Name: _____ Date: _____

Field Guide to Room 214

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 929 words

FIELD GUIDE TO ROOM 214, by Rafael Delgado, Observer. My grandpa Tano says you do not know a place until you can name what lives in it. Back home in Nebraska, I knew eleven kinds of sparrow. Here in the city, I know none, because there are 1,140 students and a language I believe is called Text. In three weeks I have said sorry to a door, a fire extinguisher, and a vending machine, which does not count as making friends, so I started a guide in the back of my math notebook.

ENTRY ONE. THE HALLWAY DRIFTER (Corridor ambulans). Field marks: white earbuds, a slow and even walk, and a gaze fixed about four inches above the floor; call: none. The Drifter moves at a steady two miles an hour regardless of traffic, and it never bumps into another Drifter, as though each one carried a tiny radar. It does bump into me. I have apologized to forty-one of them, and not one has looked up, so I think I am the only obstacle in the entire building, and I think I was put in the hallway by mistake.

ENTRY TWO. THE LUNCH TABLE MIGRATOR (Cafeteria vagans). Field marks: a tray carried high, like a shield, and a phone propped against a milk carton. The Migrator stays two minutes at one table and then flies to the next. I sat in the same seat for three days and became, I think, a landmark. On day four a girl named Simone Achterberg waved me over, and I said, "Sorry, I'm good." On day eight I dropped my whole tray, and somebody at that table began to sing, very badly, so that the entire room turned to look at her.

ENTRY THREE. THE TEACHER WHO IS SECRETLY NICE (Pedagogus mitis). Specimen: Ms. Kettering, homeroom, Room 214. Field marks: severe eyebrows, a voice like a closing door, and handwriting so kind that it looks like a hug. Habitat: the desk by the window, which holds a jar of butterscotch candies that she says are for emergencies, and in this room everything is an emergency. I have seen her give a detention with one hand and a butterscotch with the other. The eyebrows are a defense, like a porcupine's quills, only quieter.

ENTRY FOUR. THE OWL (Strix scacchi). Specimen: Joon-ho Baek, back row, near the radiator. Field marks: a chess clock, which he keeps on his desk like a pet, and a stillness that makes the room seem a little bit louder. The Owl sees everything and says almost nothing, and in three weeks he has said eleven words to me, seven of which were, "Your knight is hanging." Yesterday I found him reading over my shoulder, and he read the whole guide in a minute. "You missed one," he said. "Who?" I asked. He nodded across the room, at Simone.

ENTRY FIVE. SIMONE ACHTERBERG (Pavo simonis). I wrote this one at lunch, and I would like to be clear that I was in a mood. Field marks: loud, always at the front, certain about

everything, and says so; call: carries across three classrooms. Behavior: raises her hand before the question is finished. Note: probably not as nice as she seems. I drew a peacock next to it, with the tail up, and I believed it was my best work. Then I closed the notebook, and on the way out of homeroom I left it on my desk.

She found it. She did not tell anyone, and she did not make a scene, which would have been easy for her. On Thursday she put it in my hands before first period, folded open to the page. "Nice peacock," said Simone, in her regular voice, which was not as loud as I had thought. "You spelled Achterberg right. Nobody gets that." I had eleven things to say, and none of them came out, so she went to her seat with her chin up, and I could see that her ears were red.

That Sunday, Tano called, as he does at six every week, and I told him everything, the Drifters and the Migrators and the peacock. He was quiet for a while. "In my old guide," he said at last, "there are corrections in the margins on nearly every page. I wrote the wrong bird, and then I saw the right bird. I crossed out the wrong one and wrote the right one next to it, so a person could see." "Is that allowed?" I asked. "It is the only way it works," he said.

On Monday I wrote it out. I drew one straight line through Pavo simonis, so that you could still read it. Then I wrote, CORRECTION. Field marks: loud on purpose. Observation, day eight: when I dropped my tray, she sang so badly that nobody looked at me. I handed it to her at her locker, and she read the page twice. "You are a terrible bird guide," said Simone. "Yes," I said. "I am going to be mad until lunch."

At lunch she took the notebook out of my hands, turned to a clean page, and wrote for a long time with her tongue between her teeth. ENTRY SIX. RAFAEL DELGADO (Passer apologeticus). Field marks: says sorry to doors. Call: "Sorry." Habitat: unknown, but seen near the loud table, looking surprised. She slid it back across the tray. Joon-ho moved his chess clock over to make room, and the Owl, who sees everything, did not say a word about the way I was grinning at a milk carton.

Questions

1. Where does Rafa get the idea of a field guide?

A. From his grandpa Tano, who names what lives in a place

B. From Ms. Kettering's class

C. From a video

2. Why does Rafa call himself the only obstacle in the building?

A. He is very tall

B. The Drifters never look up and keep bumping into him

C. He stands in the doorway of Room 214

3. What did Simone say when she returned the notebook?

A. That she was furious
B. That he had spelled her name right
C. That he must leave school

4. Why did Simone sing badly on day eight?

A. So that nobody would look at Rafa after he dropped his tray
B. She was practicing for a concert
C. She wanted to be loud

5. What does Rafa do to the wrong entry about Simone?

A. Tears out the page
B. Draws one line through it so it can still be read, and writes a correction
C. Gives it to Ms. Kettering

6. In this story, the word severe describes eyebrows that look

A. stern and strict
B. wet and cold
C. very funny

Words to know

observer: careful watcher
specimen: one example
habitat: where it lives
severe: stern, strict
correction: fixed mistake

Answer key: Field Guide to Room 214

1. A. From his grandpa Tano, who names what lives in a place
2. B. The Drifters never look up and keep bumping into him
3. B. That he had spelled her name right
4. A. So that nobody would look at Rafa after he dropped his tray
5. B. Draws one line through it so it can still be read, and writes a correction
6. A. stern and strict