



Benchmark 6.4

Subject: English Language Arts

State: New Jersey

Student Name: _____

Teacher Name: _____

School Name: _____

Read the following excerpt from *Counting on Grace*, a novel by Elizabeth Winthrop. Then answer the questions based on the text.

Excerpt from Counting on Grace

by Elizabeth Winthrop

The setting is the early 1900s, a time when child labor laws were sometimes ignored in the United States. Grace is the twelve-year-old narrator. She and Arthur work in the mill during the day, and Miss Lesley is their teacher after work.

1. Miss Lesley nods to Arthur and he pulls out the paper and smooths the wrinkles he made when he crunched it up.
2. “Read it to her,” Miss Lesley says.
3. “Are you practicing your writing?” I ask.
4. “Grace, hush for once in your life and listen.”
5. It’s a letter. Arthur’s doing the writing. It goes this way.
6. *To Miss Anna Putnam, National Child Labor Committee, Vermont Chapter, Bennington, Vermont.*
7. *Dear Madam,*
8. *This is to inform you that there are underage children working in the cotton mill in the town of North Pownal, Vermont. These children range in age from eight to thirteen. They are employed in the following dangerous tasks.*
9. It stops there.
10. “That’s as far as we got,” Arthur says. “Before you barged in.”
11. “So now you can help us, Grace.”
12. My brain is whirling around. My feet start shifting under the desk.
13. “What is that child labor comm-thing?”
14. “They investigate places where children are not supposed to be working because they are too young. Believe it or not, there are laws against child labor. They’re just not enforced,” Miss Lesley says.
15. “But we need to work. For the money.” I can hear Mamère’s voice speaking right through my lips.

16. “Yes, Grace. But you also need your education. Then when you get older, you’ll have a job that makes you much more money than you’ll ever get working in the mill.”
17. “Stop arguing,” Arthur says to me. “You wanna leave?”
18. I don’t. This is more interesting than reading *la Justice* to P  p   for the third time this week. Or doing laundry with Mam  re. Or weeding.
19. I’ll help them write their dumb old letter. What difference does it make? When that inspector comes, we’ll just hide in the elevator the way we always do until he leaves the premises. That’s a fancy word Mr. Wilson uses for the mill.
20. “So back to the letter. What jobs do children do in the mill?”
21. “Doffing,”¹ I say.
22. “Besides doffing,” says Miss Lesley.
23. “Sweeping,” says Arthur. “And carrying the bobbin boxes. They’re heavy.”
24. “Good. Write that down. What else, Grace?”
25. I’m thinking hard. This is like a test and I want to do well on it. “Some of the boys work in the warping room.”
26. Arthur writes.
27. “And what about Thomas?” Miss Lesley asks.
28. “He was fooling around at the time,” I tell her. “He was standing too close to that gearbox.”
29. “More accidents happen because of the number of children working in the mill. But Thomas was legally old enough to be working so we’ll forget him for now. What else?”
30. “We clean the machines on Saturdays. And some other times if the roving² gets too bunched up. Delia’s got scars on her fingers from the cleaning hook.”
31. “Perfect,” says Miss Lesley, and I smile. I’m passing the test. “Arthur, put down machine maintenance.”
32. Then she writes out that big word for him so he can copy it.

33. “Why aren’t you writing the letter to the committee place?” I ask Miss Lesley.
34. “She’ll get fired if they find out it’s coming from her,” Arthur says, and rolls his eyes at me as if everybody is supposed to know that. “You’d better not tell.”
35. “Who will fire her?”
36. “The mill owners,” Arthur spits. “They own the mill school.”
37. “Hush, Arthur,” says Miss Lesley. “Nobody’s going to be firing me as long as we keep this quiet. Now sign it this way.” She writes out another big word for him to copy. It says Anonymous.

1 Doffing: Removing objects from a textile machine

2 Roving: Soft fibers ready to be twisted into yarn

1 Reread paragraph 14 from the story:

“They investigate places where children are not supposed to be working because they are too young. Believe it or not, there are laws against child labor. They’re just not enforced,” Miss Lesley says.

Based on this paragraph, what is the meaning of the phrase “not enforced”?

- (A) not well liked
- (B) not strictly followed
- (C) not useful for children
- (D) not applied fairly

2 What is one of the themes of the story?

(A) When trying to change a bad situation, taking a risk is worthwhile.

(B) During difficult times, true friendships remain strong.

(C) In response to peer pressure, a person should make his or her own decisions.

(D) When helping out one's family, no sacrifice is too big to make.