



# St. Mark's School of Texas

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## **The Reading Passage Interview for Middle School Candidates**

Saturday, October 3, 2009

10:15 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

David Baker & Dean Clayman

In an effort to develop a more effective interview process for middle school candidates, St. Mark's School of Texas adopted a strategy for an on-campus interview that includes a reading passage, followed by a personal response essay, and concluding with a small group discussion/interview. The presenters discuss their trial efforts and promising results. Learn how their new process led to significant reductions in the number of required interviews and human resource efforts and produced better information about their candidates.

### **Agenda**

- I. Introduction
  - a. Challenges of Typical Interviews for Middle School Students
  - b. Goals of the Interview Process
  - c. Paths to the Reading Passage Interview
  
- II. The Passage Based Interview Process at St. Mark's
  - a. Sample Schedules for School Day and After School Programs
  - b. The Reading and Writing Process
  - c. Facilitating the Discussion
  - d. The Rubric Based Evaluation Form
  - e. Training Faculty Interviewers
  
- III. Building a Passage Library
  - a. Qualities of a Good Passage
  - b. Sources for Literature
  - c. Sample Passages and Questions for Interviewers
  - d. Security Concerns
  - e. What's next?
  
- IV. Questions and Discussion

Some internet resource links:

[www.responsibilityproject.com](http://www.responsibilityproject.com)

[www.goodcharacter.com](http://www.goodcharacter.com)

<http://ced.ncsu.edu/ircms/fifth.htm>



# St. Mark's School of Texas

## 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Interview Process: School Day

Capacity: 9 boys per day, total of 108 boys during interview season

Faculty Need: 3 interviewers per day plus a proctor from the Office of Admission

- Each faculty member should sign up for at least 5 interview dates during the year
- Schedule of events:
  - 10:35-11:00: Office of Admission will proctor initial reading and writing exercises for all student candidates
  - 11:05-11:30: Small group discussion with up to 3 candidates led by faculty member
  - 11:30-11:45: Time for faculty to complete interview forms

November 5	November 19	December 3
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.

December 10	December 11	January 14
	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.

January 21	January 22	February 4
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.

February 11	February 12	February 18
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.



# St. Mark's School of Texas

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## 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Interview Process: Evening

Capacity: 54 boys in 3 sessions per evening

Faculty Need: 6 interviewers plus one proctor from Office of Admission

### **Session #1: 18 boys**

4:00-4:25.....Read and Quick Write with Proctor.....All 18 boys in N114  
4:25-4:50.....Small Group Discussion w/ faculty.....6 groups of 3 boys  
4:50-5:05.....Faculty Fill Out Evaluation Form.....Conference Room

### **Session #2.: 18 boys**

4:45-5:10.....Read and Quick Write with Proctor.....All 18 boys in N114  
5:10-5:35.....Small Group Discussion w/ faculty.....6 groups of 3 boys  
5:35-5:50.....Faculty Fill Out Evaluation Form.....Conference Room

### **Session #3: 18 boys**

5:30-5:55.....Read and Quick Write with Proctor.....All 18 boys in N114  
5:55-6:20.....Small Group Discussion w/ faculty.....6 groups of 3 boys  
6:20-6:35.....Faculty Fill Out Evaluation Form.....Conference Room



## Admission Interview Evaluation

St. Mark's School of Texas  
Office of Admission

<b>Name:</b>	
<b>Grade Apply:</b>	
<b>Current School:</b>	
<b>Interviewed by:</b>	

	1 (Lowest)	2	3	4 (Highest)
<b>Clarity / Idea Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unfocused</li> <li>• Vague</li> <li>• Not on topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of clarity</li> <li>• Little detail</li> <li>• Some relevance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally clear</li> <li>• Some detail</li> <li>• Mostly relevant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very clear</li> <li>• Great detail</li> <li>• Relevant</li> </ul>
<b>Speaking Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hard to hear</li> <li>• Many errors in pronunciation and grammar</li> <li>• Limited vocabulary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uneven voice</li> <li>• Noticeable errors in pronunciation and grammar</li> <li>• Fair vocabulary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear voice</li> <li>• Very few errors in pronunciation and grammar</li> <li>• Good vocabulary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong voice</li> <li>• Near perfect pronunciation and grammar</li> <li>• Excellent vocabulary</li> </ul>
<b>Non-verbal Cues / Poise</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncomfortable</li> <li>• Little eye contact</li> <li>• Much Anxiety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somewhat uncomfortable</li> <li>• Some eye contact</li> <li>• Some anxiety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somewhat composed</li> <li>• Regular eye contact</li> <li>• Little or no anxiety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Composed</li> <li>• Steady eye contact</li> <li>• Relaxed/confident</li> </ul>
<b>Interaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oppositional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indifferent or Passive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somewhat involved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively engaged</li> </ul>
<b>Overall Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor candidate</li> <li>• Unlikely to do well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair candidate</li> <li>• May do well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good candidate</li> <li>• Likely will do well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong candidate</li> <li>• Great fit</li> </ul>

Based on your experience with the candidate, please circle the words that best describe him:

Bright	Cheerful	Confident	Cooperative	Distracted	Immature
Creative	Curious	Focused	Genuine	Irritable	Negative
Independent	Insightful	Mature	Patient	Self-centered	Shy

**Comments:**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



St. Mark's School of Texas  
Middle School Applicant Writing Activity

Place Applicant Information label here:

Please read the passage below. When you are finished, turn this page over and follow the instructions. You may make notes in the margin or underline parts of the passage.

(Adapted from)

*Life on the Mississippi* Chapter 4 "The Boy's Ambition"

By Mark Twain

When I was a boy, there was but one permanent ambition among my comrades in our village on the west bank of the Mississippi River. That was, to be a steamboatman. We had transient ambitions of other sorts, but they were only transient. When a circus came and went, it left us all burning to become clowns; the first minstrel show that came to our section left us all suffering to try that kind of life; now and then we had a hope that if we lived and were good, God would permit us to be pirates. These ambitions faded out, each in its turn; but the ambition to be a steamboatman always remained.

But these were only day-dreams,--they were too heavenly to be contemplated as real possibilities. By and by one of our boys went away. He was not heard of for a long time. At last he turned up as apprentice engineer or 'striker' on a steamboat. This thing shook the bottom out of all my Sunday-school teachings. That boy had been notoriously worldly, and I just the reverse; yet he was exalted to this eminence, and I left in obscurity and misery. There was nothing generous about this fellow in his greatness. And whenever his boat was laid up he would come home and swell around the town in his blackest and greasiest clothes, so that nobody could help remembering that he was a steamboatman. If ever a youth was cordially admired and hated by his comrades, this one was. When his boat blew up at last, it diffused a tranquil contentment among us such as we had not known for months. But when he came home the next week, alive, renowned, and appeared in church all battered up and bandaged, a shining hero, stared at and wondered over by everybody, it seemed to us that the partiality of Providence for an undeserving reptile had reached a point where it was open to criticism.

This creature's career could produce but one result, and it speedily followed. Boy after boy managed to get on the river. So by and by I ran away. I said I never would come home again till I was a pilot and could come in glory. I had comforting daydreams of a future when I should be a great and honored pilot, with plenty of money, and could kill some of these mates and clerks and pay for them.

Candidates were instructed to write an essay about the passage using the following prompt:

*Have you ever wanted something so badly it almost hurt? Write a brief essay below about your experience and how it ended. Provide as many details as possible.*

**Sample Questions:**

**Why do you think the boys changed their minds so frequently about what they wanted to be when they grew up?**

**Without using names, do you remember a time when somebody you knew got something they did not deserve? How did you feel about that?**

**Is there a point where wanting something badly becomes a bad thing?**

**What is the difference between ambition and jealousy?**

**Have you ever received or won something you did not deserve? What did you do?**

**Do you think Mark Twain would have felt OK about anybody else getting a job on a steamboat?**

**Is being a little jealous always a bad thing?**

**What do you think Mark Twain meant when he said “This thing shook the bottom out of all my Sunday-school teachings.”**

**“If ever a youth was cordially admired and hated by his comrades, this one was.” What do you think this means?**

**In the last section of the passage, Mark Twain says, “I had comforting daydreams of a future when I should be a great and honored pilot, with plenty of money, and could kill some of these mates and clerks and pay for them.” Do you think he really intended to kill them?**

**What word or words do you think best describes the attitude toward the boy who got the job as a steamboatman: jealous, angry, indifferent, joyful, envious or frustrated? Explain your answer.**



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(Adapted from)

***Gregor the Overlander***

By: Suzanne Collins

Gregor the Overlander is the story of an eleven year old boy who falls through a grate in the laundry room of his New York City apartment building into an entirely different world—The Underland, far below the surface of the earth. Gregor encounters a culture where giant spiders, rats, and cockroaches coexist uneasily with humans. The entire culture is on the brink of war. Gregor also discovers that his father (who disappeared years ago) may have also discovered the Underland, and may still be alive. In the dangerous world below the earth, humans move around by flying on giant bats. Gregor meets the future Queen of the Underland city of Regalia—a girl his age named Luxa—and talks with her about her life and her relationship with Aurora, Luxa's bat.

“Does everybody down here have a giant bat to fly around on?” asked Gregor, thinking it would be nice to know somebody was going to hang around and defend you in this place.

“Oh no. Some never find a bat to bond with. I became one with Aurora when I was quite young, but this is not common,” said Luxa.

“How come you bonded so early?” asked Gregor.

“After my parents were killed, I went through a time where I never felt safe on the ground. I spent all my waking hours in the air on Aurora. It is why we fly so well together,” she said simply. “My Grandfather Vikus convinced the council to allow us to bond early. After that I was not so afraid.”

“Are you afraid now?” said Gregor.

“At times,” she admitted. “But it is no worse than if I were in the underland city of Regalia. You see, I tried of constant fear, so I made a decision. Every day when I wake I tell myself that it will be my last. If you are not trying to hold on to time, you are not so afraid of losing it.”

Gregor thought this was the single saddest thing anyone had ever said to him. He couldn't answer.

“And then, if you make it to bedtime, you feel the joy of cheating death out of one more day,” she said. “Do you see?”

“I think so,” said Gregor numbly. An awful thought struck him. Wasn't Luxa's strategy just an extreme form of his own rule to not think about how great it would be to have his father back? True, he didn't think about dying every day, but he denied himself the luxury of thinking about the future with or without his dad. If he hadn't fallen into the underworld and discovered his dad was still alive, if his dad had never come home, how long would he have gone on refusing to be happy? His whole life? “Maybe,” he thought. “Maybe my whole life.”

Candidates were instructed to write an essay about the passage using the following prompt:

*Please write a paragraph discussing how you feel about the idea of “living only for today” and provide a personal example to support your opinion.*

**Sample Questions:**

**How cool would it be to have your own personal giant bat?**

**Even though Gregor was in an entirely different world, he seemed to find common ground with Luxa. Do you agree? Do you think finding common ground made Gregor feel safer?**

**Is feeling insecure or doubtful the same as feeling afraid?**

**Is it sometimes a good thing to feel a little insecure?**

**Luxa believed every day of life was cheating death. Do you agree? Is that a good way to look at life?**

**Gregor made the connection between Luxa’s attitude toward fear and his own fear concerning his father. Do you think those fears were the same?**

**Sometimes when we experience disappointments, we are told to “get over it.” How do you do that?**

**Is there a difference between “getting over it” and forgetting about it?**

**Is it possible to “get over it” without forgetting about it?**

**Can you think of an example (yourself or others) when not “getting over it” resulted in more disappointments?**

**Does “living only for today” require ignoring the future?**

**How do you balance the need to appreciate today with preparations for the future?**



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***The Melian Dialogue***

by Thucydides

In: ***The Book of War: 25 Centuries of Great War Writing***

by John Keegan

Thucydides (c.460-c.400 BC) is regarded as the first modern—and perhaps still the world's greatest—historian, for his history of the Peloponnesian War. In *The Melian Dialogue*, Thucydides chronicles negotiations between Athenian emissaries and leaders of the island nation of Melos. In the meeting, the Athenians confront the Melians with the option of surrendering their island and becoming slaves or being destroyed by the far superior forces from Athens. What follows is part of the dialogue between the leaders of the army from Athens and the leaders of the island of Melos:

*Melians:* Surely, if you are ready to risk so much to maintain your empire, and the enslaved peoples so much to escape from it, it would be criminal cowardice in us, who are still free, not to take any and every measure before submitting to slavery?

*Athenians:* No, if you reflect calmly: for this is not a competition in heroism between equals, where your honour is at stake, but a question of self-preservation, to save you from a struggle with a far stronger Power.

*Melians:* Still, we know that in war fortune is more impartial than the disproportion in numbers might lead one to expect. If we submit at once, our position is desperate; if we fight, there is still a hope that we shall stand secure.

*Athenians:* Hope encourages men to take risks; men in a strong position may follow her without ruin, if not without loss. You are weak, your future hangs on a turn of the scales; avoid the mistake most men make, who might save themselves by human means, and then, when visible hopes desert them, in their extremity turn to the invisible—prophecies and oracles and all those things which delude men with hopes, to their destruction.

*Melians:* We too, you can be sure, realize the difficulty of struggling against your power and against Fortune if she is not impartial. Still we trust that Heaven will not allow us to be worsted by Fortune, for in this quarrel we are right and you are wrong.

*Athenians:* As for divine favour, we think that we can count on it as much as you, for neither our claims nor our actions are inconsistent with that men believe about Heaven or desire for themselves. We believe that Heaven, and we know that men, by a natural law, always rule where they are stronger. We did not make that law nor were we the first to act on it; we found it existing, and it will exist for ever, after we are gone; and we know that you and anyone else as strong as we are would do as we do.

Candidates were instructed to write an essay about the passage using the following prompt:

*Power comes in many forms. A few examples are: physical power, will power, and assigned or delegated power—like a teacher’s power over your grade. Write about a time (the first time if appropriate) when you used “power” to accomplish a goal or assignment.*

**Sample Questions:**

**If might always wins, does it matter who is right?**

**Since the soldiers from Athens could easily conquer the island of Melos, why do you think the Athenians bothered to have the conversation?**

**If the Melians had no hope of victory, was there any reason for them to resist?**

**The Melians seem to be willing to die for the sake of freedom—even though they have no chance to win. Is that foolish?**

**Is there a difference between power and authority?**

**If you know you can’t win, then should you not try? Always? Never? Sometimes?**

**Have you ever been part of a lost cause?**

**According to natural law, the Athenians claim, the strong always rule the weak. Do you agree? Can you think of any circumstance where the strong do not rule the weak?**

**The Athenians argue natural law (the strong rule the weak) has always been true and since the Athenians did not “make” the law, they are not responsible for its moral implications. Do you agree?**

**The *Melian Dialogue* was written between 460 and 400 BC. Specifically concerning the way power is discussed in the passage, do you think things have changed a lot since then?**

**What are your thoughts about the following section of the reading?**

*Hope encourages men to take risks; men in a strong position may follow her without ruin, if not without loss. You are weak, your future hangs on a turn of the scales; avoid the mistake most men make, who might save themselves by human means, and then, when visible hopes desert them, in their extremity turn to the invisible—prophecies and oracles and all those things which delude men with hopes, to their destruction.*



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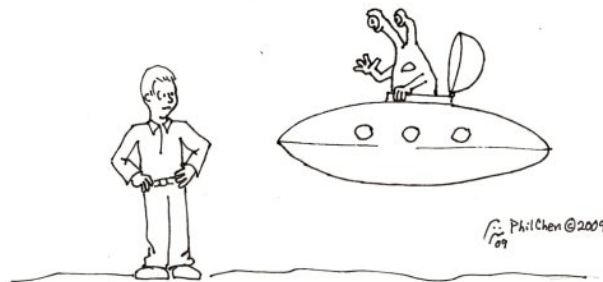
St. Mark's School of Texas  
Cartoon Caption Activity

Place Applicant Information label here:

Please write a caption under one or both of the cartoons below. The caption may be any length and the caption may be funny or serious. When you are finished, please turn this page over and remain quiet until everyone has finished.



Your Caption: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Your Caption: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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