

OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/AP LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

Name (first and last): _____ Date: _____ Grade: _____

Reading Package 11: Mary Hunter Austin's *The Land of Little Rain*

Mary Hunter Austin (1868 – 1934) was born in Illinois and moved to California after graduating from Blackburn College in 1888. Her family joined many others in taking advantage of the 1862 Homestead Act, which encouraged people to buy cheap and easily-attainable land out west. She spent over a decade wandering the desert, conducting studies of flora, fauna and local peoples, whether they were Native tribes struggling to retain their land, or migrants like herself who had moved to the frontier. Austin was one of the earliest nature writers of the American Southwest and she went on to become a prolific author of works that included poems, plays, essays and novels. Her most famous writing can be found in *The Land of Little Rain*, a collection of lyrical essays on the lives of the inhabitants (human and otherwise) of the desert. Although she never achieved the same level of fame as naturalists like Henry David Thoreau and Aldo Leopold, her work proved to be influential for environmental movements. *Land of Little Rain* has been published six times since its initial publication in 1903, and many of the places Austin wrote so passionately about became national parks in 1994, when President Bill Clinton signed the California Desert Protection Act.

from *The Land of Little Rain*

PREFACE

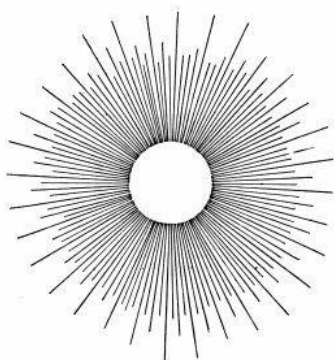
I confess to a great liking for the Indian fashion of name-giving: every man known by that phrase which best expresses him to whoso names him. Thus he may be Mighty-Hunter, or Man-Afraid-of-a-Bear, according as he is called by friend or enemy, and Scar-Face to those who knew him by the eye's grasp only. No other fashion, I think, sets so well with the various natures that inhabit in us, and if you agree with me you will understand why so few names are written here as they appear in the geography. For if I love a lake known by the name of the man who discovered it, which endears itself by reason of the close-locked pines it nourishes about its borders, you may look in my account to find it so described. But if the Indians have been there before me, you shall have their name,

which is always beautifully fit and does not originate in the poor human desire for perpetuity.

Nevertheless there are certain peaks, cañons, and clear meadow spaces which are above all compassing of words, and have a certain fame as of the nobly great to whom we give no familiar names. Guided by these you may reach my country and find or not find, according as it lieth in you, much that is set down here. And more. The earth is no wanton to give up all her best to every comer, but keeps a sweet, separate intimacy for each. But if you do not find it all as I write, think me not less dependable nor yourself less clever. There is a sort of pretense allowed in

matters of the heart, as one should say by way of illustration, “I know a man who ...,” and so give up his dearest experience without betrayal. And I am in no mind to direct you to delectable places toward which you will hold yourself less tenderly than I. So by this fashion of naming I keep faith with the land and annex to my own estate a very great territory to which none has a surer title.

The country where you may have sight and touch of that which is written lies between the high Sierras south from Yosemite¹—east and south over a very great assemblage of broken ranges beyond Death Valley,² and on illimitably into the Mojave Desert. You may come into the borders of it from the south by a stage journey that has the effect of involving a great lapse of time, or from the north by rail, dropping out of the overland route at Reno. The best of all ways is over the Sierra passes by pack and trail, seeing and believing. But the real heart and core of the country are not to be come at in a month’s vacation. One must summer and winter with the land and wait its occasions. Pine woods that take two and three seasons to the ripening of cones, roots that lie by in the sand seven years awaiting a growing rain, firs that grow fifty years before flowering,—these do not scrape acquaintance. But if ever you come beyond the borders as far as the town that lies in a hill dimple at the foot of Kearsarge, never leave it until you have knocked at the door of the brown house under the willow-tree at the end of the village street, and there you shall have such news of the land, of its trails and what is astir in them, as one lover of it can give to another.



THE LAND OF LITTLE RAIN

East away from the Sierras, south from Panamint and Amargosa,³ east and south many an uncounted mile, is the Country of Lost Borders.

¹ A valley in Yosemite National Park in Northern California, famous for *Half Dome*, a granite peak that’s shaped like a dome that’s been cut in half.

² One of the hottest places on the planet, Death Valley (now a national park) is located near the border of California and Nevada. It’s home to the lowest point in North America (282 ft. below sea level) as well as the highest point in the contiguous United States (14, 505 ft.).

³ *Sierra Nevada*: a mountain range in California; *Panamint*: a mining town located close to Death Valley, California, now a ghost town; *Amargosa*: a desert located along the California-Nevada border.

Ute, Paiute, Mojave, and Shoshone⁴ inhabit its frontiers, and as far into the heart of it as a man dare go. Not the law, but the land sets the limit. Desert is the name it wears upon the maps, but the Indian's is the better word. Desert is a loose term to indicate land that supports no man; whether the land can be bitted and broken to that purpose is not proven. Void of life it never is, however dry the air and villainous the soil.

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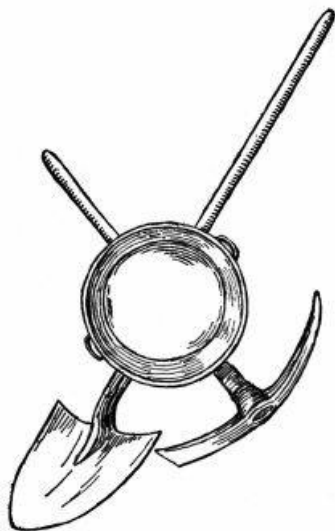


This is the nature of that country. There are hills, rounded, blunt, burned, squeezed up out of chaos, chrome and vermilion painted, aspiring to the snow-line. Between the hills lie high level-looking plains full of intolerable sun glare, or narrow valleys drowned in a blue haze. The hill surface is streaked with ash drift and black, unweathered lava flows. After rains water accumulates in the hollows of small closed valleys, and, evaporating, leaves hard dry levels of pure desertness that get the local name of dry lakes. Where the mountains are steep and the rains heavy, the pool is never quite dry, but dark and bitter, rimmed about with the efflorescence of alkaline deposits. A thin crust of it lies along the marsh over the vegetating area, which has neither beauty nor freshness. In the broad wastes open to the wind the sand drifts in hummocks about the stubby shrubs, and between them the soil shows saline traces. The sculpture of the hills here is more wind than water work, though the quick storms do sometimes scar them past many a year's redeeming. In all the Western desert edges there are essays in miniature at the famed, terrible Grand Cañon, to which, if you keep on long enough in this country, you will come at last.

Since this is a hill country one expects to find springs, but not to depend upon them; for when found they are often brackish and unwholesome, or maddening, slow dribbles in a thirsty soil. Here you find the hot sink of Death Valley, or high rolling districts where the air has always a tang of frost. Here are the long heavy winds and breathless calms on the tilted mesas where

⁴ Native Tribes whose traditional homelands are located in the U.S. Southwest.

dust devils dance, whirling up into a wide, pale sky. Here you have no rain when all the earth cries for it, or quick downpours called cloud-bursts for violence. A land of lost rivers, with little in it to love; yet a land that once visited must be come back to inevitably. If it were not so there would be little told of it.



THE POCKET HUNTER

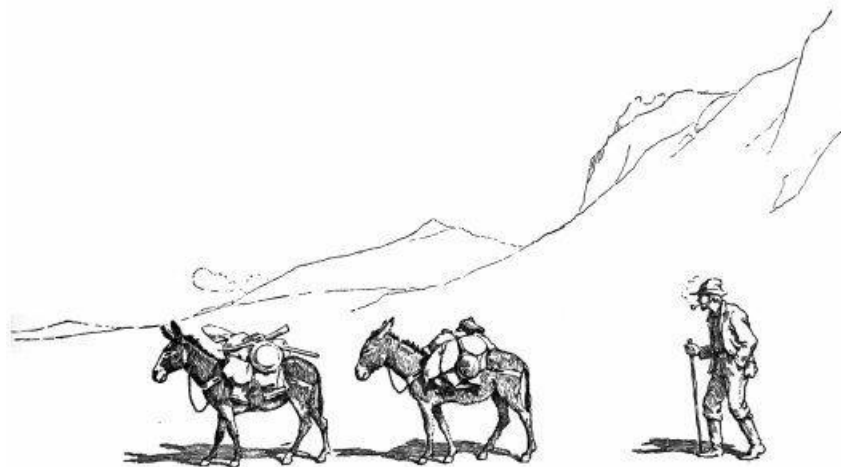
I remember very well when I first met him. Walking in the evening glow to spy the marriages of the white gilies, I sniffed the unmistakable odor of burning sage. It is a smell that carries far and indicates usually the nearness of a campoodie,⁵ but on the level mesa nothing taller showed than Diana's sage. Over the tops of it, beginning to dusk under a young white moon, trailed a wavering ghost of smoke, and at the end of it I came upon the Pocket Hunter making a dry camp in the friendly scrub. He sat tailorwise in the sand, with his coffee-pot on the coals, his supper ready to hand in the frying-pan, and himself in a mood for talk. His pack burros in hobbles strayed off to hunt for a wetter mouthful than the sage afforded, and gave him no concern.



⁵ A word with Spanish origins that was used to refer to small Native encampments or villages.

We came upon him often after that, threading the windy passes, or by water-holes in the desert hills, and got to know much of his way of life. He was a small, bowed man, with a face and manner and speech of no character at all, as if he had that faculty of small hunted things of taking on the protective color of his surroundings. His clothes were of no fashion that I could remember, except that they bore liberal markings of pot black, and he had a curious fashion of going about with his mouth open, which gave him a vacant look until you came near enough to perceive him busy about an endless hummed, wordless tune. He traveled far and took a long time to it, but the simplicity of his kitchen arrangements was elemental. A pot for beans, a coffee-pot, a frying-pan, a tin to mix bread in—he fed the burros in this when there was need—with these he had been half round our western world and back. He explained to me very early in our acquaintance what was good to take to the hills for food: nothing sticky, for that “dirtied the pots;” nothing with “juice” to it, for that would not pack to advantage; and nothing likely to ferment. He used no gun, but he would set snares by the water-holes for quail and doves, and in the trout country he carried a line. Burros he kept, one or two according to his pack, for this chief excellence, that they would eat potato parings and firewood. He had owned a horse in the foothill country, but when he came to the desert with no forage but mesquite, he found himself under the necessity of picking the beans from the briers, a labor that drove him to the use of pack animals to whom thorns were a relish.

I suppose no man becomes a pocket hunter by first intention. He must be born with the faculty, and along comes the occasion, like the tap on the test tube that induces crystallization. My friend had been several things of no moment until he struck a thousand-dollar pocket in the Lee District and came into his vocation. A pocket, you must know, is a small body of rich ore occurring by itself, or in a vein of poorer stuff. Nearly every mineral ledge contains such, if only one has the luck to hit upon them without too much labor. The sensible thing for a man to do who has found a good pocket is to buy himself into business and keep away from the hills. The logical thing is to set out looking for another one. My friend the Pocket Hunter had been looking twenty years. His working outfit was a shovel, a pick, a gold pan which he kept cleaner than his plate, and a pocket magnifier. When he came to a watercourse he would pan out the gravel of its bed for “colors,” and under the glass determine if they had come from far or near, and so spying he would work up the stream until he found where the drift of the gold-bearing outcrop fanned out into the creek; then up the side of the cañon till he came to the proper vein. I think he said the best indication of small pockets was an iron stain, but I could never get the run of miner’s talk enough to feel instructed for pocket hunting. He had another method in the waterless hills, where he would work in and out of blind gullies and all windings of the manifold strata that appeared not to have cooled since they had been heaved up. His itinerary began with the east slope of the Sierras of the Snows, where that range swings across to meet the coast hills, and all up that slope to the Truckee River country, where the long cold forbade his progress north. Then he worked back down one or another of the nearly parallel ranges that lie out desertward, and so down to the sink of the Mojave River, burrowing to oblivion in the sand,—a big mysterious land, a lonely, inhospitable land, beautiful, terrible. But he came to no harm in it; the land tolerated him as it might a gopher or a badger. Of all its inhabitants it has the least concern for man.



There are many strange sorts of humans bred in a mining country, each sort despising the queernesses of the other, but of them all I found the Pocket Hunter most acceptable for his clean, companionable talk. There was more color to his reminiscences than the faded sandy old miners “kyoteing,” that is, tunneling like a coyote (kyote in the vernacular) in the core of a lonesome hill. Such a one has found, perhaps, a body of tolerable ore in a poor lead,—remember that I can never be depended on to get the terms right,—and followed it into the heart of country rock to no profit, hoping, burrowing, and hoping. These men go harmlessly mad in time, believing themselves just behind the wall of fortune—most likable and simple men, for whom it is well to do any kindly thing that occurs to you except lend them money. I have known “grub stakers” too, those persuasive sinners to whom you make allowances of flour and pork and coffee in consideration of the ledges they are about to find; but none of these proved so much worth while as the Pocket Hunter. He wanted nothing of you and maintained a cheerful preference for his own way of life. It was an excellent way if you had the constitution for it. The Pocket Hunter had gotten to that point where he knew no bad weather, and all places were equally happy so long as they were out of doors. I do not know just how long it takes to become saturated with the elements so that one takes no account of them. Myself can never get past the glow and exhilaration of a storm, the wrestle of long dust-heavy winds, the play of live thunder on the rocks, nor past the keen fret of fatigue when the storm outlasts physical endurance. But prospectors and Indians get a kind of a weather shell that remains on the body until death.

The Pocket Hunter had seen destruction by the violence of nature and the violence of men, and felt himself in the grip of an All-wisdom that killed men or spared them as seemed for their good; but of death by sickness he knew nothing except that he believed he should never suffer it. He had been in Grape-vine Cañon the year of storms that changed the whole front of the mountain. All day he had come down under the wing of the storm, hoping to win past it, but finding it traveling with him until night. It kept on after that, he supposed, a steady downpour, but could not with certainty say, being securely deep in sleep. But the weather instinct does not sleep. In the night the heavens behind the hill dissolved in rain, and the roar of the storm was borne in and mixed with his dreaming, so that it moved him, still asleep, to get up and out of the path of it. What finally woke him was the crash of pine logs as they went down before the unbridled flood, and the swirl of foam that lashed him where he clung in the tangle of scrub while the wall of water went by. It went on against the cabin of Bill Gerry and laid Bill stripped and broken on a sand bar at the mouth of the Grape-vine, seven miles away. There, when the sun

was up and the wrath of the rain spent, the Pocket Hunter found and buried him; but he never laid his own escape at any door but the unintelligible favor of the Powers.

The journeyings of the Pocket Hunter led him often into that mysterious country beyond Hot Creek where a hidden force works mischief, mole-like, under the crust of the earth. Whatever agency is at work in that neighborhood, and it is popularly supposed to be the devil, it changes means and direction without time or season. It creeps up whole hillsides with insidious heat, unguessed until one notes the pine woods dying at the top, and having scorched out a good block of timber returns to steam and spout in caked, forgotten crevices of years before. It will break up sometimes blue-hot and bubbling, in the midst of a clear creek, or make a sucking, scalding quicksand at the ford. These outbreaks had the kind of morbid interest for the Pocket Hunter that a house of unsavory reputation has in a respectable neighborhood, but I always found the accounts he brought me more interesting than his explanations, which were compounded of fag ends of miner's talk and superstition. He was a perfect gossip of the woods, this Pocket Hunter, and when I could get him away from "leads" and "strikes" and "contacts," full of fascinating small talk about the ebb and flood of creeks, the piñon crop on Black Mountain, and the wolves of Mesquite Valley. I suppose he never knew how much he depended for the necessary sense of home and companionship on the beasts and trees, meeting and finding them in their wonted places,—the bear that used to come down Pine Creek in the spring, pawing out trout from the shelters of sod banks, the juniper at Lone Tree Spring, and the quail at Paddy Jack's.

There is a place on Waban, south of White Mountain, where flat, wind-tilted cedars make low tents and coves of shade and shelter, where the wild sheep winter in the snow. Woodcutters and prospectors had brought me word of that, but the Pocket Hunter was accessory to the fact. About the opening of winter, when one looks for sudden big storms, he had attempted a crossing by the nearest path, beginning the ascent at noon. It grew cold, the snow came on thick and blinding, and wiped out the trail in a white smudge; the storm drift blew in and cut off landmarks, the early dark obscured the rising drifts. According to the Pocket Hunter's account, he knew where he was, but couldn't exactly say. Three days before he had been in the west arm of Death Valley on a short water allowance, ankle deep in shifty sand; now he was on the rise of Waban, knee-deep in sodden snow, and in both cases he did the only allowable thing—he walked on. That is the only thing to do in a snowstorm in any case. It might have been the creature instinct, which in his way of life had room to grow, that led him to the cedar shelter; at any rate he found it about four hours after dark, and heard the heavy breathing of the flock. He said that if he thought at all at this juncture he must have thought that he had stumbled on a storm-belated shepherd with his silly sheep; but in fact he took no note of anything but the warmth of packed fleeces, and snuggled in between them dead with sleep. If the flock stirred in the night he stirred drowsily to keep close and let the storm go by. That was all until morning woke him shining on a white world. Then the very soul of him shook to see the wild sheep of God stand up about him, nodding their great horns beneath the cedar roof, looking out on the wonder of the snow. They had moved a little away from him with the coming of the light, but paid him no more heed. The light broadened and the white pavilions of the snow swam in the heavenly blueness of the sea from which they rose. The cloud drift scattered and broke billowing in the cañons. The leader stamped lightly on the litter to put the flock in motion, suddenly they took the drifts in those long light leaps that are nearest to flight, down and away on the slopes of Waban. Think of that to happen to a Pocket Hunter! But though he had fallen on many a wished-

for hap, he was curiously inapt at getting the truth about beasts in general. He believed in the venom of toads, and charms for snake bites, and—for this I could never forgive him—had all the miner's prejudices against my friend the coyote. Thief, sneak, and son of a thief were the friendliest words he had for this little gray dog of the wilderness.

Of course with so much seeking he came occasionally upon pockets of more or less value, otherwise he could not have kept up his way of life; but he had as much luck in missing great ledges as in finding small ones. He had been all over the Tonopah country, and brought away float without happening upon anything that gave promise of what that district was to become in a few years. He claimed to have chipped bits off the very outcrop of the California Rand, without finding it worth while to bring away, but none of these things put him out of countenance.

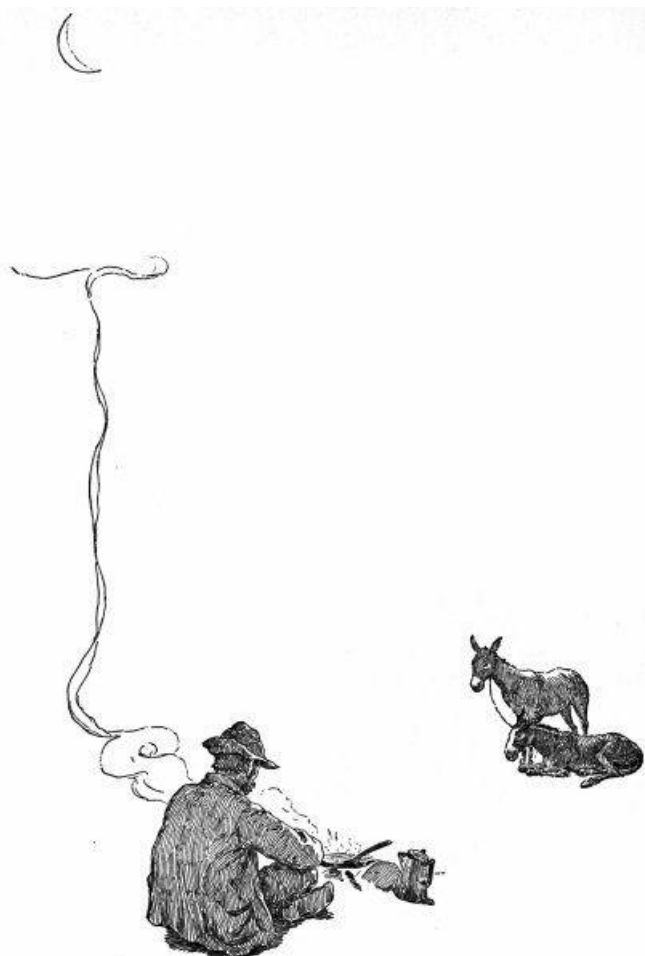
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It was once in roving weather, when we found him shifting pack on a steep trail, that I observed certain of his belongings done up in green canvas bags, the veritable “green bag” of English novels. It seemed so incongruous a reminder in this untenanted West that I dropped down beside the trail overlooking the vast dim valley, to hear about the green canvas. He had gotten it, he said, in London years before, and that was the first I had known of his having been abroad. It was after one of his “big strikes” that he had made the Grand Tour,⁶ and had brought nothing away from it but the green canvas bags, which he conceived would fit his needs, and an ambition. This last was nothing less than to strike it rich and set himself up among the eminently bourgeois of London. It seemed that the situation of the wealthy English middle class, with just enough gentility above to aspire to, and sufficient smaller fry to bully and patronize, appealed to his imagination, though of course he did not put it so crudely as that.

⁶ A tour of Europe that was (and in many ways still is) taken by young upper-class men as part of their education.

It was no news to me then, two or three years after, to learn that he had taken ten thousand dollars from an abandoned claim, just the sort of luck to have pleased him, and gone to London to spend it. The land seemed not to miss him any more than it had minded him, but I missed him and could not forget the trick of expecting him in least likely situations. Therefore it was with a pricking sense of the familiar that I followed a twilight trail of smoke, a year or two later, to the swale of a dripping spring, and came upon a man by the fire with a coffee-pot and frying-pan. I was not surprised to find it was the Pocket Hunter. No man can be stronger than his destiny.



Read the excerpt from *The Land of Little Rain* and determine the following (please write in complete sentences):

Subject: what *specific* subject is the writer writing about?

Occasion: what prompted the writer to write?

Audience: who is the writer writing for?

Purpose: why is the writer writing?

Speaker: Who is the writer? What qualifications does he or she have? What makes them uniquely suited to write about the subject?

List some examples of how Mary Hunter Austin uses the three rhetorical appeals in her essay.

| Ethos | Logos | Pathos |
|-------|-------|--------|
| | | |

Consider the following passage from paragraph 6:

“The sculpture of the hills here is more wind than water work, though the quick storms do sometimes scar them past many a year’s redeeming.”

1. A) What exactly is Austin saying here? Translate this passage into the language of a typical 16-year old high schooler from the year 2020. The only thing that’s *atypical* about the student is that she’s a great writer (I’m not trying to diss high schoolers, I swear!). Make sure you keep the structure of the phrase as close to the original as possible.

1. B) What effect does Mary Hunter Austin establish by using phrases such as “sculpture,” “more wind than water work,” “scar” and “past many a year’s redeeming”? How would you describe her style? And how does this style of writing contribute to the argument(s) she’s making?

- 2) Consider the following passage from paragraph 10:

“I suppose no man becomes a pocket hunter by first intention. He must be born with the faculty, and along comes the occasion, like the tap on the test tube that induces crystallization. My friend had been several things of no moment until he struck a thousand-dollar pocket in the Lee District and came into his vocation.”

Does Austin succeed in making her audience feel sympathetic towards the pocket hunter? Why or why not? You may draw on evidence from the rest of the passage in your answer.

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- 3) **INTEGRATION/MODIFIER EXERCISE:** Show off your integration skills by writing a blurb (no longer than two sentences) that: a) describes what you thought a “pocket hunter” was before you read this excerpt from *Land of Little Rain*, b) a quote from Austin’s definition of a “pocket,” and c) your brief analysis of how you think the term “pocket hunter” works rhetorically in influencing our understanding of the person it describes (Hint: use both one-word and phrase-oriented modifiers to extend the length of your sentences).

Remember: no more than two sentences!

Consider the following passage from paragraph 10:

“The sensible thing for a man to do who has found a good pocket is to buy himself into business and keep away from the hills. The logical thing is to set out looking for another one.”

- 5. A) (OPTIONAL)** What is the difference between “sensible” and “logical”? Which of these two options do you think makes more sense, and why?

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5. **B) (OPTIONAL)** Why do you think Austin uses “sensible” and “logical” (both words that are typically used to describe decisions made by smart and reasonable people) to describe vastly different courses of action?
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5. **C) SUMMARY PARAGRAPH EXERCISE:** Write an 8-12 sentence paragraph that focuses on the Pocket Hunter figure in Mary Hunter Austin’s writing. In your paragraph, **answer all of the following questions:**
- 1) Who is the Pocket Hunter?
 - 2) What is Mary Hunter Austin’s overall argument?
 - 3) How does Mary Hunter Austin’s use of fiction (including her use of one or more “voices,” as described in Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of Heteroglossia) promote her overall argument?
 - 4) What point is Austin trying to make when the pocket hunter returns to the desert at the end of “The Pocket Hunter” chapter?
 - 5) How does this point bolster her overall argument?

A Level 5-worthy Checklist:

- A topic sentence (opening sentence) that catches the reader’s attention and summarizes what the paragraph will be about.
- A definition that uses quotes from Austin’s writing to pinpoint who exactly the Pocket Hunter is.
- A summary of Austin’s argument that includes quotes from the text.
- An analysis of how the story of the Pocket Hunter promotes Austin’s argument.

- A concluding sentence that explains the significance of your analysis of the Pocket Hunter.
- Seamless integration of quotes and paraphrasing using MLA format.

Use the space below to plan your paragraph:

- Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaids Tale*

Example 2:

Now get this, these emcees wanna test me like litmus,
Bear witness: I'm like shot clocks, interstate cops, and blood clots –
My point is, your flow gets stopped!

- Talib Kweli in “Hater Players,” from the album *Mos Def & Talib Kweli Are Black Star*

Example 3:

“Wanting to reform the world without discovering one’s true self is like trying to cover the world with leather to avoid the pain of walking on stones and thorns. It is much simpler to wear shoes.”

-Hindu Sage Ramana Maharshi

Example 4 (Epic Simile):

As east wind and south wind fight it out with each other
in the valleys of the mountains to shake the deep forest timber,
oak tree and ash and the cornel with the delicate bark; these
whip their wide-reaching branches against one another
in inhuman noise, and the crash goes up from the splintering timber;
so Trojans and Achaians springing against one another
cut men down, nor did either side think of disastrous panic,
and many sharp spears were driven home about Kebriones,
and many feathered arrows sprung from the bowstrings, many
great throwing stones pounded against the shields, as they fought on
hard over his body, as he in the turning dust lay
mightily in his might, his horsemanship all forgotten.

-Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 16: 765-776. (Trans. Richmond Lattimore). Patroklos and Hektor fighting over the body of Hektor’s half-brother, Kebriones.

Provide an example from a literary work, article, essay, speech, adage (traditional saying), movie, TV commercial, song or other form of media (remember to include the name of the author and/or the source):

Describe how your chosen example is effective. Remember to 1) describe how your chosen example is in fact an example of the rhetorical device (*[insert quote here] is an example of [insert rhetorical device here] because...*) and 2) describe the point or argument that the author is trying to make and how your chosen example promotes that point or argument.

Create your own example:

Describe how your created example is effective. Remember to 1) describe how your created example is in fact an example of the rhetorical device (*[insert quote here] is an example of [insert rhetorical device here] because...*) and 2) describe the point or argument that you are trying to make and how your created example promotes that point or argument.
