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**Written Response to
Literature four-
paragraph essay
MODEL**

Response to Literature Essay Example

The short story “On the Bridge” by Todd Strasser centers around a life-changing incident involving two teenage boys. Seth, the protagonist, desires to be like Adam, a boy with a reputation for danger and risk. In an attempt to identify with Adam, Seth smokes a cigarette for the first time and listens with admiration as Adam tells him about his experiences with police, girls, and fighting. While standing on a bridge, trouble begins when Adam flicks a cigarette butt onto the windshield of a car below. The three men inside the car drive onto the bridge and attack Seth after Adam inaccurately indicates that Seth was responsible for the cigarette butt. This incident teaches Seth that Adam is not a true friend and that he should enjoy being himself. Conflict and theme drive the plot of “On the Bridge” and add interest to the story.

Both external and internal conflict move the story forward while creating suspense for the reader. Seth, wanting to be like Adam, wears a worn-looking denim jacket but “feels like a fraud” because the jacket was actually new but made to look worn. Like Adam, he has a pack of Marlboro cigarettes sticking out of the pocket of his jacket (18). The fact that Seth “feels like a fraud” reveals his internal struggle. Throughout the story he expresses a desire to be like Adam yet realizes their differences; however, Seth still attempts to be like him even though his personality conflicts with Adam’s. In addition, Seth experiences external conflict when he is attacked by the three men and forced to lick the cigarette ash from their windshield: “The husky guy leaned harder against him, squeezing Seth painfully against the car. He pushed Seth’s face

down until it actually pressed against the cool glass. Seth could feel a spasm in his chest as his lungs cried for air” (20). The struggle between the men and Seth creates suspense for the reader in that the reader cannot help but wonder what will happen to Seth. Seth’s conflicts interest the reader and reveal him to be a character similar to an ordinary teenage boy.

Strasser emphasizes the theme that a person should follow his own thinking and actions rather than conform to another’s ideals. Seth reveals that his behavior differs greatly from Adam’s when he thinks, “It was pretty cool to think that the cops didn’t like you. Seth was pretty sure the cops didn’t even know who he was” (18). Although Seth had never been in trouble until he begins to spend time with Adam, he indicates that he admires Adam for his reckless actions. Seth’s thoughts foreshadow that he soon will have an experience uncharacteristic for himself. Later that afternoon, Seth finds himself attacked by three men as a result of Adam flicking a cigarette butt onto the men’s car windshield from the bridge. Seth lies on the ground bleeding after the men leave. Seth’s desire to be like Adam not only results in him being attacked, but he also learns that Adam is not the tough outlaw he portrays himself to be. Instead of Adam helping Seth, he blames Seth for the cigarette butt incident and watches without helping as the men attack Seth. Through Adam’s actions, Seth learns that being someone other than himself leads to negative consequences.

Strasser relies on conflict and theme to not only interest the reader but also to shape the characters’ personalities. Seth’s internal conflict reveals him to lack individuality; only a physical attack and Adam’s passiveness in the face of danger challenges his usual thinking. The problems arising from conformity versus the advantages of individuality stand out as the theme through the development of Seth in “On the Bridge.” Seth must face challenges and experience conflict in order to change and learn—a method of education all too familiar to most teenagers.