

Advanced Composition Study Guide **Mrs. Brady/ Mrs. Renshaw**

***Note: This book is to be read and the study guide completed before class if the student is in either the first OR the second semester class of Advanced Composition.**

Novel: *The Glass Castle*, a memoir by Jeannette Walls

Introduction: Many writing classes begin the year with a personal narrative to establish confidence and familiarity with student writers. These essays usually concern the account of a significant event in the student's life, and many times specify that the essay discuss the student's educational experiences, preferably his development as a writer and reader. An essay about one's own life is a personal narrative, and if the essay is about how the student became a reader/writer, it is a literacy narrative.

Jeannette Walls has written a personal narrative in the form of her published memoir, *The Glass Castle*. Her story is remarkable and full of lessons of resilience and redemption, and as it happens, also of schooling and how Ms. Walls became the writer she is today. Please read the novel completely and finish the following questions with a paragraph or two. These questions are meant to provoke your thoughts on what it means to be a writer, how one can tell a personal story, and also provide some ground work for the IN CLASS writing we will do the first week of our class concerning Walls' novel.

Questions: Most of these questions will require a TWO paragraph answer!

1. Walls uses the first person point of view when she writes *The Glass Castle*. You will probably also use this POV when you write your own personal narratives. Review some of your favorite parts of the novel and choose a paragraph that shows an example of first person point-of-view. Remember the top error in Criterion online writing—redundant word choice, often, using 'I' excessively. Please type the paragraph from the novel, and next, tell in your own words how Walls avoid the problems of using 'I' for every sentence.

2. Rose Mary Walls (Jeanette's mother) seem to have a philosophical saying to answer any of their children's questions or problems. Choose one of your favorite ones and retype it, including the page number on which you found it. In the first paragraph give a brief summary of the incident in which Walls' mother uses the saying. In the second paragraph, think of a saying from your own life. Something your mother, father, brother, sister, grandparent, priest, or teacher has said to you in the past. Write a paragraph summarizing that incident (include the saying!)

Here are some examples to get you thinking:

“Mom likes to encourage self-sufficiency in all living creatures” (64).

“ ‘Don’t’ worry, God understands,’ Mom said. ‘He knows that your father is a cross we must bear’”(105).

3. Walls’ memoir is a collection of vignettes that illustrate her early life as a child. There are no chapter headings, but many of the episodes start with one simple sentence. It seems like Walls is telling the story by starting in the middle of the action. This writing technique is very effective when writing a personal narrative.

“I was on fire” (9).

“I never believed in Santa Claus” (39).

“A lot of our neighbors on North Third Street were kind of weird” (102).

“City life was getting to Dad” (106).

Find the section that starts with one of the above sentences OR another section of your choosing. Retype the introduction sentence and write a brief summary of the incident. In the second paragraph, tell a brief anecdote from your own childhood. Be sure to start the paragraph in the middle of the action with a simple sentence like Walls does.

4. Schools and teachers play a very important part in the early life of Jeannette Walls. In fact, one could make the case that without her experiences there and advice from certain teachers, Ms. Walls would not have become the writer she is today. Review the novel and make a list of schools Walls attended and what she learned from each. Start with Mary S. Black Elementary (58) and end with Barnard College (250).

For the second part of this question, list the schools you have attended. Add an idea, book, or teacher that you remember from each school. Add how this person, lesson, or book has helped you develop into the student you are today. Why is this a memorable part of your education?

5. The book jacket of the novel contains this quote from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, “Charles Dickens’s scenes of poverty and hardship are no more audacious and no more provocative than those in the pages of this stunning memoir.” Find a section in the novel that confirms/proves the above statement that Walls paints a vivid portrait of poverty in her memoir. List the page numbers on which the example exists and write a brief summary of the episode.

Next, think of an incident in your life that would be proof that your family was rich, smart, poor, different, spiritual, or any other adjective that you want to discuss. Write a brief summary of this what this personal incident did to prove to you that your family was _____.

6. Titles are very important whether you are writing a short essay or a novel-length book. A clever or symbolic title is the reader's first hint as to what the writing will be about. What does the title *The Glass Castle* do for the novel? What does it mean metaphorically or symbolically? Why do you think Walls choose this particular title? What other titles could she have chosen from her memoir?

7. Rex Walls had a distinctive outlook on life and very different views on the universe. One famous quote can be found on page 61 and then in the very last paragraph of the novel. Other professional writers often use this technique—mentioning something early in the piece and then returning to it in the end. What effect do you think this has on an essay? Secondly, why did Jeannette Walls choose this comment of her father's to center and end her memoir with.

“Dad told us that zone was known in physics as the boundary between turbulence and order. ‘It’s a place where no rules apply, or at least they haven’t figured ‘em out yet,’ he said” (61).

8. As memoirs have emerged as one of the more popular literary forms, many have come under scrutiny as they have been revealed to be false or have discrepancies. How do we remember the events of our lives? Could you tell a true story of your life without embellishment or selective facts? What constitutes a true story?