

FAST-R

Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading



Name _____

“A Walk to the Jetty” • Fiction

Date _____

Teacher/Class _____

A teenage girl from the island of Antigua is being sent to live with relatives in England where she will attend nursing school. As she walks with her parents along the jetty where a boat awaits her, she remembers the walks to the jetty she used to take with her father in years past. This young girl has mixed feelings about leaving. Read this excerpt from the novel Annie John to see what happens. Answer the questions that follow.

A Walk to the Jetty

by Jamaica Kincaid

1 My heart now beat fast, and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't keep my mouth from falling open and my nostrils from spreading to the ends of my face. My old fear of slipping between the boards of the jetty and falling into the dark-green water where the dark-green eels lived came over me. When my father's stomach started to go bad, the doctor had recommended a walk every evening right after he ate his dinner. Sometimes he would take me with him. When he took me with him, we usually went to the jetty, and there he would sit and talk to the night watchman about cricket¹ or some other thing that didn't interest me, because it was not personal; they didn't talk about their wives, or their children, or their parents, or about any of their likes and dislikes. They talked about things in such a strange way, and I didn't see what they found funny, but sometimes they made each other laugh so much that their guffaws² would bound out to sea and send back an echo. I was always sorry when we got to the jetty and saw that the night watchman on duty was the one he enjoyed speaking to; it was like being locked up in a book filled with numbers and diagrams and what-ifs. For the thing about not being able to understand and enjoy what they were saying was I had nothing to take my mind off my fear of slipping in between the boards of the jetty.

Spotlight On: Jamaica Kincaid

Jamaica Kincaid, whose original name is Elaine Potter Richardson, was born on the island of Antigua in 1949. She was educated in British schools because Antigua was an English colony that was not given its independence until 1981.

In 1965, she was sent to New York to work as a nanny and eventually left the position to pursue a college education. She changed her name in 1973 because her family disapproved of her writing.

She continues to be an advocate for education and for the school-aged children growing up in Antigua. “I was always being told I should be something, and then my whole upbringing was something I was not: it was English” (Cudjoe 219).

¹ **cricket** — an outdoor game played with bats, a ball, and wickets by two teams of eleven players each

² **guffaw** — a hearty burst of laughter

2 Now, too, I had nothing to take my mind off what was happening to me. My mother and my father—I was leaving them forever. My home on an island—I was leaving it forever. What to make of everything? I felt a familiar hollow space inside. I felt I was being held down against my will. I felt I was burning up from head to toe. I felt that someone was tearing me up into little pieces and soon I would be able to see all the little pieces as they floated out into nothing in the deep blue sea. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I could see that it would be better not to think too clearly about any one thing. The launch was being made ready to take me, along with some other passengers, out to the ship that was anchored in the sea. My father paid our fares, and we joined a line of people waiting to board. My mother checked my bag to make sure that I had my passport, the money she had given me, and a sheet of paper placed between some pages in my Bible on which were written the names of the relatives—people I had not known existed—with whom I would live in England. Across from the jetty was a wharf, and some stevedores³ were loading and unloading barges. I don't know why seeing that struck me so, but suddenly a wave of strong feeling came over me, and my heart swelled with a great gladness as the words “I shall never see this again” spilled out inside me. But then, just as quickly, my heart shriveled up and the words “I shall never see this again” stabbed at me. I don't know what stopped me from falling in a heap at my parents' feet.

3 When we were all on board, the launch headed out to sea. Away from the jetty, the water became the customary blue, and the launch left a wide path in it that looked like a road. I passed by sounds and smells that were so familiar that I had long ago stopped paying any attention to them. But now here they were, and the ever-present “I shall never see this again” bobbed up and down inside me. There was the sound of the seagull diving down into the water and coming up with something silverish in its mouth. There was the smell of the sea and the sight of small pieces of rubbish floating around in it. There were boats filled with fishermen coming in early. There was the sound of their voices as they shouted greetings to each other. There was the hot sun, there was the blue sea, there was the blue sky. Not very far away, there was the white sand of the shore, with the run-down houses all crowded in next to each other, for in some places only poor people lived near the shore. I was seated in the launch between my parents, and when I realized that I was gripping their hands tightly I glanced quickly to see if they were looking at me with scorn, for I felt sure that they must have known of my never-see-this-again feelings. But instead my father kissed me on the forehead and my mother kissed me on the mouth, and they both gave over their hands to me, so that I could grip them as much as I wanted. I was on the verge of feeling that it had all been a mistake, but I remembered that I wasn't a child anymore, and that now when I made up my mind about something I had to see it through. At that moment, we came to the ship, and that was that.

³ **stevedore**—one who loads or unloads ships or barges