

Honors English 400 Summer Assignment

Due on Tuesday September 8, 2026.

1. Read the novel *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom.
2. Complete 3 of the *Tuesdays with Morrie* journal prompts.
These journals are meant for you to make your own meaning of some of life's greatest questions. Show me your thought process, personal connections, and feelings about these topics. I am not concerned about your finding the "correct" answer".
3. Complete a close reading of the following short stories in preparation for our college essay and memoir unit:
 - a. "Crying in H Mart" by Michelle Zauner
 - b. "Chameleon" by Trevor Noah
 - c. "The Monsters of Kings Island" by Christopher Bollen

Tuesdays with Morrie

Student Reflection Journal

Overview:

This journal is a space for your own ideas to connect with Morrie's. Instead of just looking at the novel as an inspirational story, we want to dive deeper into how it's written and the social issues it brings up. We are looking for a thoughtful, personal exploration of big themes like love, forgiveness, and building a meaningful life.

Instructions:

- From the list of provided journal prompts, you are required to select and **complete any three (3) entries for submission**. Choose the topics that resonate most with your personal philosophy or those that challenge your current world view.
- To encourage a more intentional and reflective process, **all responses must be handwritten**. Digital or typed submissions will not be accepted.

Expectations:

- ☐ **Thoughtful Exploration:** Aim for roughly 1.5-2 pages of handwriting (equivalent to 300-400 words) per entry. Rather than hitting a strict word count, focus on fully unpacking your thoughts. If you've reached a moment of genuine insight, you've hit the mark.
- ☐ **Cultural Connections:** In at least two of your entries, bring in an outside voice. This could be a favorite song lyric, a scene from a movie, a poem, or even a podcast episode that echoes Morrie's philosophy. How does this outside artifact help you better understand the chapter?
- ☐ **The Writer's Craft:** Morrie provides the wisdom, but Mitch Albom provides the delivery. In each entry, highlight one specific tool Albom uses (like a recurring metaphor, a sharp aphorism, or a meaningful paradox) and explain why it made that specific lesson stick with you.

Prompts:

TOPIC	PROMPT
Reflection #1: The Cultural Critique (p. 1-25)	Morrie argues that "the culture we have does not make people feel good about themselves." Analyze Albom's portrayal of 1990s materialism—then reflect on your own digital "culture" today. Does your social media feed nourish you or drain you? How do you personally resist the "hustle culture" Morrie warns against?
Reflection #2: The Ethics of Presence (p. 26-45)	Mitch is initially a man of ambition and efficiency. Critically think about why our society prizes being <i>busy</i> over being <i>present</i> . Reflect on a time you were physically present but mentally elsewhere. What did you miss, and how does Morrie's "presence" challenge your current lifestyle?
Reflection #3: Socratic Dialogue (p. 46-66)	Evaluate the teacher-student dynamic. Analyze how Morrie uses questions rather than lectures to change Mitch. Reflect on your own education: Have you ever had a "Morrie" who shifted your perspective? If you were to mentor someone younger this summer, what is one "truth" you'd want to lead them toward?
Reflection #4: The Art of Detachment (p. 67-107)	Morrie speaks of "washing yourself in the emotion" and then letting it go. Analyze this as a psychological strategy. Reflect on a personal heavy emotion (fear, regret, or even intense joy). Do you tend to suppress it, or do you let it "wash" over you? How could "detaching" change your stress levels?
Reflection #5: Building a Counter-Culture (p. 109-140)	Create your own culture. Critically evaluate which of our society's unwritten rules (e.g., "always be productive," "hide your weaknesses") are actually harmful. Reflect: If you were the architect of a new set of life principles for your generation, what are the top three values you'd codify?
Reflection #6: The Paradox of Decay (p. 141-163)	Analyze the motif of the Hibiscus plant in the book. It is dying, yet beautiful. Reflect on the "beauty" in life's difficult or "decaying" moments. As you prepare to leave high school (a "death" of one era), what are you most afraid of letting go, and what are you excited to grow in its place?
Reflection #7: The Human Connection (p. 164-192)	"Death ends a life, not a relationship." Analyze the rhetorical weight of this quote. Reflect on the legacy you want to leave behind at your school or in your family. Beyond grades or sports, what is the <i>human</i> mark you want to stay behind once you're gone?

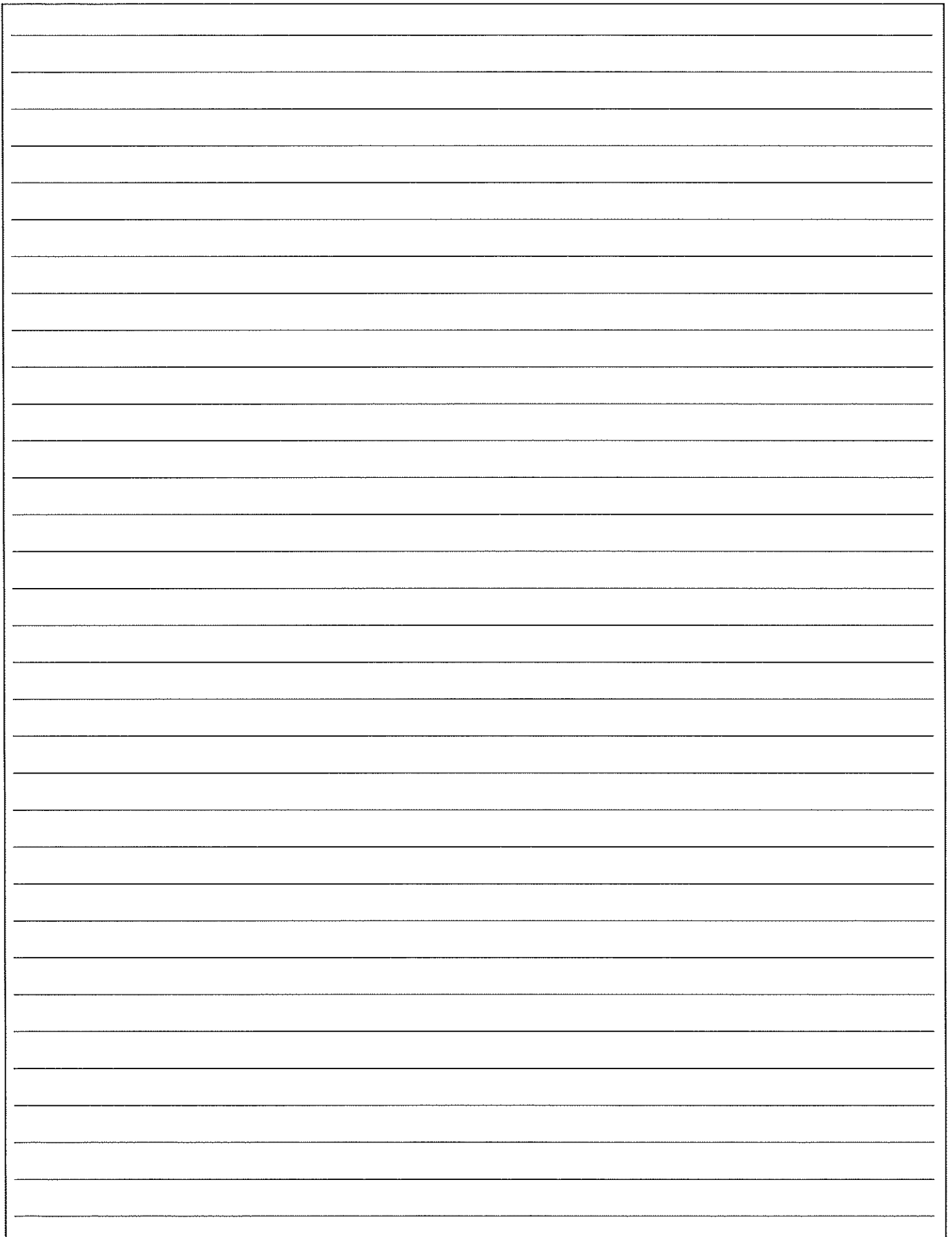
Tuesdays with Morrie

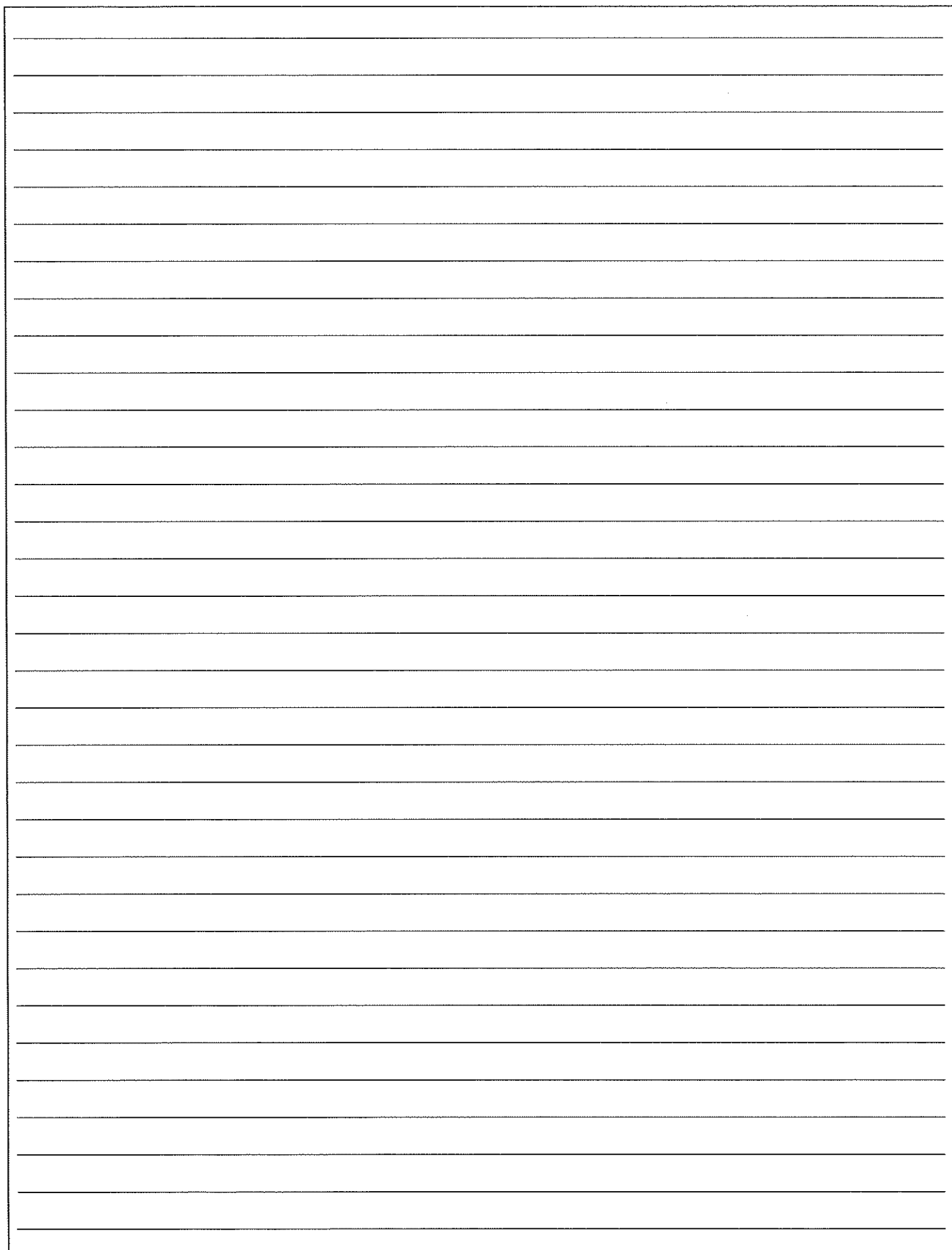
TOPIC #1 :

REMINDERS:

- ☐ **Aim for 300-400 words:** Focus on a moment of genuine insights rather than just fluff.
- ☐ **Outside connections:** include a cultural artifact (song, movie, poem) in at least two entries this summer.
- ☐ **The Writer's Craft:** Identify one rhetorical tool (metaphor, aphorism, paradox) in every entry and explain its impact on you.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's part of a bound notebook or folder.





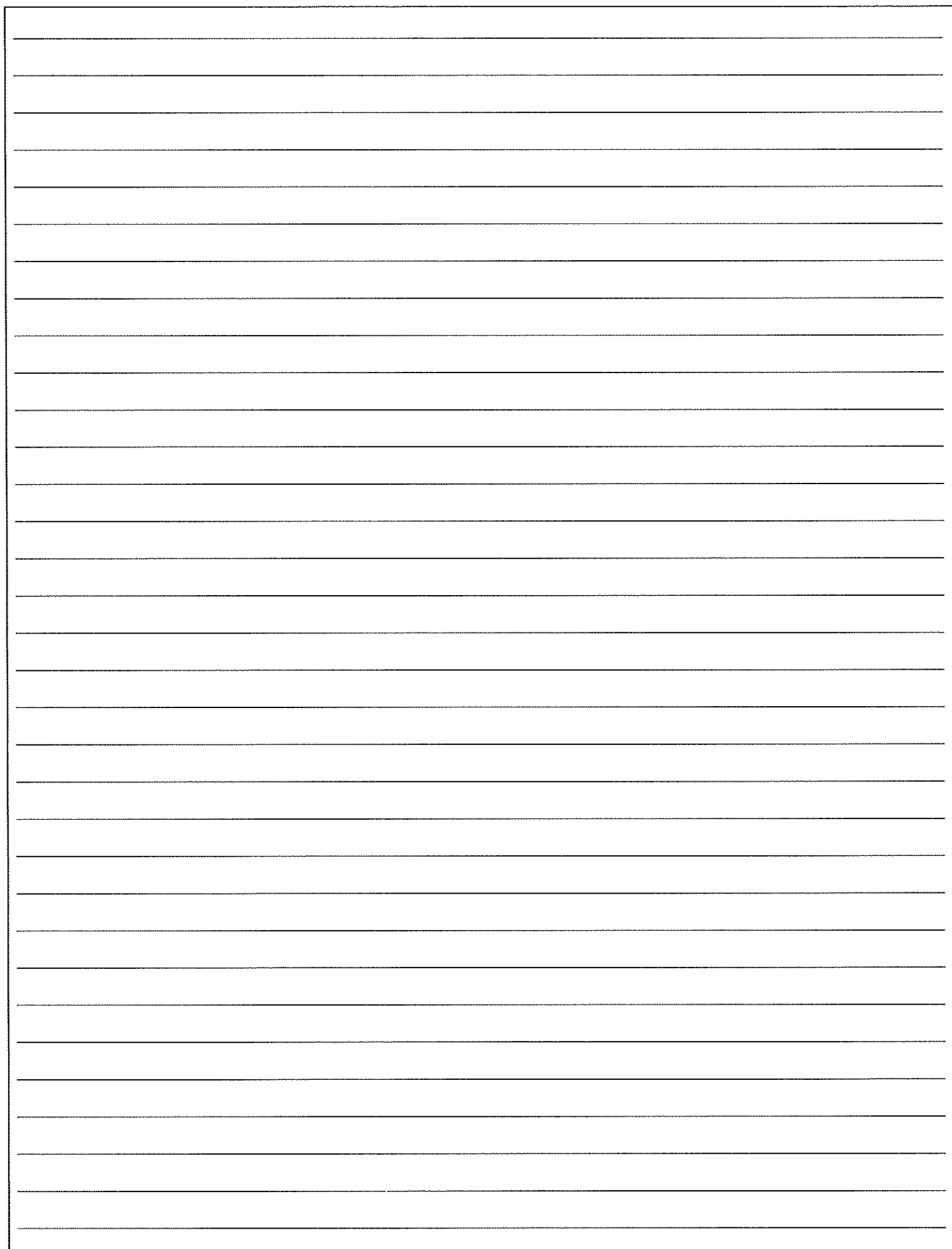
Tuesdays with Morrie

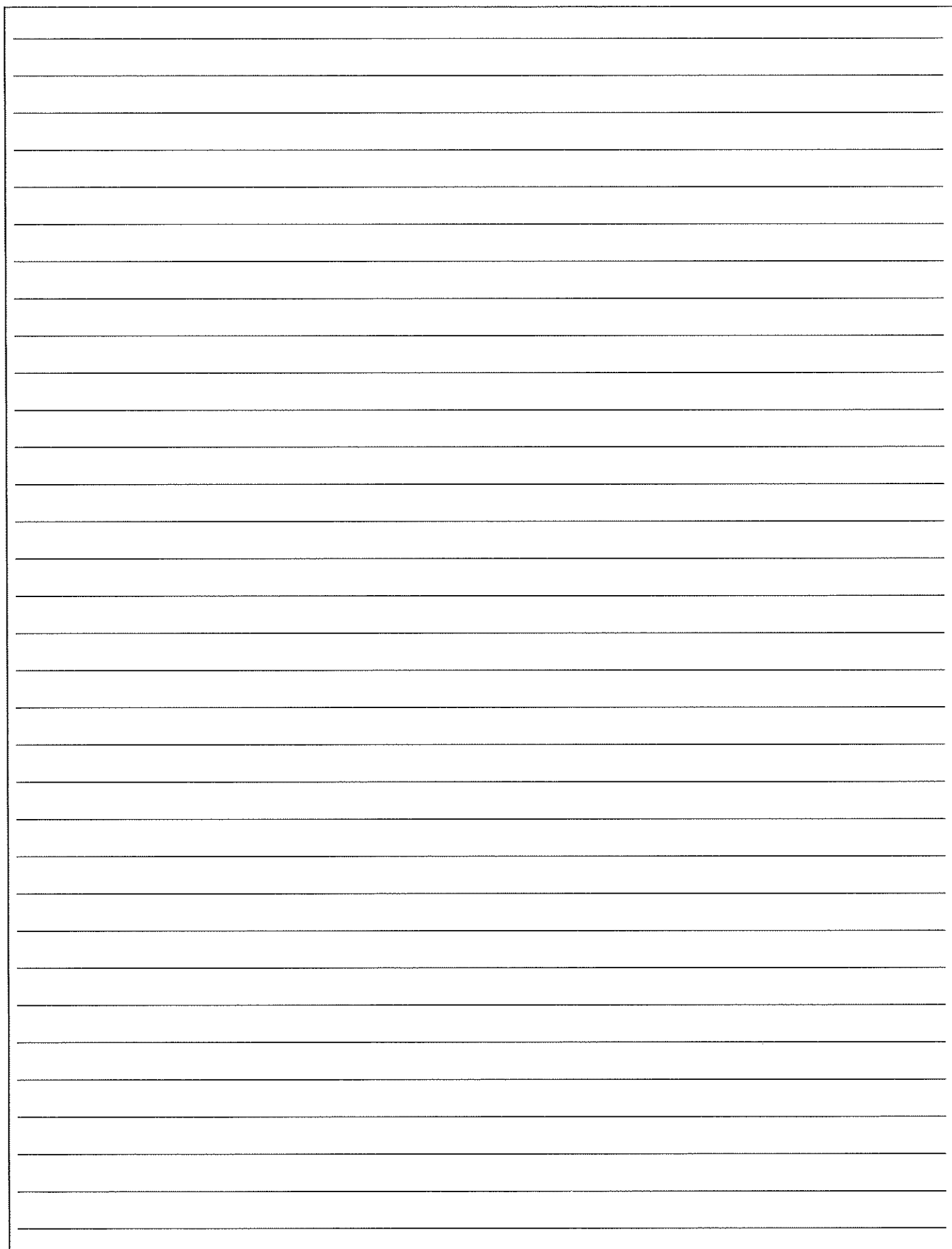
TOPIC #2 :

REMINDERS:

- ☐ **Aim for 300-400 words:** Focus on a moment of genuine insights rather than just fluff.
- ☐ **Outside connections:** include a cultural artifact (song, movie, poem) in at least two entries this summer.
- ☐ **The Writer's Craft:** Identify one rhetorical tool (metaphor, aphorism, paradox) in every entry and explain its impact on you.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slightly textured appearance, and there are some very faint, small dark spots or specks scattered across the surface, likely due to the scanning process or the age of the paper. The edges of the paper are slightly irregular.



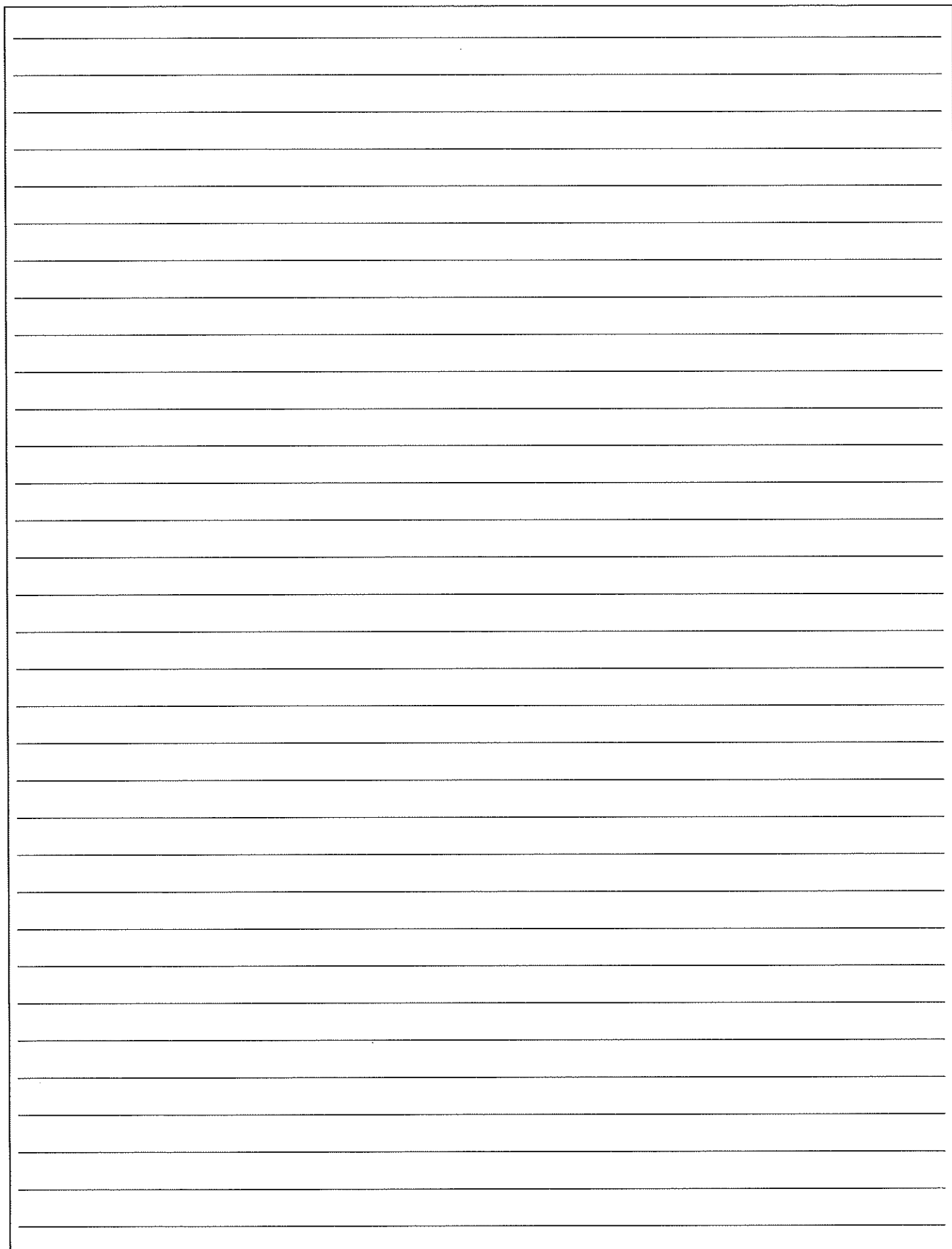


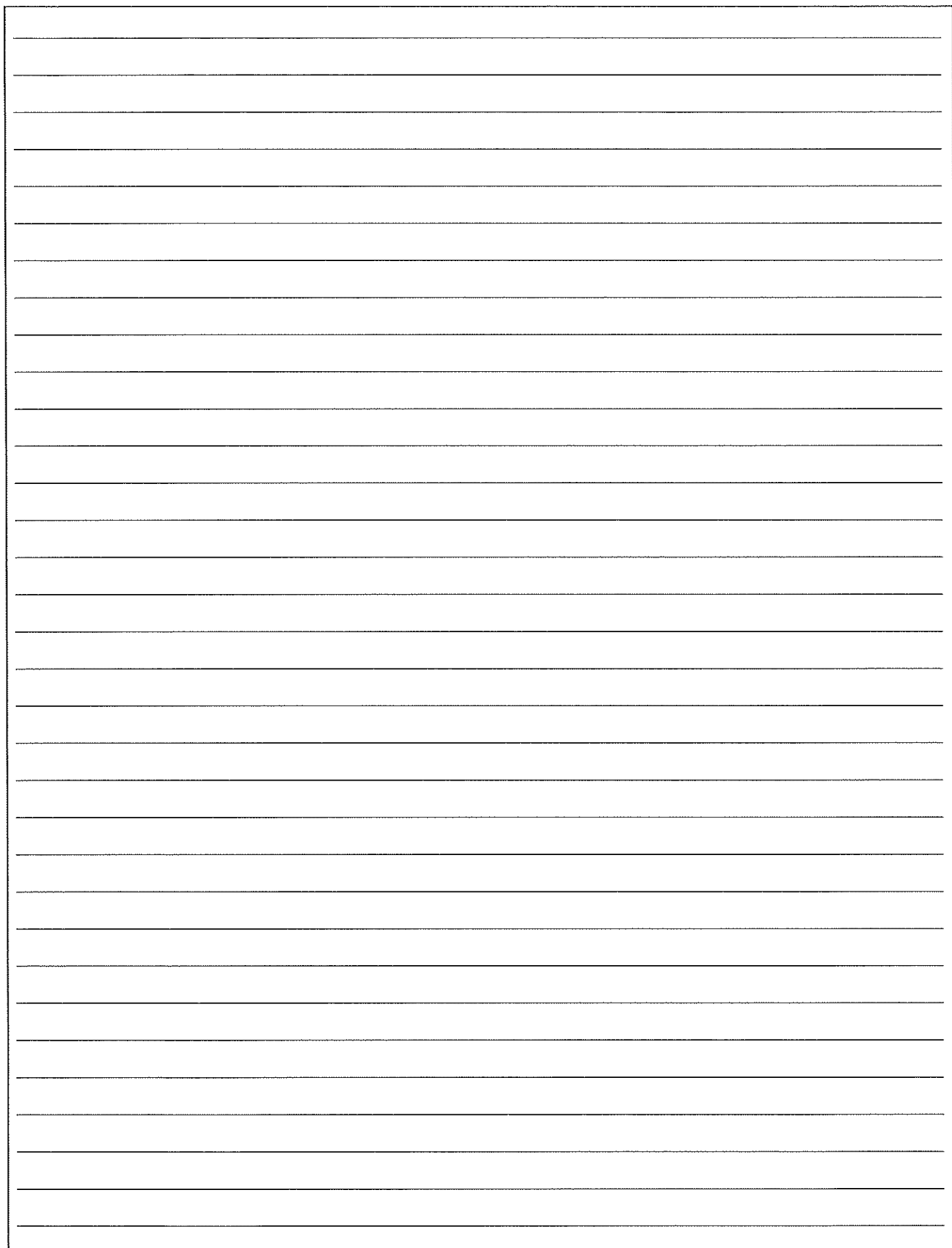
Tuesdays with Morrie

TOPIC #3 :

REMINDERS:

- ☐ **Aim for 300-400 words:** Focus on a moment of genuine insights rather than just fluff.
- ☐ **Outside connections:** include a cultural artifact (song, movie, poem) in at least two entries this summer.
- ☐ **The Writer's Craft:** Identify one rhetorical tool (metaphor, aphorism, paradox) in every entry and explain its impact on you.





Name _____

Class _____

Crying in H Mart

Michelle Zauner

About this Text

Michelle Zauner is a Grammy-nominated Korean-American musician and the author of the New York Times best-selling memoir *Crying in H Mart*. **As you read, take notes on the significance of Korean food for the author.**

Vocabulary

You will see the following words in this text:

Embody (em-**bod**-ee)

Fusion (**fyoo**-zhuhn)

Pseudo (**soo**-doh)

INDEPENDENT READING

[1] Ever since my mom died, I cry in H Mart. For those of you who don't know, H Mart is a supermarket chain that specializes in Asian food. The "H" stands for *han ah reum*, a Korean phrase that roughly translates to "one arm full of groceries." H Mart is where parachute kids¹ go to get the exact brand of instant noodles that reminds them of home. It's where Korean families buy rice cakes to make *tteokguk*, a beef soup that brings in the new year. It's the only place where you can find a giant vat of peeled garlic, because it's the only place that truly understands how much garlic you'll need for the kind of food your people eat. H Mart is freedom from the single-aisle "ethnic" section in regular grocery stores. They don't prop Goya beans next to bottles of sriracha here. Instead, you'll likely find me crying by the *banchan* refrigerators, remembering the taste of my mom's soy-sauce eggs and cold radish soup. Or in the freezer section, holding a stack of dumpling skins, thinking of all the hours that Mom and I spent at the kitchen table folding minced pork and chives into the thin dough. Sobbing near the dry goods, asking myself, "Am I even Korean anymore if there's no one left in my life to call and ask which brand of seaweed we used to buy?"

[2] When I was growing up, with a Caucasian father and a Korean mother, my mom was my access point for our Korean heritage. While she never actually taught me how to cook (Korean people tend to disavow measurements and supply only cryptic² instructions along the lines of "add sesame oil until it tastes like Mom's"), she did raise me with a distinctly Korean appetite. This meant an over-the-top appreciation of good food and emotional eating. We were particular about everything: kimchi had to be perfectly sour, *samgyupsal* perfectly crisped; hot food had to be served piping hot or it might as well be inedible. The concept of prepping meals for the week was a ludicrous³ affront⁴ to our lifestyle. We

NOTES

Take notes on the significance of Korean food for the author.

¹ Refers to children or teens from East Asian countries who are sent to the United States for school while their parents remain at home.

² **Cryptic** (*adjective*): mysterious or difficult to understand

³ **Ludicrous** (*adjective*): silly or unreasonable to the point of laughter

⁴ **Affront** (*noun*): a purposeful insult, often in person

chased our cravings daily. If we wanted the same kimchi stew for three weeks straight, we relished it until a new craving emerged. We ate in accordance with the seasons and holidays. On my birthday, she'd make seaweed soup: a traditional dish for celebrating one's mother that is also what women typically eat after giving birth. When spring arrived and the weather turned, we'd bring our camp stove outdoors and fry up strips of fresh pork belly on the deck. In many ways, food was how my mother expressed her love. No matter how critical or cruel she seemed — constantly pushing me to be what she felt was the best version of myself — I could always feel her affection radiating from the lunches she packed and the meals she prepared for me just the way I liked them.

[3] I can hardly speak Korean, but in H Mart I feel like I'm fluent. I fondle the produce and say the words aloud — *chamoe* melon, *danmuji*. I fill my shopping cart with every snack that has glossy packaging decorated with a familiar cartoon. I think about the time Mom showed me how to fold the little plastic card that came inside bags of Jolly Pong, how to use it as a spoon to shovel caramel puff rice into my mouth, and how it inevitably fell down my shirt and spread all over the car. I remember the snacks Mom told me she ate when she was a kid and how I tried to imagine her at my age. I wanted to like all the things she did, to embody her completely.

[4] My grief comes in waves and is usually triggered by something arbitrary.⁵ I can tell you with a straight face what it was like watching my mom's hair fall out in the bathtub, or about the five weeks I spent sleeping in hospitals, but catch me at H Mart when some kid runs up double-fisting plastic sleeves of *ppeong-twigi* and I'll just lose it. Those little rice-cake Frisbees were my childhood: a happier time, when Mom was there and we'd crunch away on the Styrofoam-like disks after school. Eating them was like splitting a packing peanut that dissolved like sugar on your tongue.

[5] I'll cry when I see a Korean grandmother eating seafood noodles in the food court, discarding shrimp heads and mussel shells onto the lid of her daughter's tin rice bowl. Her gray hair frizzy, cheekbones protruding like the tops of two peaches, tattooed eyebrows rusting as the ink fades out. I'll wonder what my Mom would have looked like in her seventies — if she would have the same perm that every Korean grandma gets as though it were a part of our race's evolution. I'll imagine our arms linked, her tiny frame leaning against mine as we take the escalator up to the food court. The two of us in all black, "New York style," she'd say, her image of New York still rooted in the era of "Breakfast at Tiffany's."⁶ She would carry the quilted-leather Chanel purse that she'd wanted her whole life, instead of the fake ones that she bought on the back streets of Itaewon. Her hands and face would be slightly sticky from QVC anti-aging creams. She'd wear some strange, ultra-high-top sneaker wedges that I'd disagree with. "Michelle, in Korea, every celebrity wears this one." She'd pluck the lint off my coat and pick on me — how my shoulders slumped, how I needed new shoes, how I should really start using that argan-oil treatment she bought me — but we'd be together.

[6] If I'm being honest, there's a lot of anger. I'm angry at this old Korean woman I don't know, that she gets to live and my mother does not, like somehow this stranger's survival is at all related to my loss. Why is she here slurping up spicy *jjamppong* noodles and my mom isn't? Other people must feel this way. Life is unfair, and sometimes it helps to irrationally⁷ blame someone for it.

⁵ **Arbitrary** (*adjective*) : coming about unpredictably or by chance; random

⁶ A 1961 American film about a fashionable and popular woman in New York City who falls in love with a writer.

⁷ **Irrationally** (*adjective*) : done without using reason or clear thinking; unreasonably

[7] Sometimes my grief feels as though I've been left alone in a room with no doors. Every time I remember that my mother is dead, it feels like I'm colliding into a wall that won't give. There's no escape, just a hard wall that I keep ramming into over and over, a reminder of the immutable reality that I will never see her again.

[8] H Marts are usually situated far from a city's center. When I lived in Brooklyn, it was an hour-long drive in traffic to Flushing. In Philly, it's about the same to Upper Darby or Elkins Park. H Marts often serve as the center of larger complexes of Asian storefronts, and are surrounded by Asian restaurants that are always better than the ones found closer to town. We're talking Korean restaurants that pack the table so full of *banchan* side dishes that you're forced to play a never-ending game of horizontal Jenga with twenty-plus plates of tiny anchovies, stuffed cucumbers, and pickled everything. This isn't like the sad Asian-fusion joint by your work, where they serve bell peppers in their bibimbap and give you the stink eye when you ask for another round of wilted bean sprouts; this is the real deal.

[9] You'll know that you're headed the right way because there will be signs to mark your path. As you go farther into your pilgrimage,⁸ the lettering on the awnings slowly begins to turn into symbols that you may or may not be able to read. This is when my elementary-grade Korean skills are put to the test — how fast can I sound out the vowels while in traffic? I spent more than ten years going to *hangul hakkyo*⁹ every Friday, and this is all I have to show for it: I can read the signs for churches in different Asian texts, for an optometrist's office, a bank. A couple more blocks in, and we're in the heart of it. Suddenly, it's like another country. Everyone is Asian, a swarm of different dialects¹⁰ crisscross like invisible telephone wires, the only English words are "HOT POT" and "LIQUORS," and they're all buried beneath a handful of different characters, with an anime tiger or hot dog dancing next to them.

[10] Inside an H Mart complex, there will be some kind of food court, an appliance shop, and a pharmacy. Usually, there's a beauty counter where you can buy Korean makeup and skin-care products with snail mucin or caviar oil, or a face mask that proudly and vaguely advertises "PLACENTA."¹¹ (Whose placenta? Who knows?) There will usually be a *pseudo*-French bakery with weak coffee, bubble tea, and an array of glowing pastries that always look much better than they taste.

[11] Lately, my local H Mart is in Cheltenham, a town northeast of Philadelphia. My routine is to drive in for lunch on the weekends, stock up on groceries for the week, and cook something for dinner with whatever fresh bounty inspired me. The H Mart in Cheltenham has two stories; the grocery is on the first floor and the food court is above it. Upstairs, there is an array of stalls for different kinds of food. One is dedicated to sushi, one is strictly Chinese, and another is for traditional Korean *jjigaes*, bubbling soups served in traditional stone pots called *dolsots*, which act as mini cauldrons to insure that your soup is still bubbling a good ten minutes past arrival. There's a stall for Korean street food, which serves up Korean ramen (which basically just means Shin Cup Noodles with an egg cracked in them); giant steamed dumplings full of pork and glass noodles, housed in a thick, cake-like dough; and *tteokbokki*, chewy, bite-sized cylindrical rice cakes boiled in a stock with fishcakes, red pepper, and *gochujang*, a sweet-and-spicy paste that's one of the three mother sauces used in pretty much all Korean dishes. Last, there's my personal favorite: Korean-Chinese **fusion**, which serves *tangsuyuk*

⁸ **Pilgrimage** (*adjective*) : a special journey to a foreign place that is considered special, often for spiritual reasons

⁹ *Hangul hakkyo* is a type of Korean language school.

¹⁰ **Dialects** (*adjective*) : a form of a language that people speak in specific parts of a country, often with its own unique words or pronunciations

¹¹ In pregnant mammals, an organ that nourishes the fetus and keeps it healthy. The mother's body expels the placenta after giving birth.

— a glossy, sweet-and-sour orange pork — seafood noodle soup, fried rice, and *jajangmyeon*.

[12] The food court is the perfect place to people-watch while sucking down salty, fatty, black-bean noodles. I think about my family who lived in Korea, before most of them died, and how Korean-Chinese food was always the first thing we'd eat when my mom and I arrived in Seoul¹² after a fourteen-hour flight from America. Twenty minutes after my aunt would phone in our order, the apartment ringer would buzz "Für Elise" in MIDI, and up would come a helmeted man, fresh off his motorcycle, with a giant steel box. He'd slide open the metal door and deliver heaping bowls of noodles and deep-fried battered pork with its rich sauce on the side. The Saran wrap on top would be concave¹³ and sweating. We'd peel it off and dribble black, chunky goodness all over the noodles and pour the shiny, sticky, translucent orange sauce over the pork. We'd sit cross-legged on the cool marble floor, slurping and reaching over one another. My aunts and mom and grandmother would jabber on in Korean, and I would eat and listen, unable to comprehend, bothering my mom every so often to translate.

[13] I wonder how many people at H Mart miss their families. How many are thinking of them as they bring their trays back from the different stalls. Whether they're eating to feel connected, to celebrate these people through food. Which ones weren't able to fly back home this year, or for the past ten years? Which ones are like me, missing the people who are gone from their lives forever?

[14] At one table is a group of young Chinese students, alone without family at schools in America. They have banded together to take the bus forty-five minutes outside the city, into the suburbs of a foreign country, for soup dumplings. At another table, there are three generations of Korean women eating three types of stews: daughter, mom, and grandmother dipping their spoons into each other's *dolsots*, reaching over one another's trays, arms in one another's faces, pinching at their different *banchan* with chopsticks. None of them pay any notice or give second thought to the concept of personal space.

[15] There is a young white man and his family. They giggle together as they butcher the pronunciation of the menu. The son explains to his parents the different dishes they've ordered. Maybe he was stationed in Seoul for military service or taught English abroad. Maybe he's the only one in his family with a passport. Maybe this will be the moment his family decides it's time to travel and discover these things themselves.

[16] There is an Asian guy blowing his girlfriend's mind, introducing her to a whole new world of flavors and textures. He shows her how to eat *mul naengmyeon*, a cold noodle soup that tastes better if you add vinegar and hot mustard first. He tells her about how his parents came to this country, how he'd watch his mom make this dish. When she made it, she didn't add zucchini; she subbed radishes instead. An old man hobbles over to a neighboring table to order the chicken-and-ginseng porridge that he probably eats here every day. Bells go off for people to collect their orders. Women in visors work behind the counters without stopping.

[17] It's a beautiful, holy place. A cafeteria full of people from all over the world who have been displaced in a foreign country, each with a different history. Where did they come from and how far did they travel? Why are they all here? To find the *galangal* no American supermarket stocks to make the Indonesian curry that

¹² Seoul is the capital and largest city of South Korea.

¹³ **Concave** (*adjective*) : curving in

their father loves? To buy the rice cakes to celebrate Jesa¹⁴ and honor the anniversary of their loved one's passing? To satisfy a craving for *tteokbokki* on a rainy day? Were they moved by a memory of some drunken, late-night snack under a *pojangmacha* tent in Incheon?¹⁵

[18] We don't talk about it. There's never so much as a knowing look. We sit here in silence, eating our lunch. But I know we are all here for the same reason. We're all searching for a piece of home, or a piece of ourselves. We look for a taste of it in the food we order and the ingredients we buy. Then we separate. We bring the haul back to our dorm rooms or suburban kitchens, and we re-create a dish that couldn't be made without that journey, because what we're looking for isn't accessible at a Trader Joe's.¹⁶ H Mart is where you can find your people under one odorous roof, where you can have faith that you'll find something you can't find anywhere else.

[19] In the H Mart food court, I find myself again, searching for the first chapter of the story that I want to tell about my mother. I am sitting next to a Korean mother and her son, who have unknowingly taken the table next to ol' waterworks over here. The kid dutifully gets their silverware from the counter and places it on paper napkins for the both of them. He's eating fried rice and his mom has *seolleongtang*, ox-bone soup. He must be in his early twenties, but his mother is still instructing him on how to eat, just like my mom used to. "Dip the onion in the paste." "Don't add too much *gochujang* or it'll be too salty." "Why aren't you eating the mung beans?" Some days, the constant nagging would annoy me. Woman, let me eat in peace! But, most days, I knew it was the ultimate display of a Korean woman's tenderness, and I cherished that love.

[20] The boy's mom places pieces of beef from her spoon onto his spoon. He is quiet and looks tired and doesn't talk to her much. I want to tell him how much I miss my mother. How he should be kind to his mom, remember that life is fragile and she could be gone at any moment. Tell her to go to the doctor and make sure there isn't a small tumor growing inside her.

[21] Within the past five years, I lost both my aunt and mother to cancer. So, when I go to H Mart, I'm not just on the hunt for cuttlefish and three bunches of scallions for a buck; I'm searching for their memory. I'm collecting the evidence that the Korean half of my identity didn't die when they did. In moments like this, H Mart is the bridge that guides me away from the memories that haunt me, of chemo head and skeletal bodies and logging milligrams of hydrocodone. It reminds me of who they were before: beautiful and full of life, wiggling Chang Gu honey-cracker rings on all ten of their fingers, showing me how to suck a Korean grape from its skin and spit out the seeds.

"Crying in H Mart" by Michelle Zauner. From The New Yorker. August 20, 2018.

¹⁴ A Korean ceremony memorializing the ancestors of the participants, often held on the anniversary of the ancestry's death

¹⁵ The third largest city in South Korea

¹⁶ An American chain of grocery stores

Close Reading

Directions: Reread or refer back to the section(s) indicated. Then answer the questions with your group.



START at PARAGRAPH 1

STOP at the end of PARAGRAPH 2

1. Explain the dual nature of Zauner's loss. [RL.3]

START at Paragraph 4

STOP at the end of Paragraph 7

2. How does Zauner help the reader understand her grief? [RL.3]

START at PARAGRAPH 8

STOP at the end of PARAGRAPH 9

3. What does the use of the word “pilgrimage” reveal about Zauner’s motivations for visiting H Mart? **[RL.4]**

START at PARAGRAPH 12

STOP at the end of PARAGRAPH 12

4. What central ideas does Zauner develop through the scene set in Seoul? **[RL.3]**

START at PARAGRAPH 17

STOP at the end of PARAGRAPH 18

5. Why does Zauner call H Mart a “beautiful, holy place”? [RL.3]

START at PARAGRAPH 21

STOP at the end of PARAGRAPH 21

6. How do the descriptions of the author's mother and aunt affect the reader? [RL.4]

Name _____

Class _____

Chameleon

Trevor Noah

About this Text

Trevor Noah is a South African comedian and host of *The Daily Show*. "Chameleon" is a chapter from his best-selling memoir, *Born a Crime*, about his experience growing up as a mixed-race child in South Africa. **As you read, take notes on the author's developing understanding of his identity.**

Vocabulary

You will see the following word in this text:

Endear (en-deer)

INDEPENDENT READING

NOTES

[1] One afternoon I was playing with my cousins. I was a doctor and they were my patients. I was operating on my cousin Bulelwa's ear with a set of matches when I accidentally perforated her eardrum. All hell broke loose. My grandmother came running in from the kitchen. "Kwenzeka ntoni?!" "What's happening?!" There was blood coming out of my cousin's head. We were all crying. My grandmother patched up Bulelwa's ear and made sure to stop the bleeding. But we kept crying. Because clearly we'd done something we were not supposed to do, and we knew we were going to be punished. My grandmother finished up with Bulelwa's ear and whipped out a belt and she beat the s — out of Bulelwa. Then she beat the s — out of Mlungisi, too. She didn't touch me.

[2] Later that night my mother came home from work. She found my cousin with a bandage over her ear and my gran crying at the kitchen table.

[3] "What's going on?" my mom said.

[4] "Oh, Nombuyiselo," she said. "Trevor is so naughty. He's the naughtiest child I've ever come across in my life."

[5] "Then you should hit him."

[6] "I can't hit him."

[7] "Why not?"

[8] "Because I don't know how to hit a white child," she said. "A black child, I understand. A black child, you hit them and they stay black. Trevor, when you hit him he turns blue and green and yellow and red. I've never seen those colors before. I'm scared I'm going to break him. I don't want to kill a white person. I'm so afraid. I'm not going to touch him." And she never did.

[9] My grandmother treated me like I was white. My grandfather did, too, only he was even more extreme. He called me "Mastah." In the car, he insisted on driving me as if he were my chauffeur. "Mastah must always sit in the backseat." I never

Make notes about the author's developing understanding of his identity.

challenged him on it. What was I going to say? "I believe your perception of race is flawed, Grandfather." No. I was five. I sat in the back.

[10] There were so many perks to being "white" in a black family, I can't even front. I was having a great time. My own family basically did what the American justice system does: I was given more lenient treatment than the black kids. Misbehavior that my cousins would have been punished for, I was given a warning and let off. And I was way naughtier than either of my cousins. It wasn't even close. If something got broken or if someone was stealing granny's cookies, it was me. I was trouble.

[11] My mom was the only force I truly feared. She believed if you spare the rod, you spoil the child. But everyone else said, "No, he's different," and they gave me a pass. Growing up the way I did, I learned how easy it is for white people to get comfortable with a system that awards them all the perks. I knew my cousins were getting beaten for things that I'd done, but I wasn't interested in changing my grandmother's perspective, because that would mean I'd get beaten, too. Why would I do that? So that I'd feel better? Being beaten didn't make me feel better. I had a choice. I could champion racial justice in our home, or I could enjoy granny's cookies. I went with the cookies.

[12] At that point I didn't think of the special treatment as having to do with color. I thought of it as having to do with Trevor. It wasn't, "Trevor doesn't get beaten because Trevor is white." It was, "Trevor doesn't get beaten because Trevor is Trevor." Trevor can't go outside. Trevor can't walk without supervision. It's because I'm me; that's why this is happening. I had no other points of reference. There were no other mixed kids around so that I could say, "Oh, this happens to us."

[13] Nearly one million people lived in Soweto.¹ Ninety-nine point nine percent of them were black — and then there was me. I was famous in my neighborhood just because of the color of my skin. I was so unique people would give directions using me as a landmark. "The house on Makhalima Street. At the corner you'll see a light-skinned boy. Take a right there."

[14] Whenever the kids in the street saw me they'd yell, "*Indoda yomlungu!*" "The white man!" Some of them would run away. Others would call out to their parents to come look. Others would run up and try to touch me to see if I was real. It was pandemonium.² What I didn't understand at the time was that the other kids genuinely had no clue what a white person was. Black kids in the township didn't leave the township. Few people had televisions. They'd seen the white police roll through, but they'd never dealt with a white person face-to-face, ever.

[15] I'd go to funerals and I'd walk in and the bereaved would look up and see me and they'd stop crying. They'd start whispering. Then they'd wave and say, "Oh!" like they were more shocked by me walking in than by the death of their loved ones. I think people felt like the dead person was more important because a white person had come to the funeral.

[16] After a funeral, the mourners all go to the house of the surviving family to eat. A hundred people might show up, and you've got to feed them. Usually you get a cow and slaughter it and your neighbors come over and help you cook. Neighbors and acquaintances eat outside in the yard and in the street, and the family eats indoors. Every funeral I ever went to, I ate indoors. It didn't matter if we knew the deceased or not. The family would see me and invite me in. "*Awunakuvumela umntana womlungu ame ngaphandle. Yiza naye apha*"

¹ A predominantly Black township, or neighborhood, in Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city

² **Pandemonium** (*noun*): a noisy, confusing, sometimes exciting situation; chaos

ngaphakathi," they'd say. "You can't let the white child stand outside. Bring him in here."

[17] As a kid I understood that people were different colors, but in my head white and black and brown were like types of chocolate. Dad was the white chocolate, mom was the dark chocolate, and I was the milk chocolate. But we were all just chocolate. I didn't know any of it had anything to do with "race." I didn't know what race was. My mother never referred to my dad as white or to me as mixed. So when the other kids in Soweto called me "white," even though I was light brown, I just thought they had their colors mixed up, like they hadn't learned them properly. "Ah, yes, my friend. You've confused aqua with turquoise. I can see how you made that mistake. You're not the first."

[18] I soon learned that the quickest way to bridge the race gap was through language. Soweto was a melting pot: families from different tribes and homelands. Most kids in the township spoke only their home language, but I learned several languages because I grew up in a house where there was no option but to learn them. My mom made sure English was the first language I spoke. If you're black in South Africa, speaking English is the one thing that can give you a leg up. English is the language of money. English comprehension is equated with intelligence. If you're looking for a job, English is the difference between getting the job or staying unemployed. If you're standing in the dock, English is the difference between getting off with a fine or going to prison.

[19] After English, Xhosa³ was what we spoke around the house. When my mother was angry she'd fall back on her home language. As a naughty child, I was well versed in Xhosa threats. They were the first phrases I picked up, mostly for my own safety — phrases like "*Ndiza kubetha entloko*." "I'll knock you upside the head." Or "*Sidenge ndini somntwana*." "You idiot of a child." It's a very passionate language. Outside of that, my mother picked up different languages here and there. She learned Zulu⁴ because it's similar to Xhosa. She spoke German because of my father. She spoke Afrikaans⁵ because it is useful to know the language of your oppressor. Sotho she learned in the streets.

[20] Living with my mom, I saw how she used language to cross boundaries, handle situations, navigate the world. We were in a shop once, and the shopkeeper, right in front of us, turned to his security guard and said, in Afrikaans, "*Volg daai swartes, netnou steel hulle iets*." "Follow those blacks in case they steal something."

[21] My mother turned around and said, in beautiful, fluent Afrikaans, "*Hoekom volg jy nie daai swartes sodat jy hulle kan help kry waarna hulle soek nie?*" "Why don't you follow these blacks so you can help them find what they're looking for?"

[22] "*Ag, jammer!*" he said, apologizing in Afrikaans. Then — and this was the funny thing — he didn't apologize for being racist; he merely apologized for aiming his racism at us. "Oh, I'm so sorry," he said. "I thought you were like the other blacks. You know how they love to steal."

[23] I learned to use language like my mother did. I would simulcast — give you the program in your own tongue. I'd get suspicious looks from people just walking down the street. "Where are you from?" they'd ask. I'd reply in whatever language they'd addressed me in, using the same accent that they used. There would be a brief moment of confusion, and then the suspicious look would

³ The language spoken by the second largest ethnic group in South Africa

⁴ The language spoken by the largest ethnic group in South Africa

⁵ A language derived from Dutch which developed during colonization and is still spoken in South Africa

disappear. "Oh, okay. I thought you were a stranger. We're good then."

[24] It became a tool that served me my whole life. One day as a young man I was walking down the street, and a group of Zulu guys was walking behind me, closing in on me, and I could hear them talking to one another about how they were going to mug me. *"Asibambe le autie yomlungu. Phume ngapha mina ngizoghamuka ngemuva kwakhe."* "Let's get this white guy. You go to his left, and I'll come up behind him." I didn't know what to do. I couldn't run, so I just spun around real quick and said, *"Kodwa bafwethu yingani singavele sibambe umuntu inkunzi? Asenzeni. Mina ngikulindele."* "Yo, guys, why don't we just mug someone together? I'm ready. Let's do it."

[25] They looked shocked for a moment, and then they started laughing. "Oh, sorry, dude. We thought you were something else. We weren't trying to take anything from you. We were trying to steal from white people. Have a good day, man." They were ready to do me violent harm, until they felt we were part of the same tribe, and then we were cool. That, and so many other smaller incidents in my life, made me realize that language, even more than color, defines who you are to people.

[26] I became a chameleon. My color didn't change, but I could change your perception of my color. If you spoke to me in Zulu, I replied to you in Zulu. If you spoke to me in Tswana, I replied to you in Tswana. Maybe I didn't look like you, but if I spoke like you, I was you.

[27] As apartheid⁶ was coming to an end, South Africa's elite private schools started accepting children of all colors. My mother's company offered bursaries, scholarships, for underprivileged families, and she managed to get me into Maryvale College, an expensive private Catholic school. Classes taught by nuns. Mass on Fridays. The whole bit. I started preschool there when I was three, primary school when I was five.

[28] In my class we had all kinds of kids. Black kids, white kids, Indian kids, colored kids. Most of the white kids were pretty well off. Every child of color pretty much wasn't. But because of scholarships we all sat at the same table. We wore the same maroon blazers, the same gray slacks and skirts. We had the same books. We had the same teachers. There was no racial separation. Every clique was racially mixed.

[29] Kids still got teased and bullied, but it was over usual kid stuff: being fat or being skinny, being tall or being short, being smart or being dumb. I don't remember anybody being teased about their race. I didn't learn to put limits on what I was supposed to like or not like. I had a wide berth to explore myself. I had crushes on white girls. I had crushes on black girls. Nobody asked me what I was. I was Trevor.

[30] It was a wonderful experience to have, but the downside was that it sheltered me from reality. Maryvale was an oasis that kept me from the truth, a comfortable place where I could avoid making a tough decision. But the real world doesn't go away. Racism exists. People are getting hurt, and just because it's not happening to you doesn't mean it's not happening. And at some point, you have to choose. Black or white. Pick a side. You can try to hide from it. You can say, "Oh, I don't pick sides," but at some point life will force you to pick a side.

[31] At the end of grade six I left Maryvale to go to H. A. Jack Primary, a

⁶ From 1948-1994, the South African system of legal segregation based on race

government school. I had to take an aptitude test before I started, and, based on the results of the test, the school counselor told me, "You're going to be in the smart classes, the A classes." I showed up for the first day of school and went to my classroom. Of the thirty or so kids in my class, almost all of them were white. There was one Indian kid, maybe one or two black kids, and me.

[32] Then recess came. We went out on the playground, and black kids were *everywhere*. It was an ocean of black, like someone had opened a tap and all the black had come pouring out. I was like, *Where were they all hiding?* The white kids I'd met that morning, they went in one direction, the black kids went in another direction, and I was left standing in the middle, totally confused. Were we going to meet up later on? I did not understand what was happening.

[33] I was eleven years old, and it was like I was seeing my country for the first time. In the townships you don't see segregation, because everyone is black. In the white world, any time my mother took me to a white church, we were the only black people there, and my mom didn't separate herself from anyone. She didn't care. She'd go right up and sit with the white people. And at Maryvale, the kids were mixed up and hanging out together. Before that day, I had never seen people being together and yet not together, occupying the same space yet choosing not to associate with each other in any way. In an instant I could see, I could feel, how the boundaries were drawn. Groups moved in color patterns across the yard, up the stairs, down the hall. It was insane. I looked over at the white kids I'd met that morning. Ten minutes earlier I'd thought I was at a school where they were a majority. Now I realized how few of them there actually were compared to everyone else.

[34] I stood there awkwardly by myself in this no-man's-land in the middle of the playground. Luckily, I was rescued by the Indian kid from my class, a guy named Theesan Pillay. Theesan was one of the few Indian kids in school, so he'd noticed me, another obvious outsider, right away. He ran over to introduce himself. "Hello, fellow anomaly! You're in my class. Who are you? What's your story?" We started talking and hit it off. He took me under his wing, the Artful Dodger to my bewildered Oliver.⁷

[35] Through our conversation it came up that I spoke several African languages, and Theesan thought a colored kid speaking black languages was the most amazing trick. He brought me over to a group of black kids. "Say something," he told them, "and he'll show you he understands you." One kid said something in Zulu, and I replied to him in Zulu. Everyone cheered. Another kid said something in Xhosa, and I replied to him in Xhosa. Everyone cheered. For the rest of recess Theesan took me around to different black kids on the playground. "Show them your trick. Do your language thing."

[36] The black kids were fascinated. In South Africa back then, it wasn't common to find a white person or a colored person who spoke African languages; during apartheid white people were always taught that those languages were beneath them. So the fact that I did speak African languages immediately **endeared** me to the black kids.

[37] "How come you speak our languages?" they asked.

[38] "Because I'm black," I said, "like you."

[39] "You're not black."

[40] "Yes, I am."

⁷ In the Charles Dickens novel *Oliver Twist*, Artful Dodger is a street-smart boy who introduces the protagonist, Oliver, to his gang of fellow thieves.

[41] "No, you're not. Have you not seen yourself?"

[42] They were confused at first. Because of my color, they thought I was a colored person, but speaking the same languages meant that I belonged to their tribe. It just took them a moment to figure it out. It took me a moment, too.

[43] At some point I turned to one of them and said, "Hey, how come I don't see you guys in any of my classes?" It turned out they were in the B classes, which also happened to be the black classes. That same afternoon, I went back to the A classes, and by the end of the day I realized that they weren't for me. Suddenly, I knew who my people were, and I wanted to be with them. I went to see the school counselor.

[44] "I'd like to switch over," I told her. "I'd like to go to the B classes."

[45] She was confused. "Oh, no," she said. "I don't think you want to do that."

[46] "Why not?"

[47] "Because those kids are... you know."

[48] "No, I don't know. What do you mean?"

[49] "Look," she said, "you're a smart kid. You don't want to be in that class."

[50] "But aren't the classes the same? English is English. Math is math."

[51] "Yeah, but that class is... those kids are gonna hold you back. You want to be in the smart class."

[52] "But surely there must be some smart kids in the B class."

[53] "No, there aren't."

[54] "But all my friends are there."

[55] "You don't want to be friends with those kids."

[56] "Yes, I do."

[57] We went back and forth. Finally she gave me a stern warning.

[58] "You do realize the effect this will have on your future? You do understand what you're giving up? This will impact the opportunities you'll have open to you for the rest of your life."

[59] "I'll take that chance."

[60] I moved to the B classes with the black kids. I decided I'd rather be held back with people I liked than move ahead with people I didn't know.

[61] Being at H. A. Jack made me realize I was black. Before that recess I'd never had to choose, but when I was forced to choose, I chose black. The world saw me as colored, but I didn't spend my life looking at myself. I spent my life looking at other people. I saw myself as the people around me, and the people around me were black. My cousins are black, my mom is black, my gran is black. I grew up black. Because I had a white father, because I'd been in white Sunday school, I got along with the white kids, but I didn't belong with the white kids. I wasn't a part of their tribe. But the black kids embraced me. "Come along," they said. "You're rolling with us." With the black kids, I wasn't constantly trying to be. With the black kids, I just was.

"Chameleon" from BORN A CRIME: STORIES FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDHOOD by Trevor Noah, copyright © 2016 by Trevor Noah. Used by permission of Spiegel & Grau, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Close Reading

Directions: Reread or refer back to the section(s) indicated. Then answer the questions with your group.



START at PARAGRAPH 1

STOP at the end of PARAGRAPH 8

1. Why does Noah choose to open the memoir with the scene in which he punctures his cousin's eardrum? [RL.5]

START at Paragraph 13

STOP at the end of Paragraph 16

2. How do Noah's descriptions of setting help develop ideas about his identity? [RL.3, RL.4]

3. Noah describes various people's reactions to his appearance. What effect do these descriptions have on this section's tone? **[RL.4]**

START at PARAGRAPH 20

STOP at the end of PARAGRAPH 26

4. Why does Noah describe language as a "tool?" **[RL.4]**

START at PARAGRAPH 30

STOP at the end of PARAGRAPH 33

5. How does the juxtaposition of experiences at Maryvale and H.A. Jack Primary develop Noah's understanding of his identity? **[RL.3]**

START at PARAGRAPH 37

STOP at the end of PARAGRAPH 43

6. What ideas about identity are developed by the conversations between Noah and the Black students in this section? **[RL.2]**

START at PARAGRAPH 44

STOP at the end of PARAGRAPH 61

7. Why does Noah choose to close the memoir with the scene in the school counselor's office? [RL.5]

Name _____ Class _____

The Monster of Kings Island

Christopher Bollen

About this Text

Christopher Bollen is a New York City based author. He has written five novels and several short stories, articles, essays, and interviews. **As you read, take notes on how the author sees himself and others.**

Vocabulary

You will see the following words in this text:

commensurate (*kuh-men-ser-it*)

dubious (*doo-bee-uhs*)

infamy (*in-fuh-mee*)

innate (*ih-neyt*)

ubiquitous (*yoo-bik-wi-tuhs*)

INDEPENDENT READING

NOTES

[1] The monsters of Southern Ohio had long wait lines and strict height requirements. But one behemoth¹ in particular — a roller coaster called the Beast — served as a rite of passage for us kids of Cincinnati. Even before I saw the roller coaster, its **infamy** was scored in my mind by way of the Beast's **ubiquitous** logo: two manacled² claws straddling a railroad track that disappeared into a fiery hellhole.

[2] It was a test of courage and bladder control that made watching a slasher film at a friend's sleepover seem like a walk in the woods. (Full disclosure: At 8, walks in the woods frightened me, as did swimming pools and vans with sliding doors — in fact my childhood could be described as one extended panic attack kept in check by the far worse fear of social ridicule.) Every summer my family packed into our van and drove to our local amusement park, Kings Island. And every summer I was spared the horror of the world's longest wooden roller coaster by being too short to clear Scooby-Doo's outstretched paw in the park's **dubious** measuring system of emotional and physical maturity.

[3] But by the summer of 1984, my body had failed my **innate** survival instincts by growing beyond the 48-inch ride requirement. My older sister, Heather, a Beast veteran with lip-snagging braces, brought along her best friend, Traci. On the drive, I tried to calm myself with memories of **benign** park activities: the rainbow potato-sack slide or the Viking ship. Heather turned to me in the back seat. "I call hitting the Beast first." I appreciated her biannual tightenings at the orthodontist.

Make notes about how the author sees himself and others.

¹ **Behemoth** (*noun*): an extremely large and powerful animal or monster

² **Manacled** (*adjective*): shackled, chained by the hands

[4] "Are you O.K., Christopher?" my father asked as we waited in line at the Beast's entrance. "We can skip it." This might have been the moment I realized that clutching your stomach was an international sign of distress. Heather and Traci rolled their eyes. "That wouldn't be fair to Dad," Heather said. "If you don't go on, he can't either." I watched the line creep forward, filled with wiry young men with Steve Perry haircuts and women embalmed in enough hair spray that even a rocket launcher wouldn't disturb their perms. The prospect of fear was a Midwestern mating ritual.

[5] The rickety, brown monster rose vertiginously³ through the trees. It looked like the Hells Angels⁴ had kidnapped Amish barn builders⁵ and forced them to erect a shrine of suicidal madness. By the time we reached the boarding station and I towered over Scooby, red cars returned with their shellshocked passengers. I felt the impulse to marry Scooby, to begin a life together on the platform where we would never separate. The teenage conductor grunted. "Chris, come on," Heather snapped. I belted myself in, my knees nowhere close to touching the bar that was supposed to lock me in place. I just had time to say, "I don't want to," before the ride rocked forward.

[6] The car ascended on a jittery chain that did the work of teeth-chattering for me, up a 112-foot peak, and all my brain could contemplate was the drop. My father patted my knee. Goodbye, life. Goodbye, third grade. Boy who feared risks topples out of coaster. As we summited the crest, the world froze briefly, peacefully, and then we plunged. I tried to scream but the wind swept it back into my throat. We were falling a million-miles a second into a black tunnel, swooping on a current of metal and wood, and it wasn't just the speed but the ride's jerry-built⁶ epidermis⁷ that seemed to promise total detachment from the track. We banked turns so fast the landscape became a flip book of greenery and cement. As we shot toward another steep descent, I noticed Traci cringing with her eyes closed, Heather with her metal teeth gritted, her mascara watering and my father, a construction worker whom I had never observed more than mildly irritated, screaming with his back fillings on display.

[7] A sense of joy overtook me, that we could all be scared out of our wits together. Maybe we were always frightened of what was coming, had been forever, but only now could express it in shrieks and tears. Fear was like a connective tissue even if our real connective tissue was sustaining whiplash. After all, that's what the Beast offered: not death but four minutes of life strapped in and beyond the tether of its own control.

[8] The train threaded into the station. We climbed out, laughing dizzily, and I felt something **commensurate** to love: I had survived the monster, and all I wanted was to go back and be tossed around again.

"The Monster of Kings Island" by Christopher Bollen. From the New York Times. (c) May 2, 2014 The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. Used under license.

³ Causing vertigo, which is a feeling of being off balance

⁴ An international motorcycle club with a reputation for violent activity

⁵ An American religious community known for their pacifist beliefs

⁶ Poorly made

⁷ The outermost layer of the skin

Close Reading

Directions: Reread or refer back to the section(s) indicated. Then answer the questions with your group.



START at Paragraph 2

STOP at the end of Paragraph 4

1. What ideas about fear do these paragraphs develop? **[RL.2]**

2. How does Bollen develop a humorous tone in this section? **[RL.4]**

START at Paragraph 6

STOP at the end of Paragraph 7

3. How does the author support the realization that “fear was like a connective tissue”? [RL.2, RL.3]

Student-Led Discussion

Directions: Discuss the questions with a partner. Record notes on both of your answers. Push yourselves to use formal language and evidence from the text. *5 minutes*



1. To Bollen, what did the Beast **embody**? How does that change over the course of the memoir?

2. **CROSS TEXTUAL:** Bollen says "fear was like connective tissue." Consider Zauner's message in "Crying in H Mart" and Noah's message in "Chameleon." What would each author argue is our "connective tissue?" Explain.

3. **CROSS TEXTUAL:** You have read "Crying in H Mart," "Chameleon," and "The Monster of Kings Island." Which memoir's theme resonated most with you? Explain.