**Literary Exploration**

**Suggested time: 70 to 80 minutes**

**Suggested word count range: 400 to 900 words**

Read the following nonfiction excerpt in order to complete your literary exploration.

*The narrator and his son Chris are on a motorcycle trip across the United States. They are in California, nearing the end of their journey.*

**From ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE**

“I’m sleepy,” I tell Chris. “I’m going to take a nap.”

“Me too,” he says.

We sleep and when we wake up I feel very rested, more rested than for a long time. I take Chris’ jacket and mine and tuck them under the elastic cables holding down the pack on the cycle.

It’s so hot I feel like leaving this helmet off. I remember that in this state they’re not required. I fasten it around one of the cables.

“Put mine there, too.” Chris says.

“You need it for safety.”

“You’re not wearing yours.”  
 “All right,” I agree, and stow his too.

The road continues to twist and wind through trees. It upswings around hairpin and glides into new scenes one after another around and through brush and then out into open spaces where we can see canyons stretch way below.

“Beautiful!” I holler to Chris.

“You don’t need to shout,” he says.

“Oh,” I say, and laugh. When the helmets are off you can talk in a conversational voice. After all these days!

“well, it’s beautiful, anyway,” I say.

More trees and shrubs and groves. It’s getting warmer. Chris hangs onto my shoulders now and I turn a little and see that he stands up on the foot pegs.

“That’s a little dangerous,” I say.

“No, it isn’t. I can tell.”

He probably can. “Be careful anyway,” I say.

After a while when we cut sharp into a hairpin under some overhanging trees he says, “Oh,” and then later on, “Ah,” and then, “Wow.” Some of these branches over the road are hanging so low they’re going to conk him on the head if he isn’t careful.

“What’s the matter?” I ask.

“It’s so different.”

“What?”

“Everything. I never could see over your shoulders before.”

The sunlight makes strange and beautiful designs through the tree branches on the road. It flits light and dark into my eyes. We swing into a curve and then up into the open sunlight. That’s true. I never realized it. All this time he’s been staring into my back. “What do you see?” I ask.

“It’s all different.”

We head into a grove again, and he says, “Don’t you get scared?”

“No, you get used to it.”

After a while he says, “Can I have a motorcycle when I get old enough?”

“If you take care of it.”

“What do you have to do?”

“Lots of things. You’ve been watching me.”

“Will you show me all of them?”

“Sure.”

“Is it hard?”

“Not if you have the right attitudes. It’s having the right attitudes that’s hard.”

“Oh.”

After a while I see he is sitting down again. Then he says, “Dad?”

“What?”

“Will I have the right attitudes?”

“I think so,” I say. “I don’t think that will be any problem at all.”

And so we ride on and on, down through Ukiah, and Hopland, and Cloverdale, down into the wine country. The freeway miles seem so easy now. The engine which has carried us halfway across a continent drones on and on in its continuing oblivion to everything but its own internal forces. We pass through Asti and Santa Rosa, and Petaluma and Novato, on the freeway that grows wider and fuller now, swelling with cars and trucks and buses full of people, and soon by the road are houses and boats and the water of the Bay.

Trials never end, of course. Unhappiness and misfortune are bound to occur as long as people live, but there is a feeling now, that was no there before, and is not just on the surface of things, but penetrates all the way through: We’ve won it. It’s going to get better now. You can sort of tell these things.

Robert M. Pirsig

**THE ASSIGNMENT**

In the excerpt from *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, the narrator states that what we want to accomplish is not difficult if we have the right attitudes, but that it is ‘having the right attitudes that’s hard.’

|  |
| --- |
| **What is your opinion that having the right attitude is difficult?** |