

Directions: The following passage deals with the role that Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5702 plays in your community. Read the passage and answer the multiple-choice and open-ended questions that follow it.

VFW Meeting

By

Doug Neralich

Simone Legras was very proud of her ethnic French heritage, but she didn't like being called Simon Lagree by some of the wise-guy boys in her eighth grade class at Franklin Avenue Middle School. She certainly didn't think Art Frascarelli, the young man with the dreamy brown eyes who sat in front of her in class, was in that category. In fact, Art frequently appeared in her dreams, but she was too shy to speak to him. Art was currently having a conversation with Tony Peterson. Tony sat next to her in class in the row to her right.

"We're going where?" Art's face was crinkled up in surprise. Simone thought it made him look even cuter than usual.

"To the VFW Post across the street! Right now, as I came back to class, I heard Ms. Jules speaking to some old guys about it." Tony's voice had a whiny quality that Simone found annoying.

"You mean the place with the tank out front, right?" Art's curiosity twinkled in his eyes. "I wonder what we are going to do there?"

"What do the VFW people do there? I don't want to sit around and listen to a bunch of old guys tell war stories. That would creep me out." Tony was being his usual charming self.

"Yeah, but it would be cool if we got to drive the tank," offered Art.

Simone could not help overhearing their conversation, and the crimson of anger began to show in her face. She turned to Tony and said: "Until he died a few months ago, my grandpa, John Legras, was a member of that VFW Post, and if you knew anything, Tony Peterson, you'd have a little more respect for the men and women of the VFW."

"Shut up Simon Lagree. You're just a girl. What do you know? Did you suddenly take an IQ pill? Tony flipped his hand in Simone's direction as if to brush her away. "Hey, maybe if those guys are wearing hearing aids we can mouth our words. You know without really speaking. I saw that in a movie once and it was hilarious." Tony had a really nasty smirk on his face.

Simone was usually very reserved and quiet, but she knew the people at the VFW very well and thought they were very kind and nice. Perhaps it was part rightful indignation and perchance she was thinking of her grandfather, but before she knew it, she was yelling at Tony. "Well let me tell you something Tony Peterson, you are just about the meanest, nastiest, and ill-informed moron I have ever met."

Tony and most of the boys in class sat there with their mouths agape, but most of the girls giggled and nodded their heads in agreement. Ms. Jules abruptly ended the conversation she was having by the doorway with the VFW members and stepped back in her classroom.

“Would you mind explaining what’s going on here?” Ms. Jules was looking straight at Tony with an occasional sideways glance at Simone.

“I heard you talking to the men from the VFW about visiting there when I returned from the men’s room a few minutes ago. I was commenting and joking about it to Art when Simone got all annoyed,” Tony whimpered.

“Simone got annoyed? Right!” Ms. Jules left eyebrow arched upward. Can you offer an explanation, Simone?”

“Until he died, my grandpa was a member of the VFW Post, and I helped him with many of their activities. I apologize for the outburst, Ms. Jules. I got a little upset with the ‘joke’ that Tony told.”

“I see. Would you mind sharing some of the information about your grandfather and the VFW with the class? It might provide some meaningful background before we make our visit.”

The thought of speaking in front of the class petrified Simone, but since she loved her grandfather and was very proud of him, she answered: “Yes, I would be happy to do that.”

“Ms. Jules, I was talking to Tony before Simone got upset, and I feel kind of – you know - responsible. If you approve, I’d like to help her with the project,” Art suggested, softly.

Tony and most of their classmates couldn’t believe what they were hearing, and Simone felt as if her heart had skipped a beat.

“That sounds just fine. Perhaps the two of you and Tony can have a Power Point presentation ready for us in a week.”

“Okay!” answered Art.

Tony sat in his seat and scowled.

Ms. Jules reminded the class of their assignment, and returned to her guests at the classroom doorway to complete her conversation with them. She invited the VFW members into the classroom and they spoke at her desk. Mr. Schrieber, one of the VFW members Simone knew well, gave her a big smile, and Simone smiled and waved.

Art turned around and put his notebook on Simone’s desk. “Simone, put your cell phone number and your e-mail address on my notebook, and I’ll call you after school about the project. I don’t know about you, but I think we better leave Tony out of this as much as possible.”

Simone was so nervous she could barely write her e-mail address and phone number. She nodded her head in agreement and answered: “Okay.”

As soon as she got home from school she immediately called her best friend Natalie to give her the news about Art and what had happened in class. Natalie went to a nearby parochial school, and all Simone got was her voice mail. Simone remembered that Natalie was on an extended field trip and wouldn’t be home to later that evening. Simone was so filled excitement she felt she would burst, and she left Natalie a message. A few minutes later Simone’s cell phone rang.

“Natalie?” she asked while answering the call.

“No, Simone, this is Art. I’ve been on the VFW website and I found a lot of good stuff we can use. I copied the facts I thought were really interesting, and I just e-mailed them to you. I thought maybe we could get together tonight and work on the project.” There was a hint of hesitancy in Art’s voice.

“Wait. Let me ask my Mom.”

“Covering the phone, she ran downstairs and found her Mom at the desk preparing notes for a real estate presentation.

“Mom. Can one of my classmates come over tonight and work on a project about the VFW.”

“Your grandfather would be very proud of you for choosing that topic,” said her Mom. “What’s her name?”

“His name is Art,” Simone answered.

“Oh, of course dear. We should be finished with dinner by seven o’clock,” she answered with a knowing smile.

“Art?” Are you still there?”

“Yeah,” replied Art.

“Would you like to come to my house? My Mom says we should be done with dinner by seven.”

“Sure,” replied Art. “That would be great.”

“I live on Peach Tree Lane.”

“Oh, I know where you live,” interjected Art. “I live just a few blocks away on Orchard.”

Simone knew where Art lived. She walked past his house every chance she got just to catch a glimpse of him, but she was a bit surprised that he knew where she lived.

“OK, see you then,” Simone said softly.

“You betcha,” Art replied.

Simone went to her computer and started to make a list of all of the things that she had done with her grandfather at the VFW. She used her blog or e-diary for reference. “This list is pretty impressive,” she thought, as she looked it over:

- ❑ Members of VFW Post 5702 visit the Veterans Nursing Home in Paramus several times a month. They organize bingo games for the patients and provide money for the prizes.
- ❑ They bring some of the Veterans from the Veterans Nursing Home to the Post a few times a year and provide them with a spaghetti dinner.
- ❑ They organize the Memorial Day Parade and ceremony in Franklin Lakes
- ❑ The Post sponsors the Voice of Democracy essay contest in Ramapo and Indian Hills High Schools. Students who win are provided with scholarship money.
- ❑ The Post sponsors Senior Citizen dinners several times per year.
- ❑ The Post serves as a meeting place for civic and community organizations.
- ❑ The VFW participates in community events like the Franklin Lakes Town Fair and the Oakland Memorial Day Parade, and sponsors events like craft shows, car shows, and flea markets.
- ❑ The Post provides guest speakers to local schools.
- ❑ The VFW recognizes and honors members of local police and fire departments, as well as members of local ambulance squads.
- ❑ The Post provides monetary support for Fisher House, a low cost hotel facility in Washington, D.C. that aids family members visiting injured or sick soldiers being treated at Walter Reed Army Hospital.

- ❑ The Post provides monetary support for the Wounded Warrior Project. This endeavor helps severely injured soldiers readjust to civilian life.
- ❑ The Post supports soldiers currently fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan by sending them packages of “goodies.”
- ❑ The Post presents a citizenship award every year to a student at FAMS.
- ❑ The Post presents awards to members of the Scouts who have attained Eagle Scout or Girl Scout Gold Award status.

Satisfied with her list, Simone hurried off to fix her hair, makeup, and to pick the perfect outfit. Her heart was pounding as she rushed to answer the doorbell when it rang at seven o'clock sharp.

“Wow! Don't you look nice,” Art said as she opened the door. “And you smell great too.”

“Thanks,” answered Simone, and she was blushing as she turned to introduce Art to her mother.

“Mom, this is Art Frascarelli. Turning back to Art she said: “Art this is my mother.”

“I'm pleased to meet you, Mrs. Legras,” Art said softly.

“Likewise,” said Mrs. Legras. “Why don't you kids work in the den? There's a computer in there connected to a color printer.”

Once in the study, Art handed her some information he had printed out and announced: “Here is the hard copy of the information I e-mailed to you. I think we can turn the information into Power Point slides very easily.”

Simone examined the list very carefully:

- The VFW mission is to *“honor the dead by helping the living”* through veterans' service, community service, national security and a strong national defense.
- The VFW, with its Auxiliaries, includes 2.4 million members in approximately 9,000 Posts worldwide.
- VFW accomplishments include lobbying for a GI bill for the 20th century; donating more than \$1 million each to the Vietnam, Korean, Women in the Service and World War II memorials; fighting for compensation to veterans diagnosed with Gulf War Syndrome; and improving VA medical centers services for women veterans.
- Annually, VFW members and its Auxiliary contribute more than 13 million hours of volunteerism in the community, including participation in Make A Difference Day and National Volunteer Week.
- The VFW provides \$2.5 million in college scholarships to high school students every year.
- The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States traces its roots back to 1899 when veterans of the Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippine Insurrection (1899-1902) founded local organizations to secure rights and benefits for their service. Many arrived home wounded or sick. There was no medical care or veterans' pension for them, and they were left to care for themselves. In their misery, some of these veterans banded together and formed organizations with what

would become known as the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

- The VFW ensures veterans are provided with all the care, entitlements and compensation that they have earned through their service and sacrifice in defense of our nation in a prompt and compassionate manner by the Department of Veterans Affairs and other concerned Departments and Agencies.

Simone found it very easy to talk and work with Art. He was smart, and listened to all of her ideas and opinions. As they worked, a few times their hands touched as they were both reaching for the computer's mouse, and Art always smiled when that happened. They searched for pictures to use with the Power Point slides, and made lists of patriotic songs they might use as background music.

Art glanced at his watch and discovered that it was nine o'clock. "It's getting late. I think maybe we should stop here. Perhaps, you and your parents wouldn't mind me coming over tomorrow night so we could continue working."

"Oh, I'm sure they wouldn't mind," Simone said instantly.

Art smiled at her, gathered up his notes, and Simone walked him to the front door.

"Good night, Simone," he said softly.

"Good night, Art," she answered. For a moment her heart stood still as she thought he was going to kiss her on the cheek, but the moment passed. "Be careful getting home," she called after him as she closed the door. Simone raced to a side window, where she could secretly watch him walking down the street.

Art walked a short distance, turned around, looked back at the house and waved, and then continued on his way. She watched him until he was out of sight.

How did he know I was watching? Simone wondered just before bolting up the stairs to call Natalie.

Vocabulary/ Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which of the following BEST describes the central idea of this story?

- A. The VFW has a long history
- B. The VFW has a "cool" tank
- C. The VFW is an important local, state, national, and international organization
- D. The community does not understand the purposes of the VFW

2. Which of the following sets of words BEST describes Simone's attitude toward the VFW?

- A. Critical and angry
- B. Admiring and proud
- C. Immature and insulting
- D. Quiet and shy

3. The word **agitated** on Page Two means:
- A. Disturbed and angry
 - B. Something washing machine related
 - C. A type of rock
 - D. Quiet
4. The role the grandfather plays in the story is important. Which word BEST describes Simone's relationship with her grandfather?
- A. Distant
 - B. Angry
 - C. Impatient
 - D. Loving
5. What action is the author trying to persuade you to take?
- A. Attend the Memorial Day Parade
 - B. Respect the American flag
 - C. Develop and appreciation of the role the VFW plays in the community
 - D. Admire the VFW's Sheridan tank
6. Why is Simone so angry when Tony speaks about the VFW?
- A. He called her stupid
 - B. His attitude was insulting an immature
 - C. Tony whined when he spoke
 - D. She would rather listen to Art
7. The word **petrified** in paragraph on Page one means?
- A. Hard as a rock
 - B. Glad
 - C. Scared
 - D. Proud
8. According to the story, which choice is not something the VFW does?
- A. Sending packages to soldiers in combat zones
 - B. Conducting activities to support veterans in the Veterans Nursing Home
 - C. Organizing parades and ceremonies
 - D. Teaching students to sing the Star Spangled Banner
9. The word **bolting** on Page 5 means:
- A. Locking the door
 - B. Running quickly

