

Response to Literature Writing Task

Directions:

- Read the story that begins on the following page. As you read, you may mark the story or make notes.
- After reading the story, you will be given directions to write an essay. You will have time to read, plan, write, and proofread.
- You may reread or go back to the story at any time during the assessment.
- Only what you write on the lined pages in this booklet will be scored.

Scoring:

Your writing will be scored on how well you write an essay that:

- shows your understanding of the author's message and your insight into the characters and ideas presented in the story;
- is organized around several clear ideas and/or images from the story;
- justifies your interpretation by giving examples and citing evidence from the text; and
- uses correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

Read the Following Story:

Mama and the Graduation Present By Kathryn Forbes

"It is the custom, then," Mama asked, "the giving of gifts when one graduates?"

"My goodness, Mama," I said, "it's practically the most important time in a girl's life—when she graduates."

I had seen a beautiful pink plastic dresser set at Mr. Schiller's drugstore, and I set my heart upon it. I dropped hint after hint, until Nels took me aside and reminded me that we did not have money for that sort of thing. Had I forgotten that the Aunts and the hospital must be paid up? That just as soon as Papa was well enough, he must do the Beauchamp job for no pay?

"I don't care," I cried recklessly, "I must have a graduation present. Why, Nels, think how I will feel if I don't get any. When the other girls ask me—"

Nels got impatient and said he thought I was turning into a spoiled brat. And I replied that since he was a boy, he naturally couldn't be expected to understand certain things.

When Mama and I were alone one day, she asked me how I would like her silver brooch for a graduation present. Mama thought a lot of that brooch—it had been her mother's.

"Mama," I said reasonably, "what in the world would I want an old brooch for?"

"It would be like a—an heirloom, Katrin. It was your grandmother's."

"No, thank you, Mama."

"I could polish it up, Katrin."

I shook my head. "Look, Mama, a graduation present is something like—well, like that beautiful dresser set in Mr. Schiller's window."

There, now I had told. Surely, with such a hint—

Mama looked worried, but she didn't say anything. She just pinned the silver brooch back on her dress. I was so sure that Mama would find some way to get me the dresser set, I bragged to my friends as if it were a sure thing.

Graduation night was a flurry of excitement. And when I got home—there was the pink plastic dresser set! Mama and Papa beamed at my delight, but Nels and Christine, I noticed, didn't say anything. I decided that they were jealous, and felt sorry that they would not join me in my joy.

Mama let me sleep late the next morning. When I got down for breakfast, she had already gone downtown to do her shopping.

After my breakfast, Christine and I went upstairs to make the beds. I made her wait while I ran up to my attic to look again at my wonderful present. Dagmar came with me, and when she touched the mirror, I scolded her so hard she started to cry.

Christine came up then and wiped Dagmar's tears and sent her down to Papa. She looked at me for a long time.

"Why do you look at me like that, Christine?"

"What do you care? You got what you wanted, didn't you?" She pointed to the dresser set. "Trash," she said. "Cheap trash."

"Don't you dare talk about my lovely present like that! You're jealous, that's what. I'll tell Mama on you!"

"And while you're telling her," Christine said, "ask her what she did with her silver brooch. The one her very own mother gave her. Ask her that."

I looked at Christine with horror. "What? You mean—did Mama—?" Christine walked away.

I grabbed up the dresser set and ran down the stairs to the kitchen. Papa was drinking his second cup of coffee, and Dagmar was playing with her doll in front of the stove. Nels had left.

"Papa, oh, Papa!" I cried. "Did Mama—Christine says—" I started to cry then, and Papa had me sit down next to him.

"There now," he said, and patted my shoulder. "There now."

After my hiccupping and sobbing had stopped, Papa talked to me very seriously. It was like this, he said. I had wanted the graduation present. Mama had wanted my happiness more than she had wanted the silver brooch. So she traded it to Mr. Schiller for the dresser set.

"But I never wanted her to do that, Papa. If I had known—I would never have let her—."

"It was what Mama wanted to do, Katrin," Papa said.

"But she loved it so. It was all she had of Grandmother's."

"She always meant it for you, Katrin."

I stood up slowly. I knew what I must do. And all the way up to Mr. Schiller's drugstore, the graduation present in my arms, I thought of how hard it must have been for Mama to ask Mr. Schiller to take the brooch as payment. It was never easy for Mama to talk to strangers.

Mr. Schiller examined the dresser set with care. He didn't know, he said, about taking it back. After all, a bargain was a bargain, and he had been thinking of giving the brooch to his wife for her birthday next month. Recklessly, I mortgaged my vacation. If he would take back the dresser set, if he would give me back the brooch, I would come in and work for him every single day, even Saturdays.

"I'll shine the showcases," I begged. "I'll sweep the floor for you."

Mr. Schiller said that would not be necessary. Since I wanted the brooch back so badly, he would call the deal off. But if I was serious about working during vacation, he might be able to use me.

So I walked out of Mr. Schiller's drugstore not only with Mama's brooch, but with a job that started the next morning. I felt proud. The dresser set suddenly seemed like a childish and silly thing.

Writing the Essay: Write an essay in which you present your understanding of the characters and the overall meaning of the story. Support your ideas with examples and/or evidence from the text.

Remember that your writing will be scored on how well you write an essay that:

- shows you understanding of the author's message and your insight into the characters and ideas presented in the story;
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