

Research Learning Experiences (RLEs)

Student Works

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A Day at the Beach

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A Day at the Beach

Emily Keniston

The air was hot and dry as I stepped outside. It wasn't an overbearing heat, just enough to feel the sweat start to moisten your skin and stick your baby hairs to your forehead. It was a great day for the beach. I put my earbuds in as I walked down the front steps to my apartment. *The walk to the beach is about half an hour, I may as well catch up on my true crime podcasts.* I heard the signature intro music and smiled to myself as I began my journey. This week's episode was captivating from the very start.

By the time I reached the beach the podcast episode had ended and my summer playlist was on full blast. I slipped off my sandals as I reached the sand and began walking across the beach, towards my favorite spot on the rocks. It's the spot Elena and I claimed for ourselves when we were children and to go anywhere else would be traitorous. Of course the spot is more meaningful when we're here together, but today it was just me. Elena was out of town with her family on their annual camping trip and instead of going with them like I have for the past eight years, I had to stay behind to house sit for my mom while she's on her business trip in Amsterdam.

As I unfolded my towel onto the rock and laid down, I couldn't help but feel like I wasn't alone. This shouldn't be a surprise because while this beach is small and secluded it's very well known in the area, but something about the atmosphere just seemed off. I lifted my head and pulled my sunglasses on, scanning my surroundings. A man off in the distance to my left caught my attention. He was too far for me to see him clearly, but I could see his shaggy, untamed salt-and-pepper hair and beard. His navy blue polo shirt and khaki colored cargo shorts clashed with his choice of shoe which was a pair of big black work boots.

The man saw me turn in his direction and waved in greeting. I looked around, confused, before realizing it was in fact me that he was waving to. I gave him a weak wave in response before lying back down. While doing so, I turned my music down and took one ear bud out. *Come on, Sidney, you know better than to have both earbuds in. Rookie mistake for a true crime fanatic.* I tried to relax and focus on the feeling of the sun on my skin and the (quieter) music in my ear, but I couldn't help but feel like there were eyes on me. *You're being paranoid,* I thought to myself, but my heart stopped as I began hearing footsteps gradually walking towards me. I sat

up, trying to seem casual about scrolling through my phone as I watched as the man walked up to me over the rim of my sunglasses. *He's probably harmless. Why do you always assume the worst of people?* I took my remaining earbud out and smiled at the man as he stopped in front of me. *Just be polite and friendly.*

“Hi!” I said to the man.

“Hey there, gorgeous. How are you liking the weather?” he asked me with a slight smirk. *Oh boy. This is going to be insufferable.*

“Oh it's so beautiful out. This is my favorite weather by far.” I replied.

“Y'know, I was just sitting way down over there but when you walked onto the beach I was distracted by you. You're absolutely stunning. Definitely a ten out of ten.” He said with a wink. I wanted to both gag and shudder at the same time. This man was very blunt. I was getting more uncomfortable by the minute.

“Aw thank you...” I replied with an awkward laugh. I began gathering my things and I stood up.

“What's your name?” He asked.

“Sidney.” I replied. *Shit. I probably should've lied about that one.*

“Well, Sidney. My name is Cam. Do you want to go get a drink?” He asked.

“Oh I'm only twenty, I'm not old enough to drink.”

“That's okay, hun, nobody has to know.” He gave me another wink. *Red flag.*

“No, it's okay, I really have to go anyway.” I told him, slipping on my sandals. He bent down and tightened the straps of my shoes before I got the chance. I stiffened at the touch.

“I really think you should stay.” He said with a menacing tone. He was still kneeling on the ground, so I took the opportunity to kick him in the stomach.

“I said I have to go. My boyfriend is expecting me.” I turned and quickly walked away as I said this, hoping he would finally take the hint. I looked behind me once I got to the edge of the beach near the entrance and saw him standing there. He waved at me again and then began walking in the other direction. *Thank god.*

I chose against any music on the walk home. I was still freaked out by the entire encounter and I wanted to be aware of my surroundings. The walk back from the beach consisted of twenty minutes on a forested dirt road before it finally connected back to one of the main

roads going through town. The desolation of the road seemed magnified as my heart was still racing. I couldn't shake the feeling of the man, "Cam" supposedly, and his touch on my ankle.

I was about halfway down the road when I heard something from behind me and my heart plummeted. *Footsteps*. I looked behind me and saw him following me, maybe 150 feet away while he had his phone out in front of him. I turned around and quickened my pace. While doing so, I pulled out my phone and dialed Elena. It went straight to voicemail.

"Shit shit shit." I whispered to myself. *Of course she can't answer, there's no service at the campsite*. I tried my mom next. I held my breath as I listened to the ringing of the outgoing call, while I also listened to Cam as he grunted while he tried to keep pace with me. The dial tone changed and I started to explain what was happening. "Mom I'm so scared I don't know what to-"

"Hi! You've reached Margaret Davenport. Please leave a message and I'll-" I hung up, cutting the voicemail off.

"SHIT!" I yelled in both frustration and fear. I was alone on this dirt road with a man following me and getting closer by the second. I broke into a run as I pulled up my keypad to dial 911. As I ran, I tripped over a tree root that had grown from the edge of the forest and under the dirt. I managed to stay upright but as I turned back for my phone, I saw Cam approaching me much closer than from before. There was no way I could grab it and still manage to get away; I was barely managing that as it was. I continued forward running as fast as I could and I could hear Cam pick up his pace. It felt as though all hope was lost when I heard the familiar sound of tires traveling up the dirt road. As headlights rounded the corner, I let out a cry of relief and began waving my arms.

"Please please! Help me please!" I hollered. A younger man looking to be in his mid twenties was behind the wheel. He rolled down the window to talk to me but I was already at his back door, pulling frantically on the handle.

"What's going on?" He asked, looking both concerned and confused. "Are you okay?"

"Please help me, there's a man chasing me! I don't know him and I don't know what he wants but he won't leave me alone! I have no one to help me, please get me the hell out of here!" I begged. I turned around to point at Cam, but he had disappeared somewhere into the woods. My heart dropped at the thought that he could be anywhere watching me.

The young man finally unlocked the door and I was quick to climb in and slam it shut behind me. I panted heavily for a moment, trying to calm myself down and be a little more coherent.

“Thank you, thank you,” I said to the man. “Could you please bring me to the police station? I can’t go home right now and I want them to find that guy before he does something to someone.” I shuddered at the thought of what I could have faced if I hadn’t come across someone to help me. I waited for a moment, but the man did nothing. A pit in my stomach began to grow. The car was still running but it was parked and the man said nothing. The pit in my stomach began to grow as I saw Cam emerge from the woods.

“He’s right there!” I hollered. “Please! We need to leave!”

The man did nothing except unlock the front passenger door. I panicked and began trying to open my door in the back, but there was no use. *Child safety locks*. Cam smiled and waved at me through the window before climbing into the car.

“Hey Sidney,” he said with a disgusting grin. “Need a ride?”

The car shifted into drive.