

## **Critical Thinking Skills for Career and College Readiness**

By Raymond Gerson

The following excerpt is fictional. In college and in your career you will need to use your critical thinking skills to analyze, evaluate and synthesize both fiction and non-fiction. Please read the excerpt below and then answer the six questions that follow.

### **The Rope Climber**

Joe Danton always wanted to be somebody. He longed to accomplish something that he would feel was important. Deep in his heart he felt he would succeed at reaching an important goal someday, although at times he had his doubts. He knew the pursuit of this goal would be a long and difficult struggle filled with many disappointments. However, Joe also felt that he must never give up hope and he held firmly to his dream of accomplishing something great.

Joe ached to do well at something. He tried different jobs and participated in a variety of college courses without discovering what he wanted to do with his life. He felt mediocre and sometimes a failure at everything he tried. One day Joe went into a gym and noticed a 25 foot rope hanging from the ceiling. He felt a sudden urge to climb this rope and he imagined a crowd cheering him on. It was difficult to climb but he made it to the top using both his arms and legs. He decided to practice every day. After many failures and several injuries which cost him months of training, Joe succeeded in climbing the rope with only the use of his hands. He continued to practice every day for several years, but improvement was often slow and a struggle. Finally he became an excellent rope climber.

An opportunity of a lifetime came when rope climbing was reintroduced as an Olympic sport and he was chosen to represent the United States. Joe and nine other young men, each representing a different country, successfully completed the Olympic trials and qualified for the finals. In the finals a young man from Russia was the first to climb. He was an awesome sight to behold, with rippling muscles on top of muscles. The Russian climbed to the top quickly and gracefully in only 4.2 seconds. The others followed, but no one could beat the Russian's time.

Finally, it was Joe's turn. His girlfriend and his parents were in attendance, and they anxiously watched as he concentrated in preparation for this great moment. Several times he went through the climb mentally. The opportunity he had hoped for, prayed for, and worked his heart out for had arrived. He went for it with all he had in him. Victory! 4.0 seconds! A new world record! A gold medal! The crowd went crazy. A new Olympic hero! A dream comes true!

Years later Joe realized the significance of this Olympic accomplishment. It symbolized the struggle of life as one attempts to climb to the top and attain one's goals. Joe learned that we can make a dream come true if we really want it, if we are willing to work for it; if we are willing to reach deep within ourselves and pull out the best we have to give.

### Activity 1

#### Questions to Answer for the Rope Climber Story

1. (Remember) - What was Joe's dream or goal? -----  
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2. (Understand) – What was this story about? Explain the main idea in the story.-----  
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3. (Apply) – How was Joe like you and how can you apply what you learned to your own goals?-----  
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4. (Analyze) – What qualities and abilities did Joe have and use to succeed?-----  
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5. (Evaluate) – Can you combine these qualities and abilities into a whole picture? Draw a mind or idea map on a separate sheet of paper with Joe in the middle and branches of his qualities going out from the middle.
6. (Create) – What do you think Joe learned from his experience? What is your opinion about him?-----  
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### Activity: 2

Now make a list of six questions of your own for the Rope Climber Story which are different from the ones you just answered.

1. (Remember) -----  
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2. (Understand) -----  
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3. (Apply) -----  
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4. (Analyze) -----  
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5. (Evaluate) -----  
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6. (Create) -----  
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### **Using Bloom’s Taxonomy for Problem Solving**

Problems and obstacles are part of life. Problems can be barriers to your goals or you can look at them as challenges to be solved. In other words, they can be opportunities for your personal development and success.

You can use Bloom’s six levels of thinking and critical thought to solve or resolve many of your problems. Many students say that a major problem for them in college is procrastination. We looked at ways to overcome procrastination in Chapter 3, but let’s take a look at how you can use Bloom’s six levels of thinking to tackle this problem. You can also use the same process and steps to solve other problems.

1. **Define and explain my problem.** (Remember and Understand) – “My problem is that I procrastinate and turn my school papers in late over 50% of the time.”
2. **What is a similar problem that I solved before? Can I apply this experience to my current problem?** (Apply) - “I overcame a problem of being late for my classes by setting my watch ten minutes early. Maybe I can draw from this successful experience and use it with this problem.”
3. **What are three possible solutions to my problem?** (Analyze) – “One is to write in my planner that my papers are due two days earlier than the actual date. Second, to use sticky note reminders on my refrigerator. Third, to give myself a reward if I turn my papers in on time.”
4. **What do I think would happen if I try each of these possible solutions or combine them?** (Create) – “I think that the sticky notes will not work because after a while I won’t even notice them. If I combine #1 and #3 they might work.”
5. **Choose a solution (or solutions) and try it. Take the action.** (Apply) – “I will give the combination of one and three a try for my paper which is due next week.”
6. **What was my outcome and was I satisfied with the results? In my opinion was my solution and outcome worthwhile?”** (Evaluate) – “I turned my paper in on time. It felt great and I went to a movie as a reward. I will continue to use this approach with my next papers.”

### Activity 3

Now think of one of your school related problems (or use the one below) and use the process above to solve it.

1. **Define and explain my problem.** (Remember and understand). Many students graduate from high school lacking the critical and creative thinking skills needed for excellent 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs. How can I help my staff and other educators at my school to better prepare our students for these jobs?  
Or state another problem of interest. -----  
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2. **What is a similar problem that I solved before? Can I apply this experience to my current problem?** (Apply). -----  
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3. **What are three possible solutions to this problem?** (Analyze). -----  
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4. **What do I think will happen if I try each of these possible solutions?** (Create). -----  
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5. **Choose a solution or solutions and try it.** (Apply). -----  
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6. **What was my outcome and was I satisfied with the results?** In my opinion was my solution and outcome worthwhile? -----  
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### The Story of the Chinese Bamboo Tree

This is a true story about the Chinese bamboo tree which may contain lessons and truths that can be applied to your life. You start by planting a seed in the ground and then you must water and fertilize it frequently. After one year there are no visible signs above ground that the seed has sprouted and that growth is occurring. You continue to water and fertilize the seed for another year, and still, there are no apparent results from your efforts. So you continue to water and fertilize the ground where you planted the seed for a third year, but you still see nothing happening. You continue for a fourth year and still there is no apparent growth.

During the fifth year you can begin to see a shoot above ground and signs that growth is occurring. And then something remarkable happens! The tree grows over 90 feet in six weeks. Eventually the seed you planted is capable of becoming a tree that grows over 200 feet tall.

Once the bamboo tree becomes visible (even as a shoot) it grows rapidly. What was happening during all of those years that you were watering and fertilizing the seed? It was developing strong and wide root structures to support the tree and its rapid growth above ground. In other words, the foundation upon which it would grow and stand was being developed during the first four years.

#### Activity 4

Please answer the following questions:

1. What is one experience from your life that is similar to a lesson in the story of the Chinese bamboo tree that you did not see when you first read the story? Read the story again as an “explorer” to discover that lesson. -----  
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2. What is one new idea that you get from asking from the following question? What new idea and big picture do I see if I pretend that I am the bamboo tree in the story? Be like an artist.-----  
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3. What is the overall theme of the story when you connect all of the main parts? In your opinion what are the most important parts of the story? Be like a judge. -----  
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4. How can I act as a warrior and apply an important lesson in the story to my life? What is that lesson and the action will I take?-----  
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### **Conclusion to the Story of the Bamboo Tree**

Your life dreams are like seeds that need to be planted, watered and fertilized. Keep working to make your dreams come true and be patient. When you plant seeds there is an incubation period in which growth is occurring, but it may be invisible and occurring underground so to speak. Do not be discouraged if the results don’t happen right away. That which is built slowly and upon a strong foundation is more likely to last and the harvest tend to be more plentiful.

Going to college is a lot like growing a bamboo tree. It can take four years or more to complete your degree. It might seem at times like you are working hard and making sacrifices for nothing. The journey may seem long and you might not see many signs of visible progress. Do not be discouraged or lose heart.

Even if only a small percentage of your efforts produce results this can be enough to bring you great success. Remember the story of the Chinese bamboo tree when you feel impatient or discouraged due to a lack of quick progress toward your goals. Remember that tall and strong trees have grown from tiny seeds that were cared for and nourished. Keep nurturing the seeds of your dreams and working hard to make them a reality. You will most likely be pleasantly surprised when you get the fruits of your labor.

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Contact information:

Raymond Gerson (512) 280-8383 raymondgerson@gmail.com

[www.achievecollegesuccess.com](http://www.achievecollegesuccess.com)

[www.successforcollegestudents.com](http://www.successforcollegestudents.com)

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