



**NEW ENGLAND
COMMON ASSESSMENT PROGRAM**

**Released Items
2012**

**Grade 11
Writing**

Writing

Response to Literary Text

In this passage, a young man gets a haircut from an old barber. As you read, think about what the incident reveals about the two characters and their relationship. Then write a response to the prompt that follows.

Hard-Boiled Egghead

by Barbara Park

“Hello, Mr. Peoples,” I said pleasantly. “How are you feeling today? Arthritis acting up? Problems with the wife?”

Mr. Peoples frowned. “Get in the chair, Alex. I’m tired. My feet hurt. And I’m not in the mood for your jokes.”

Right away, I started backing out of his shop.

“Okie-doke. Well, nice chatting with you, Mr. P. I think I hear my mother calling me from the parking lot. I’ll come back another day when your feet are feeling better.”

Mr. Peoples pointed to the chair. “Sit!” he ordered.

Mr. Peoples has known me since I was two, so he feels comfortable bossing me around like that.

I hesitated. “I don’t know, Mr. Peoples. Are you sure? I mean, are you positive you want me to sit down? Because if you’re upset about something, I would be happy to leave you alone to gather your thoughts.”

This time, his face got totally red. “I said *sit!*” he blustered.

Nervously, I climbed into the big vinyl seat. A man holding scissors is not a man to mess with.

“Well, okay then, Mr. Peoples. But I really don’t need a big haircut today. Mostly all I need is a little trim. Just a little bit off the sides and that’s all.”

Mr. Peoples didn’t hear a word I said. He was too busy plugging in his electric clippers.

“No, wait, Mr. Peoples,” I said quickly. “I really don’t think you’ll be needing the clippers today. I just need a trim, remember?”

His mood wasn’t getting better. “Who’s the barber here, Alex, you or me?”

That’s when I decided to be quiet. If there was one thing I didn’t want to do, it was to make the guy any grouchier than he already was.

Mr. Peoples took his scissors and began snipping at my hair. No, wait . . . snipping is the wrong word. The word is *hacking*. Mr. Peoples started *hacking* at my hair.

“Whoa, you’re really going to town there, aren’t you, Mr. P.? It’s getting kinda short, don’t you think?” I asked.

That’s when Mr. Peoples picked up the clippers and began buzzing all around the back of my head. Before I had a chance to protest, he was already heading up toward my left ear.

Then all of a sudden, he stopped cold.

“Whoopsie!” he said.

My stomach turned over inside of me. Of all the words you don’t ever want to hear your barber say, *whoopsie* is right at the top of the list.

“*Whoopsie?* Did you say ‘*whoopsie*,’ Mr. Peoples? *Whoopsie*, as in a mistake has just occurred up there?”

I looked in the mirror and turned my head. That’s when I saw the “whoopsie.” It was a large round bald spot right over my left ear.

Mr. Peoples brushed the area lightly with his fingers. “Looks like this haircut might be a little bit shorter than you wanted it, Alex. But at least it will be nice and cool for the summer.”

My eyes opened wide. “The summer?” I said. “The summer? This is March, Mr. Peoples. The summer is still months away.”

Mr. Peoples nudged me with his elbow and grinned. “That’s my point . . . get it? Even months from now, this haircut will still be nice and cool.”

He began to chuckle. Already he had cheered himself up a ton.

He started the clippers again.

“More?” I asked, feeling sick.

“Well, we can’t leave her like this, can we?” he said. “Gotta even her up. Right?”

I couldn’t stand to look anymore, so I covered my eyes with my hands and waited until he was finished. After circling my head with the clippers about twenty more times, he finally shut them off.

Slowly I opened my eyes. No! It couldn’t be! My hair was gone! *Totally* gone, I mean! I looked like a hard-boiled egg with a face!

Mr. Peoples dusted the hair off my neck. “Well? What do you think?”

I could barely speak. “What do I think about what?”

“About your hair. What do you think about your hair?” he asked cheerfully.

Stunned, I gazed at my hair lying all over the floor. “I think it looked better on my head. *That’s* what I think.”

- ❶ What does the incident in the barbershop reveal about the characters and their relationship? Use details from the passage to support your answer.

Before writing, consider

- *the focus/controlling idea of your response*
- *the supporting details/references to the passage in your response*
- *how your response will connect the passage to the larger world*

A complete response to the prompt will include

- a clear purpose/focus
- coherent organization
- details/elaboration
- well-chosen language and a variety of sentence structures
- control of conventions

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