

Sixth Grade Language Arts – Dictation

Catching the Contagion

The matriarch, pitchfork in hand, was giving orders like a general on a battlefield, encouraging, speeding up her forces, herself setting a stout example, gray head bare to the sun, full black Sunday skirts turned up over a white starched petticoat. Everybody was at it, women and children raking, piling up the carts, men staggering about like miniature haystacks, invisible beneath the loads piled high on their shoulders, on forklike porte-foins¹. In the west new clouds rode the wind like great white galleons.

“Vite², vite, my little ones!” came now and again the high carrying call of the matriarch.

Emily had caught the contagion and worked with the rest, worked till blisters broke on her hands, and her back ached furiously, and her breath came hard. She found this mad race with the elements more exciting than any sport she had tried. She heard herself singing.

Suddenly it was upon them, not with a few first drops of warning, but like a cloudburst, a deluge: one of the terrible rainstorms of the Pyrenees.

Eleanor Kelly

Directions: Answer the following questions with a paragraph each. Be careful – if you do not use complete sentences, it will affect your grade!

1. Why is the matriarch “giving orders”? Who are her “forces”? What are they doing?
2. “Emily had caught the contagion . . .” Explain. What is a contagion? What contagion is Emily referring to?
3. Why was Emily singing? Did the work she was doing seem to encourage singing? Why or why not?

¹ Porte-foins – tool for gathering and transporting hay

² Vite – French for “quickly”