

The Journal of Otto Peltonen
By William Durbin

Responding to literature through writing and discussion.

Objective: The purpose of these exercises is to give you, the reader, a chance to interact and react to the thoughts, feelings, and situations of the character and compare them to your own life and experiences. Some of the responses will be in writing while others will be in the form of discussion within the class or in small groups.

When you are required to write a response, you must follow certain guidelines. They are as follows:

- You must refer to the literary piece you are responding to by stating the name of the novel and the author within your writing. Remember, this is a novel, so when writing you would underline it and make sure to capitalize all important words. If you type your responses, you put the title in italics and your paper must be double spaced with 12" font and Times New Roman print.

EX: In *The Journal of Otto Peltonen* by William Durbin, Otto is a 15-year old immigrant boy who moves from Finland to America with his family in the early 1900s.

EX: William Durbin's novel *The Journal of Otto Peltonen* is about a 15-year old immigrant boy who moves from Finland to America with his family.

- Give a brief overview or introduction and then briefly paraphrase or restate the questions (which are in italics) and explain the characters thoughts, feelings, or experiences.
- Then relate to the character by giving your own experiences and feelings about the questions.
- Finally, make sure to write a concluding sentence.
- Each response must be a minimum of ten (10) sentences long.

Keep in mind that you do not have to write your responses in the exact order stated above. You can vary your style as long as you meet all of the requirements.

Response #1 (Written)**The Real America**

Prior to leaving Finland, Otto envisioned America to be like a photograph in his mind. He thought, "There will be big white houses and broad, tree-lined streets." (page 3) When Otto arrived in Hibbing, he found America to be quite different. *How did Otto's vision of America compare to what he found life and his home in America really to be like? How did Otto feel? Explain a time when you thought something was going to be one way and it turned out to be totally different. How did you feel?*

Response #2 (Written)**The Reality of Death**

Throughout the novel, Otto and his family encounter many experiences with death. Many of those who die in the novel are of a young age. Otto and his sisters are also very young to be experiencing so much death. Unfortunately, death is a part of life and everyone either has or will have to experience it in some way. *How did Otto and his sisters feel about all of the deaths? What were some of their experiences? Write about your experiences with death and how it affected your life. If you've never had a close experience with death, try to imagine how you think you'd feel.*

Response #3 (Discussion)**Otto's Sacrifice and the Family's Dream**

The Peltonen's came to America hoping to get a place of their own. Many sacrifices were made by all of the family members along the way. *What were some of the sacrifices Otto's mother, father and sisters made? How did they feel? What was Otto's big sacrifice? Why did he do what he did and was he all right with his decision? Have you ever made a sacrifice to benefit other or to make others happy? What was it, and how did you feel?*

Response #4 (2 parts)**Father's and Mother's Causes**

Throughout the novel, Father talks about the unfairness of the mine owners and the unsafe conditions in the mine. He and others are trying to form a union to change the way operations are run and to benefit the miners. Mother is very involved in the suffrage movement in America. She believes that women's voices and opinions are important as men's.

Discussion *What do you think about Father's and Mother's causes? Are they right or wrong? What effect has or will their "stands" have on the family? What do Otto and his sisters think?*

Written *Make a flyer or a pamphlet announcing the next union meeting (if you are a male) or the next suffragette meeting (if you are a female). Make sure to keep in mind the time period. Include all of the pertinent information like who, what, when, where, why, and how. Be creative. This is advertising for your cause.*

Response #5 (Discussion)**Friendship**

Otto wonders why his father cannot afford to buy their family nice things like Nikko's father can. As time goes by, Otto learns the truth about MR. Nikkola. *What does Otto learn? What is the definition of friendship? What are some qualities and characteristics that make people friends? So Otto and Nikko have a good friendship? In what ways? Does what Otto learn change his friendship with Nikko? If so, in what ways?*

Response #6 (Written)**Look Around You**

“Since I've been working at the Helsinki, I notice things about nature that I look for granted before.” (page 101) After being in the cold, dark, damp mine for ten hours a day, six days a week, Otto appreciates nature --- the smells, the sights, and the sounds. *Take some time to look around you. Go for a slow walk around your yard or neighborhood, or find a place to sit and just look and listen to what is happening around you. Write about the things you hadn't notice before. What are the things you appreciate about where you live? Why?*

Response #7 (Written)**Family Traditions**

Otto's journal explains much about his Finnish heritage, some of their foods, and some of their activities. It also tells how Mother thinks they should “Americanize” themselves, too, by celebrating such holidays as Independence Day and Thanksgiving. Family, culture, traditions, and your heritage are important. *What is one of your special family traditions? Describe it, explain it, or tell how it came about and why your family does it. Is it important to keep these traditions alive? Why or why not?*