
SAMPLE CONTEXT RESPONSE: FAMILY

OUR CLOSE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS BRING US THE GREATEST
JOY AND DISTRESS.

PLANNING

- Great joy comes from close relationships, and these are often our family relationships.
- Great distress also comes from our close relationships, and often these are our family relationships.
- Most of our close relationships are with family, but sometimes we experience these extremes of experience with people we are close to but are not family.

THE RESPONSE

It is common for people to decry life in the Western world in recent decades as both materialistic and individualistic. In spite of this perception, we are social creatures and, for the most part, live and thrive together. In our world of social connectivity, our strongest connections are with family, so it is unsurprising that we find our brightest and darkest moments with these people. As we decry these modern times, it seems that the notion of family was easier to define in the halcyon days of the past: a husband, a wife, and kids, all living together. But it has always been more complicated than that. Any given family evolves with births, deaths and marriages. Relationships and loyalties wax and wane as circumstances change, sometimes gradually and sometimes spectacularly. In 2010, a family might include the "traditional" unit and it might include step-children, de-facto partner, non-biological parents, and same-sex couples. Whatever the label on these relationships, they share common ground. They tend to be enduring, strong, and – for the most part – caring. In these close relationships, we can experience all the major joys of our life. These might be as grand as the love for a child, or as mundane as the moments lying next to your partner before the alarm goes off in the morning. In contrast to the joys, our closeness in families also exposes us to distress, both minor and extreme. We can lose the ones we love, either through death or alienation. Our close

Comment [%1]: Global statement about the theme

Comment [%2]: Restate the prompt

Comment [%3]: Define the key concept: family

Comment [%4]: Introduce the first point

relationships can sour and becomes destructive. Of course, these things can happen outside the family, too. Substantial attachments to people sometimes happen outside the family unit, however wide the family definition is drawn. These substantial connections happen in friendships, romances, at church, at sporting clubs, and at work. Closeness happens, just like it does in families. And with this closeness, too, comes great joy and great distress. Certainly, there are the highs and lows of life in our family relationships, but these same things happen – in all their splendid glory – outside of families, too.

Comment [%5]: Introduce the second point

Comment [%6]: Introduce the final point

Comment [%7]: Link

Most of our closest relationships happen in families, and so these are the people that we common share our best experiences and our moments of joy. The closeness comes from shared experience, shared culture and the sheer force of all those years together. Although David Hayden, our narrator in Larry Watson’s novel ‘Montana 1948’, never “conspicuously traded on the Hayden name”, he still benefitted from the prestige associated with it. Similarly, David was the son of the town sheriff, Wes, who in turn was the son of the town sheriff. The family closeness that they did have came, in part, from this similarity and commonality of experience.

Comment [%8]: Topic sentence: what I mean to say in response to the prompt

Comment [%9]: Expands on a point from the topic sentence.

Comment [%10]: An example to demonstrate some causes of family closeness.

Far from being automatic, this closeness is produced and, for the most part, lasting and substantial. Despite the dramatic events, such as those described in ‘Montana 1948’ there is joy in this experience of closeness. David Hayden recognises his mother’s love for him and his father when as he watches Gail rub her husband’s neck to comfort him when he is distressed.

Comment [%11]: Explaining how this examples goes towards proving the topic sentence.

Comment [%12]: Example of joy using a specific example

This is joy in the face of adversity, rather than the joy of carefree fun, but it seems genuine and substantial. Similarly, in ‘My Sister’s Keeper’, the 2009 film by Nick Cassavetes, we see a family both connected and, on occasion joyous.

Comment [%13]: Explanation of how the example demonstrated the point about joy

The Fitzgerald family is brought together by the unusual circumstance of Kate suffering from leukemia. Even against the backdrop of this struggle and the tensions that emerge from the younger sister Ana’s attempt to gain medicated emancipation, we see this family sharing time together on the beach. In the framing of these shots – with the family members sharing the frame as they frolic on the sand, and the rich hues of the palate, we see moments of sheer pleasure, connection and joy. In these examples, we see

Comment [%14]: Introduce another example.

Comment [%15]: Example of connection and joy

Comment [%16]: Explanation of how the example demonstrates the point about joy.

that often our closest relationships are with family members, and that these connections bring us moments of genuine joy, even in the darkest times.

Comment [%17]: Link these ideas back to the essay prompt.

The same closeness that can comfort us in dark and difficult times can also amplify and intensify suffering and distress. When these relationships are toxic, the closeness becomes our enemy as well feel betrayal and hurt intensely from this near and dear. Wes Hayden feels torn between his overbearing father, Julian and his amoral brother, Frank, on one hand and his sense of justice and his wife expectations on the other. His efforts to deliver justice are complicated and trying enough without the family connections. But once the family tensions and expectations are brought into play, the stakes are raised literally to breaking point. When the overbearing patriarch Julian comes to free Frank, the conversation comes poisonous and the distress is palpable as Julian dresses down Wes, bombastically pronouncing, "If it meant whipped your ass I should've straightened you straightened out." This pitched battle wills between grown men is much more distressing because it is between father and son, between family. Similarly, Sarah Fitzgerald discovers in the motion-picture 'My Sister's Keeper' that her two daughters have conspired against to allow the other, Kate, to die. Although she simply says, "I'm not mad at you. I'm just mad" we recognize the intensity of her heartbreak, not just at the death of her child, but at having become an obstacle for her beloved daughters to navigate around. As a lawyer, we presume that she had experience in people employing cunning and deception, but when this comes from family the weight of this distress is magnified, enormous. The same closeness that allows our family to provide joy in the face of distress is the very source of distress sometimes, and this distress can be greatest that we experience in life.

Comment [%18]: Topic sentence setting out the second point.

Comment [%19]: Example of distress in a family

Comment [%20]: Explanation of how this proves the point about great distress in family

Comment [%21]: Example from the minor text about distress caused by family

Comment [%22]: Explanation of how this proves the topic sentence.

Comment [%23]: Link back to the essay prompt

While there are great joy and distress within families, these things will come from the outside world also. Towards the end of 'Montana 1948' David shares a playful, loving moment with his housekeeper and babysitter Marie and her boyfriend, Ronnie Tall Bear. After describing these tender moments, he explains that he felt, "as though I was part of a family, a family that accepted me from myself..." David feels joy and love in this connection and, in turn, genuine grief and

Comment [%24]: Topic sentence spelling out the final point.

distress when she is taken from him. Marie was not family as such, but they were close and

Comment [%25]: Example

that's what brought him both great joy and distress. Likewise, Kate, the sick daughter in 'My

Comment [%26]: Explain how the examples proves the topic sentence.

Sister's Keeper" finds genuine connection with another cancer patient, Taylor Ambrose.

Comment [%27]: Another example

Although their relationship is brief, and he was not family, she experienced joy when she

dressed up and went on date with him to the hospital ball. Her grief and distress we also

genuine and substantial. There are joys and distress in families, but they also exist – and just as

Comment [%28]: Explain how the example proves the topic sentence.

vividly – when we make strong connections to people outside our families as well.

Comment [%29]: Link this topic back to the main prompt.

Life is dramatic. Like the grand of Duke of York's men, when it's up and it's up and when it's

down it's down. This is one of the things that give our lives shape and character. Often it is our

family that brings us those spectacular and comforting moments of joy. In the darkest hour of

Comment [%30]: Restate the prompt.

conflict or dear death, family members can support us and lift us up in a way that feels unique.

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Conversely, when our close relationships in families turn sour, this brings us the greatest

distress of our lives. Our connection to these people feels like a pipeline to pain and this if often

intense. However, we will have other intense relationships and interactions with people, people

Comment [%32]: The second point

who are not family, just other people we encounter and connect with as we go. Just like our

intense family connection, these will give us joy and distress. Ultimately, it seem that the key to

Comment [%33]: The third point

the highs and lows of life is connection, a connection that we commonly find with family, but

that, if we are lucky, we will find throughout our lives.

Comment [%34]: Coda