

Name _____ Hr. _____

1. Highlight or circle your confusion
2. Show evidence of a close reading
3. Write a 7 sentence response following 7th grade writing expectations.

The Last Lecture

by Randy Pausch

Chapter 7: I Never Made it to the NFL

I love football. Tackle football. I started playing when I was nine years old, and football got me through. It helped me make me who I am today. And even though I did not reach the National Football League, I sometimes think I got more from pursuing that dream, and not accomplishing it, than I did from many of the ones I did accomplish.

My romance with football started when my dad dragged me, kicking and screaming, to join a league. I had no desire to be there. I was naturally wimpy, and the smallest kid by far. Fear turned to awe when I met my coach, Jim Graham, a hulking, six-foot-four wall-of-a-guy. He had been a line-backer at Penn State, and was seriously old-school. I mean really old school; like he thought the forward pass was a trick play.

On the first day of practice, we were all scared to death. Plus he hadn't brought along any footballs. One kid finally spoke up for all of us. "Excuse me, coach. There are no footballs."

And Coach Graham responded. "We don't need any footballs."

There was a silence while we thought about that...

"How many men are on the football field at a time?" he asked us.

Eleven on a team, we answered. So that makes twenty-two.

"And how many people are touching the football at any given time?"

One of them.

"Right!" he said. "So we're going to work on what those other twenty-one guys are doing."

Fundamentals. That was a great gift Coach Graham gave us. Fundamentals, fundamentals, fundamentals. As a college professor, I've seen this as one lesson so many kids ignore, always to their detriment: You've got to get the fundamentals down otherwise, because otherwise the fancy stuff is not going to work.

Coach Graham used to ride me hard. I remember one practice in particular. "You're doing it all wrong, Pausch. Go back! Do it again!" I tried to do what he wanted. It wasn't enough. "You owe me, Pausch! You're doing push-ups after practice."

When I was finally dismissed, one of the assistant coaches came over to reassure me. "Coach Graham rode you pretty hard, didn't he?" he said.

I could barely muster a "yeah."

"That's a good thing," the assistant told me. "When you're screwing up and nobody says anything to you anymore, that means they've given up on you."

That lesson stuck with me my whole entire life. When you see yourself doing something badly and nobody's bothering to tell you anymore, that's a bad place to be. You may not want to hear it, but your critics are often the ones telling you they still love you and care about you, and want to make you better.

There's a lot of talk these days about giving children self-esteem. It's not something you can give; it's something they have to build. Coach Graham worked in a no-coddling zone. Self-esteem? He knew there was really only one way to teach kids how to develop it:

you give them something they can't do, they work hard until they find they can do it, and you just keep repeating the process.

When Coach Graham first got hold of me, I was this wimpy kid with no skills, no physical strength, and no conditioning. But he made me realize that if I work hard enough, there will be things I can do tomorrow that I can't do today.

Even now, having just turned forty-seven, I can give you a three point stance that any NFL lineman would be proud of.

I realize that, these days, a guy like Coach Graham might get thrown out of a sports league. He'd be too tough. Parents would complain.

I remember one game when our team was playing terribly. At half time, in our rush for water, we almost knocked over the water bucket. Coach Graham was livid:

"Jeez! That's the most I have seen you boys move since this game started!" We were eleven years old, just standing there, afraid he'd pick us up one by one and break us with his bare hands. "Water?" he barked. "You boys want water?" He lifted the bucket and dumped all the water on the ground.

We watched him walk away and hear him mutter to an assistant coach: "You can give water to the first-string defense. They played OK."

Now let me be clear: Coach Graham would never endanger any kid. One reason he worked so hard on conditioning was he knew it reduces injuries. However, it was a chilly day, we'd all had access to water during the first half, and the dash to the water bucket was more about us being a bunch of brats than needing hydration.

Even so, if that kind of incident happened today, parents on the sidelines would be pulling out their cell phones to call the league commissioner, or maybe their lawyer.

It saddens me that many kids today are so coddled. I think back to how I felt during halftime rant. Yes, I was thirsty. But more than that, I felt humiliated. We had all let down Coach Graham, and he let us know it in a way we'd never forget. He was right. We had shown more energy at the water bucket than we had in the damn game. And getting chewed out by him meant something to us. During the second half, we went back on the field, and gave it our all.

I haven't seen Coach Graham since I was a teen, but he just keeps showing up in my head, forcing me to work harder whenever I feel like quitting, forcing me to be better. He gave me a feedback loop for life.

When we send our kids to play organized sports- football, soccer, swimming, whatever- for most of us, it's not because we're desperate for them to learn the intricacies of the sport.

What we really want them to learn is far more important: teamwork, perseverance, sportsmanship, the value of hard work, an ability to deal with adversity. This kind of indirect learning is what some of us like to call a "head fake."

There are two kinds of head fakes, the first is literal. On a football field, a player will move his head one way so you'll think he's going in that direction. Then he goes the opposite way. It's like a magician using misdirection. Coach Graham used to tell us to watch a person's waist. "Where his belly button goes, his body goes," he'd say. The second kind of head fake is the really important one- the one that teaches people things they don't realize they're learning until well into the process. If you're a head fake specialist, your hidden objective is to get them to learn something you want them to learn.

This kind of head-fake learning is absolutely vital. And Coach Graham was the master.