

Below are the opening paragraphs of an essay that might be written for an assignment analogous to your assignment for Essay 1. The assignment for the essay below was to explore how the thinking and writing of child safety experts differ from, or are similar to, the thinking and writing of child psychologists.

Safety Tips and Psychological Insights: Two Approaches to “Red Riding Hood”

The story of Red Riding Hood is told in many forms and in many cultures. In most of its forms, it includes a little girl who is sent on a journey to carry food to a bedridden grandmother who lives in, or on the other side of, a forest. The girl is given strict instructions not to speak to anybody on the way. She encounters a wolf who tricks or tempts her into telling him her destination. He then runs ahead of her, devours the grandmother, and, when Red Riding Hood shows up, tricks her either into getting into bed with him or into getting near the bed. In any case, the wolf then devours Red Riding Hood, too. In some version, both she and the grandmother are saved by passing hunters who, hearing screams, come in, slay the wolf, cut him open, and thereby save grandmother and granddaughter.

The richness and depth of this story is demonstrated by the fact that it has been told and interpreted from countless different points of view. Two of the principal approaches have been those of the child safety expert and those of the child psychologist. It can be instructive to look at both of these approaches together; the contrast can help us get a clearer understanding and a better appreciation of the uses of each approach. The child safety approach is essentially practical; it aims to give parents specific tips on how to help their children get where they have to go in the world without being harmed. The

approach of the child psychologist, on the other hand, aims to give insights into the fears and conflicts that may be stirring deep within the psyche of a child approaching puberty. Each approach may be highly effective in fulfilling an important parental need.

The child safety approach to “Red Riding Hood” concerns itself with a certain set of questions. What are the chief dangers to the bodily safety of a child making his or her way from one place to another in the world? What are the best ways of protecting a child from such dangers? What should one say – and not say – to a child leaving on a trip through a “forest” (which might take the form of a busy city)? How much decision-making should be left to the child?

After a fifteen-year-long study of what parents typically say to children before sending them on a trip away from home, the American Child Safety Association in 2003 developed and published “Three Cardinal Rules of Giving Instructions to Children.” They are as follows: “(1) Focus on what a child should do, not what the child should not do. (2) Don’t describe possible dangers in a way that might turn them into temptations. (3) Don’t give instructions so specific that they leave the child no room for independent judgment in each situation” (“Three Cardinal Rules” 2).

Safety experts favor the Grimm Brothers’ version of “Red Riding Hood” because the mother in that version reinforces the three cardinal rules by so clearly breaking them. Her first words to Red Riding Hood are an almost perfect example of what *not* to say to a child leaving on a trip: “Now, dear, you must take this food straight through the forest to your sick grandmother. Do not stop and talk to anyone on the way, especially if they have a long red tongue, bright twinkling eyes, and a low, luscious voice. I talked to someone like that once, and now I have you. Be especially careful if he is wearing a

long, expensive coat that seems to be covering up a lot of hair. The hairy types can be irresistible.” One child safety expert who has analyzed the mother’s language in this passage points out that her words are “almost guaranteed to plant temptation in Red Riding Hood’s heart before she even steps out the door” (Malone 241). . . .

Some questions about this beginning:

1. *Does the title begin to set up the ideas in the essay?*
2. *Does the introduction introduce the general subject and give some necessary background information?*
3. *Somewhere in the beginning, is there a clear thesis statement about the differences between the thinking and writing of child safety experts and child psychologists?*
4. *Where, exactly?*
5. *Does the thesis seem one that the writer will be able to develop in interesting ways?*
6. *Before this beginning is over, can one see the outlines of a plan for the essay? Can one guess what is probably going to come in the rest of the essay?*