



CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS AND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS:

1. How is Oscar feeling at the beginning of the book? What do his feelings have to do with his father and their farm?

2. What makes Oscar realize something isn't right before he sees that the suitcases are gone?

3. What does Oscar expect to find when he chases the little girl with the raggedy braids? What does he find instead?



4. What is Oscar feeling—and struggling with—when he realizes that Jennie and Bruno are trapped in the burning house?

5. Initially, Oscar is angry at Jennie for helping Otis and the gang steal his suitcase. Why do his feelings about her change?

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CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS AND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT *(CONTINUED)*

6. What does Oscar discover he has in common with Jennie? Why doesn't he share this discovery with her?

7. What does Oscar figure out about how Otis recruits kids for his gang? What does Otis know about them?

8. Why do Oscar's feelings about Mr. Morrow change because of what happens during the fire?

9. How does Oscar's new stepfather end up helping Oscar keep a promise to Papa that Oscar thought he'd already broken?

10. In terms of Oscar wanting to be like Papa, what is special about the fact that Earless Max Kildair gets arrested as a result of Oscar searching for Jennie and Bruno?

ESSAY ASSIGNMENT: Answer the organizer questions on the next page to help you write a three-paragraph essay detailing how the Great Chicago Fire shifts Oscar's perspective about Mr. Morrow and about Jennie, which ultimately changes Oscar's life for the better.

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CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS AND ESSAY ASSIGNMENT *(CONTINUED)*

THREE-PARAGRAPH ESSAY ORGANIZER FOR *I SURVIVED THE GREAT CHICAGO FIRE, 1871*

Answer the questions below to brainstorm ideas for your first paragraph, which will be your introduction:

At the beginning of the book, how does Oscar see Mr. Morrow? How does he see Jenny?

For your second paragraph, explain what happens that changes Oscar's mind about Mr. Morrow and about Jennie:

1. _____

2. _____

Next, answer the questions below to help you write a concluding paragraph.

In what ways is Oscar's life better after the fire than it was before? What do these changes have to do with Mr. Morrow and Jennie?

Now, write your essay on the back of this page or on a computer using your answers above.

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ANSWERS

CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS:

1. At the beginning of the book, Oscar is sick to his stomach because he's being forced to leave the Minnesota farm where he grew up and move to Chicago with his mother and new stepfather. Oscar's father died two years ago, and Oscar is still grieving. He feels guilty about leaving the farm after promising his father he'd look after it.
2. He realizes something isn't right because the little girl who asked him for help suddenly lets go of his sleeve, apologizes, and then disappears into the crowd.
3. Oscar expects to find the outlaws' hideout. Instead, he finds that the girl lives with her three-year-old brother, and they are on their own.
4. Oscar is terrified of the fire, and he also knows that he has to get back to his mother as soon as possible. But he can't leave Jennie and Bruno trapped in the burning house.
5. Oscar realizes that Jennie is taking care of her three-year-old brother by herself, which he thinks is very brave. He's also grateful to her for calling out directions to him so he can escape the burning house.
6. Oscar discovers that he made a promise to his Papa—to look after the farm—just as Jennie made a promise to her mother—to look after Bruno. He doesn't share this with Jennie because he feels guilty for breaking his promise to Papa and doesn't want to admit it to her.
7. Oscar realizes that Otis looks for kids whose parents are gone because he knows those kids are so desperate to stay out of the orphanages that they'll do anything.
8. When Oscar is facing the gigantic wave of fire outside Palmer House, Mr. Morrow suddenly appears and helps Oscar. Oscar learns that Mr. Morrow sent Mama to safety but stayed behind, risking his life to find Oscar.
9. Because Oscar can look at Mr. Morrow's beautiful paintings of the farm every day, Oscar feels like he is, in a way, keeping his promise to his father to look after the farm.
10. In a way, Oscar is finishing the job that his father started years ago when he chased Earless Max Kildair all the way to Chicago.

ESSAY ASSIGNMENT: Answers will vary but should include something about how Oscar stops seeing Jennie as a thief and starts seeing her as a brave, kind girl, and how he realizes Mr. Morrow genuinely cares about him. His life is better after the fire because he sees Jennie and Mr. Morrow for the good people they really are.