

*What Was the Battle of Gettysburg?*  
By Jim O'Connor

STUDENT  
10/23/16  
Reading 1

## Non Fiction LRJ

“Meade’s strategy was simple.” This quote describes General George G. Meade’s battle strategy for day two of the Battle of Gettysburg. The first day of fighting was very violent and bloody. On the second day, Meade decided to simply place cannons and infantry in a four-mile-long line along Cemetery Ridge, the highest point of the battlefield. In a battle, whichever side has cannons and troops on the highest points is at an advantage, because the troops on the peaks have the best view of the charging army. So the Confederates, led by General Robert E. Lee, would have trouble taking the Union by surprise. A simple strategy like this one can be extremely effective. On the other hand, Lee planned an attack that depended on multiple steps, and if one wasn’t successful, it could cost the Confederates the whole battle. In the end, the Confederates *did* lose the Battle of Gettysburg, and it was a big turning point in the Civil War. So the simple Union strategy proved effective.

This reminds me of the game of chess. Chess is very much like a real battle in a real war, so you are almost like your own general. When I first started playing, I kept trying to beat my opponents using very complicated planning and moves, but they never worked. One day, I read about an extremely simple strategy in a chess book I got for a gift. The strategy is called “Blitzkrieg,” which is German for lightning, because you win so quickly. There are only four moves, and if you don’t win after those four moves, your troops or “pieces” are still in a good position. After I learned that simple strategy, I started winning so often that I tied for first place in our chess club’s winter tournament.

Throughout history, there have been many simple solutions to solve complicated problems, and lots of simple inventions that have changed everyday life. For example, in 1899, the paperclip was invented, which was a simple way to hold papers together without a straight pin, which is what was used before. The paperclip design was so useful that it hasn’t changed at all in 117 years! Sometimes, a simple idea can change the world. One day, hopefully, we’ll find a cure for cancer. Maybe the solution will be really simple, but brilliant.

*Eleven*  
By Sandra Cisneros

STUDENT  
10/26/16  
Reading 1

## Choice Fiction LRJ

“ . . . When you’re eleven, you’re also ten, and nine, and eight, and seven, and six, and five, and four, and three, and two, and one.” This quote describes how Rachel, a fifth grader in the short story *Eleven*, by Sandra Cisneros, feels when her teacher, Mrs. Price, incorrectly assumes that an old, frayed red sweater that’s been lying around in the coatroom for months is hers. Mrs. Price forces Rachel to put on the sweater, but it’s itchy and it smells like cottage cheese, and someone else has worn it before. Rachel can’t seem to speak up for herself to say that the sweater isn’t hers. As a result, she feels helpless like a much younger kid, because she can’t take control of the situation like an eleven-year-old.

I’ve felt this way many times myself. Earlier this school year, there was one day when my mom switched the contents of my brother’s and my backpacks, so my little brother, Sidney, was missing his own lunch and his homework folder. I knew that Sidney wouldn’t eat a sandwich with mustard on it, like I always get in my lunch, and since our lunches were switched, I knew he wouldn’t eat his sandwich. For some reason, even though I noticed that our backpacks were mixed up before school, I felt that there wasn’t time to go and deliver his lunch and his folder to his classroom in the second grade hallway. I didn’t think I knew exactly where his classroom was either, because the school year had just started, so he had a new teacher. But there *was* time, and I *could* have found where his classroom was just by asking somebody. Consequently, just like Rachel, I felt helpless and young, and unable to deal with the situation like a fifth grader. I felt like I couldn’t fix the problem.

No matter how old we are, maybe even when we’re adults, there will be some situations in which we don’t know what to do or how to react, in which we will feel helpless and young. Possibly even powerful public figures like the President feel like this sometimes. Maybe that’s because whether you’re one hundred years old or one, you will always have weaknesses or things that make you feel powerless.

*Sea Change*  
By Frank Viva

STUDENT  
10/17/16  
Reading 1

## Fiction LRJ

In the book *Sea Change*, a boy named Eliot Dionisi is sent away to Point Aconi, Nova Scotia, for the summer to live with his Great Uncle Earl, whom he's never met. He's sure that his friends back home will have so much more fun over the summer, and that he will be stuck with "wrinkly old relatives who smelled like fish." Sure enough, Point Aconi is an isolated little fishing village, and Uncle Earl wakes Eliot up when it's still dark every morning to work on his lobster boat, and feeds him things like tongue and onions for dinner. But as the summer goes by, Eliot makes new friends, learns how to help on the lobster boat, like rubber banding lobster claws, and he also changes as a person. He tries new things, which gives him a sense of confidence, and he does something really brave to help a friend in trouble, who is being abused by her father. At the end of the book Eliot realizes that spending the summer in Point Aconi, which seemed so unappealing at first, was one of the best experiences of his life.

After I read that quote about how Eliot was dreading going to Nova Scotia, and then it actually turned out to be a learning opportunity, I was reminded of a similar experience of my own. When I was six, I started to play baseball on a team, but I wasn't very good. I couldn't throw twenty feet. I was terrified of the ball at bat, and when someone was throwing to me. It just wasn't fun. After a couple of seasons, I decided that I wanted to quit. But even though I pleaded and pleaded with my parents, they didn't let me, because they said that it was important for me to learn how to do something that I wasn't good at. I've been playing for four years now, and I'm still not the greatest player, but I can throw from third to first, I'm a consistent contact hitter at the top of the lineup, and I can catch balls that my dad throws at me as hard as he can. Now, baseball is really fun, and I look forward to every game. I also learned something about myself. Sticking with baseball taught me that I could succeed at something that I thought I couldn't do before.

Like Eliot, I discovered that even if something seems like it's going to be the worst experience ever, it's good to have an open mind. So if you're ever forced to do something that you don't want to do or go somewhere that you don't want to go, don't expect the very worst from it. Things that make you feel uncomfortable or seem difficult at first can turn out to be great learning opportunities, and because you learn new things, that experience can be enjoyable.

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10/27/16  
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### LRJ Vocabulary Assignment

| <b>Original Word</b> | <b>New Word</b> | <b>New Word Definition</b>  | <b>Explanation</b>   |
|----------------------|-----------------|---|--|
| 1) throws            | hurls           | Throw (an object) with great force.   | I think "hurls" is a better word choice because it emphasizes how fast and hard my dad throws the ball to me.  |
| 2) big               | critical        | Having a decisive or crucial importance in the success, failure, or existence of something. | I think "critical" is a better choice because it signifies that the Battle of Gettysburg was crucially important to the outcome of the Civil War.                                    |
| 3) things            | circumstances   | A fact or condition connected with or relevant to an event or action.                       | I think "circumstances" is a better word choice because it is more specific than "things," and my sentence is about specific situations, not "things," that make you feel powerless. |