

Name: _____

Reading Passages I & II

Directions: Read the passages on the following pages (a poem and an excerpt from a memoir). Answer the multiple-choice questions and write the essay as described in Your Task.

Task:

After you have read the passages, write a unified essay about the influence of grandmothers as revealed in the passages. In your essay, use ideas from *both* passages to establish a controlling idea about the influence of grandmothers. Using evidence from *each* passage, develop your controlling idea and show how the author uses specific literary elements or techniques to convey that idea.

Guidelines:

Be sure to:

- Use ideas from *both* passages to establish a controlling idea about the influence of grandmothers
- Use specific and relevant evidence from *each* passage to develop your controlling idea
- Show how each author uses specific literary elements (for example: theme, characterization, structure, point of view) or techniques (for example: symbolism, irony, figurative language) to convey the controlling idea
- Organize your ideas in a logical and coherent manner
- Use language that communicates ideas effectively
- Follow the conventions of standard written English

Reading Passage I: *For My People*
by Margaret Walker

My grandmothers were strong.
They followed plows and bent to toil.
They moved through fields sowing seed.
They touched earth and grain grew.
5 They were full of sturdiness and singing.
My grandmothers were strong.

My grandmothers are full of memories
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay
With veins rolling roughly over quick hands
10 They have many clean words to say.
My grandmothers were strong.
Why am I not as they?

—Margaret Walker
from *For My People*, 1942
Yale University Press

Reading Passage II: “How I Learned to Speak Italian” by Helen Barolini

...With my grandmother there was a brief ritual phrase in her dialect mouthed by us children when we went to the old Queen Anne style house in Utica where my mother and all her brothers and sisters grew up. My grandmother was always in the kitchen, dressed in black, standing at a large black coal range stirring soup or something. My brothers and I, awkward in the presence of her foreignness, would be pushed in her direction by our mother during those holiday visits, and told “Go say hello to Gramma.”

We’d go to the strange old woman who didn’t look like any of the grandmothers of our friends or like any of those on the covers of the *Saturday Evening Post* around Thanksgiving time. Gramma didn’t stuff a turkey or make candied sweet potatoes and pumpkin pies. She made chicken soup filled with tiny pale meatballs and a bitter green she grew in her backyard along with broad beans and basil, things that were definitely un-American in those days. Her smell was like that of the cedar closet in our attic. She spoke strange words with a raspy sound.

When we stepped into her kitchen to greet her she smiled broadly and tweaked our cheeks. We said in a rush the phrase our mother taught us. We didn’t know what it meant. I think we never asked. And if we were to know it meant “how are you?” what difference would it have made? What further knowledge would we have had of the old woman in the shapeless black garment, with her wisps of gray hair falling out of the thick knob crammed with large old-fashioned tortoise-shell hairpins? None. We were strangers.

When on a visit upstate I had occasion to drive through Cazenovia, a village on the shores of Lake Cazenovia, it appeared to me as if in a dream. I saw again the lakeshore meadow that has always remained indelibly imprinted on my mind from childhood, but that I had thought must, by now, have vanished from the real world. That meadow, now called Gypsy Bay Park, was the site of family picnics to which we and Aunt Mary’s family proceeded from Syracuse, while the other contingent (which was by far the greater number—my mother’s three brothers, two other sisters and all their families plus our grandmother) came from Utica. Cazenovia was the approximate half-way point, and there in the meadow on the lake the cars would all pull up and baskets of food would be unloaded for the great summer reunion....

It was Gramma who had decreed this annual outing. When two of her daughters married and moved from Utica, she had made known her wish: that the family should meet each summer when travel was easier and eat together *al fresco*.¹ It was her pleasure to have all her children, and their children, convene in the meadow, and spend the day eating, singing, playing cards, gossiping, throwing ball, making jokes and toasts. It was a celebration of her progeny² of which she, long widowed, was the visible head, the venerable ancestor, the symbol of the strong-willed adventurer who had come from the old world to make a new life and to prosper.

She was monumental. I can see her still, an imposing figure, still dressed in black although it was summer, seated on a folding camp chair (just for her) under the shade of a large, leafy elm tree. She sat there as silently as a Sioux chief and was served food, given babies to kiss, and paid homage to all day. The others spread around her, sitting on blankets on the grass, or on the running boards of

50 their Oldsmobiles and Buicks. What made my grandmother so intriguing was the
mystery of her. For, despite its gaiety, the family picnic was also a time of
puzzlement for me. Who was this stranger in black with whom I could not speak?
What was her story? What did she know?

55 What I knew of my grandmother, I heard from my mother: she believed in
good food on the table and good linen on the bed. Everything else was fripperies³
and she had the greatest scorn for those who dieted or got their nourishment
through pills and potions. She knew you are what you eat and she loved America
for the great range of foods that it provided to people like her, used to so little,
used to making do. She could not tolerate stinginess; she lived with her eldest son
and his family of eleven and did all the gardening and cooking, providing a
generous table....

60 We were about fifty kin gathered in that meadow, living proof of the family
progress. Gramma's sons and daughters vied to offer her their services, goods,
and offspring—all that food, those cars, the well-dressed young men who would
go to college. And Butch, an older cousin, would take me by the hand to the
water's edge and I'd be allowed to wade in Cazenovia's waters, which were always
65 tingling cold and made me squeal with delicious shock.

70 And yet with all that, for all the good times and good food and the happy
chattering people who fussed over me and my brothers, I still felt a sense of
strangeness, a sense of my parents' tolerating with an edge of disdain this old
world *festa* only for the sake of the old lady. When I asked my mother why
Gramma looked so strange and never spoke to us, I was told, she came from the
old country ... she doesn't speak our language. She might as well have been from
Mars.

75 I never remember hearing our own mother speak to her mother, although she
must have, however briefly. I only recall my astonishment at mother's grief when
Gramma died and we went to Utica for the funeral. How could mother really feel
so bad about someone she had never really talked to? Was it just because she was
expected to cry? Or was she crying for the silence that had lain like a chasm
between them?...

¹al fresco — in the open air

²progeny — offspring

³fripperies — nonessentials

—Helen Barolini
excerpted from "How I Learned to Speak Italian"
Southwest Review, Winter 1997

- 1) In Passage I, the narrator implies that the strength of grandmothers results from their
- A) large bodies C) long lives
B) hard work D) cheery songs
- 2) "They touched earth and grain grew" (line 4) from Passage I suggests the grandmothers' role of
- A) entertainer C) provider
B) protector D) teacher
- 3) In order to emphasize her feelings about her grandmothers, the narrator in Passage I uses
- A) repetition C) onomatopoeia
B) simile D) symbolism
- 4) The narrator's feeling toward her grandmothers in Passage I is *best* described as
- A) concern
B) admiration
C) embarrassment
D) resentment
- 5) In comparison to the grandmothers, the narrator in Passage I is seen as
- A) less intelligent C) more religious
B) more nurturing D) less capable
- 6) According to the narrator in Passage II, the "annual outing" celebrated the importance of
- A) solitude C) travel
B) family D) responsibility
- 7) The narrator's description of her mother's reaction to the death of "Gramma" in Passage II is an example of
- A) alliteration C) irony
B) personification D) humor
- 8) In Passage II, the comparison between the Native American chief and the grandmother (line 45) characterizes her as
- A) respected C) kind
B) courageous D) intelligent
- 9) The grandmothers of Passage I differ from the grandmother in Passage II in the ability to
- A) heal C) discipline
B) survive D) communicate
- 10) Both passages reveal the theme of
- A) social conflict
B) grandparents' trust
C) generational difference
D) family rivalry

- 1) B 2) C 3) A 4) B 5) D
6) B 7) C 8) A 9) D 10) C