To Sir, With Love
by E. R. Braithwaite

Next morning I had an idea. It was nothing clear cut, merely speculative, but I considered it all the way to school. Then, after assembly, as soon as they were quiet I waded in. This might be a bit rough, I thought, but here goes.

"I am your teacher, and I think it right and proper that I should let you know something of my plans for this class." I tried to pitch my voice into its most informally pleasant register. "We're going to talk, you and I, but we'll be reasonable with each other. I would like you to listen to me without interrupting in any way, and when I'm through any one of you may say your piece without interruption from me." I was making it up as I went along and watching them; at the least sign that it wouldn't work I'd drop it, fast.

They were interested, in spite of themselves; even the husky blasé Denham was leaning forward on his desk watching me.

"My business here is to teach you, and I shall do my best to make my teaching as interesting as possible. If at any time I say anything which you do not understand or with which you do not agree, I would be pleased if you would let me know. Most of you will be leaving school within six months or so; that means that in a short while you will be embarked on the very adult business of earning a living. Bearing that in mind, I have decided that from now on you will be treated, not as children, but as young men and women, by me and by each other. When we move out of the state of childhood certain higher standards of conduct are expected of us . . ."

At this moment the door was flung open and Pamela Dare rushed in, somewhat breathlessly, to take her seat. She was very late.

"For instance," I continued, "there are really two ways in which a person may enter a room; one is in a controlled, dignified manner, the other is as if someone had just planted a heavy foot in your backside. Miss Dare has just shown us the second way; I'm quite sure she will now give us a demonstration of the first."

To this day I do not know what made me say it, but there it was. I was annoyed with the way in which she had just barged her way in, insolently carelessly late.

All eyes were on her as she had probably planned, but instead of supporting her entrance they were watching her, waiting to see the result of my challenge. She blushed.
“Well, Miss Dare?”
Her eyes were black with anger and humiliation, but she stood up and walked out, closing the door quietly behind her; then to my surprise, and I must confess, my relief, she opened it as quietly, and with a grace and dignity that would have befitted a queen, she walked to her seat.

“Thank you. As from today there are certain courtesies which will be observed at all times in this classroom. Myself you will address as ‘Mr. Braithwaite’ or ‘Sir’—the choice is yours; the young ladies will be addressed as ‘Miss’ and the young men will be addressed by their surnames.”

I hadn’t planned any of this, but it was unfolding all by itself, and I hoped, fitting into place. There was a general gasp at this, from boys and girls alike.

Potter was the first to protest.

“Why should we call ‘em ‘miss’, we know ‘em.”

“What is your name?”

“Potter.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Potter, Sir.” The “Sir” was somewhat delayed.

“Thank you, Potter. Now, is there any young lady present whom you consider unworthy of your courtesies?”

“Sir?”

“Is there any one of these young ladies who you think does not deserve to be addressed as Miss?”

With one accord the girls turned to look at Potter, as if daring him; he quailed visibly before their converted eyes and said: “No, Sir.”

“You should remember, Potter, that in a little while all of you may be expected to express these courtesies as part of your jobs; it would be helpful to you to become accustomed to giving and receiving them.”

I walked around my desk and sat in my chair. For the time being at least they were listening, really listening to me; maybe they would not understand every word, but they’d get the general import of my remarks.

1. converted: turned toward something
LEAP—Grade 8 Reading and Responding
To Sir With Love

1. Read the following sentence.

   "With one accord the girls turned to look at Potter, as if daring him; he quailed visibly before their converted eyes and said: 'No, Sir.'"

   The word quailed in this sentence means

   A. shrank.
   B. smirked.
   C. felt proud.
   D. became happy.

2. The teacher is annoyed with Pamela Dare because

   A. she refused to listen.
   B. she was rude to Potter.
   C. her behavior was disrespectful.
   D. her exit from the room was noisy.

3. In this passage, the teacher’s actions can best be described as

   A. rude.
   B. careless.
   C. vindictive.
   D. unrehearsed.

4. The main reason the teacher wants his students to practice courtesy is so that they can

   A. graduate on time.
   B. make good grades.
   C. please their parents.
   D. prepare for the job market.

5. Describe a turning point in this passage and explain its significance.

   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
   ____________________________________________
6. Based on the passage, what are two things that the teacher says or does that show he cares about the students?
LEAP—Grade 8 Reading and Responding
To Sir With Love
Answer Key

1. A Achievement Level: Mastery
   ELA-1-M1: Using knowledge of word meaning and developing basic vocabulary
   using various strategies (e.g., context clues, idioms, affixes, etymology, multiple-
   meaning words).

2. C Achievement Level: Basic
   ELA-7-M1: Using comprehension strategies (e.g., summarizing, recognizing literary
   devices, paraphrasing) to analyze oral, written, and visual texts.

3. D Achievement Level: Basic
   ELA-7-M1: Using comprehension strategies (e.g., summarizing, recognizing literary
   devices, paraphrasing) to analyze oral, written, and visual texts.

4. D Achievement Level: Approaching Basic
   ELA-7-M4: Using inductive and deductive reasoning skills across oral, written, and
   visual texts.

5. ELA-6-M2: Identifying, comparing, and responding to a variety of classic and
   contemporary fiction and nonfiction literature from many genres (e.g., novels,
   drama).

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| 2     | The student’s response  
   • describes a turning point in the passage  
   AND  
   • explains its significance. |
| 1     | The student’s response is partially correct. It  
   • describes a turning point  
   OR  
   • gives a description of its significance. |
| 0     | The student’s response is incorrect, irrelevant, too minimal to evaluate,  
   or blank. |

Exemplary Responses:
Turning Points
  _ The teacher is unsure of how his speech will be received. The first turning point  
    is when the students listen in spite of themselves.
  _ Other text-based response
Significance
_ This was significant because the teacher wanted to get their attention, and this
was proof that even though he was making it up as he went along, it was
working and they continued to listen.
_ Other text-based response

Other Turning Points
_ When Pamela Dare accepts the teacher’s instructions to enter the room
properly
_ When Potter says _Sir_
_ When the girls support the teacher instead of Potter
_ Other text-based response

Significance
_ Similar to above: significance is that they are willing to change
_ Other text-based response

6. ELA-1-M4: Interpreting (e.g., paraphrasing, comparing, contrasting) texts with
supportive explanations to generate connections to real-life situations and other texts
(e.g., business, technical, scientific).

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| 2     | The student’s response
|       | • includes at least two details showing Mr. Braithwaite’s concern. |
| 1     | The student’s response is partially correct. It
|       | • includes one detail showing Mr. Braithwaite’s concern. |
| 0     | The student’s response is incorrect, irrelevant, too minimal to evaluate, or blank. |

Exemplary Responses:
Things teacher says or does
_ All the way to school the teacher plans a way to reach the students.
_ He tries to speak pleasantly.
_ He says he will be reasonable.
_ He offers to let them speak also.
_ He says he wants to treat them like adults.
_ He states the rules clearly and gives reasons for the rules, saying they will need these
  skills on the job.
_ Other text-based response