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| **Employability** |

**RLA/Science/Social Studies Lesson Planning Template Location:**

**Lesson Title: Health Science Careers in Diagnostic Services: Observing for Detecting & Diagnosing**

**“The Card” by James Ross**

The only thing I ever got off my old man was a birthday card when I was ten. He’d gone off when I was three and left me and mom and my sister to fend for ourselves. Mom never talks about him but my sister remembers him.

“What was dad like?” I ask.

She looks at me through dark, sleepy eyes, pushes her hair back from her eyes. Her arms are scabbed like she’s been shimmying up a rusty drainpipe and accidentally slid back down and scraped herself. “Why?”

“I said, what was dad like?”

She smiles at me, and she says that she’s still trippin’ and I should ask her later when she’s straight. Anyhow the only thing I ever got from him was a birthday card when I was 10. It said, “Happy Birthday Mickey!” And then there was a verse inside the card that went:

*Now you’re ten, and how you’ve grown*

*It really won’t be long*

*Till you’re a man, and fully grown*

*With arms both big and strong.*

And on the front of the card was a picture, a cartoon, of a little boy wearing a hardhat and driving a tractor. But I mean, how would he know I’d grown? To be honest, I was surprised he knew where I was, we moved so often. But the killer was, at the bottom of the card, below the rhyme, he’d added:

“Remember, no one’s got your back.

XX Dad.”

I’d studied this card on more than one occasion, trying to work out some depth to what he was telling me. “Laura, what was dad like?”

Three hours later and she’s washing up. The dutiful daughter. She looked up a little, thought about my question for a second or two. Then she said, “I love him, still.”

“Well I hate him. What was he like, though?”

And she said, “Stern.”

“Stern, huh?”

“I don’t mean strict; more serious. Like you, a bit, but smarter, taller and better looking.” Then she laughed and slapped me across the arm. “Dry the dishes,” she said.

It’s funny, I learn a lot from my sister, mainly *don’t do drugs*, which I should have written in capital letters instead of italics, but never mind, the thing is, when she’s not high or shaking ‘cause she needs some stuff, she’s really smart and, truth be told, she’s the core of our family, the strength, believe it or not. Honest, she keeps us together. There’s me, fifteen, bright, got a future, they tell me, though I haven’t and I’ll tell you more about that later. Then there’s my mom, honest, hardworking, and sensible (though not in her choice of boyfriends or anything) and all that stuff. And then there’s Laura. Nineteen, and a junkie, but she holds the family together ‘cause mom’s a flake and useless. And I, basically, am at a loose end; financially; educationally; socially; morally…..I won’t go on.

Laura has one thing going for her; she’s honest. And because she is honest she sees more than most, so she knows more than most, and she holds me and mom together.

Mom.

Hold on, I was told by my English teacher, Miss Wright that I should show, not tell. “Too much exposition,” she’ll say to me (look it up). So maybe I should stop describing my life and start showing what happens instead, but I’ll get to that.

Okay, so mom. My mother. She is thirty-seven years old and she is a flake. A total dribble. They should do a reality TV show on my mom, “How Not to….”

“How Not to Bring up Your Children,” “How Not to Save for the Future, “How Not to Get a Good Job,” “How Not to Attract a Nice Boyfriend.”

She did once; attract a nice boyfriend, that is. And I’ve read all the women’s magazines she buys and I knew from the start it wasn’t going to last. From the moment she said to me, “He’s kind, thoughtful, good looking, He’s got a good job and a lovely car (a great car, since you ask. You didn’t? But you would have. A Mercedes Kompressor. That means supercharger, which also means money. Cool, German cool, and much more.) But anyway, as she’s telling me all this I’m thinking, “Yeah, but mom, you’re going to dump Pete and tell me, ‘There was no spark,’ which translates as, you think that love equals pain and affection means distress and you think that being nice is the equivalent of being invisible. And it kind of is. So just be honest, please.” So, as predicted, Pete went away, Kompressor and all. And in moved Mark. Fifteen years younger than mom. What a jerk!

It was embarrassing. I was twelve, which made Laura sixteen. She’d just failed her exams and was working at a Safeway. Very content, regular money, dreaming about her own place, and a boyfriend. Mark made a play for Laura one afternoon. She screamed and mom came dashing downstairs half-dressed and slapped Laura to shut her up and slapped her again when she heard what she was accusing Mark of doing.

I’m not tough, really, I’m not. And I’m not pretending to be not tough so you’ll think that secretly I am tough. I’m just not. So when mom took his side against Laura, I couldn’t drop Mark with a right hook to the jaw or a knee in the family jewels, though I really, really wanted to. So, I just went and sat on the front step and listened to them fight.

It was one of those afternoons with dark and light grey clouds flying across the sky on the wind. I sat on the step of our front door watching the sea gulls wheel and fly and sail on the wind. I wished I could do that.

I have a theory that, to us, the world is a flat thing we stand on. But to birds, it is a cliff they cling to, a huge ball and they cling to the side and then fall off and fly and glide. I’m digressing here, but I can’t remember what else happened, except I know how it ended.

The next morning I used mom’s phone to call the police and arrest Mark for the twenty grams of cocaine he had stashed in a knapsack under the stairs.

Bingo.

Job done.

Like I say, I’m not tough. But I don’t need to be when there are five policemen and a German Shepherd dog breaking down the door and dragging Mark screaming down the path and into a van.

Anyhow, this card I got from my dad. It said, “Remember, no one’s got your back,” like this was some piece of information I’d known but had forgotten. Or, like I already had asked someone to get my back and then discovered they hadn’t got it, or something. I mean, come on dad, I don’t know who you are, or where you are or what you do or anything, but come on, be a dad for a minute. For as long as it takes not to write that sentence.

I was ten years old for Christ’s sake.

Write, “I miss you,” or “We’ll meet up when you’re older,” or “Stick with school.” In fact, here’s an idea, don’t send me a card. Go on. Unsend it.

The funny thing is, dumb card with a stupid picture and deranged verse it might have been. But he was right. No one’s got your back.