

Reading Questions

Name: _____

English 11R – *The Glass Castle*

PART III. Welch

Back in Battle Mountain, we had stopped naming the Walls family cars, because they were all such heaps that Dad said they didn't deserve names. (pp. 129-132)

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *"Life is a drama full of tragedy and comedy," Mom told me. "You should learn to enjoy the comic episodes a little more."* (p. 129).

1. What is her father's family like? How does Jeannette react to them?
2. How is Rex Walls like or not like his family members?

The next day was Sunday... (pp. 133-135)

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *"My career could really take off here."* (p. 135)

1. Describe the local history of Welch.
2. How do the locals greet the outsiders?
3. Does the setting of Welch foreshadow positive or negative events?

The next day Mom took Brian and me to Welch Elementary, near the outskirts of town. (pp. 136-139)

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *"This girl ain't got no buttons on her coat!"* (p. 139)

1. Why doesn't the principal believe Mary's assertion that her children are gifted?
2. Why does Mary tell her children not to be ashamed of being smarter than the local kids?
3. Describe Jeannette's history class. What does it imply about the quality of public education in West Virginia?
4. How does the English teacher treat Jeannette? What does it suggest about the teacher?
5. Why do the girls beat up Jeannette?

When we all got home that afternoon, Mom and Dad were eager to hear about our first day. (pp. 140-144)

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *"Everyone has something good about them," she said. "You have to find the redeeming quality and love the person for that."* (p.144)

1. Describe the family's hygiene habits.
2. Why doesn't Jeannette tell her parents about the bullying? What do you think they'd do if they did know?
3. What do Mary Walls' "high-minded arguments" suggest about her ability to understand Jeannette's predicament?
4. Why does Dinita finally stop bullying Jeannette?

5. What is Grandmother Walls' (Erma) attitude toward black people? What reasons are given for why she feels this way?
6. Why does Mary tell Jeannette to be nice to Erma?
7. What do you think of Mary Walls' assertion that everyone possesses redeeming qualities?
8. Does the fact that Hitler loved dogs redeem him in our eyes? Why or why not?

In late winter, Mom and Dad decided to drive the Oldsmobile back to Phoenix. (pp. 145-148)

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: "You'd be weird too, if Erma was your mom," Lori said. (p.148)

1. What reason does Rex give for refusing to work in the mines, the only place where locals can find work?
2. What does Erma tell her grandchildren about her own childhood? Why do you think she shares this information with them?
3. Why do Erma and Lori get into a fight?
4. What does Jeannette accuse Erma of doing to Brian?
5. Why don't Rex and Mary take the kids' side against Erma?
6. What do the children learn about the roots of their father's behavior?
7. How is Rex different from the other members of his family? How does he resemble them?

Mom and Dad told us they'd made it to Phoenix... (pp. 149-154)

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *"It's good we raised our young'uns to be tough," Dad said. "Because this is not a house for the faint of heart."* (p. 150)

1. How does Rex Walls plan to turn the house on Little Hobart Street into a glass castle? How realistic is he being?
2. How does Mary try to "perk the place up"?
3. Why don't the Walls go back to Phoenix?

Seeing as how Welch was our new home, Brian and I figured we'd make the best of it. (pp. 155-158)

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *"Life's too short to worry about what other people think," Mom said. "Anyway, they should accept us for who we are."* (p. 157).

1. Where is Rex most of the time?
2. What happens to the foundation that Rex digs for the glass castle? What does it symbolize?
3. How does Maureen's fear of the rats connect with her fear of strangers in Phoenix? Are these fears substantiated by her reality, or are they unreasonable?
4. Why does Jeannette try to paint the house? What happens to her efforts? Why don't the other family members help her?

Little Hobart Street led up into one of those hollows so deep and narrow that people joked you'd had to pipe in the sunlight. (pp. 159-163)

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *"We can take care of our own," Mom and Dad liked to say. "We don't accept handouts from anyone." (p. 159)*

1. Is the parents' refusal to accept handouts consistent with some of their previous behaviors? Why or why not?
2. What are Jeannette's fantasies about prostitution? How do they differ from Ginnie Pastor's reality?
3. Why do you think Ginnie asks Jeannette if she knows how to pick a chicken clean? What does this reveal about both of them?

We fought a lot in Welch. (pp. 164-167)

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *"We'd lived in some pretty scrappy places back in the desert, but Mom said Welch was the fightingest town she'd ever seen."*

1. What reasons are given for the hardness of life in Welch?
2. What is illustrated by the feud between the Walls and the Goads? Why do you think the author includes this story?

As the weather warmed, a sort of rough beauty overtook the hillsides around Little Hobart Street.
(pp. 168-170).

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *...I never had the feeling of togetherness I'd had in Battle Mountain when we lay around in the depot with our books. (p.168).*

1. Why does the family no longer have the sense of solidarity it had in Battle Mountain? What has changed?
2. Why does Jeannette love the novel, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*?
3. Why is it getting harder for Jeannette to believe in her father?
4. When Jeannette sews up her father's wound, what could this suggest symbolically? What cannot be so easily mended in her own life?

Dad had taken to disappearing for days at a time. (pp. 171-174).

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *"She told us we should forgive her the way we always forgave Dad for his drinking." (p. 174)*

1. With neither parent working, how does the family survive financially?
2. What were some of the Walls children's strategies for finding food?
3. What do you think of the Mary's action of secretly eating chocolate while her children are hungry? What does it reveal about her character?
4. Why does Mary compare her act of eating chocolate to Rex's drinking?
5. How does Brian react to Mary's request for forgiveness? Do you think that this is the first time she's done this? Why or why not?

Winter came hard that year. (pp. 175-179)

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *"Just remember," Mom said after examining the blisters, "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger." "If that was true, I'd be Hercules by now," Lori said." (p. 179).*

1. Why don't the children get angry when Lori isn't taken to the hospital for her burns?
2. What does Jeannette discover at Carrie Mae Blankenship's home?

Erma died during the last hard snowfall... (pp. 180-185).

RESPOND/EXPLAIN: *She said that sexual assault was a crime of perception. "If you don't think you're hurt, then you aren't." (p. 184).*

1. How does Jeannette react to being described as the daughter of the town drunk?
2. Why does Mary send Jeannette out to find her father, and not one of the other children?
3. Why do you think Erma spent so much time preparing for her own funeral?
4. What is your opinion of Mary's assertion that sexual assault is a matter of perception? What burden does this statement place on Jeannette?

Name: _____

Welch – Part 2

English 11R

The Glass Castle



One day while Brian and I were scrounging around on the edge of our property... (pp. 186-188).

REACT/RESPOND: *Welfare, she said, would cause irreparable psychological damage to us kids.* (p. 188)

1. What does Mary do with the diamond? What does this reveal about her? What should she have done?
2. What does Jeannette suggest that her mother should do? Why doesn't Mary do it?
3. What is ironic about Mary's assertion that welfare will psychologically damage her children?

Mom never told Dad that I'd urged her to leave him. (pp. 189-192).

REACT/RESPOND: *I'd never felt cleaner.* (p. 192)

1. What is ironic about Rex's statement about real estate?
2. How does the behavior in the women's locker room differ from Jeannette's usual experience?
3. Why is Jeannette more comfortable with Dinita than she is with white children?

That afternoon I was alone in the house. (pp. 193-195).

REACT/RESPOND: *Maybe coming back to Welch had killed the idea Dad used to have of himself as a man going places. (p. 194)*

1. Why would the Walls children be raised to be suspicious of government officers?
2. Why does Jeannette hate the man from child welfare, even though her own parents don't take proper care of her?
3. Why does Mary Walls decide to get a job?

Qualified teachers were so scarce in McDowell County... (pp. 196-198).

REACT/RESPOND: *But month after month, the money would disappear before the next paycheck arrived, and once more I'd find myself rooting in the garbage at school for food. (p. 197).*

1. How do children react to Mary's weekly refusal to go to work?
2. What effect does Mary's job have on their standard of living? Why don't things improve more than they do?

I'd started seventh grade that fall... (pp. 199-202)

REACT/RESPOND: *I had what Mom called distinctive looks. (p. 200).*

1. How does Dinita's behavior change? What do you think is the reason behind the change?
2. What aspect of her appearance most preoccupies Jeannette? What does she do about it? What do her attempts reveal about her character?
3. How does Rex react to Jeannette's attempts to create her own braces? What do you think of his reaction?

That year I started working for the school newspaper. (pp. 203-205)

REACT/RESPOND: *I decided I wanted to be one of the people who knew what was really going on. (p. 205).*

4. Why does Jeannette start working for the school newspaper?
5. How does newspaper writing differ from the type of writing (her mother's) that Jeannette was used to?
6. What does Jeannette learn about her father's past experiences?
7. What attracts Jeannette to journalism?
8. What does Jeannette decide?
9. Did you ever have a moment in your life where you suddenly knew what you wanted to be?

At times I felt like I was failing Maureen, like I wasn't keeping my promise that I'd protect her...(pp. 206-213).

REACT/RESPOND: *...I swore to myself that it [my life] would never be like Mom's, that I would not be crying my eyes out in an unheated shack in some godforsaken holler. (p. 208).*

1. Why does Jeannette feel that she is not protecting her little sister, Maureen?
2. Why is Maureen attracted to Pentecostalism?
3. Why does Maureen idealize California?
4. Looking at Mary Walls' mood swings, what do you think a psychologist might label her condition?

5. How does Jeannette react to her mother's breakdown (p. 208)?
6. What does Jeannette resolve in her reaction to the breakdown?
7. Do you agree with Jeannette that all her father needed was a strong woman?
8. Why can't Jeannette be honest with her father regarding his behavior?
9. What happens at the bar? Who is being exploited and/or manipulated?
10. Why isn't Rex more protective of his daughter?
11. Do you agree with Rex's assertion that Jeannette can take care of herself? How does this point of view reflect earlier incidents in Jeannette's relationship with her father?

The next evening Dad disappeared. (pp. 214-217).

REACT/RESPOND: *Being a strong woman was harder than I had thought.* (p. 214).

1. Why doesn't Rex just take Mary's check outright? Why must he be devious?
2. What kind of harassment does Jeannette put up with at her job in the jewelry store? Would you have acted differently if you were in her shoes?
3. Why does Jeannette want a watch?
4. Why does Jeannette steal the watch and how does she rationalize her actions? Where do you think this attitude comes from? Why does she eventually return the watch?

In late August, I was washing clothes in the tin pan in the living room... (pp. 218-221).

REACT/RESPOND: *I had been counting on Mom and Dad to get us out, but now I knew I had to do it on my own. (p. 221).*

1. What conclusion does Mary come to from her summer spent reading self-help books? Has she learned anything about herself?
2. Why does Mary react with anger when Jeannette tells her she doesn't behave like a mother?
3. What is Jeannette and Rex's standoff really about?
4. What does Jeannette resolve to do?
5. Why do the parents side against Jeannette?

That fall, two guys showed up in Welch who were different from anyone I'd ever met. (pp. 222-225).

REACT/RESPOND: *But Lori began to see New York as a sort of Emerald City—this glowing, bustling place at the end of a long road where she could become the person she was meant to be. (p. 223).*

1. Describe Lori at this point in her life.
2. Why do the New York City visitors appeal to her?
3. What plan do Lori and Jeannette hatch as a result of these visitors?
4. Why do they name their piggy bank "Oz"?
5. Why does Rex choose to buy a car rather than pay for an indoor toilet? What do you think of his decision and what does it suggest about him?

As spring approached and the day of Lori's graduation drew closer... (pp. 226-230).

REACT/RESPOND: "The family is falling apart," he said.

"It sure is," I told him. (p. 230)

1. In what ways does poverty interfere with Lori's attempts to get a scholarship?
2. What do you think is the real reason behind Rex's destruction of Lori's Shakespeare sculpture?
3. What happens to "Oz"? Why does Rex deny the obvious?
4. How does Lori get out of Welch after the money is stolen?
5. Why doesn't Rex's charm work on Jeannette anymore?
6. How does Jeannette make sure that her money won't be stolen in the future?
7. In your opinion, who is stronger, Lori or Jeannette? What details can you cite to support your opinion?

That fall, when I was going into the tenth grade... (pp. 231-234)

REACT/RESPOND: "Great," he said. "But let's juice it up a little." (p. 234).

1. Based on the book's description of Chuck Yeager, why do you think he would be one of Rex's heroes?
2. Why does Rex provide Jeannette with her interview questions?

Lori had been writing to us regularly from New York. (pp. 235-238).

REACT/RESPOND: "Go ahead and build the Glass Castle, but don't do it for me." (p. 238).

1. What is Jeannette's professional goal?
2. What advice does Jeannette get from the college guidance counselor regarding college? What is her reaction to this advice?
3. Why is Mary sad when Jeannette says that she is planning on moving to New York City?
4. How does her father react to her decision? Why does he resurrect his dream at that point in time?

It had been a mild winter, and summer came early to the mountains. (pp. 239-241).

REACT/RESPOND: *I wanted to look ahead to where I was going, not back at what I was leaving, but then I turned around anyway. (p. 241)*

1. What reasons does Mary give for not seeing Jeannette off at the bus station? Do you believe these excuses are the real reasons? Why or why not?
2. Why does Rex give Jeannette his jackknife? Why is this ironic?