

I knew I would need a lot of courage to get through the day...

Note: The sample essays on this website were written by my Junior Cert students over the years. I tidied up the spelling and grammar when necessary, but the ideas were all theirs. It is with their kind permission that these essays are reproduced here, to give you an idea of what can be done. These essays cannot be copied and passed off as your own work, of course. That is plagiarism. Don't forget that this website is accessible to everyone, and your teacher is likely to check online if he or she suspects that the work you hand up is not your own.

I knew I would need a lot of courage to get through the day. If I could survive that, maybe I could survive the coming weeks. My family and I were heading off on our annual camping holiday, which doesn't sound like the worst thing in the world, I'm sure, but that's because you haven't met my family. My parents are embarrassing, my five year old brothers are miniature devils and - as if it wasn't bad enough being cooped up in a car and then a caravan with them - my mother had invited my cousin Louise along too. Louise. I couldn't stand her, but Mum was determined that we should be friends.

What my mother didn't know was that I already knew all I needed to know about Louise. She was Little Miss Perfect: always top of her class, always winning tennis tournaments and even sailing through the piano exams. She had already reached Grade 5, while I was stuck at Grade 2, with little prospect of ever improving on that. Everyone loved Louise. Even my parents fussed around her when she visited, and my annoying little brothers behaved like humans in her presence. How would I cope with two weeks of being compared to her? It was too much to bear.

And now, here we were, all jammed into Dad's car. I was in the middle, squashed between Louise on one side and my hyperactive brothers on the other. I groaned inwardly. We had only been on the road for ten minutes, and already I was at the end of my tether. How was I going to survive the four hour car journey, not to mind two weeks stuck in a tiny caravan with this lot? Louise's elbow was digging into my side. 'Do you mind?' I snarled, shoving her away none too gently. But she just pulled her elbow away, smiled and apologised. She really was unbearable.

I must have fallen asleep after a while, because the next thing I knew I was jerked awake by my dad announcing loudly that 'the ship has successfully completed her maiden voyage'. I rolled my eyes, but Mum giggled like a schoolgirl. Dad found the site we had been allocated,

and he and Mum busied themselves with the caravan: hooking up the electricity and all sorts of other boring things. Louise offered to help, naturally, but Mum just beamed at her and said that they were fine. She suggested that Louise and I go and 'explore the campsite'. She made it sound as if it were Disneyland, not a field in the middle of nowhere. I glared at Louise and stalked off, not bothering to wait for her. She didn't follow me. Perhaps she was getting the hint at last.

The 'exploration' of the campsite didn't take long. It was just green fields bordered by woods on three sides and a river on the fourth. There was a playground – not much use for a fifteen year old – and a small shop with a little fish and chip shop attached. It was closed, of course. I sighed heavily and wandered back to the caravan. Night was falling, and Dad announced that he'd treat us all to fish and chips. Louise offered to go and get it, and I smiled to myself, knowing she'd fail, for once. The chipper had been shut tight with no sign of life when I walked past.

Naturally, it opened the minute Louise arrived, and she tripped back to the caravan with our dinner a short time later. After the meal, we were all tired so decided to call it a night and make an early start the next day. You can imagine my horror when I found out that Louise and I were expected to share a single bed. I did my best to stay as far away from her as I could, but her cold feet kept finding my legs no matter what.

The next morning I woke to the sound of rain drumming on the roof of the caravan. I pulled back the curtain and looked out at the dreary scene. Rain drops splashed into enormous puddles that had formed all over the campsite and the trees bowed in the wind. It was a typical Irish summer's day, really.

'Well, it looks like we'll be playing board games for the day!' Dad announced brightly, as if this was a delightful prospect.

'You mean bored games,' I snapped irritably. They ignored me started sorting out the various games, while I headed back to bed to try and sleep the day away.

I was awoken abruptly by a dog growling. I sat up immediately; we don't have a dog. It was my awful little brothers, playing at being animals. I roared at them to get out of the bedroom, but it was no use. 'We've been outside!' they shouted, dancing gleefully out of reach as I tried in vain to swipe at them. 'It's stopped raining. Mum and Dad have gone to Clifden to do some shopping, and you and Louise are in charge. She's already made us lunch.' With that, they stuck out their tongues and darted from the room, laughing.

I was furious. How dare Louise take charge of my brothers? Much as I detested them, they were my brothers. I scrambled out of bed and into my clothes. I would take the boys out and show them how much better a sister was than a mere cousin.

My plan was simple but brilliant. I would bring the boys to the playground and, while they leaped about on the various swings and slides, I would dawdle in the shop, checking out the magazines and maybe having an ice-cream.

The plan worked perfectly, right up until the moment that I decided it was time to leave the shop and collect my brothers. I had bought them both a packet of jelly babies, just to show how much nicer than Louise I was.

When I couldn't see the boys, I didn't worry, at first. They were always up to something. But when I went into the playground and searched each tunnel and slide, then I began to worry. I called their names, but there was no response. I circled the area, but still no sign of them. Now I began to worry in earnest. What would I do? They were only five. They didn't have the sense to know that they shouldn't wander off into the woods or down to the river. I realised how irresponsible I had been. If anything happened to them, it would be my fault.

I raced back towards the caravan, praying that my parents would be home by now. They would know what to do. At the same time, I knew how much trouble I was in if they were home. I bounded up the metal steps and in the door, only to see my brothers sitting at the table, playing Snakes and Ladders with Louise. At that moment, my parents arrived home from the shop. 'Had a good day?' Dad asked, dropping shopping bags onto the counter. I looked over at Louise. 'Great!' she said. 'Laura and I took turns looking after the boys and we all had a good time.' I caught her eye, and she winked, briefly.

Well, everything changed after that. I dragged Louise outside for a walk and thanked her sincerely for covering for me. I felt awful, knowing that it was only luck that had brought my little brothers back to the caravan. And I felt doubly bad because I had behaved so awfully towards Louise and yet she had bailed me out. I had blamed her for being better at things and more popular than I was, but maybe that was because she made more of an effort than I did, if I was honest with myself.

The result of all this was that Louise and I became a lot closer. I don't know if I can give you any greater proof of this than that we have made arrangements for me to join her on holiday this year and vice versa. Connemara, here we come.

