



Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Grade 9

Name: _____

Date: _____

Learning to Lose

For three years, I did not lose a single debate round. I want to be honest about how much that record meant to me, because the story I am about to tell only makes sense if you understand how thoroughly I had built my identity around it. I was not just a good debater. I was, in my own mind, the undefeated one, and I had started to believe that record said something true and permanent about who I was.

Then came the state semifinal, against a sophomore I had beaten twice before without much difficulty. I do not remember the specific arguments anymore, which tells you something about how little they mattered in the end. What I remember is the judge's decision, read aloud in a flat, unemotional voice, and the sudden, disorienting sensation of the floor tilting slightly beneath a version of myself I did not know how to be.

I would like to tell you I handled the loss gracefully. I did not. I spent the car ride home in silence, and the following week avoiding both practice and most conversations about the tournament entirely. My coach, Mr. Ferreira, finally cornered me after a particularly quiet Tuesday practice and asked a question I have thought about often since: "What exactly are you afraid this loss proved?"

I did not have an answer that day. It took me most of the following month to realize what I was actually afraid of, that the loss had revealed something true about my limits, something the undefeated record had let me avoid confronting. But limits, I eventually understood, are not the same as failures. Every debater loses eventually. The ones who keep improving are simply the ones who lose, examine what happened honestly, and return to the next round anyway. I returned to debate the following season with a record that included losses for the first time, and, somewhat to my own surprise, with considerably less fear than I had carried while I was still undefeated.

Circle the Correct Answer

1. What had the author's undefeated debate record come to represent to them?

- a) Nothing significant at all
- b) A core part of their identity and sense of self
- c) Just a fun statistic they rarely thought about

2. How did the author initially respond to losing the semifinal round?

- a) They handled it gracefully and moved on immediately
- b) They avoided practice and conversations about the tournament for a week
- c) They quit debate entirely

3. What question did Mr. Ferreira ask the author?

- a) "Why did you lose that round?"
- b) "What exactly are you afraid this loss proved?"
- c) "Are you going to quit the team?"

4. What did the author ultimately conclude about limits and failure?

- a) That limits and failures are exactly the same thing
- b) That limits are not the same as failures, and improvement comes from examining losses honestly
- c) That the best debaters never lose at all

True or False

5. The author had an undefeated debate record for three years before this loss.

6. The author immediately had an answer to Mr. Ferreira's question. _____

7. The author felt more fear after returning to debate with some losses on their record.

Fill in the Blank

8. The author describes the sensation of the floor _____ slightly beneath a version of themselves they did not know how to be.

9. The author says every debater eventually _____.

Think and Explain

10. What is the author's purpose in telling this personal story, and how does Mr. Ferreira's question function as the turning point of the essay? Use specific evidence from the text.

11. Identify the tone of this essay (for example, reflective, honest, self-critical) and explain how specific word choices or admissions create that tone.
