

*** All assignments are to be completed individually without the aid of outside sources**

Summer Reading Assignment Examples Using Kate Dicamillo's *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*

Option 1 Character Journal (An example of one entry. If you choose this option, you must have *FOUR ENTRIES*)

I cannot believe this was the story Pellegrina was holding on to all this time. This is what she was saving up for Abilene? It doesn't even make sense. She said that it made no difference that the princess was beautiful because she didn't love anybody. What's that supposed to mean? Of course it makes a difference. Do you think I'd want to stare at myself in the window all day if I didn't have such jaunty ears and wear such fine "handmade silk suits" (5)? As if being made of real china and the finest rabbit fur didn't make a difference. Why do you think Abilene clings to me so tightly, taking me everywhere? Because she wants to be seen with me, the most handsome rabbit ever. The word probably hasn't been invented yet, but later and probably just temporarily because slang has such a short shelf life, I will be known as the swag rabbit, the swaggiest, rabbitiest rabbit ever. Of course, I will always be Edward Tulane, handsome and brilliant, lending his dignity and handsomeness to Abilene, the girl fortunate enough to think he's hers.

But that story...was creepy, made even creepier by Pellegrina's "large sharp nose and black black eyes that [shine] like dark stars" (7). When she was talking, she seemed almost gleeful about the princess's transformation into a warthog, ecstatic about her being killed and roasted, the cook wearing the gold ring the princess had swallowed in her former life. I don't know why, but it felt like Pellegrina was telling the story to me rather than Abilene...but why? **(264 words)**

Option 2 Analytic Journal (An example of one entry. If you choose this option, you must have *FOUR ENTRIES*)

How does a china rabbit die?

Can a china rabbit drown?

Is my hat still on my head?

These were the questions that Edward asked himself as he went sailing out over the blue sea. The sun was high in the sky, and from what seemed to be a very long way away, Edward heard Abilene call his name.

"Edwaaarrd," she shouted, "come back."

Come back? Of all the ridiculous things to shout, thought Edward.

As he tumbled, ears over tail through the air, he managed to catch one last glimpse of Abilene. She was standing on the deck of the ship, holding on the railing with one hand. In her other hand was a lamp—no, it was a ball of fire—no, Edward realized, it was his gold pocket watch that Abilene held in her hand; she was holding it up high, and it was reflecting the light of the sun (DiCamillo 47-49) . **(Passage, 153 words)**

My Response:

In the passage, DiCamillo creates a wonderfully mixed tone of humor and terror, a tone established in the rhetorical questions that begin the passage. Cast overboard, Edward immediately

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realizes the gravity of the situation, but being the vain, little rabbit that he is, he undercuts the seriousness of his situation by worrying about something as trivial as his hat. As he falls “ears over tail” from the Queen Mary into the forbidding sea below, Edward simultaneously wonders if this is how “a china rabbit die[s]”, if a “china rabbit [can] drown,” and if “my hat [is] still on my head?” Edward’s ability (disability perhaps) to place concerns about his fate and the fate of his hat on equal footing is obviously humorous, mixing the profound with the ridiculous as it does. Besides being humorous, however, these questions offer real insight into Edward’s character. He is a superficial, narcissistic rabbit, obsessed with his looks, a mere toy without a clue about what it means to be alive. His identity is his appearance, his value not in Abilene’s love for him but in his lovely looks. **(180 Words)**

Option 3 Letter to the Author

Dear Ms. DiCamillo:

I just finished your wonderful novel, *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*. Although your novel is supposedly a “children’s” book—whatever that means—I found it to be a rich read, a book any child—whether nine or ninety—would love to get lost in. I mean from the first chapter, when Edward describes his ears being arranged to reflect his “mood—jaunty, tired” or “full of ennui,” I knew this book would not talk down to anyone (3).

I know you know that most kids—especially elementary school kids—wouldn’t know these words. Did you include them mostly because you wanted to teach them that “jaunty” means dashing and rakish, and “ennui” a profound sense of boredom and lassitude? Or did you just pick those words because they sounded cool, the kind of words lovers of words love using? Or perhaps you just thought it would be funny, not rip-roaringly funny but clever funny, sly smile funny, to put such elevated diction in a toy rabbit’s mouth. Maybe your choice also has to do with Edward’s self-important, refined persona. After all, he is a china rabbit with silk suits and a pocket watch, not a stuffed rabbit in overalls. Even if none of these are the conscious reasons for your choices, I kind of suspect all of them figure in there somewhere. Really, this isn’t the main reason I wrote, but I just wanted to let you know that I recognized that phrase as a little sign post, an indication that Edward’s journey was one I was going to enjoy.

Another thing that first struck me about the novel was its mixture of realism and fantasy, a kind of reimagined fairytale for our times. For example, from the very beginning, we accept that Edward has been blessed—or perhaps cursed—with consciousness, although ironically, about the only thing he seems conscious of is himself. Edward’s magical consciousness, however, exists within a very fine, but very unmagical body of china, “real” rabbit fur, and “long and elegant” whiskers that give him “pause” because of “their uncertain origin”(4). Again, there’s the sly humor of Edward’s mixture of pride and disquietude regarding his whiskers, but his eyes—and their limitations—prove most telling. Though “penetrating and intelligent blue,” Edward’s eyes are painted and always open, forcing him to always see without ever seeing anything. Indeed, Edward likes winter best because “the sun set early then and the dining room windows became dark and Edward could see his own reflection in the glass” (6). It’s a wonderful little irony you’ve got going on there. It was intentional, wasn’t it? The ever-seeing rabbit who cannot see beyond himself. Of course, you drop a nice little hint of what’s to come with the stars Edward gazes upon on clear nights while Abilene sleeps, the “pinprick light” that “comfort[s] Edward in a way” he cannot “quite understand” (9). Those stars are the first sign of Edward’s awareness of anything other than himself, something larger, a glimmer of light amidst the black narcissism that is both funny

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but also serious. It's hard to take a toy rabbit's excessive pride too seriously, especially when it's presented in such a whimsical, playful fashion, but there is a lesson there.

I first suspected that Edward's story was a kind of parable when the fairy godmother-like Pellegrina tells her bedtime story about the beautiful but purposeless princess, whose purposelessness stems from her inability to love, a situation that got her turned into a warthog that is eventually hunted, butchered, and eaten. Whereas the story's moral may be lost on Edward, it is not on the discerning reader, especially since Pellegrina tells Edward when she tucks him in that night, "'You disappoint me,'" (33). Obviously, Edward is the beautiful princess, handsome to look at but useless, not useless because he cannot move but because he cannot be moved by anything except his own reflection.

But moved he soon is, tossed overboard from the *Queen Mary* and saved by a series of individuals, each one a little further down the socio-economic scale. First, are Lawrence and Nellie, a kindly old fisher man and wife who mistake Edward for a girl, rechristen him Susanna, and love him so much that he becomes a kind of surrogate for a little girl they lost many years ago (61-65). Later he finds his way into the hands of a "hobo" named Bull (93) and later still, becomes a loving companion to Bryce and his sister, Sara Ruth, two virtual orphans living in tarpaper shack with a largely absent, alcoholic father. And just because you thought the story wasn't sad enough, you made Sara Ruth die from tuberculosis or something like that, coughing up blood as she did (147-148). Man, that was sad.

Of course, just when it couldn't any worse, it does. It's really cool the way the angry owner of the diner, Neal, shatters Edward's head because Bryce cannot pay for a meal. That Neal is one classy guy, begrudging a prepubescent homeless boy a meal and shattering his one prized possession. When I said it was cool, I didn't really mean the shattering but Edward's near-death experience. I like how he meets all the people who've adopted him along his journey, how he sprouts wings and takes flight to meet up with the constellation of Sara Ruth, a flight only stopped when Bull, Abilene, and others pull him to the ground, a ground that turns out to be a doll repair shop. I love how you tied that star thing together, in which heaven is the heavens, the "comforting stars" Edward first notices in the opening pages prove to be heaven itself, where Sara Ruth dwells and where he was heading before the doll-maker intercedes.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about this seemingly simple book is the powerful but subtle message it delivers, a message that uses paradox to celebrate the value of humanity's greatest gift, the ability to love. As Edward goes from cushy privilege to ragged desperation, from shiny and pristine to soiled and shattered, he is transformed into something beautiful.

Some might think it's a miracle that Edward's journey ends with a now grownup Abilene finding him, but the true miracle is that Edward finds his heart. What a journey, indeed. Thanks for letting me tag along.

Sincerely,

A Deer Who Loves Rabbits

(A little over 1,000 words, about 250 more than the minimum)

DiCamillo, Kate. *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*. Candlewick Press, 2006.

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Option 4 Movie Trailer

Rather than an example of a movie trailer, which are available at a theater or computer near you, here is a list of helpful suggestions.

- Write a script before you get started. Decide if you want to do voiceovers or if language on the screen is sufficient.
- Think about which music would make the most sense, if and when it would be appropriate to change the music at some point in the trailer.
- Consider what images, what lighting, what editing will best convey the sense of the novel.
- Remember, it must be at least two minutes.

After you are happy with the trailer, remember to **explain** it. Your explanation must be at least 400 words and read a little like an analytic response. However, rather than discussing how rhetorical or literary devices contribute to a piece of writing, you are to discuss how imagery, lighting, editing, sound effects, or other cinematic devices contribute to the effectiveness of the trailer or how they reveal something essential about your reading. Basically, you're explaining the artistic choices you made with your trailer and what you were aiming to achieve with these choices.