

ESSAY UNIT

Expository Essay

Read the essay below and answer all questions which follow.

My Mother, My Rival

(Adapted)

Original by Miriah Burton Nelson

- 1 The first time my mother and I competed against each other she was 37; I was five. We swam one lap of our neighbour's pool. She won.
- 2 As a five-year-old I didn't realize – and I don't think my mother realized – that she was teaching me about love. We thought we were just fooling around.
- 3 Later we had diving competitions, which she also won, though I would argue and she would agree, that I deserved higher marks for versatility. For my jackknife, I would *boing* into the air, desperately grab my toes, then splash down on all fours. For my back dive, I would reach my hands meekly overhead, then fall into the water as if I'd been shot. Mom had only one dive – the swan dive – but if you do only one dive you can learn to do it well. She'd fly skyward, arch like a ship's proud figurehead, then streamline toward the water and quietly, tapered toes last, disappear.
- 4 Eventually I gave up diving – pointing my toes always seemed so unnatural – but I joined a swim team, and by the time I was 10, I could outswim Mom.
- 5 Mom was my fan, too, when I would race against Betty and Letty Landers, the indomitable twins. Betty had skinny arms as sharp and swift as Osterizer¹ blades; Letty had furious legs that started kicking mid-dive, like a windup bathtub toy. I didn't stand a chance.
- ¹Osterizer – brand name for a food processor
- 6 But Mom would root for me anyway, yelling from the sidelines as if I could hear her underwater. She would transport my friends and me to swimming meets all over the country (she liked to drive fast over hilly, back-country roads so we'd fly up out of our seats and scream), and she even arranged practice time for me during family vacations. It made me feel important.
- 7 Mom was also my teammate; the two of us ganged up on the Landers twins in the mother-daughter relay races at year-end championships. Mrs. Landers had great form, but no speed, so Mom and I were undefeated for six years until adolescence caught up with me and I left swimming for more important things, like basketball.
- 8 So, when I think about competition I also remember the Landers twins, who would join me for a burger after the meets. I think about Gordon, whom I later met on the basketball court. I remember six-foot-three-inch Heidi, my teammate, who would rebound the ball viciously, sharp elbows out. When I think about competition I realize that beginning with my fiercely, competitive mother, competition taught me most of what I know about companionship and friendship.
- 9 So, while competition is about a passion for perfection, it's also a passion for the other people who join us on this impossible quest. What better way to know someone than to test your abilities together, to be daring and sweaty and exhausted together? Through competition I have learned to acknowledge my failures and make allowances for the failures of others.
- 10 Believing that “competitive” was a dirty word, I used to say, “I'm not competitive, I just happen to be the best.” My teammate Heidi and I had a tearful yelling match one night after a basketball game, and I accused her of not passing the ball. “How am I supposed to score more than 19 points if you won't even look in my direction?” I screamed. “Why are you so competitive with me?”
- 11 “Look who's being competitive!” she countered. “Since when is 19 points something to be ashamed of? Only when it's compared to my 29, right?”
- 12 But despite such humiliations, Heidi and I are good friends, and because we have played basketball together, she knows me better than friends with whom I go to parties or movies. I am never more exposed than in the heat of competition. I never feel more vulnerable than after flubbing a catch in the ninth inning, or rolling a bowling ball into the gutter.

- 13 In sports, as in relationships, one can never pretend.
- 14 Why many people are apathetic – if not downright hostile – toward sports, and why others embrace sports, is that playing sports is an intense physical activity. Why risk anger, frustration, aggression, and other unseemly emotions? It is easier to sit on the sidelines. To play sports one must be passionate and make a determined commitment. How scary. Or depending on your point of view – how thrilling.
- 15 So, competition is about relationships, I noticed early, and about fear, which I noticed later. That’s why I like to remember my childhood, when the love and friendship part was pure, untainted by fear of failure, or fear of looking like a fool. I feel blessed to have had a big brother who taught me how to throw, and a mother who never let me win. She is 68 now and I am 37, and when I visit her, we still race. “Give me a head start,” she’ll suggest, “or better yet, I’ll do freestyle and you swim backstroke, just kicking, okay?” If she wins, she smacks her hand against the wall, jerks her head up, and yells, “Ha! Beat you?”
- 16 I complain that she must have cheated. She splashes me. I dunk her.
- 17 We laugh a lot.

Selected Response Items: Circle the letter of the correct or BEST answer.

- What is the main method of development employed in this essay?
 - classification and division
 - example and illustration
 - fact and statistic
 - process analysis
- The word “*boing*” (paragraph 3) represent which literary device?
 - metaphor
 - onomatopoeia
 - paradox
 - symbolism
- Which literary device is used in “She’d fly skyward, arch like a ship’s proud figurehead . . .” (paragraph 3)
 - allusion
 - connotation
 - personification
 - simile
- In the context in which it is found, what is the meaning of the word “indomitable” in paragraph 5?
 - charming
 - easygoing
 - unbeatable
 - weak
- What is main method used to develop the main idea of paragraph 6?
 - authority
 - auditory imagery
 - cause and effect
 - figure of speech
- Which word BEST describe the tone of this essay?
 - appreciative
 - bragging
 - resentful
 - understanding

7. Why is the use of the word “quest” (paragraph 9) an example of good diction?
- A) It comes at the end of a sentence
 - B) It highlights how difficult the goal is
 - C) It is a difficult word to understand
 - D) It is an example of sarcasm
8. Which of the following would be the BEST alternate title for this essay?
- A) Healthy Competition
 - B) Losing is Needed to Win
 - C) Sports – A Lifetime Commitment
 - D) Sports – The Rewards are More Than Physical
9. What point is being made by the author’s friend, Heidi, in paragraph 11?
- A) Sport can destroy friendships
 - B) Sport is about getting the highest score
 - C) Sport is about pride in one’s own accomplishments
 - D) Sport is fun
10. Paragraph 12 begins with the phrase: “But despite such humiliations . . .” To what aspect of the essay does this contribute?
- A) coherence
 - B) imagery
 - C) irony
 - D) style
11. The line “In sports, as in relationships, one can never pretend”(paragraph 13) is an example of which of the following?
- A) argumentation
 - B) comparison
 - C) hyperbole
 - D) thesis statement
12. In the context in which it is found, what is the meaning of the word “apathetic” (paragraph 14)?
- A) enthusiastic
 - B) normal
 - C) supporting
 - D) uninterested

Constructed Response Items – COMPLETE EACH OF THESE IN YOUR EXERCISE BOOK OR FOLDER. Please head your answers with the title of the essay and the date.

13. Identify and explain ONE method through which the writer has achieved unity in this essay.

Notes:

14. Identify TWO types of emphatic devices employed in this essay and explain how each is effective.

Notes: