

Name: _____
English 11

Date: _____
Period: _____

ORDINARY PEOPLE

Reader's Response Journal Assignment



CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—which this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, I have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than my prompts, you should write about that. I hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go. Just be sure to completely answer the prompt and to work to your full potential.

Pre-Reading

1. Read several times the poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay that appears before the title page, "Sonnet CLXXI." Rewrite the poem in your own words. Then, write a few sentences predicting what the novel will be about based on the content of Millay's poem.

Chapter 1

2. The first chapter opens with the assertion that "to have a reason to get up in the morning, it is necessary to possess a guiding principle." Bumper stickers, it suggests, are one way people express the things that are important to them. Respond to one of the following prompts:
 - A. Write a paragraph describing the most memorable bumper sticker you have seen, and explain why it made an impression on you.
 - B. Do you agree that bumper stickers reveal things that are important to the people who display them? Write a paragraph explaining your perspective. If possible, use an example to support your thoughts.
 - C. Do some light internet research on bumper stickers. Choose two or three ideas that reflect your "guiding principle(s)" or things that are important to you. Record them, and write a few sentences for each about how it relates to something that is important to you.
3. We can learn something about Conrad by what he says was on his walls—posters for athletic teams and bumper sticker-like sayings pasted onto cardboard. Think about your own bedroom; what could someone learn about you by looking at the contents of it?

Imagine that your bedroom is being made into an interactive museum. Guests will be able to touch anything in the room, and it will come to life and tell about you through its unique perspective and experience with you. Choose two to three objects in your room and write a script for each one to say when it comes to life. Include information such as where the object came from, how you acquired it, what it says about you, how important it is to you, how often you use it, why you use it, what it observes about you, phrases it hears you say most often, etc. Be creative!

4. Several words and phrases in this chapter are capitalized: Sense of Humor, Anxious Failure, Right Road, etc. Make a list of the capitalized phrases. Think about what the significance of capitalizing them might be. Write a few sentences explaining why you think the author capitalized these words and what kind of effect this emphasis has on the chapter.

Chapter 2

5. In this chapter, the narrator shares Calvin's perspectives on and questions what it means to be a kid, a teenager, a father, and a mother. "Nobody's role is simple these days," he muses. Reread his reflections, and consider whether those roles have changed over time. Then choose one of them and write your own definition for it. Is the role simple, in your opinion, or complex?
6. "Growing up is serious business. He, Cal, would not be young again, not for anything. And not without sponsors: a mother and father, good fortune, God" Reflect on the process of growing up, and choose one of the following to write about:
- A. If you could go back and relive any year or period of your life, what would it be? Write a paragraph about that time and why you would choose it.
 - B. Do you think that Cal's perspective is typical for a middle-aged adult? Take a poll of several middle-aged adults that you know, asking them whether they would like to be young again and why or why not. Then, write a paragraph comparing or contrasting your findings to Cal's perspective. Explain why you think these adults feel as they do.
 - C. Cal lists four things that he would not want to be without if he had to go back and grow up again: a mother, a father, good fortune, and God. Write your own list. What are the three to five most important things you would want if you had to go back and grow up again? Write a few sentences to explain why you chose each one.

Chapter 3

7. "The air is crisp and cool, and he rubs his hands together, shivering in the thin denim jacket. He should go back inside; get a heavier one, but he doesn't want to risk it. Not that she will care, or say anything. But the hurdle has been jumped once today. Enough." Write a paragraph explaining your understanding of the vague references in this opening paragraph of the chapter. Be sure to answer the following questions: What does Conrad not want to "risk"? Who is "she"? What is the "hurdle" he refers to? Why is once "enough"?

Chapter 4

8. "Clichés," Cal reflects, "... jump out at you from everywhere, but you never see your own." Clichés are descriptions that once inspired a vivid picture through an unusual comparison but are no longer powerful because of overuse. Out-of-date clichés include "head over heels" to describe a person in love or "burning rubber" to describe a speeding car. Make a list of all the clichés you find in this chapter. Look at more than just Ray's speech; the author herself uses several clichés in other parts of the chapter. Then, rank each one from 1 (infrequent/never) to 5 (regularly/often) based on your personal use of them.
9. Cal doesn't like to ride the train to work because, he says, it "gives him too much time to think" and "too much thinking can ruin you." Do you understand what he means? Write a paragraph explaining what you think Cal means. If possible, provide an example to illustrate your explanation.

Chapter 5

10. Words can have different meanings depending on the context in which they appear. Re-read the paragraph at the end of the chapter that begins, "The worst, the first session has been gotten through. And the guy is not bad; at least he is loose." Then, write several sentences explaining what you think Conrad means by "loose" in this passage. Use details from the session and from this paragraph to support your explanation.
11. In the next-to-last paragraph of this chapter, the author uses italics to indicate Conrad's conversation with himself. Write a screenplay for the movie version of this scene. How will you show Conrad's discussion with himself? Consider the following:
- Will there be more than one actor?
 - Will Conrad be speaking aloud or only in his mind?
- Write your screenplay in script form with speaker(s) designated and specific line delivery and stage directions. Try to make the scene as vivid and realistic as possible. You may use the following beginning or write your own:
- **[Walking down the street, hands in his pockets, staring off into space ahead of him]**
 - (Conrad thinking to himself); audience hears his voice but he is not physically speaking): So, how do you stay open, when nobody mentions anything, when everybody is careful *not* to mention it?...

Chapter 6

12. Calvin inwardly expresses disgust at the superficiality of his secretary Cherry. Even though she is young and immature, she seems to know who she is and has the confidence to act accordingly. He also sees his former mentor, Arnold Bacon, as an example of a person who knew exactly who he was. Calvin feels the weight of his lack of self-knowledge. He knows *what* he is (a tax attorney) and *how* to be what he is, which he knows by rote, but he doesn't know *who* he is; he doesn't have a grasp of his true, inner self. The question plagues him, and he finds it too complicated to answer.

Write a poem describing yourself and how you perceive yourself. Do you feel that you know your true self, or are you uncertain? Convey how your perception of yourself influences your actions. Your poem must be at least ten lines long. It does not need to rhyme, but it certainly may.

13. Calvin describes the loss of two people in his life. His mother's death was his first experience with loss. He explains that he didn't feel this loss very deeply, as she wasn't a large part of his life. Her death represented the loss of more tangible things, and provided him with a sense of status. Calvin felt a similar loss with the death of Arnold Bacon. He again experienced the feeling of loss on a different level. Bacon's actual death did not impact him as much as the earlier loss of Bacon as a mentor. It was then that Calvin acutely felt the pain of disillusionment; it was this loss of his ideals, perceptions, and sense of self that provided his first experience with the pain of grief.

Think of a time when you experienced a loss. This can be the loss of a person, pet, thing, or what Calvin experienced—the loss of part of who you are. A eulogy is a tribute written or spoken in honor of someone who has died. Write a eulogy for someone or something you have lost. In the eulogy, describe what the person or thing meant to you, and how the loss has impacted your life. Keep in mind that eulogy can be for something intangible, as well as a person or thing.

Chapter 7

14. When Conrad meets Karen at the drugstore for a Coke, she becomes very uncomfortable with his joking about paranoia and warns him that they both need to be careful who they hang around with because “it’s contagious” to get “down.” Laughter is also said to be contagious, as are yawns. Make a list of as many things as you can think of that could be described as contagious. They can be real illnesses, emotional states, phrases, gestures, or habits. Then, choose the one that seems most prevalent in your school at the moment or which seems the most contagious to you, and write a spoof of a public health announcement for the Centers for Disease Control to make at your school. In your announcement, name the contagious “disease” going around, describe its symptoms, warn the audience about what other, worse conditions it can lead to, and explain how to avoid catching it. Be sure to include plenty of drama and be creative!
15. Conrad and Karen’s meeting is very awkward for them both. Do you identify with the difficulty they feel? Reflect on a time when you met someone you knew in a very different place or setting from where you met or became friends (for example, meeting a friend from summer camp at the mall or a friend from church at school). Write a two-part response: first, write a few sentences in which you describe your relationship with the person at the first location (where you met or became friends); then, write about meeting that person in a different place. What was it like? Was it awkward for you like it was for Conrad and Karen? Finally, explain why it was or was not hard to relate to the person in the different setting.

Chapter 8

16. At the dinner party, Calvin reflects on the contrasts between his wife who is “cool and quiet and relaxed” and Sarah, who “has an endless supply of nervous energy.” He compares Sarah to a butterfly, “jockeying” between people, constantly moving in a frenzied manner and taking pleasure from being looked at. Do you know someone whose personality or mannerisms remind you of an animal? Without naming the person, write a description of him or her similar to Calvin’s. Explain what animal he or she reminds you of, and show the person acting in ways that mimic the animal’s behavior.

Chapter 9

17. During the pop quiz in trigonometry class, Conrad notices Suzanne Moseley having a hard time. He, too, is struggling, but when he talks to her afterwards, he learns that her father puts pressure on her to perform better and she does not cope well with it. Conrad offers to help her learn the material, but she is suspicious of his motives. Rewrite this scene from Suzanne Moseley’s perspective. Begin with the first sentence, “A surprise quiz in trig,” but change the next to “*She takes her seat...*” Some of the passages, like this first one, will remain the same (the characters’ actions and words won’t change), but since it’s Suzanne’s point of view, she may notice different things, will have different memories when she looks at Conrad and different thoughts as she takes the test, and we will know what she’s thinking and feeling as Conrad talks to her afterwards. End your version with Suzanne saying, “No. No thanks, it’s all right” and walking away from Conrad.
18. When Conrad tells Berger about his dream, Berger first says that he doesn’t believe that dreams mean anything. Then, later, he confesses that he really does think dreams are significant and that Conrad’s is very interesting. What do you think about dreams? Respond to one of the following options:
 - A. Record one of your dreams that you think means something. Write a few sentences about what you think it means.
 - B. Write a paragraph that explains your general perspective on dreams. Do you agree with Berger’s first opinion or his second one, or are you somewhere in between them? Explain, using examples, if possible, why you feel as you do about dreams.
 - C. Write a paragraph as if you are Dr. Berger recording your notes from the therapy session. What do you think Conrad’s dream says about him and the things he is struggling with? In your analysis, refer to specific parts of the dream and explain what you think they mean for Conrad or how they seem to relate to Conrad’s life.
19. Conrad is originally very hesitant to begin seeing Dr. Berger, but eventually decides that the doctor is a good fit for him. Write a newspaper advertisement for Dr. Berger that reflects what you think are his personality traits, strengths, and therapy style. Make your ad inviting but honest.
20. Write a paragraph in which you describe your personal reaction to Conrad’s therapy. Consider the following questions: How do the sessions compare with what you would expect psychiatric therapy to look like? Does it make sense to you why Conrad keeps going back? What do you think the sessions do for Conrad?

Chapter 10

21. After the swim meet, Conrad accidentally overhears a conversation about himself that his teammates are having. Have you ever overheard a conversation about yourself? Imagine that Conrad does not choose to ignore what he’s heard but instead, goes back into the locker room and confronts Stillman. How do you think he responds? What does he say?

Write a scene to insert between the overheard locker room conversation and the conversation with Salan. Include descriptions of the room, the characters, and the dialogue that they exchange.

22. Several people have questioned Conrad’s busyness so soon after the hospitalization, calling it too much, too soon. When Conrad quits the swim team, however, Salan voices the opposite perspective. He suggests that Conrad is making a grave mistake, that he’s “messing up” his life again. Dr. Berger, however, thinks that Conrad should do what he wants to do. Imagine that you are Conrad’s school counselor. Coach Salan has just notified you about Conrad’s decision, and you feel the need to write a letter to Conrad’s parents expressing your feelings on the issue. Write a detailed paragraph in which

you clearly state your opinion on Conrad's decision to quit the swim team. Give specific, detailed reasons why you feel as you do. Use a letter format such as the following:

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Jarrett,

I have just heard of Conrad's decision to quit the swim team. Coach Salan called me. As you probably know by now, he believes Conrad is making a big mistake. Personally, I feel...

23. As Conrad reflects on his decision to quit the swim team, he thinks, "There is no problem improving your timing, or perfecting a stroke, if the desire is there, but you cannot fire up, cannot manufacture desire, when there is no spark at all to build on. This was not a mistake, what happened today. It is not to be looked at as a failure." What is your perspective on quitting and failure? Is the decision to quit something before it is completed always a failure? Have you ever quit something midstream? Do you think that you failed at it or became a failure because you quit? Imagine that you are a parenting expert who writes an advice column for a popular parenting magazine. Choose one of the following titles and write a persuasive article for your readers about how to guide their children through the activities they participate in: It's Never Ok to Quit or Sometimes, the Right Thing to Do is Quit. Be sure to include specific reasons to support your opinion and examples to illustrate your points, if possible.
24. In Conrad's memory of their family vacation to Maine, he can hear his family joking about the view from Cadillac Mountain. Although they can see only water, they pretend to see "majestic," "awesome," and "impressive" sights. Finally, one of them calls it "excessive." Conrad feels that about his entire life at this moment: "everything seems...too intense, too important." Make a list of 5-7 things that seem excessive to you. Write a sentence or two for each one explaining what about it seems to be too much or over the top.

Chapter 11

25. Calvin remembers one of his former mentor's favorite quotes: "The things which hurt, instruct" (Benjamin Franklin). Calvin disagrees, however. "Sometimes," he thinks, "they merely hurt." What is your opinion? Write a paragraph in which you agree or disagree with Franklin's quote. If possible, use an example from your own life or experience to support your position. Come up with a clever title for your piece.
26. Calvin remembers a conversation about reality and illusion that he had with his law partner's wife Nancy seven years before. Her husband had had an affair, and she said that she would have preferred not to know, she would have preferred her illusions to the reality, and she claimed that almost everyone else would, too. Do you agree with her? If your spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend had cheated on you, would you want to know? Why or why not? Create a chart with reasons in support of both sides of the issue (one column will be it's better to know, one column will be it's better not to know). Then, write a few sentences about your preference.
27. When Conrad's father asks how things are going, Conrad tells him about the "A" he just got on a trigonometry quiz. The narrator speaks of a "gift" at the end of this exchange. Imagine that you are discussing the chapter with a classmate who doesn't understand what the narrator is talking about. Write your friend an email explaining in detail what you think the "gift" is and why you think the narrator calls it that.

Chapter 12

28. After he quits the swim team, Conrad is concerned that he won't know what to do with all the time he has after school. He fills it up quickly, though, studying, taking walks, and feeding and identifying birds. The narrator comments, "He has his own Life List." What do you think he means by "Life List"? Write your own definition of Life List based on the first paragraph of this chapter and what you've learned about Conrad in general. Then, make a Life List for yourself.
29. Just before Christmas, Joe Lazenby approaches Conrad at school and tells him that Coach Salan has announced that Conrad quit the team. Lazenby seems to genuinely care about Conrad and how he's doing, but the conversation ends with both boys feeling angry and defeated. Imagine that you are on the swim team and hear Coach Salan make the announcement about Conrad's quitting. Write a speech for Salan to deliver to the boys. Base the speech on what you know about Salan (Chapter 10) and what you get a glimpse of here when Lazenby begins to suggest that Salan would consider Conrad again. Consider what Salan might say to the team about Conrad and what he would want to say to the rest of the swim team as they face the reality of Conrad's quitting. Would it be a warning speech, a motivational one, some combination of the two, or something totally different? Be creative.
30. After his impromptu date with Jeannine, Conrad feels like running down the street, but he stops himself because running is something that would make people look at him and wonder what is wrong. He muses, "So many people in the world, so few behavior tracks, you can't even run any more without attracting attention to yourself..." What other seemingly normal activities are outside the generally accepted "behavior tracks"? Make a list of seven to ten things that you could legally and naturally do, but would call attention to you because they are atypical ways of acting.
31. There is a wide range of events in this chapter: a confrontation with Lazenby, an intense therapy session with Berger, a spontaneous date with Jeannine, a memory of a skiing trip with Buck, and an awareness of changes in Conrad's grief. Suggest two to three different titles for this chapter that would summarize the content appropriately. Write a few sentences explaining why each title would be appropriate and which one you think is the best fit.

Chapter 13

32. The last sentence of this chapter seems out of place, coming at the end of a scene of intense conflict and argument: "the snow, piled high against the windows, seals them inside its softness, its silence." Why do you think the author ends the chapter in this way? Imagine that you are part of the editorial team that is preparing a new edition of the novel. Some of your fellow editors want to delete this sentence, some want to change it, and others want to keep it as it is. How do you feel about it? Write a persuasive paragraph explaining to the rest of the editorial team why you think the sentence should be deleted, changed, or left the same. To support your argument, explain in detail how it does or does not fit in with this chapter and the rest of the novel.

Chapter 14

33. After Conrad's argument with his mother, he feels horribly guilty. He describes feeling "hammer blows of guilt and remorse." What else do you think guilt or remorse can feel like? Brainstorm several other metaphors that describe guilt you have felt or that you imagine might be appropriate for guilt. Write a sentence or two explaining each one.
34. At the end of this session with Dr. Berger, the psychiatrist pushes Conrad to consider people he may need to forgive. Conrad is exhausted, though, and the scene ends without resolution on the question. At the high point of the tension, the narrator speaks of a "hair trigger of release, waiting to be sprung." What do you think this means? Imagine that you are writing an entry for a dictionary of metaphors in literature. Your entry is "hair trigger," and it should contain three parts: a literal definition of the phrase, a general explanation of how it could be used as a metaphor, and an example and explanation of its specific use in a piece of literature. First, use a dictionary to record the literal meaning of "hair trigger." Then, suggest ways this phrase could be used as a metaphor. Finally, explain how you think the metaphor applies to this scene in particular. In the third part, try to answer the questions: What is the "trigger" in this chapter? Who would pull the trigger? What would it release?
35. The session with Dr. Berger in Chapter 14 is especially intense. Using only words and phrases from this chapter, write a poem that captures the intensity of the session and the revelations Conrad experiences or gets closer to in it.
36. Howard prefers this year's Christmas—at home in snowy Chicago with a live tree and a homemade turkey dinner—to the previous year's, when they celebrated the holiday at a beach resort in Florida. Think about two holidays you have experienced that were very different (two Hanukkahs, Christmases, Thanksgivings, Fourth of July, etc.) Fill in the chart below comparing the two holidays. Then, write a few sentences explaining which you preferred and why.
37. When Conrad's parents buy him a car for Christmas, he is very surprised and a little uncertain how to react. Getting a brand new car unexpectedly may sound like a great surprise to some people, but others would prefer to have some say in choosing a car. How do you feel about this kind of surprise? Write an article about giving gifts in which you provide parents with some suggestions about what kinds of gifts teens like receiving as surprises and which they would prefer to have some input in selecting. Consider including a list of several things that most teens would not want to receive as a surprise. Write a sentence or two explaining what aspect of each gift the teen would likely want to have input on and why. Remember that your audience is parents who are trying to have positive relationships with their teens, so keep your article encouraging and helpful in its tone. Try to avoid sarcasm or condescension.

	Holiday 1	Holiday 2
Location		
Weather		
Activities		
People		
Tone/Atmosphere		
Food		
Other		

Chapter 16

38. In his list of goals, Conrad reflects on how lonely he is and how much he misses having friends. All of his old friends are seniors focusing on graduation, while he is still a junior and not the same person he used to be. In contrast, in the hospital, there were too many people around. Conrad muses, "Excess turns virtue into vice." Do you agree? Write a paragraph in which you first explain what you think Conrad means and then agree or disagree with Conrad's perspective. If you mostly agree, are there some things that this is *not* true for? If you mostly disagree, are there some things that it *is* true for? Include specific, detailed examples to support your position.
39. After Conrad's attempt to get a job at the library isn't immediately successful, he begins listing all the things a job requires that he does not have—"experience... financial need... confidence... you name it." What skills and characteristics do you think he *does have* that would make him a good employee? Write a resume for Conrad that highlights his strengths and skills in a way that would encourage an employer to hire him.

Chapter 17

40. Both Conrad and Calvin find Dr. Berger's eyes piercing and probing. What do you think Dr. Berger is like outside of his psychiatry practice? Write a scene for Dr. Berger that takes place in another aspect of his life—at home, in recreation, with friends, etc. Stay true to what you already know about him, but also reveal some more of what you think his personality may be through his interaction with other people at other places. Include dialogue and at least one new character.

Chapter 18

41. Karen's mother seems very suspicious when Conrad calls her house, and she hangs up the phone before Conrad can even thank her. Assuming that she does actually give Karen the message, what do you think the conversation would sound like? What would Karen's reaction be? Choose one of the following prompts to respond to:
- A. Write a dialogue exchange between Karen and her mother about Conrad's phone call. Use what you already know about the characters to help you. Begin your dialogue this way, or write your own beginning:
 Karen: Hi, Mom! I'm home from play practice. Mom: Hi, honey, Karen, I got a strange phone call today. We need to talk about it...
- B. Write a personal journal entry from Karen's perspective after she hears that Conrad called her. What do you think she is thinking or feeling? Does she want to talk to him? Is she still afraid? Does she have mixed feelings? Try to use what you know about the characters to write in Karen's voice and from her perspective.

Chapter 19

42. When Calvin suggests to his law partner that he might take a vacation, Ray is enthusiastically supportive. Ray's wife has had a conversation with Beth, who is worried about Calvin, and Ray says that he believes getting away for a few days is "the answer." This quick-fix perspective seems pretty

optimistic. Do you think many complex problems in life can be reduced to simple, formulaic answers? Choose a problem that you think may not be as simple to solve as the formulaic “answer” suggests. First, describe the problem. Then, explain “the answer” that you have heard offered. Finally, write several sentences explaining why you think the cure may need to be more complex than “the answer” says it is.

43. After hearing about Beth and Conrad’s problems, Ray says, “nobody’s normal...nobody’s got it together, not anybody in this frigging world.” Free write on the topic of “normal.” What is normal? Is anybody normal? Does anyone have it together?

Chapter 20

44. Conrad is so nervous about his first official date with Jeannine that he forgets to ring her doorbell and stands on the porch for several minutes before he realizes it. Write a poem about first dates. Use words and phrases from this chapter as much or as little as you want. Come up with a creative title for your poem.
45. On their date, Conrad and Jeannine play “instant history.” Do you play anything like this people watching game when you are in a public place? Imagine that a well-known game producer is compiling a book of simple games for people to play to pass the time or relieve tension in social situations such as dates, waiting rooms, airplanes, flights, etc. You have been asked to write the chapter on this game that Conrad and Jeannine call “instant history.” Based on the way they play the game and your own experience, if possible, write a set of official rules to “instant history.” Be sure to include information about the players, necessary equipment, turntaking, the object of the game and how to determine a winner. Title your chapter “Instant History,” or come up with a creative new title for the game.

Chapter 21

46. After Beth meets Calvin’s mentor, Arnold, for the first time, she begins referring to him as “Arnold Fagin.” Do some light research on the character Fagin from Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*. Write a summary of this character. Then, write several sentences that explain why you think Beth refers to Arnold in this way. What do you think she is trying to communicate to Calvin?

Chapter 22

47. When Conrad attends the swim meet, he seems for a moment to consider asking Salan to take him back onto the team again, but he quickly dismisses this, thinking, “No. Salan is a Man of his Word, actions have consequences, *Lord Jim* and all that.” Read a summary of the novel *Lord Jim* by Joseph Conrad and then write a paragraph explaining why you think Conrad references that novel in this context. How does it relate to what he is feeling and thinking?
48. The fight scene between Conrad and Stillman in the parking lot is told entirely from Conrad’s point of view. The reader knows only what Conrad knows in the moment. It is not clear who punches Conrad in the stomach or who pulls him off of Stillman. Imagine that one of the boys who observes the fight works for the school newspaper. Write an article about the fight and what led up to it from a spectator’s perspective. Give your article a creative title.
49. After the fight, Conrad is certain that he will be punished. He knows that he has hurt Stillman pretty badly, and he believes that Stillman will tell his father, at least. So he waits for the inevitable punishment. Waiting, he believes, is actually part of the punishment, and as the night progresses, we see in detail the difficulty of Conrad’s waiting. Do you identify with Conrad’s feelings about waiting? Free write about waiting for something unpleasant that you are sure is coming.

Chapter 23

50. As he gets ready for bed, Calvin wonders why Beth didn’t look in on Conrad. Do you agree with Calvin that something’s wrong with Beth? Imagine that Beth writes in a journal before bed. Write an entry for this night. What did she do when she got home? What did she think? How is she doing emotionally overall? What is she worried or afraid of? Try to write in Beth’s voice and to stay true to her personality while revealing what you think is going on inside her head.

Chapter 24

51. At dinner, Conrad’s grandmother grills him with one set of questions after another. Conrad doesn’t really care because he thinks her lectures are a sign that he’s improving; she no longer sees him as fragile but capable of growth and improvement. Finally, she launches into the “Easy Life” lecture. You may have heard a version of this lecture in your life. It often begins, “When I was your age...” Record a version that you have heard with as many specific details as you can remember. Then, write a few sentences reflecting on why you think this may be a universal type of speech for older people to deliver to younger ones.
52. Before Conrad and Jeannine go to the movie, Jeannine says she needs to stop by her house and let her mother know where she’ll be. When they get there, though, Jeannine becomes immediately upset about something. In the dialogue that follows between Jeannine, her mother, Mr. Ferrier, and Conrad, the tension is clear, and there are many more things left unspoken than are actually said. Reread the dialogue. Write a few sentences for each character about what you think he or she is thinking but not saying.
Jeannine’s mom, Mr. Ferrier, Jeannine, Conrad:

Chapter 25

53. When Ward tells Calvin that he needs to buy Beth a big horse and keep it in the backyard, Calvin teases Beth’s brother about Texans liking everything big. “Why is it that Texans always confuse ‘big’ with ‘best’?” he jokes. List as many things as you can think of for which bigger isn’t necessarily better.

Chapter 26

54. As Conrad washes his car and reflects on his date with Jeannine, he has a sudden awareness that he is strong and that he’s known it for a while. “There are no secret passages to strength,” he thinks, “no magic words.” What do you think Conrad means by “secret passages”? What other things do

you think there are no “secret passages” to? Make a list of several things that you believe do not come through “secret passages” or “magic words.” Write a sentence about each that explains how you think you do achieve it.

55. After Sunday dinner, Conrad and his grandfather sit together and read the paper. Although Conrad would prefer to stay at home by himself while his parents are gone, his grandparents’ house is a comforting place, too. Conrad points out many sounds that comfort him—his grandmother banging cabinet doors, the pipes groaning in the walls, his grandfather rustling the paper. Make a list of sounds that are comforting to you, and write a brief explanation of why you think each has that effect on you.
56. After Conrad reads the article describing Karen’s suicide, he is unable to think clearly. Vivid memories come back to him in rapid succession—images of the hospital, the night he tried to kill himself, the night Buck drowned, and the funeral. Come up with several titles for this chapter. Then, choose the one you think is the most appropriate and write a few sentences explaining why you think it’s the best.

Chapter 27

57. As Conrad wrestles with his memories and emotions, Dr. Berger tries to get him to just let them all out. Depression, he says, is not about tears and letting bad feelings out but about keeping them in—refusing to have or to acknowledge feelings and let them move through you naturally. “People who keep stiff upper lips find that it’s damn hard to smile,” he says. What do you think of Dr. Berger’s summary? Is his a good metaphor? Write a letter to Dr. Berger telling him your opinion on depression and happiness.
58. As Conrad and Dr. Berger eat breakfast, Dr. Berger tries to bring Conrad back to reality by reminding him of suicide statistics. Fifty percent of people who attempt suicide, he says, try suicide again, and fifteen percent are eventually successful. Do some light research on current suicide rates. Write a report comparing or contrasting your findings to Dr. Berger’s summary. Try to offer reasons for the changes or similarities that you find.
59. After breakfast, Conrad doesn’t know where to go. Dr. Berger suggests that he skip school, go back to his own house and get some sleep. What do you think of Dr. Berger’s advice? Does it seem wise, considering how upset Conrad is and his own history of attempting suicide? Write a letter to Dr. Berger agreeing or disagreeing with his advice. Use evidence from the story to support your argument. Begin your letter as follows, or write a beginning of your own:
Dr. Berger,
You should not have sent Conrad home alone today after everything he’s been through...
OR
Dr. Berger,
Although it might not make sense to some people, I think you gave Conrad good advice this morning...

Chapter 28

60. When Calvin returns to the house with a third-place finish after having had such a great first round, Ward consoles him by saying that he didn’t really expect to win. That leads Calvin to reflect on how powerful expectation really is. What do you think about expectation? Do you think you basically get what you expect in life? Write a paragraph about your feelings on the role of expectation in life.

Chapter 29

61. The flight back from Beth’s brother’s house is tense as Beth refuses to talk to Calvin, and he chooses to leave her alone. The distance between them leads him to reflect on several different sayings: “movement is not action,” “haste makes waste,” “a rolling stone gathers no moss,” and finally to decide that “it is better to move than to be unable to move, because you fear loss so much: loss of order, loss of security, loss of predictability.” Choose two characters in the book that reflect the opposite ends of this perspective—one that you believe chooses to move and one that seems unable to move. Write a few sentences for each one explaining how the individual is moving or not, what things he or she seems most afraid of (loss of order, security, predictability, or other things) and what the effect is on his or her life. Finally, write a sentence or two explaining your perspective on movement. Do you agree with Calvin?

Chapter 30

62. Jeannine says that she knows it’s pretty early, but she is already worried about going away to college in the fall. Even though Conrad is not graduating this year, he, too, needs to begin thinking about his future educational plans. Imagine that he is beginning to fill out college applications. His high school transcripts will likely show that he has taken his junior year classes twice. That could raise concerns in the minds of the admissions committee members about offering him a position in their school, so he will probably want to write a letter of explanation to each committee to help them understand what he’s been through and how he’s grown from it. Consider how much of the story Conrad will want and need to share with an admissions committee. Does he need to share details or a more general description of what happened? Write a letter for him to include with his college applications that explains why he took all his junior classes a second time and how his experiences have helped him grow as a person and a student to prepare him for college and life.
63. Jeannine is very impressed by one of the songs Conrad is playing on the guitar and helps him write out the musical notation for it. Conrad doesn’t believe that the tunes he makes up are very good, but Jeannine says that he doesn’t have a very good idea of what he does well. Respond to one of the following prompts:
A. Do you have a good sense of what you do well? Does it agree with or differ from what others would say that you do well? Create a chart in which you reflect on what you think you do well and what you think others would say that you do well.
B. Conrad asks Jeannine what she thinks he *doesn’t* do well, and she says that he doesn’t accept compliments very gracefully. What do you think Conrad *does* do well? Make a list of several things and write a sentence of explanation for each one.

Chapter 31

64. Beth leaves for Europe without even saying goodbye to Conrad. He had no idea she was even going away. What do you think of her actions? Write a letter to Beth in which you tell her your thoughts and feelings about what she has done.
65. Make a list of all the characters whose reactions to Beth's leaving are recorded in the book. Write a sentence or two that summarizes each character's reactions to her leaving and what each one thinks it means (whether he or she sees it as temporary, permanent, nothing to worry about, etc.) Then, write a few sentences explaining your own thoughts on what her leaving means. Do you think she'll come back? Do you think Beth and Calvin's marriage is over? Have you ever heard of a couple separating like this and later reconciling?

Epilogue

66. Conrad says that as his family moved out of their house, he found a box of things he had made as a child that his mother had saved all these years. He believes that it is an indication that they meant something to her, and offers this example as one of the "gestures" that he says he's "learning to interpret." Imagine that one of your classmates is confused by what Conrad means by "gestures" and how this story relates to them. Write an email in which you explain what you think Conrad means and how the story he tells fits in.

Wrap-Up

67. This novel is full of memorable dialogue exchanges between characters. What is your favorite or the most memorable one to you? Copy it and write a few sentences that explain its significance to you.
68. There are many scenes in this book that are very dramatic and powerful. Choose the two scenes that you feel are the most powerful; write a paragraph for each one describing what happens.
69. We naturally develop opinions about books we read. We may view them as good, bad, or some combination of the two. Imagine that you are the book reviewer for your town's local newspaper. Write a detailed review of *Ordinary People*. Provide an overview of what the book is about, and explain your opinions about it, as well.
70. Though the book is mostly about Conrad and his family, there are several other memorable characters in it. Choose the character you like the most and the character you like the least. Then write a few sentences explaining why you chose the ones you did.
71. The title of the novel is drawn from a quote in the book: "They are ordinary people, after all." First, write a few sentences explaining what you think the author wanted to convey through this title. Then, write a few sentences in which you share your personal feelings on the title. Finally, suggest a title that emphasizes another aspect of the novel that you think is also important, and explain why you think your title would also be suitable.
72. This book contains descriptions of teenage suicide, underage drinking, teenage sex, and strong language. It also shows people who find ways to heal from horrible tragedies. Imagine that a group of parents are questioning the use of this novel in your school district. The school board has called a meeting to discuss banning it, and they have issued an open invitation for anyone who wants to speak in favor or against the book. Which side are you on? Write a speech explaining whether you feel the book should be used or not used in your school. Be sure to provide specific, detailed examples to support your position and to consider what your opponents' arguments might be, as well.
73. This book deals extensively with the subject of grief. It shows many different types of loss—sudden death, suicide, separation, divorce, an affair, being disowned, etc. It also reveals how people grieve and deal with loss in many different ways. Write an extended definition of "grief." Begin with a dictionary definition, then describe how three different characters in the story express grief in their unique ways. Title your piece "The Many Faces of Grief," or come up with a creative title of your own.

RUBRIC

Each response will be worth 10 points and they will be collected at the end of the novel.

Is the prompt answered completely?	1	2	3	4
Conventions (spelling, grammar, etc).	1	2	3	4
Is the response interesting to read? Does the author use style?	5	1	1.5	2