

Island Morning

Descriptive Essay by Jamaica Kincaid

What place do you call **HOME?**

COMMON CORE

RI 3 Analyze how an author unfolds a series of ideas or events.

RI 4 Determine the figurative meaning of phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone. **RI 5** Analyze in detail how an author's ideas are developed and refined.

The word *home* can mean many different things. When you think about your home, you might envision the building you live in or your own familiar neighborhood. You may picture the streets of your hometown or the landscape of your home country. *Home* can include the people you care about and your memories of growing up. It can even be a place where you no longer live that still feels more like home than where you live today.

QUICKWRITE What does the word *home* bring to mind? In a short paragraph, describe the first image—be it person, place, or thing—you picture when you think of *home*. If you'd like, attach a sketch to accompany your description.



● TEXT ANALYSIS: DICTION

Diction includes both a writer’s choice of words as well as syntax, or the way those words are arranged into sentences. Jamaica Kincaid arranges words in unique ways, often using repetition to create rhythmic sounds. Describing her neighbors’ morning routine, she writes,

All of these different people doing all these different things did this one thing; they were all up and about by half past five in the morning.

As you read, look for other passages in which Kincaid creates unusual sentences or chooses words to establish rhythm as well as imagery.

Review: Tone

● READING SKILL: ANALYZE PATTERNS OF ORGANIZATION

To show connections between ideas, writers arrange their information in an order that emphasizes those connections. In this essay, Kincaid uses both **comparison and contrast** and **chronological order**.

- When organizing according to comparison and contrast, Kincaid presents all of the details about one subject or place and then all of the details about another.
- When Kincaid uses chronological order, she presents events in the order in which they typically occur.

As you read, record **signal words** that help you identify both patterns of organization that Kincaid uses in this essay.

Signal Words	Pattern of Organization
<i>"by six o'clock" (line 29)</i>	<i>chronological order</i>
<i>"I now live in..." (line 93)</i>	<i>comparison and contrast</i>



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Jamaica Kincaid

born 1949

Leaving the Island

Jamaica Kincaid is the name Elaine Potter Richardson chose for herself when she began writing. Born on Antigua, a small Caribbean island that was then a British colony, Kincaid was educated in British schools. Although she was often at the top of her class, her mother removed her from school at age 17 against her wishes and sent her to America to support the family.

Musical Musings

When she arrived in America, Kincaid explains, "I didn't know there was such a world as the literary world. I didn't know anything, except maybe how to put one foot in front of the other." She broke ties with her family and took a number of different jobs—and was fired from each one. In 1976, Kincaid landed a job at the *New Yorker*, a literary magazine, where her unique and resilient writing voice emerged. Much of Kincaid's writing expresses her anger at colonialism and the British disregard for her identity as an African-Caribbean woman. Her prose is celebrated for its lyrical beauty. "My work," she says, "is a chord that develops in many different ways."

BACKGROUND TO THE ESSAY

History of Antigua

Kincaid's birthplace, a small island in the eastern Caribbean, was a British colony for over 300 years. In 1981, Antigua united with a small neighboring island to become Antigua and Barbuda, an independent state. Most Antiguanians have African heritage, as they are descendants of slaves brought to the island centuries ago to work in the tobacco and sugarcane fields.



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Island MORNING

Jamaica Kincaid

I grew up on an island in the West Indies which has an area of a hundred and eight square miles. On the island were many sugarcane fields and a sugar-making factory and a factory where both white and dark rum were made. There were cotton fields, but there were not as many cotton fields as there were sugarcane fields. There were arrowroot¹ fields and tobacco fields, too, but there were not as many arrowroot fields and tobacco fields as there were cotton fields. Some of the fifty-four thousand people who lived on the island grew bananas and mangoes and eddoes and dasheen and christophine² and sweet potatoes and white potatoes and plums and guavas and papaws and limes and lemons and oranges and grapefruits, and every Saturday they would bring them to the market, which was on Market Street, and they would sell the things they had grown. This was the only way many of them could make **A** a living, and, though it sounds like farming, they weren't farmers in the way a Midwestern wheatgrower is a farmer, and they don't think of the plots of land on which they grew these things as The Farm. Instead, the plots of land were called The Ground. They might say, "Today, me a go up ground." The Ground was often many miles away from where they lived, and they got there not by taking a truck or some other kind of automotive transportation but by riding a donkey or by walking. A small number—a very small number—of the fifty-four thousand people worked in banks or in offices. The rest of them—the ones who didn't grow things that were sold in the market on Saturday or work in the factories or in the fields, the banks or the offices—were carpenters or

Analyze Visuals ▶

Examine the painting on page 561. What **mood** do the bright colors, busy people, and whimsical animals create? Explain your answer.

A DICTION

Reread lines 7–12 aloud. What is the effect of listing each fruit and vegetable separately instead of simply referring to the crops as a group?

1. **arrowroot**: a West Indian plant from which a starch is derived, for use in cooking and medicine.

2. **eddoes and dasheen and christophine**: eddoes and dasheen are plants with edible corms, or small bulblike growths. Christophine is a fruit-growing plant.



masons or servants in the new hotels for tourists which were appearing suddenly all over the island, or servants in private homes, or seamstresses, or tailors, or shopkeepers, or fishermen, or dockworkers, or schoolchildren. All of these different people doing all these different things did this one thing: they were all up and about by half past five in the morning, and they did this without the help of an alarm clock or an automatic clock radio. Every morning—workday, Saturday, or Sunday—the whole island was alive by six o’clock. People got up
30 early on weekdays to go to work or to school; they got up early on Saturday to go to market; and they got up early on Sunday to go to church. **B**

It is true that the early morning is the most beautiful time of day on the island. The sun has just come up and is immediately big and bright, the way the sun always is on the island, but the air is still cool from the night; the sky is deep, cool blue (like the sea, it gets lighter as the day wears on, and then it gets darker, until by midnight it looks black); the red in the hibiscus and the flamboyant³ flowers seems redder; the green of the trees and grass seems greener. If it is December, there is dew everywhere: dew on the painted red galvanized rooftops;⁴ dew on my mother’s upside-down washtubs; dew on the stones that
40 make up her stone heap (a round mound of big and little stones in the middle of our yard; my mother spreads out soapy white laundry on these stones, so that the hot sun will bleach them even whiter); dew on the vegetables in my mother’s treasured (to her, horrible to me) vegetable garden. But it wasn’t to admire any of these things that people got up so early. I had never, in all the time I lived there, heard anyone say, “What a beautiful morning.” Once, just the way I had read it in a book, I stretched and said to my mother, “Oh, isn’t it a really lovely morning?” She didn’t reply to that at all, but she pulled my eyelids this way and that and then said that my sluggish liver was getting even more sluggish. I don’t know why people got up so early, but I do know that they took great pride in
50 this. It wasn’t unusual at all to hear one woman say to another, “Me up since **C** way ’fore day mornin’,” and for the other woman to say back to her, with a laugh, “Yes, my dear, you know de early bird ketch de early worm.”

In our house, we got up every day at half past five. This is what got us up: every morning, Mr. Jarvis—a dockworker who lived with his wife (she sold sweets she made herself to schoolchildren at the bus depot just before they boarded buses that would take them back to their homes in the country) and their eight children in a house at the very end of our street—would take his herd of goats to pasture. At exactly half past five, he and his goats reached our house. We heard the cries of the goats and the sound the stake at the end of the chain tied around their
60 necks made as it dragged along the street. Above the sound of what my mother called “the early morning racket,” we could hear Mr. Jarvis whistling. Mostly, he whistled the refrain of an old but popular calypso⁵ tune. The words in the refrain were “Come le’ we go, Soukie, Come le’ we go.” If we heard only the crying of

B DICTION

Reread lines 28–31.

What effect is created by the **repetition** of the phrase “got up early”?

C GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Reread lines 32–50.

Kincaid creates long, fluid sentences by using the **coordinating conjunctions** *and* and *but*.

COMMON CORE RI.4

Language Coach

Idioms Groups of words that have a special meaning different from the meaning of each separate word are **idioms**. Lines 53 and 58 contain the same idiom for a time expression. Identify the idiom and tell what it means.

3. **flamboyant**: another name for the royal poinciana (poin’sē-ăn’ə) tree, known for its huge red flowers.

4. **galvanized rooftops**: metal roofs coated with a layer of zinc to prevent rust.

5. **calypso** (kə-lĭp’sō): a type of West Indian music based on African rhythms, often with lyrics about local events or personalities.



Farm in Haiti, Roosevelt. Oil on canvas. Private collection. © SuperStock.

the goats and the sound of their chain, we knew it was Mr. Jarvis's son Nigel, a rude wharf-rat boy, who was taking the goats to pasture. **D**

We weren't the only ones who got up to the sound of Mr. Jarvis and his goats. Mr. Gordon, a man who grew lettuce and sold most of it to the new hotels and who lived right next to us, would get up soon after Mr. Jarvis passed. He would throw open all the windows and all the doors in his house, and he would turn on his radio and tune it to a station in St. Croix,⁶ a station which at that hour played American country-and-Western music. It may have been from this that my mother developed her devotion to the music of Hank Williams.⁷ Mr. Gordon was very nice to my family, but that didn't prevent me from deciding that he resembled a monkey, and so I nicknamed him Monkey Lettuce. I called him this only behind his and my parents' back, of course. We never tuned our radio to the station in St. Croix. Instead, at exactly seven o'clock, my parents turned on our radio and tuned it to the station on our island. A man's voice would say, "It is seven o'clock." Then another voice, a completely different voice, would say, "This is BBC London."⁸ Then we would listen to the news being broadcast. At around that time, we sat down to eat breakfast. **E**

D **DICTION**

Reread lines 61–65. Compare the dialect in the song Kincaid quotes with Kincaid's own words, such as "a rude wharf-rat boy." Describe how they differ.

E **PATTERNS OF ORGANIZATION**

Identify the pattern of organization used in lines 75–80, and cite the specific words that signal this pattern. How does the organization help you to follow the events Kincaid describes?

6. **St. Croix** (kroi): an island in the Caribbean Sea, one of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

7. **Hank Williams**: American songwriter, known for many country-and-Western hits, who died at the age of 29.

8. **BBC London**: the British Broadcasting Corporation, based in London, broadcasts in many areas that are part of the Commonwealth of Nations.

Between the time I got up and eight o'clock, I would have helped my mother fill her washtubs with water, swept up the yard, fed the chickens, taken a bath in cold water, polished my shoes, pressed my school uniform (gray pleated-linen tunic, pink poplin blouse), gone to the grocer (Mr. Richards) to buy fresh bread (two fourpence loaves, one each for my mother and father; a twopence loaf for me; and three penny loaves, one each for my little brothers) and also to buy butter and cheese (made in New Zealand), gone to Miss Roma to have my hair freshly braided, and eaten a breakfast of porridge, eggs, bread and butter, cheese, and hot Ovaltine.⁹ By that time, it was no longer early morning on our island,
90 and half an hour later, together with two hundred and ninety-nine other girls and three hundred boys, I would be in my school auditorium singing, "All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small."

I now live in Manhattan. The only thing it has in common with the island where I grew up is a geographical definition. Certainly no one I know gets up at half past five, at six o'clock, at seven o'clock, at half past seven, at eight o'clock. I know one person who sleeps all day and stays up all night. I know another person who has to take a nap if he gets up before noon. And how easy it is, I have noticed, to put a great distance between you and a close friend if you should call that friend before ten in the morning. **F**

100 I wake up, still, without an alarm, at half past five. In the neighborhood in which I live, it is very quiet at that hour. It is not romantic at all to hear nothing in the city. At around six o'clock, I begin to hear the sound of moving vehicles. Trucks. I know they are trucks because the sound I hear is a rumbling sound that only trucks make. The sound sometimes comes from streets far away. If I get up and look out, I might not see anyone. If I see anyone, it is always two or three men together, dressed identically, in tight black leather pants, a black leather jacket, a black leather cap, and black leather boots. They will walk very quickly down my street as if they are in a great hurry. When I look out, I never notice the early light playing on the street or on the brownstone houses across
110 the street from me. In Manhattan, I notice only whether it is sunny or bright or cloudy and gray or raining or snowing. I never notice things like gradations of light,¹⁰ but my friends tell me that they are there.

Between six and seven, I sit and read women's magazines. I read articles about Elizabeth Taylor's new, simple life, articles about Mary Tyler Moore, articles about Jane Pauley, articles about members of the Carter family, articles about Candice Bergen, articles about Doris Day, articles about Phyllis Diller, and excerpts from Lana Turner's autobiography.¹¹ I know many things about these people—things that they may have forgotten themselves and things that, should we ever meet, they might wish I would forget also. At seven o'clock, I **G**

F PATTERNS OF ORGANIZATION

Reread lines 93–99. Which pattern of organization does the author use to highlight the differences between Antigua and Manhattan? Identify the word or phrase that signals a shift in subject.

G TONE

How would you describe Kincaid's tone, or attitude, in lines 113–119? Explain your answer.

9. **Ovaltine**: a nutritious chocolate drink.

10. **gradations of light**: shades of light; light that changes by very small degrees from lighter to darker.

11. **Elizabeth Taylor's . . . Turner's autobiography**: The people named are actors, journalists, musicians, and other celebrities of the time, whose exploits would have made it into the pages of popular magazines.



Brownstones, Patti Mollica. © Patti Mollica/SuperStock.

120 watch the morning news for one whole hour. I watch the morning news for two reasons: it makes me feel as if I am living in Chicago, and on the morning news I see and hear the best reports on anything having to do with pigs. I don't know why the morning news makes me feel as if I am living in Chicago and not, say, Cleveland, but there it is. I love Chicago and would like to live there, but only for an hour. Some days, after watching the morning news, my head is filled with useless (to me) but interesting information about pigs. Some of the information, though, is good only for a day. Then, for half an hour, I watch Captain Kangaroo. I love Captain Kangaroo and have forgiven him for saying to Chastity Bono, when they were both guests on her parents' television show,¹² "Now, let me lay this on you, Chastity."¹³ Surely a grown man, even if he is a children's hero (perhaps because he is a children's hero), shouldn't talk like that.

Then it is half past eight and no longer early morning in Manhattan, either. ☺

October 17, 1977

▲ Analyze Visuals

Compare this painting with the one on page 563. How well does each capture the **setting** Kincaid describes? Consider the colors and lines in both paintings, as well as each artist's depiction of light.

12. **Captain Kangaroo . . . television show:** Captain Kangaroo, a.k.a. Bob Keeshan, was the host of a long-running television program for children. Chastity Bono is the daughter of Sonny Bono and Cher, pop singers who hosted a variety TV show in the 1970s.

13. **"Now, let me . . . Chastity":** Captain Kangaroo was using a slang expression of the time. Used mostly by young people, it meant, "Now, let me tell you something."

Comprehension

- Recall** What does Kincaid compare and contrast in this essay?
- Recall** What time did most people in Kincaid’s home country start their day?
- Clarify** Explain why the author feels that the only thing Manhattan and Antigua share is “a geographical definition” of being an island.

COMMON CORE

RI 3 Analyze how an author unfolds a series of ideas or events. **RI 4** Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone. **RI 5** Analyze in detail how an author’s ideas are developed and refined.

Text Analysis

- Analyze Patterns of Organization** To compare and contrast Antigua and Manhattan, Kincaid includes many of the same kinds of details in her description of each place. Use the chart you created as you read to find examples of these points of comparison. Then explain which one you think best highlights the similarities and differences between the two islands.
- Analyze Author’s Perspective** An author’s perspective is the way he or she looks at a topic. How might Kincaid’s childhood experiences in Antigua have influenced her perspective on living in a big city like New York? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
- Draw Conclusions** Reread lines 100–112. Why do the author’s friends in Manhattan notice the gradations of light, while she herself does not? What might this tell you about her feelings toward Manhattan as her home?
- Evaluate Diction** Kincaid frequently uses lists and repetition to achieve her unique style. Record three examples of such usage in a chart. Then complete your chart by briefly explaining the effect each example creates.

<i>Example of Kincaid’s Diction</i>	<i>Effect Created</i>
<i>“Certainly no one I know gets up at half past five, at six o’clock, at seven o’clock, at half past seven, at eight o’clock.” (lines 94–96)</i>	<i>Kincaid’s use of repetition here helps emphasize how solitary her mornings in New York are. It gives the paragraph a reflective, lonely tone.</i>

Text Criticism

- Critical Interpretations** The literary critic Suzanne Freeman has said that Kincaid’s “singsong style” produces “images that are as sweet and mysterious as the secrets that children whisper in your ear.” In your opinion, does this comment apply to Kincaid’s depiction of her island birthplace? Explain.

What place do you call HOME?

What makes a place a “home”?

Language

◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Improve Sentence Flow

Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 562. Jamaica Kincaid uses **coordinating conjunctions** to join independent clauses and connect ideas. She creates long sentences and achieves a conversational style.

Like Kincaid, use the coordinating conjunctions *and*, *but*, *for*, *nor*, *or*, *so*, and *yet* when you want to combine shorter sentences or connect ideas. In the following excerpt, notice how the author uses *and* to join two independent clauses and *but* to connect ideas:

The Ground was often many miles away from where they lived, and they got there not by taking a truck or some other kind of automotive transportation but by riding a donkey or by walking. (lines 16–19)

Notice how the revisions in blue help to improve the flow of this first draft. Revise your response to the prompt below by using similar techniques.

STUDENT MODEL

My house is home to a family of seven. ^{but} There is only one bathroom. ^{so} All five of us kids race crazily down the hall every weekday morning. My older sister almost always gets there first. ^{so} The rest of us stand blinking and yawning in the hallway. ^{or} We drift slowly downstairs to the kitchen.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Expand your knowledge of “Island Morning” by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tip** to improve your writing.

WRITING PROMPT

Extended Constructed Response: Comparison-Contrast

Choose one of the two mornings Kincaid describes and compare it with your own daily routine. Use the rich details presented in the selection to write a **three-to-five-paragraph comparison**.

REVISING TIP

Review your response. How have you used coordinating conjunctions to connect your ideas and achieve a conversational style?

COMMON CORE

L1b Use various types of clauses to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing. **W4** Produce informative writing in which the organization and style are appropriate to task and purpose.

Interactive
Revision



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