ELA Day 1 – Hanging with the Cool Kids

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Hanging with the Cool Kids

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tortugamediaservices

Middle school felt like a jungle. Students ran through the hallways like wild animals, teachers stood tall in the front of their classrooms like haunting trees, and I, like a river, flowed between the two trying to find my place.

I wasn't just in a new school; I was also in a new city. My family had recently moved from New Jersey to Florida, and I really missed my old best friend Terrance. Back home, we used to play basketball and do our homework together.

Before I left for Florida, we solidified that our friendship was for life when Terrance said, "Donovan, this isn't the end for us! Let's make a pact that we'll both get good grades so we can get into Morehouse after high school." Morehouse is one of the best Historically Black Universities in the country, and we had our hearts set on going there together.

But college with my best friend was years away, and right now, after three weeks of middle school, I was still **isolated** and sitting alone during lunch. "Donovan," I told myself as I walked home after school, "you need to come out of your shell."

The next day, I was sitting at lunch alone again when I looked out the window and caught sight of Reggie, a lanky, **confident** boy that I had noticed during my second day at school. Reggie always seemed to be strutting to class with an attitude that **demanded** respect, cracking jokes and nodding to his buddies. Over the next few weeks, I observed that wherever he was, Reggie was at the center of attention. There was no denying it-he was just *cool*.

Today he was playing basketball with his friends in the schoolyard, just like I used to do with Terrance. I wanted to play, too. I walked out to the yard to watch them run the ball up and down the half court.

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Soon, their ball got loose and rolled towards my feet. I felt a sudden spark of courage-so, in one fluid motion, I picked it up and made a shot. Score!

"Whew, that was smooth!" Reggie exclaimed. He and his friends rushed over, congratulating me on the spontaneous shot. I could feel my cheeks working hard, barely holding in a grin as they hyped me up.

"Wanna play?" Reggie asked, adding, "*You* gotta be on my team!"

"Y-yea...sure," I stammered, and joined them on the court.

Ten minutes into the game, I was beaming. I finally made friends! But before we could finish, the bell rang, so I threw the ball at Reggie and gestured that I was going back inside, saying, "Lunch is over,"-but Reggie threw the ball back at me.

"Forget that bell," he barked, "'cause we're gonna' finish this!"

A gnawing pain hit my stomach. I just made new friends, and I sure didn't want to leave them... and I was having fun, too... but...

"Umm...I don't want to miss class," I said sheepishly.

"Come on, it's only one period. We've seen you sitting alone at lunch, and you need a crew, so.... now *we're* your crew," he winked.

Reggie was right-skipping just once wouldn't hurt, and I needed a crew!

I bounced the ball and began to play again, but with each bounce, I could hear Terrance's voice echoing in my head, saying, "What about your grades? Would a Morehouse man skip class? What about our pact?"

I tried to ignore his words, but like a siren, they grew louder-so loud that I dropped the ball.

"On second thought," I told Reggie, "I've got to go." Deep inside, I knew that skipping once would turn into more than once, and I didn't want to begin the year like that. My grades were too important.

"To class? Don't be a loser," Reggie groaned, but I could hardly hear him, because I was running. I knew I wasn't a loser and that this decision was a winning move.

As I panted into class, Miss Garfield called me out, "Donovan, you're late."

"It won't happen again," I apologized.

"You missed the pairing process for our next project, but luckily for you, there's a new student here who you can pair with," she said.

I couldn't believe it. Terrance?! Had he moved to Florida, too? I scanned the room but... nope, no Terrance. Instead, there was a girl named Jamie, who smiled with all her teeth and sat down next to me.

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Jamie and I began to work on the project together and discovered that we had lots in common, even beyond being new in town. She played basketball, worked hard in school, and even wanted to one day go to Spelman, Morehouse's sister school. After school ended that day, we went out to the schoolyard where I had left Reggie and his friends. Jamie and I shot some hoops, hung out, and studied a bit.

This felt right! I didn't have Terrance and I didn't have Reggie... but I *did* have a feeling that Jamie could be the start of a crew of my own. Maybe things in this new school were going to be cool, after all.

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Vocabulary

confident

adjective

definition: having trust or faith; satisfied and sure.
We are confident that our team will win.

Spanish: confiado, seguro

demand

transitive verb

definition: to need or require.
Babies demand a lot of attention.
The roof demands fixing immediately.

Spanish: demandar, exigir, reclarmar

forms: demanded, demanding, demands

isolated

adjective

definition: apart from other persons or things; remote.
They took the boat around the shore in search of an isolated beach.

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1. Before you start reading...

Here are the vocabulary words that will be in this reading. Let's see how well you already know them.

Check the box that shows how well you know each word. It's ok if you don't know them yet (this is not graded)!

	Don't know it	Have heard of it but not sure of its meaning	Know something about its meaning	Know it well
confident				
demand				

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2. Word Changer

Words have different forms when we use them in different ways. Write the correct vocabulary word, in its correct form, in each blank.

We are _____ that our team will win.

The roof _____ fixing immediately.

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3. After reading and exploring the words through some activities...

Do you know these words better? Check the box that shows how well you know each word. It's ok if you don't know them yet (this is not graded)!

	Don't know it	Have heard of it but not sure of its meaning	Know something about its meaning	Know it well
confident				
demand				

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Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. What pact did Terrance and Donovan make before Donovan left for Florida?

A. They will both skip class every week so they can make new friends more easily.

B. They will both go to the same middle school even though they live far away from each other.

C. They will both play basketball every day with new people so they get better at the sport.

D. They will both get good grades so they can get into Morehouse together after high school.

2. How does Donovan describe Reggie?

A. as a quiet, lonely student who sits by himself

B. as a new kid in school who wants to go to Morehouse

C. as a confident, cool guy who is the center of attention

D. as a guy who dislikes sports like basketball

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3. Read the following sentences from the text.

"Soon, their ball got loose and rolled towards my feet. I felt a sudden spark of courage-so, in one fluid motion, I picked it up and made a shot. Score!

'Whew, that was smooth!' Reggie exclaimed. He and his friends rushed over, congratulating me on the spontaneous shot. I could feel my cheeks working hard, barely holding in a grin as they hyped me up.

'Wanna play?' Reggie asked, adding, '*You* gotta be on my team!'

"Y-yea...sure," I stammered, and joined them on the court.

Ten minutes into the game, I was beaming. I finally made friends!"

What conclusion can you draw from this evidence?

A. Donovan feels happy and excited to have made friends after playing basketball with Reggie.

B. This was Donovan's first time playing basketball and he wants to practice more when he goes back home.

C. Reggie doesn't want Donovan to play basketball with him because Donovan is new to the school.

D. After joining the game, Donovan is unsure about whether he wants to be friends with Reggie and his friends.

4. How does Donovan's pact with Terrance help him decide whether or not to skip class?

A. Donovan thinks Terrance is also moving to Florida with his family and may be in his class that day.

B. Donovan decides that the pact doesn't matter anymore because he's in a new middle school.

C. Donovan knows skipping class may lower his chances of getting to go to Morehouse with Terrance.

D. Donovan decides to skip class because he believes Terrance would do the same thing.

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5. What is one main theme of this story?

A. It is easier to learn and remember facts from class if you teach someone else those facts.

B. It is important to stay true to yourself and your values, even when there is pressure to fit in.

C. The best way to make new friends in a new school is to play a sport like basketball with them.

D. To get into a good middle school, you have to study every day, even on the weekends.

6. Why does the author compare middle school to a jungle?

A. to show how Donovan isn't comfortable in the new and unfamiliar environment

B. to show how everything stays the same each day in middle school

C. to show how Donovan easily navigates the calm hallways in his new school

D. to show how Florida has a lot more wild animals than New Jersey

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

_____ skipping class with Reggie, Donovan decides to go back to class and begins working on a school project with Jamie.

A. Before

B. As a result of

C. Instead of

D. Finally

8. Describe what Donovan's first three weeks of middle school were like, before he told himself to come out of his shell. Use details from the text to support your answer.

9. Why might Donovan want to skip class when Reggie tells him to?

10. Does Donovan's character or personality change in this story? Argue yes or no, using evidence from the text to support your answer

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