

8th Grade Narrative '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 the students 50 minutes to write their literary essay.
- Do **not** give the students a checklist during the pre-test, **only** during post-test.

Narrative Writing Prompt

After reading the passage, *On the Back of the Bus*, study and consider the themes presented by the author throughout the text. After making inferences about what the author wanted readers to understand, determine how the author reveals a theme through character development. Then, determine a relationship between theme and character development to create an arguable claim about the theme. Use textual evidence to support the claim(s) as you construct a **literary essay**. You will have only 50 minutes to write your literary essay, so you will need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in one sitting.

On the Back of the Bus

Jimmy Gonsalves was a small, wiry, smoke-skinned man who worked the fields in the neighborhood where I grew up. Word had it that Jimmy came from the tropics, maybe Honduras or Panama, though nobody really knew for sure. He was a familiar sight, wearing a straw hat to keep out the sun as he rode a tractor. The man was a gifted farmer. No wonder people were eager to hire him to work their fields.

"Run over to Jimmy's field and pick five ears of corn," my mother often said. We ran over, knowing Jimmy wouldn't mind, knowing there was not corn anywhere that was fresher or more delicious.

Jimmy rarely spoke, but he performed one feat that made him a legend among the neighborhood kids.

"Eat a worm, Jimmy!" we begged when we saw him.

On most days Jimmy would obligingly pick one up—not a little one, either—strip away the dirt with one hand, pop the wriggling creature in his mouth, and start to chew.

"Mmm," he'd say, smacking his lips.

We always knew what to expect, but every time we'd stand there, gaping in astonishment while Jimmy munched a big old earthworm.

During the school year Jimmy worked as a bus driver. His son, Mark, who was my age, would be the only kid waiting on the bus when it rumbled up to my stop promptly at 7:55 in the morning.

One day I was sitting next to Mark in the back seat. There was another bus directly behind us, and as we were driving along Mark made some kind of gesture to the driver. I never really knew what motion he made, whether it was friendly or rude or possibly misunderstood, but the driver took offense to it and started angrily beeping his horn. Jimmy had to pull our bus to the side of the road, and shut off the engine.

Moments later the other driver boarded our bus, and came barreling down the aisle toward where I was sitting. He grabbed Mark Gonsalves by the back of his shirt and pulled him off the bus. All the kids moved to the right side to see what would happen next. Through the windows we watched the driver yelling at Mark Gonsalves while Jimmy stood there, wiping his face with a cloth handkerchief.

Suddenly—OH!—the driver slapped Mark Gonsalves across the face, causing Mark's head to snap back.

Jimmy stood there, working his mouth, but said nothing.

Then it was over. The driver stomped back to his bus. Mark climbed onto our bus and took his seat next to me in the back. Without a word, Jimmy started up the engine and we lurched forward, continuing on the route to school. Out of consideration for Mark, I kept my eyes forward. After a few minutes I stole a glance at him. He wasn't crying, though his face was full of frustration and rage. I wondered who he was angriest at—the other driver for hitting him, or his father for letting it happen.

After a few minutes I realized my fists were clenched; later I would find a row of indentations where my fingernails had left marks on the palms of my hands. I knew I had just witnessed something terribly wrong, but I didn't know what to do about it. I felt ashamed at my own helplessness.

This happened in 1961, years before the Civil Rights movement began in the United States. Marshfield was a white town. Jimmy and Mark Gonsalves were the only people of color I knew. Many times I have thought back on what happened that day, and wondered if that driver would have dared to slap Mark Gonsalves in the face, with his father standing there watching, but for the color of their skin.