

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Death Be Not Proud

by John Gunther

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ISBN: 978-1-60389-531-6

Item No. 202294

Foreword

1. In the foreword, John Gunther speaks of his son as someone deserving admiration. Write a short paragraph describing someone you know who deserves admiration. As an alternative, write a paragraph about the suffering of someone whom you do not know personally.
2. Johnny's father describes him as having humor, charm and brains. He calls Johnny gallant in his fight for life and tells of his love of animals, the weather, gardening, rocks, magic tricks, and especially science. Write a resume for a person with these qualities and address it to a company looking for an employee with these characteristics.
3. Gunther praises his son's good qualities, saying that Johnny's only fault was an excess of virtue. He calls his son generous to a fault. Write a description of someone you know who is generous and explain why generosity might be considered a fault.

Chapter 1

4. Infantile paralysis (polio) was a disease prevalent among children in the 1940s. Johnny had some minor symptoms, but nothing directly related to the feared disease. Write a daily log of signs that might indicate you are catching a cold. What are the day-by-day symptoms as the cold progresses toward its end?

5. Doctors told Frances (Johnny's mother) that Johnny had a "pressure" in his skull. Gunther called that term a "euphemism." Define the word *euphemism* and make a list of five euphemisms that could be used for physical conditions. Example: "passed away" for "died."

6. As the doctors tried to diagnose his disease, Johnny was given many *spinal taps*. (drawing of fluid from the spinal column to test for problems). In a diary entry, describe how you felt before, during and after your last physical examination, what diagnostic tests you needed, and what results those tests provided.

7. Johnny never "whimpered" or protested the endless medical procedures he underwent. Describe the type of person you think could go through these types of experiences without complaining and explain how you might react if you had to go through them.

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8. More than 30 doctors involved themselves in Johnny's case. In the following two lists, match the type of doctor with the ailment or procedure described.
- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Psychiatrist | A. heart murmur |
| 2. Dentist | B. poor vision |
| 3. Podiatrist | C. facelift |
| 4. Allergist | D. upset stomach |
| 5. Dermatologist | E. hearing loss |
| 6. Internist | F. hay fever |
| 7. Optometrist | G. emotional problems |
| 8. Audiologist | H. toothache |
| 9. Plastic surgeon | I. acne |
| 10. Cardiologist | J. athlete's foot |
9. Gunther says that although a violent headache bothered Johnny less than having his head shaved. As he looked at his shaven skull, Johnny asked, "Papa, they aren't going to electrocute me, are they?" Make a list of things you might suspect if you were told your head had to be shaved.
10. The words *benignant* and *benign* describe harmless tumors; *malignant* is used to describe infectious or cancerous tumors. These words can also describe things besides tumors. Write an example for each of the following.
- A benign remark
 - A benign outlook
 - A malignant habit
 - A malignant attitude
 - A malignant wish
 - A benign smile

Response Journal

11. Gunther can hardly believe that something can have such devastating effects on the tissue of a human brain. He asks, “What in all sanity and conscience is a brain?” In a paragraph, explain what you think a brain really is, and explain the differences between brain, mind and consciousness.

12. Twelve days after the first operation on Johnny’s tumor, he wrote a letter to Albert Einstein in which he expounded upon a theory he developed. Consider a field with which you feel familiar, such as music, electronics or sports. Write a letter to a famous person in the field you choose and give them your ideas on how you feel improvements could be made.

Chapter 2

13. In 1946, Johnny went to the hospital every morning for X-rays of his skull before he was permitted to go to the family's country home. Because of his condition, and for his protection, he was not allowed to go boating, swimming, diving, or rock-climbing. If you were seriously impaired, what activities would you miss the most? Why?

14. John Gunther tried to explain suffering to his son. He said that pain was part of growth and perhaps would improve Johnny's brain. Do you think Gunther was convinced of this himself? Write an outline of ways you could convince someone that suffering has a purpose. Include visual aids to prove your point.

15. Frances and John Gunther never stopped searching for new ways to fight and possibly arrest their son's tumor. Write a newspaper article advising readers where to look for resources that answer medical questions. Include experiences of someone you know or have heard of who found help for their particular problems, and say where they found them.

16. Frances "taught him (Johnny) to squeeze out of every conceivable occasion, no matter how painful, every atom of humor possible." In a paragraph, explain why you think this was important for Johnny. Then find five examples of humor in the text.