

RACElaboration

A **constructed response** is an open-ended essay question that demonstrates knowledge and reasoning. Most of you know the RACE strategy (Reword, Answer, Cite, Elaborate) for responding to constructed-response questions, but it isn't merely following the format that makes a good piece of writing. A good constructed response must, as the definition says, demonstrate knowledge. *You have to show that you understand the material.* Your answer must be thoughtful, reasonable, and defensible. RACE helps you do this, but it is still your job to reason logically, make inferences, and draw conclusions. In other words, *you* do the thinking and learning, and the RACE strategy will help you explain your new knowledge clearly.

The **E** in RACE stands for *elaborate* (or *explain*). This is the part of the response that shows how the textual evidence you have cited supports your answer to the question. It is where you explain your reasoning and show how you arrived at your conclusions. It is your response to “*So what?*” Unlike the other elements of RACE, this one is **ALL YOU!** It sets your response apart from all the others. **It should be the longest and most interesting part of your response!** But students often assume that their textual evidence is self-explanatory and do not develop their RACE responses completely, or they write responses that don't contain any of their own thinking. That's not good.

Elaborate contains the word cells: *-e-* (out) and *-labor-* (work). When you elaborate, you are *working out* your claim and textual evidence. You are **developing a topic sentence or claim with specific^{*}, relevant^{**} details** so that your reader will better understand and appreciate the points you are making. Extraneous, unnecessary language or information just to make your essay longer is not elaboration.

How to RACElaborate

- 1) Reword/Answer the question with a clearly stated topic sentence or claim.
- 2) Cite textual evidence and sources.
 - a. Quote no more than 15-20 words directly from the text, with quotation marks and source citation.
 - b. Summarize/Paraphrase longer sections, and include the source citation.
 - c. Use evidence stems like these to smoothly embed your evidence into your response.
 - i. According to [Name of source and/or author] , ...
 - ii. [Name of author] claims ...
 - iii. The article titled [Title of article] indicates...
 - iv. As stated in the article [Title of article] by [Name of author] , ...
 - v. On page , the author wrote...
- 3) Elaborate: Explain why the textual evidence is significant. How does it support your topic sentence? (*So what?*) Explain the reasoning that led to the conclusion you've reached. Use elaboration stems like these to get started:
 - This [textual evidence] means...
 - In other words, ...
 - This shows...
 - Based on this information, one can conclude that...
 - The quote proves...
 - The evidence clearly shows...
 - This information reveals...
 - These events confirm...
 - This relates to...
 - It is evident since...
 - Because of this, it is clear that...
 - Since this is the case, we know that...
 - This leads one to the conclusion that...

*Specific evidence is an actual, focused, complete, detailed, fully explained example – not a generalization.

**Relevant evidence and elaboration actually support the thesis; they are not there just to lengthen the paper.

R.A.C.E. Strategy for Writing Constructed Responses
The Pigman

Model Responses: The first model includes labels to illustrate the elements of the RACE strategy. You should not do this when you write your RACE responses. Yours should be like the second model: a well-developed paragraph.

Prompt: “*We had trespassed too -- been where we didn’t belong, and we were being punished for it. Mr. Pignati had paid with his life, but when he died something in us had died as well.*”

Explain what John means: 1) Where did John and Lorraine “trespass”?

2) What died in the narrators as a result of Mr. Pignati’s death?

#1 **Restate (Reword):** In the passage from the end of *The Pigman*, John indicates that he and Lorraine are being punished for “trespassing”...

Answer (the question): ...on adulthood.

Cite (evidence): Despite the fact that he is only a sophomore in high school, John smokes cigarettes and drinks beer throughout the story, stating in his first chapter as narrator, “I smoke one with a recessed filter myself” (2). For the entirety of Chapter 9, he is in the cemetery drinking beer with Norton, and in Chapter 13 he throws a party where all kinds of alcohol is served and ashtrays overflow with cigarette butts. Lorraine tries to talk John out of smoking, but she does indulge in drinking wine with Mr. Pignati when she visits and again with John when they dress up in the Pignatis’ fancy clothes in Chapter 12.

Explain (Elaborate/Reasoning): The law states and most reasonable people agree that kids should not smoke and drink, yet we see the main characters doing so quite matter-of-factly all the time in this novel. They pretend to be older than they are because adults have the control over their lives that John and Lorraine lack. Mr. Pignati desires their company to ease his loneliness, so he allows them to go on “trespassing” on the adult world, even giving them access to his house when he is hospitalized. They dress as adults to act out a romantic evening and ultimately throw a “cocktail party” where the house gets trashed.

Restate Answer/Conclude Explanation: All of these incidents make up the “trespassing” John refers to. These kids are pretending to be something they are not, trespassing on territory they should not be on until they reach legal age, the age of responsibility.

#2

When John says “something had died in us as well,” he is referring to their loss of childhood innocence. Throughout the story, John and Lorraine have acted like Mr. Pignati’s children, and he has treated them that way. In Chapter 6, he bought them all sorts of goodies at the zoo. During their shopping trip in Chapter 8, he bought them roller skates. Later on, Lorraine and John actually pretend they *are* Mr. Pignati’s kids, telling the police they are “John and Lorraine Pignati” and answering questions about their “father”. In Chapter 12, they continue this lie in order to visit Mr. Pignati in the hospital, and it brings the Pigman great joy when the nurse says, “Your son and daughter are here” (104). All of this evidence points to the fact that John and Lorraine are symbolically Mr. Pignati’s kids. In many ways, he has treated them the same way parents treat kids, and they have grown to care about him as a kind of father figure. But while they pretend to be his children, they are also taking advantage of his house as though they are adults, dressing up in the Pignatis’ clothes, throwing a cocktail party, and trashing the house. This betrayal of trust leads to Mr. Pignati’s death, and John and Lorraine have to accept responsibility for that. Small children are not held responsible for their mistakes because “they don’t know any better,” but John and Lorraine should have known better. By trespassing on adulthood, they engaged in adult behaviors and enjoyed the freedoms of adulthood, but with those freedoms come responsibility. Their actions had consequences, and they cannot bring their Pigman back to life. It is too late to apologize. This painful realization is the death of their childhood. John and Lorraine will no longer be able to hide behind the child’s argument that they didn’t know any better, and in this sense they have lost their own childhood and the irresponsibility of innocence.

Your Turn: Using the RACE strategy, write a two-part constructed response to this prompt:

Baboons.

Baboons.

They build their own cages, we could almost hear the Pigman whisper, as he took his children with him.

1) How are the characters in this book like baboons (or monkeys)?

2) How did they “build their own cages”?

#1 **R**(estate): _____ The characters in this book are like baboons (or monkeys) because _____

A(nswer): _____

C(ite): _____

E(xplain): _____

Conclusion Sentence (Restate Answer/Conclude Explanation) : _____

#2 _____
