



Innovation • Inspiration • Excellence for All

565 Warburton Avenue
Yonkers, New York 10701
Tel. 914 376-8425
Fax 914 376-8475
dsolimene@yonkerspublicschools.org

Dr. Edwin M. Quezada
Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Andrea S. Coddett
Deputy Superintendent

RoseAnne Collins-Judon
Assistant Superintendent
Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Don Solimene
Principal
Riverside High School

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Dear College Link English 111 Students,

Attached is your summer reading assignment. Below you will find guidelines for writing a short paper based on the reading.

- Read the attached poem, "The Story of Our Lives."
- Write a thoughtful *response* to the poem: Did you like/dislike it? Was it confusing? Did it remind you of another story or poem? Why?
- Write a thoughtful *analysis* of the poem: What does the poem mean to you? Why? What *literary elements* is the writer using in the poem? Characterization? Symbolism? Irony?
- What is the **theme**, the main message, of the poem? Explain.

Your paper must be between **2-3 typed pages, double spaced, using Times New Roman 12 point font**, as well as having a **title, introduction and conclusion**. It is due the first day of class in September, no exceptions!

You must also email me a copy of your paper, at kbauer@yonkerspublicschools.org

Have a wonderful summer! See you in September!

Mr. K. Bauer

The Story Of Our Lives

by Mark Strand

1

We are reading the story of our lives
which takes place in a room.

The room looks out on a street.

There is no one there,
no sound of anything.

The tress are heavy with leaves,
the parked cars never move.

We keep turning the pages, hoping for something,
something like mercy or change,
a black line that would bind us
or keep us apart.

The way it is, it would seem
the book of our lives is empty.

The furniture in the room is never shifted,
and the rugs become darker each time
our shadows pass over them.

It is almost as if the room were the world.

We sit beside each other on the couch,
reading about the couch.

We say it is ideal.

It is ideal.

2

We are reading the story of our lives,
as though we were in it,

as though we had written it.

This comes up again and again.

In one of the chapters
I lean back and push the book aside
because the book says
it is what I am doing.

I lean back and begin to write about the book.

I write that I wish to move beyond the book.

Beyond my life into another life.

I put the pen down.

The book says: "He put the pen down
and turned and watched her reading
the part about herself falling in love."

The book is more accurate than we can imagine.

I lean back and watch you read
about the man across the street.

They built a house there,
and one day a man walked out of it.

You fell in love with him
because you knew that he would never visit you,
would never know you were waiting.

Night after night you would say
that he was like me.

I lean back and watch you grow older without me.

Sunlight falls on your silver hair.

The rugs, the furniture,

seem almost imaginary now.

"She continued to read.

She seemed to consider his absence
of no special importance,
as someone on a perfect day will consider
the weather a failure
because it did not change his mind."

You narrow your eyes.

You have the impulse to close the book
which describes my resistance:
how when I lean back I imagine
my life without you, imagine moving
into another life, another book.

It describes your dependence on desire,
how the momentary disclosures
of purpose make you afraid.

The book describes much more than it should.

It wants to divide us.

3

This morning I woke and believed
there was no more to our lives
than the story of our lives.

When you disagreed, I pointed
to the place in the book where you disagreed.

You fell back to sleep and I began to read
those mysterious parts you used to guess at
while they were being written
and lose interest in after they became
part of the story.

In one of them cold dresses of moonlight

are draped over the chairs in a man's room.

He dreams of a woman whose dresses are lost,
who sits in a garden and waits.

She believes that love is a sacrifice.

The part describes her death
and she is never named,
which is one of the things
you could not stand about her.

A little later we learn
that the dreaming man lives
in the new house across the street.

This morning after you fell back to sleep
I began to turn the pages early in the book:
it was like dreaming of childhood,
so much seemed to vanish,
so much seemed to come to life again.

I did not know what to do.

The book said: "In those moments it was his book.

A bleak crown rested uneasily on his head.

He was the brief ruler of inner and outer discord,
anxious in his own kingdom."

4

Before you woke
I read another part that described your absence
and told how you sleep to reverse
the progress of your life.

I was touched by my own loneliness as I read,
knowing that what I feel is often the crude
and unsuccessful form of a story
that may never be told.

"He wanted to see her naked and vulnerable,
to see her in the refuse, the discarded
plots of old dreams, the costumes and masks
of unattainable states.

It was as if he were drawn
irresistably to failure."

It was hard to keep reading.

I was tired and wanted to give up.

The book seemed aware of this.

It hinted at changing the subject.

I waited for you to wake not knowing
how long I waited,
and it seemed that I was no longer reading.

I heard the wind passing
like a stream of sighs
and I heard the shiver of leaves
in the trees outside the window.

It would be in the book.

Everything would be there.

I looked at your face
and I read the eyes, the nose, the mouth .

5
If only there were a perfect moment in the book;
if only we could live in that moment,
we could being the book again
as if we had not written it,
as if we were not in it.

But the dark approaches
to any page are too numerous

and the escapes are too narrow.

We read through the day.

Each page turning is like a candle
moving through the mind.

Each moment is like a hopeless cause.

If only we could stop reading.

"He never wanted to read another book
and she kept staring into the street.

The cars were still there,
the deep shade of trees covered them.

The shades were drawn in the new house.

Maybe the man who lived there,
the man she loved, was reading
the story of another life.

She imagine a bare parlor,
a cold fireplace, a man sitting
writing a letter to a woman
who has sacrificed her life for love."
If there were a perfect moment in the book,
it would be the last.

The book never discusses the causes of love.

It claims confusion is a necessary good.

It never explains.
It only reveals.

6
The day goes on.

We study what we remember.

We look into the mirror across the room.

We cannot bear to be alone.

The book goes on.

"They became silent and did not know how to begin the dialogue which was necessary.

It was words that created divisions in the first place, that created loneliness.

They waited
they would turn the pages, hoping
something would happen.

They would patch up their lives in secret:
each defeat forgiven because it could not be tested,
each pain rewarded because it was unreal.

They did nothing."

7

The book will not survive.

We are the living proof of that.

It is dark outside, in the room it is darker.

I hear your breathing.

You are asking me if I am tired,
if I want to keep reading.

Yes, I am tired.

Yes, I want to keep reading.

I say yes to everything.

You cannot hear me.

"They sat beside each other on the couch.

They were the copies, the tired phantoms
of something they had been before.

The attitudes they took were jaded.

They stared into the book
and were horrified by their innocence,
their reluctance to give up.

They sat beside each other on the couch.

They were determined to accept the truth.

Whatever it was they would accept it.

The book would have to be written
and would have to be read.

They are the book and they are
nothing else.