "Why do you come out in this bitter weather? What a foolish man you are!"

The old man smiled slyly while the cats milled about his feet. "Actually," he said, "It was not my idea."

"Then whose?" asked Mikila, tapping her foot.

"My goat. Ulysses'. He dragged me down here. What else could I do?"

"You could have stayed in your lighthouse," said Mikila.

"But Ulysses is very stubborn," replied the man. "He is also strong and clever. In fact," said the man with a grin, "he is in many ways like you."

"Like me?" Mikila tossed her head. "Many thanks for comparing me to a goat!"

"But this goat." said the man earnestly, "is my good friend." He patted the goat's head, with its stubby horns and stiff hair. "We have many conversations."

"Then Ulysses must have told you," said Mikila dryly, "that you cannot possibly feed all the cats in the world."

The old man grinned broadly, and his face creased into a thousand wrinkles. "Of course," he replied. "We all know that. But I can at least feed these lose at hand. It is much the same," he added, "as tending the lighthouse."

Mikila was silent for a long moment. Then she smiled. "Since Ulysses cares so much about the cats," she said, "send him to me tomorrow. I will show him which shops sell the very best scraps."

"A fine idea," exclaimed the old man. "But Ulysses goes nowhere without me. We shall come together." He turned and, imitating Mikila's own high voice, said, "Good-bye now, Roscoe. Tiger, and Puff. See you tomorrow!"

And so, each day after that, the man and the woman and the goat went together to buy the scraps and feed the cats, not all in the world, but the ones that lived among the rocks in the shadow of the old lighthouse. You can see the three of them walking up the rocky path together, talking and laughing as good friends do.