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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

Giant Catfish

The Mekong River in Thailand is home to some of the world's largest freshwater fish. Back in 2005, it took fishermen over an hour to haul to shore a Mekong giant catfish they had caught. The fish ended up being almost nine feet long and weighing 646 pounds. This fish was the size of a grizzly bear. Local officials tried to keep the fish alive so it could be released back into the river, but the fish died and the villagers ate it. The Mekong giant catfish is an endangered species and is only found in the Mekong River.

This story is mostly about:

A. a very large freshwater fish.
B. Thailand.
C. grizzly bears.
D. the Mekong River.

The story takes place in Thailand on the Mekong River and mentions that the catfish is about the size of a grizzly bear. Those are details about the fish and its habitat, not the main idea of the story.

You can tell from this story that:

A. Mekong giant catfish are hard to catch.
B. there are not many catfish in the world.
C. freshwater fish are bigger than saltwater fish.
D. there are lots of Mekong giant catfish in the world.

The story tells us that the catfish is an endangered species so we know that there are not very many of them. It doesn't mention anything about saltwater fish but it does say that it took over an hour to haul to shore, so it must be hard to catch.

The Mekong giant catfish caught in 2005 was:

A. as big as a grizzly bear.
B. over 700 pounds.
C. four feet long.
D. released into the river.

The story states that the Mekong giant catfish was the size of a grizzly bear, weighed 646 pounds—which is less than 700 pounds, and was almost nine feet long. The local officials attempted to release it back into the river, but they were unsuccessful.

You can infer that:

A. the Mekong River is a freshwater river.
B. local officials wanted to eat the fish.
C. the Mekong River is very shallow.
D. the Mekong giant catfish eats cats.

We learned that the local officials tried to release the fish but were unsuccessful and we learned in the first sentence that the Mekong River is "home to some of the world's largest freshwater fish". This implies that the river is a freshwater river since freshwater fish must live in a freshwater environment.

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Something to think about:
What other animals are endangered? Why is it important to try to save them?

A Dog's Tail

Most of the time, when we see a dog wagging its tail, it is friendly and wants to be petted. However, this is not always true. A wagging tail only shows us that the dog is excited, not that it is happy. A tail that is high like a flag and wagging means that the dog is showing you that it is boss. You wouldn't want to pet that dog. A dog that is holding its tail down low and moving it in short wags may be afraid. A scared dog might try to protect itself from danger and it might think that you are danger. It is best not to try to pet this dog either. A dog whose tail is about halfway up, and wagging, is a dog that may be okay to pet. Make sure you check with the owner first to see if it is okay. You might say, "Is it OK if I pet your dog?"

This story is mostly about:

A. what a wagging tail could mean.
B. when to pet a dog.
C. how to pet a dog.
D. what to name your dog.

The story gives several examples of when not to pet a dog but mostly we learned that different wags of dogs' tails can mean different things and that it is always best to ask if it is OK to pet a dog.

From this story you can guess that:

A. a scared dog may try to bite you.
B. a bossy dog will always bite you.
C. dogs are mean.
D. you should never try to pet a dog.

We learned that wagging tails often mean that a dog is not mean, but friendly. We can guess that when a scared dog tries to protect itself from danger it might bite you.

A dog with its tail high in the air waving quickly might be:

A. telling you it's in charge and you are not.
B. telling you it's scared.
C. waving hello.
D. looking for someone to play with.

We learned in the fifth sentence that a tail that is straight up might be showing dominance but halfway up tail wagging indicates playfulness.

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From the story, you can guess that:

A. it is important to be careful when approaching a dog.
B. cats make the best pets.
C. a wagging tail always means a dog is happy.
D. a wagging tail always means a dog is mad.

We learned that wagging tails can mean several things. We can make a smart guess that dogs have emotions like fear, protectiveness, and happiness and that it is best to be cautious when getting near dogs we don't know well.

Something to think about:
If you could have any pet in the world, what would it be?

Ice Cream for the Record Books

In Alberta, Canada, back in 1988, they broke the record for the biggest ice cream sundae in the world. The sundae weighed almost 55,000 pounds. In addition to 38,000 pounds of ice cream, there were 8,000 pounds of syrup and over 500 pounds of toppings. The makers of this giant sundae must have made lots of new friends!

This story is mostly about:

A. the biggest ice cream sundae ever made.
B. how much ice cream was in the biggest sundae ever made.
C. world records.
D. all the things they like to do in Canada.

While this story takes place in Canada and does tell us how much ice cream was in the sundae, those are details about the largest "sundae in the world".

You can tell from this story that the makers:

A. wanted to set a world record.
B. just wanted to feed ice cream to a lot of people.
C. were very funny people.
D. loved ice cream more than any other food.

Some people like to see if they can make something bigger than anyone has ever done. That is called a "world record".

How much ice cream was in the sundae?

A. 38,000 pounds.
B. 55,000 pounds.
C. 8,000 pounds.
D. 3,800 pounds.

In the third sentence we learn that there were 38,000 (thirty-eight thousand) pounds of ice cream.

You can guess that:

A. there must have been a large container to hold the sundae.
B. people got sick from eating too much ice cream.
C. people ate the entire ice cream sundae.
D. the makers refused to share.

We can make a good guess that if people were going to eat the sundae that it wouldn't be on the ground, so there must have been some very large container to keep it clean and edible. We can also assume they made new friends by sharing the sundae.

Something to think about:
Would you want to eat ice cream from that sundae? Give one good reason to eat it and one reason not to eat it.

Dog Car

Did you know that there is a carmaker that has created a car with your dog in mind? This car comes with a dog bed in back, a special water bowl that is designed so it won't spill, and a kennel. There is a ramp so dogs can easily get in and out. There are car seat covers with paw prints on them.

A tote bag is included and comes with a matching collar and leash. Even the floor mats have paw prints. There is a special fan in back to help keep your dog cool and stickers for the outside of the car so everyone will know that your car is dog friendly. This is one car that has gone to the dogs!

This story is mostly about:

A. a car that is designed for your dog.
B. a car shaped like a dog.
C. a ridiculous idea.
D. a waste of money.

The main idea of this paragraph is that the car has many features to keep a dog safe and happy in your car. You may disagree with the concept, but the paragraph is still about the extra features.

You can conclude that:

A. the carmaker thinks that people will be willing to buy this car.
B. the carmaker has dogs.
C. this is a joke.
D. people don't spend enough money on their pets.

We can make the guess that the carmaker wouldn't have gone to this much trouble if they didn't think that the car would sell.

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This car comes with:

A. a fan, kennel, and water bowl.
B. a kennel, dog bed, and dog seatbelt.
C. a dog and a kennel.
D. a horn that barks and a DVD player.

In the second sentence we learn that the car comes with a dog bed, water bowl and kennel. In the eighth sentence we learn about the fan. There are other features, but there is no mention of a dog seatbelt. Would that be a good idea?

You can guess that this car is designed for people:

A. who often go places with their dogs.
B. have hardly any money.
C. who have old dogs.
D. who like cats.

We can guess that all the features don't come free so you can eliminate "hardly any money". We can eliminate "cats" as the answer because there is no mention of cats. Old dogs would be able to use these features but the best answer is for owner and dogs that go places together.

Something to think about:

What do you think it says about our culture that there is actually a car designed with a dog's comfort in mind? Give one reason why it makes good sense and one reason why it is a bad idea.

Brain Surgery

People have been doing brain surgery for over 5,000 years. In ancient times, a sharp rock was used to make a hole in a person's skull. Later, when metal tools were available, people used a chisel and heavy hammer. Some believed that making a hole in the skull would help a person heal from a head injury. Others believed that a hole in the skull would release evil spirits from a person's body. A technical word for making a hole in the skull to cure diseases is trepanning, also known as trephination. Luckily, we now have hospitals and doctors to take care of our surgeries!

This story is mostly about:

A. ancient brain surgery.
B. modern brain surgery.
C. hospitals.
D. evil spirits.

We learned that people have been doing brain surgery for over 5,000 years ago. Most people could consider that ancient—not modern—surgery.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

From this story, you can tell that:

A. people have been practicing medicine for thousands of years.
B. people have been practicing medicine for hundreds of years.
C. anyone can successfully do brain surgery if they have good tools.
D. making a hole in a person's skull was only done in hospitals.

The story doesn't tell us whether the surgery was successful or where it was done. Since they were using rocks, they probably didn't have hospitals—at least anything like what we would consider a hospital. The definition of the "practice of medicine" has certainly changed over the years, but trying to help a person heal has been around for thousands of years.

The very first brain surgery tools were:

A. sharp rocks.
B. a chisel and hammer.
C. an electric drill and scissors.
D. a scalpel and laser.

In the second sentence we learned that sharp rocks were used as tools to open the skull.

From this story, you can guess that:

A. many people died from ancient brain surgeries.
B. modern doctors use stone tools for brain surgery.
C. ancient people were crazy.
D. sharp rocks work just as well as modern tools.

Have you ever seen stone tools in your doctor's office? When we compare rock tools to the sophisticated tools of today, we can make a good guess that many people did not live through the surgery.

Something to think about:

Do you think that some people were saved by the ancient surgeries? Why?

Can Playing in the Rain Make you Catch Cold?

You cannot catch a cold from playing in the rain. A cold is caused by a germ called a virus. A virus is passed from one person to another and then another and then another! More people catch colds in winter because the virus lives longer in dry air. In one experiment, scientists had people go out and walk in the cold rain and then sit in a cold room without drying off. Those people didn't catch colds more than anyone else! If you don't want to catch a cold, wash your hands a lot and don't touch your face. When you touch your face, a virus from your hand can get into your body through your nose, mouth or eyes and make you sick.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

This story is mostly about:

A. the myth that getting rained on causes you to get a cold.
B. why you should play in the rain.
C. what a virus is.
D. how to stay warm and dry in the winter.

A "myth" is a story that is told so often that some will believe it is a fact. Sometimes people make connections between what happened and what they just did, but the connections are just a coincidence. Science helps us finds the facts about "cause and effect".

From this story, you can tell that:

A. some people still believe that you can catch cold from the rain.
B. sometimes there are viruses in the rain.
C. being wet and cold will always make you sick.
D. scientists don't know what causes people to get sick, it's a mystery.

The first sentence tells us, "You cannot catch a cold from playing in the rain" then we are given facts as to how a cold is passed around and enters the body through the nose, mouth, or eyes. We can make a good guess that the first sentence is the story everyone has heard about colds and the rest of the paragraph provides the facts about colds.

People get sick more often in winter because:

A. the cold virus stays alive for a long time when it is dry.
B. it is warm and wet.
C. it rains a lot.
D. they swim more.

We learned in the story that "More people catch colds in winter because the virus lives longer in dry air".

From this story, you can guess that:

A. you should wash your face and hands when you get home from school.
B. people who wear coats don't get colds.
C. germs are not the same as viruses.
D. kids get sick more often than adults.

We learned that viruses are germs that often get into your body from touching your eyes or nose with your hands. When you are in school you are around kids who may have colds. So, if you wash your face and hands you will reduce the number of germs on them and reduce your chance of getting sick.

Something to think about:

Sally got caught in the rain on her way home from school one day. When she got home, her mother made her stay inside for the whole weekend to make sure she was warm. Sally ended up with a cold. Why did Sally get sick?

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

Centuries

Have you ever wondered why the year 1492 is in the 15th century? Let's think it through. When we start counting centuries, the 1st century would be the years one through one hundred. The years 101 through 200 are then the 2nd century and so on. The years 901 through 1000 are the 10th century and 1401 though 1500 make up the 15th century. 1901 through 2000 were the 20th century and the year 2010 is in the 21st century. So, when you are reading about the 18th century, you know that you are reading about things that happened in the 1700s.

This story is mostly about:

A. how centuries are numbered.
B. when the 18th century happened.
C. why history is so confusing.
D. when Columbus set sail.

Even though the sentence starts out with the date Columbus discovered America, the rest of the story tell us how centuries are numbered.

From this story, you can tell that:

A. the year 842 is in the 9th century.
B. the year 842 is in the 8th century.
C. the year 842 is in the 7th century.
D. the year 57 is in the 0th century.

In each of the examples in the story we notice that the century is one number larger than the hundreds place in the date. The hundreds place in 842 is eight so it is the ninth century.

We are currently in the:

A. 21st century.
B. 20th century.
C. 19th century.
D. the 18th century.

This story was written in 2013 and you are probably reading this in 2000 and something, so we are in the 21st century.

From this story, you can guess that:

A. people who think 1932 is in the 19th century don't understand how centuries are numbered.
B. the century numbering system makes no sense.
C. the 19th century was the best century.
D. the century numbering system will soon change.

Since 1932 is in the twentieth century, anyone who thinks otherwise doesn't understand how centuries are numbered.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

Something to think about:
What method can you use to figure out the century of a particular year?

A Penny for your Thoughts

The next time you look at an United States coin, notice that it has an "S", "D", "P", or "W" on it. This tells you where the coin was made. An "S" means it was made in San Francisco, California. A "D" means the coin was made in Denver, Colorado. A "P" means the coin was made in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A "W" means the coin was made in West Point, New York. Abraham Lincoln, who is on most pennies, is the only president who is facing to the right on a coin. Pennies made in 1943 were gray because they were made out of zinc-coated steel to save copper for the war effort. Today, pennies are made out of zinc with copper on the outside.

This story is mostly about:

A. facts about the penny.
B. facts about Presidents.
C. what quarters are made of.
D. where pennies are made.

We learned that a president is on the most pennies, where pennies were made, and what a penny is made of. These are all facts about the penny.

From this story, you can tell that:

A. pennies are made in four different places.
B. pennies are worth more now than they used to be.
C. more pennies are made in Philadelphia than anywhere else.
D. pennies are good luck.

The story doesn't talk about lucky pennies or how much they are worth. It does tell us the four cities where pennies were made, but not how many were made in each city.

Which way does Abraham Lincoln face on the penny?

A. Right.
B. Left.
C. Forward.
D. Backward.

The sixth sentence tells us which direction Lincoln faces: "to the right".

From this story, you can guess that:

A. copper was valuable during World War II.
B. pennies made in West Point look different from those made in Denver.
C. the penny is the most important coin.
D. we won World War II.

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We learn that there is no copper in pennies made in 1943—in the middle of WWII. With that fact, we can guess that copper must have been important and used for something else.

Something to think about:
Have you ever found an old penny? Have you ever stopped to think about where that penny has been and the events that have occurred since that penny was made?

Pleasing the Gods

Six hundred years ago in what we now call Mexico, the Aztecs were a powerful empire. The Aztecs worshipped a god named Huitzilopochtli (weet-za-la-poacht-lee) who was the God of War. The Aztecs believed that in order to make Huitzilopochtli happy, they had to offer him human hearts. The Aztecs would capture enemies and take them to a temple, where they laid the prisoner out on a stone and cut out his heart. They then offered the heart to Huitzilopochtli in hopes that the god would help the Aztecs win their wars. The Aztecs were often at war with their neighbors because they needed prisoners to sacrifice. The Aztecs also believed that the sacrifices would keep the world from ending.

This story is mostly about:

A. a way that Aztecs worshipped a god.
B. the Mayans.
C. what Mexico was like 600 years ago.
D. what the Aztecs did at their temples.

The story talks about only one part of life in Mexico 600 years ago and describes only one thing that the Aztecs did at their temples. The story gives us lots of details about how they worshiped a god.

From this story, you can guess that:

A. 600 years ago, some people thought killing prisoners was okay.
B. the Aztecs ate human hearts.
C. the Aztecs lived in what we now call Brazil.
D. the prisoners were happy to be sacrificed.

The story takes place 600 years ago and we learned that they removed the heart of prisoners. There is no specific information that the Aztecs ate the human hearts and they likely did not as it was an offering to the god. We can also guess that 600 years ago people were like us and did not want to die.

The Aztecs sacrificed prisoners to:

A. please Huitzilopochtli.
B. scare their enemies.
C. make it rain.
D. decorate their temple.

While the enemies might have also been scared, the main reason for the sacrifice was to please the God of War, Huitzilopochtli.

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From this story, you can guess that:

A. their neighbors were not happy to see Aztecs.
B. the Aztecs burned witches at the stake.
C. if they had no prisoners they would sacrifice goats.
D. Huitzilopochtli is the only god that the Aztecs sacrificed to.

The story doesn't tell us about any of the other gods or sacrifices of the Aztecs but we can be reasonably sure that their neighbors would not like to be sacrificed so they were not happy to see Aztecs.

Something to think about:
Would you have liked living in the time of the Aztecs?

Mind your own Beeswax

One fanciful story says that hundreds of years ago, women would use beeswax to fill in smallpox scars on their faces. When the women would sit near the fire though, the beeswax on their faces would melt. If a woman caught another woman staring at her face as the beeswax melted, she would say "mind your own beeswax". Today we use the phrase "mind your own beeswax" as a slightly more polite way to tell someone to worry about themselves or "mind your own business".

This story is mostly about:

A. where the phrase "mind your own beeswax" may have come from.
B. how people used to cover acne scars.
C. minding your own business.
D. different uses for beeswax.

Each line of the story gives information about beeswax. We learn where the phrase might have come from, as well, as how it was used long ago.

From this story, you can tell that:

A. some people tell busybodies to "mind your own beeswax".
B. beeswax works well as a cover for scars.
C. women weren't allowed to sit close to the fire at home.
D. beeswax is very dangerous.

Women must have been allowed to sit next to fires, otherwise the beeswax wouldn't have melted. We don't have any information about whether it worked or was dangerous. A busybody is someone who is concerned with what someone else's business and the last line of the paragraph tells us that "mind your own beeswax" is a polite way of telling someone, "mind your own business".

When women sat too close to the fire:

A. the beeswax on their faces would melt.
B. their hair would catch fire.
C. their skirts would burn.
D. they started sweating.

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The only consequence of sitting too close to the fire that was mentioned in the story is that the beeswax could melt.

From this story, you can guess that:

A. there are other explanations for the phrase.
B. this is the only explanation for the phrase.
C. women started using something else to cover up their scars.
D. beeswax can't be used to make candles.

The phrase "fanciful story" is a hint that this story may not be true and that there could be other explanations for the coining of this phrase.

Something to think about:
Historians often have different ideas about where phrases came from. Does the story about melting beeswax sound reasonable to you? Why or why not?

Say What?

If you had to run through a fire, would you rather be wearing flammable clothes or inflammable clothes? That is a trick question because flammable and inflammable mean the same thing! Many times the prefix "in" means "not" like in the words "incorrect" and "inconsiderate". However, the prefix "in" can also mean "into, in, or with" like in the word "instore" which means "inside a store". Inflammable comes from the Middle English word inflame—"with flame" while flammable comes from the Latin flammā—"to set fire to". So flammable and inflammable both mean "to catch fire and burn easily".

This story is mostly about:

A. what the words "flammable" and "inflammable" mean.
B. what the word "inflammable" means.
C. prefixes.
D. how to avoid catching on fire.

Both words are defined clearly in the paragraph and we learn the origin of each word.

From this story, you can conclude that:

A. some English words can be tricky.
B. you should always buy inflammable clothes.
C. you should look up words before you use them.
D. you should never say something is "flammable".

We learned that inflammable means "to catch fire and burn easily" so we wouldn't want to buy inflammable clothes. Since some words can be tricky, we should make sure we know what they mean before using them.

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The prefix "in" means:

A. not, in, or with.
B. now.
C. fire.
D. onto.

In the fourth sentence we learn that the prefix "in" can have multiple meanings—including not, in, and with.

From this story, you can predict that:

A. people might use the word "inflammable" incorrectly.
B. firefighters wear "inflammable" jackets.
C. people always confuse the words "flammable" and "inflammable".
D. the dictionary made a mistake.

This is a tricky one! The best answer is that people might use the word inflammable incorrectly, but we know you won't do that because now you know that they both mean "to catch fire and burn easily". We usually need to be very cautious when answering test questions that have the words, "always and never" because you are usually saying that it is true and there are no exceptions.

Something to think about:

Some words look like they are formed from a word and a prefix but they aren't. Which of these words have a prefix: inalienable, incorruptible, income, index, inconsiderate, increase, indent.

How to Avoid Mosquito Bites

Mosquitoes like some people better than others. Mosquitoes really like people who are exercising because a person exercising is breathing hard, moving, sweating, and getting warm. Mosquitoes are attracted to the smell of carbon dioxide—a gas that comes out of us when we exhale, or breathe out. Mosquitoes can smell their dinner from an impressive distance of up to 150 yards. Mosquitoes also like the smell of sweat and things that are warm. When a mosquito sees movement, she (only female mosquitoes bite) wants to chase. So the next time there are a lot of mosquitoes out, maybe you should postpone your game of basketball!

This story is mostly about:

A. what attracts mosquitoes.
B. who mosquitoes don't like to bite.
C. why only female mosquitoes bite.
D. when to play basketball.

We did learn that only female mosquitos bite but the story doesn't tell us why males do not bite. Most of the sentences of this story tell us what attracts mosquitos: sweat, warmth, and carbon dioxide.

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From this story, you can tell that:

A. mosquitoes use sight and smell to find their food.
B. mosquitoes rely only on their sense of smell.
C. mosquitoes live only in warm places.
D. you should hold your breath around mosquitoes.

While holding your breath would mean that you aren't breathing out carbon dioxide, it isn't a very practical way to avoid bites. The story tells us that both the movement and smell that attracts mosquitos.

Female mosquitoes are:

A. the only mosquitoes that bite.
B. bigger than male mosquitoes.
C. meaner than male mosquitoes.
D. interested in fashion.

Just because they bite, doesn't mean that they are mean. The story doesn't tell us about the relative size of males and females. It just tells us that only female mosquitoes bite.

Who is most likely to be bitten by a mosquito?

A. A football player during practice.
B. A lifeguard sitting in a tower.
C. A teacher in their classroom.
D. A cat lying in the sun.

The story tells us that both the movement and smell that attracts mosquitos. Only the football player is moving and sweating.

Something to think about:
Mosquitoes don't usually land on food like bees and flies do. Why do you think that is?

Dinosaur Mystery

In 1965, scientists found fossils of a dinosaur they had never seen before. They found the arm bones and a few other small bones of this dinosaur. Some of these bones contained bite marks made by a tyrannosaurus-like dinosaur. The confusing part is that the arm bones that the scientists found are eight feet long. And that's why they call the dinosaur Deinocheirus (pronounced dine-oh-kye-rus). The name Deinocheirus is derived from Greek and means "terrible hand". They are now working on figuring out if the Deinocheirus was a 40 foot long dinosaur with normal arms, or a small dinosaur with huge arms. They aren't sure if the Deinocheirus used it's massive claws for hunting or for defense against predators.

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This story is mostly about:

A. some unusual dinosaur bones.
B. where fossils come from.
C. dinosaurs and what they ate.
D. what scientists know about about plants.

Only "some unusual dinosaur bones" fit for the main idea. The story does not mention location, food, or plants.

From this story, you can tell:

A. there is a lot about dinosaurs that scientists don't know yet.
B. scientists don't know very much.
C. the Deinocheirus had a very long tail.
D. the arms of the Deinocheirus were longer than any other dinosaur's.

Scientists found the arm bones and a few other small bones of this dinosaur—but no tail. We learned that they are, "figuring out" and "they aren't sure" about the size of the arms. From this story we can infer that there is a lot we don't know about dinosaurs—especially when we find only a few bones.

How long were the arms of the Deinocheirus?

A. 8 feet
B. 10 feet
C. 40 feet
D. 3 feet

Sentence 4 states, "eight feet long". Another way to write that would be, "8 ft. in length".

What could a dinosaur do with really long arms?

A. Hunt other dinosaurs.
B. Turn cartwheels.
C. Fly.
D. Run fast.

Arms are considered upper body appendages and if the dinosaur was to run on all fours, then long legs would also be necessary. There isn't any evidence that the 8 feet long arms were wings, and no one has evidence of dinosaurs doing cartwheels. Therefore, we can guess that because one of the main tasks for dinosaurs was to eat, that the arms could have helped them have an advantage with hunting.

Something to think about:

What clues should scientists look for in order to solve their mystery?

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

Making Maple Syrup

You know that maple syrup is good on your waffles and pancakes, but have you ever wondered how it is made? Maple syrup is made from the sap of a maple tree. First, a hole is drilled into the side of a maple tree that is big enough and old enough to make good sap. A tap (which is like a small, hard hose), is put into the hole. In the spring, the sap rises from the roots and drains into the tap. Then it flows out into a bucket or bag that is hung from the tap.

Once you have a lot of sap, you can start to make your syrup. First you have to filter your sap to get rid of anything that fell into it, like bugs or leaves. Syrup is made by boiling the sap to get rid of the water. Getting rid of the water leaves behind mostly sugar. When you are finished boiling the sap, you have to raise it to a precise temperature or it will be too thick, too thin, or taste funny.

There are lots of rules for making good maple syrup. The weather has to be freezing at night, but warm during the day, so sap is usually gathered in late winter or early spring. You can't gather sap from a tree that has buds on it because it makes the syrup taste bad. The maple should be a sugar maple or a black maple because their sap has more sugar in it. You have to be careful to use very clean containers that have never had anything poisonous in them. You have to collect a lot of sap, too. It takes 43 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup! Making maple syrup is a lot of work.

This story is mostly about:

A. how to collect sap for maple syrup.
B. why making maple syrup is easy.
C. where to make maple syrup.
D. how to make maple candy.

"Why" stories will give you reasons, and "where" stories will mention places. This paragraph gives you steps to follow to do something so it is a "how" story. Since candy is not mentioned in the story but syrup is, that is what this story is mostly about.

You can tell from the story that:

A. it is not possible to make maple syrup in all parts of the country.
B. it is better to buy maple syrup from the store.
C. there are too many rules to follow when making maple syrup.
D. maple syrup does not have a lot of sugar in it.

We learned that there are lots of rules for making maple syrup but we probably couldn't say there are too many. It also tells us that part of the process is to boiling the sap leaves mostly sugar behind. The story also tells us that the temperature has to be "freezing at night, but warm during the day". In many parts of the US, it is rarely freezing at night, so the climate would not be good for making maple syrup.

You can only collect sap if:

A. it is freezing at night, warm during the day, and there are no buds on the tree.
B. you live in Canada.
C. there are buds on the tree.
D. it is freezing during the day.

The third sentence of the third paragraph gets even more specific and warns against gathering sap from

trees that already have buds.

From this story, you can guess that people who make maple syrup for a living:

A. must have many sugar and/or black maple trees to gather sap from.
B. grow trees in the tropics.
C. go on vacation in late winter.
D. always have pancakes for breakfast.

We learned that to make syrup you must have freezing nights in late winter so if you make maple syrup you can't be in the tropics and you are very busy in late winter. The story tells us that sugar and black maple maple trees have the most sugar and the last sentence tells us that it takes 43 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup. While we don't know how much one tree produces, we can make a good guess that it would need to be a forest of trees to make enough syrup to sell commercially.

Something to think about:
What would be good about being a sap farmer? What would be bad?

Swimming Cars

There are cars that can go right from the road into the water. These cars are called amphibious (am-fib-ee-us) cars because they can move on land and in the water. One company has designed a car that can go 100 miles an hour on land and 40 miles an hour in the water! The same company has designed a craft that looks like a jet ski, but on land converts to look like a dune buggy. Don't get too excited, these new swimming cars aren't allowed in the United States yet because they create too much pollution.

These special cars have actually been around since the 1960s, but they have been a rare sight on our roads and waterways. The car must have a license plate for driving on the roads and a separate license for when it is in the water. These cars have survived the trip from San Diego to Catalina Island and the trip from England to France. Who knows, maybe we'll have a car we can drive under the water someday!

This story is mostly about:

A. a car that is also a boat.
B. a brand new invention.
C. a bad idea.
D. a car that is bad for the environment and unsafe.

Since these vehicles have been around since the 1960s we wouldn't call them "brand new" and while some might not agree, that it is a good idea, the author gave reasons why it might be a good safe idea—to cross shorter bodies of water.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

You can conclude from this story that:

A. there aren't many amphibious cars in the United States.
B. the government doesn't want people to own amphibious cars.
C. a lot of people want a car that can go in the water.
D. the speed limit should be 100 miles per hour.

We can conclude that at least one of them might have been licensed for the road and the water and was in the US because San Diego and Catalina are in the US. The last sentence of the first paragraph does state that these amphibious cars, "aren't allowed in the US" so we can guess that maybe this demo car was an exception.

About how long has it been since amphibious cars were sold in the United States?

A. Over 40 years
B. Abut 10 years
C. Over 75 years
D. Never

We don't know exactly when in the 1960s the cars were invented but you can figure this one out by writing down what year it is now and subtracting 1970 from that year. What did you get? I wrote this answer in 2013 so I got 43. So we know they have been around for over 40 years but less than 75 years.

You can guess from this story that:

A. not many people bought the swimming cars in the 1960s.
B. there is a bridge from San Diego to Catalina Island.
C. there is already a car that can drive underwater.
D. the new cars will be introduced in the United States very soon.

If the car used a bridge to get from San Diego to Catalina, it wouldn't be something to write about. And while the story ends with, "Who knows, maybe we'll have a car we can drive under the water someday!", that doesn't tell us when they will be introduced. We can guess that since "they have been a rare sight on our roads and waterways", that not many people bought them.

Something to think about:

Would you rather take a boat or a car to school? Why?

Mount Rushmore

In 1923, a historian had the idea to carve faces into Mount Rushmore, but there were no presidents at all in the original design. When the idea was first presented, it was to be a monument to western heroes. The three men who were chosen to be on Mount Rushmore were Kit Carson, Jim Bridger and John Colter. Kit Carson was a trapper and scout in the western United States during the first part of the 1800's when the area was still wilderness and sparsely settled. Jim Bridger was a topographer, or mapmaker, also in the western United States during the 1800's. John Colter was part of the Lewis and Clark Expedition that found a way to the coast of Oregon from St. Louis, Missouri. All three men were very important in the

settlement of the West.

The sculptor who was hired to create Mount Rushmore didn't think that Kit Carson, Jim Bridger and John Colter were famous enough or important enough to be put on the side of a mountain. He decided instead to use the faces of four presidents: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt.

The main idea of this story is:

A. the original idea for Mount Rushmore didn't include presidents.
B. Presidents are western heroes.
C. the settling of the West was not important.
D. Kit Carson was a very famous man.

The first two paragraphs talk about the western heroes of the 1800s that were first considered for the monument. None of them were presidents and we learned that the sculptor didn't think any of them were important enough to be put on the side of a mountain.

From this story you can conclude that:

A. there were disagreements about what should be on the monument.
B. the sculptor made a mistake.
C. there were no good sculptors in 1923.
D. those four presidents were good friends.

We read about the disagreement in the third paragraph where the sculptor thought that the western heroes weren't famous or important enough.

Jim Bridger was:

A. a mapmaker.
B. a trapper.
C. a scout.
D. a really nice guy.

The story tells us that Jim Bridger was a topographer. A topographer is someone that studies the land and makes maps.

You can predict that:

A. more people would know about Colter, Bridger, and Carson if they were on Mount Rushmore.
B. not many people knew who Abraham Lincoln was before he was on Mount Rushmore.
C. the sculptor didn't like westerners.
D. Mount Rushmore is not a popular place to visit.

If the western heroes were up on the mountain they would be more common "household names" and we likely would have read more about them in History classes. Some people cannot name the presidents on Mt. Rushmore, but they know that there are presidents up there.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

Something to think about:
Do you think as many people would visit Mount Rushmore if Colter, Bridger, and Carson were on it instead?

Words to Impress Your Friends

Sometimes, when we don't know the word for something, we describe it. For example, we often talk about "the dangly thing at the back of your throat". The dangly thing is called a "uvula" (pronounced yoo-vyoo-luh). "Uvula" comes from the Latin word for "little grape".

Another feature around our mouths is the line that goes from the bottom of your nose to the top of your lip. This line runs up and down and is called the "philtrum". The word "philtrum" comes from the Greek word for "love potion".

Have you ever had the plastic at the end of your shoelace come apart? It makes it very hard to lace up your shoes. That plastic is called an "aglet". The word aglet comes from the Latin word "acus" which means needle.

If you have ever looked over a friend's paper, you might have reminded them to dot the "i" or "j". Now, you can simply say "You need to add a tittle here." The dot over an "i" or "j" is called a tittle. It comes from the Latin word for "title". "Tittle" also means a tiny bit of something.

Now, you can impress your friends with your new vocabulary. You might say "You have a bit of sauce on your philtrum." You could also say "Your aglet is coming apart." Using these words is sure to get people's attention!

This story is mostly about:

A. some interesting words.
B. where all words come from.
C. Latin words.
D. what an "aglet" is.

We learned that an aglet is the little tube around the end of a shoelace, but we also learned about other words. There are lots of interesting words in English but we only learned about four of them in this paragraph.

From this story, you can tell that:

A. English gets a some words from Latin.
B. there are too many words in the English language.
C. nobody knows what a "philtrum" is.
D. English gets a lot of words from German.

English borrows words from many languages, including German, but we don't learn that from this paragraph. We do learn that we got two words from Latin: "aglet" and "uvula".

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

A "uvula" is:

A. the thing that hangs down in the back of your throat.
B. the end of your shoelace.
C. the line from your nose to the top of your lip.
D. another name for a pogo stick.

The first paragraph gives us information about the uvula.

You can predict that:

A. if you use these words, your friends will ask you to explain what you mean.
B. nobody knows what these words mean.
C. these words were made up by the person who wrote the story.
D. aglets are no longer used in modern speech.

We learn new vocabulary words all the time. One of the best ways to learn is to read a lot and look new words up. If you use a word that is unusual, hopefully your friends will ask you to tell them what the word means so they can increase their vocabularies!

Something to think about:

Think of something that you don't know the name for. How can you find out what it is called? Hint (how about the indentation on the bottom of a glass bottle? How about the strips of wood or plastic that separate window panes?)

Bears

It is rare for a human to be attacked by a bear. However, it is happening more as people move further into the places these animals live. If you do run into a bear, it is important not to panic. There are some simple safety tips you can follow. Never go hiking, biking or jogging alone. If you know there are bears around, make noise so that you don't startle the bear. Don't carry smelly food with you, as this can attract bears .

If you do encounter a bear, do not run. Bears could think you are something tasty to chase and attack you. Stand up straight and put your arms over your head to make yourself look as big as possible. Pick up small children or pets. Yell as loudly as you can. If the bear doesn't leave, throw sticks or stones, aiming for the animal's head. If the bear attacks you anyway, fight back as hard as you can!

The exception is if you run into a mother bear with her cubs. In this case, lie down and don't fight. It has been shown that a mother bear will stop attacking if a person isn't fighting. Remember that she only wants to keep her cubs safe, so act like someone who doesn't pose a threat.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

This story is mostly about:

A. how to act around wild bears.
B. how to trick a bear.
C. how to escape from all wild animals.
D. why you should stay away from a mother bear with cubs.

We can infer from the story that we should stay away from a mother bear and her cubs. But we also learned how you should act if you encounter bears or go hiking where there might be bears. These tips might help you escape from all wild animals, but we don't know that from the story.

From this story, you can tell that:

A. sometimes people get attacked by bears because they startle the bear.
B. bears kill a lot of people.
C. bears are starting to wander into restaurants.
D. bears hate humans.

"Startle" means to surprise. When a bear is startled, it may protect itself by attacking intruders so it is best not to startle a bear.

To avoid a bear attack you should:

A. make noise as you walk, bike, or jog.
B. bark at the bear.
C. run as fast as you can from any bear you see.
D. always hike, bike, and jog alone and quietly.

From the first paragraph we learn that we should make noise if we are in bear country.

From this story, you know that:

A. mother bears are very protective of their cubs.
B. bears can't run very fast.
C. bears can't climb trees.
D. bears can't hear very well.

The last sentence of the last paragraph tells us, "she only wants to keep her cubs safe" and the story doesn't tell us anything about how fast they are, their hearing, or whether they can climb trees.

Something to think about:

Imagine you are walking along a trail in the forest and as you go around a curve, you find yourself facing a startled bear. What do you do? What could you have done to prevent the situation in the first place?

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

Quicksand

Quicksand is created when water coming up from below ground holds sand and clay in suspension. The moving water keeps the particles from sinking to the bottom. If you step in quicksand and get stuck, the most important thing to do is remain calm. You will not get sucked down past your head, you will stop sinking just past your waist. Think about floating in a pool. You float because the water is denser than your body. Quicksand is even denser than water alone so you can float easily in it. It is suggested that you try to lie on your back and float on the quicksand, then slither to safety like a snake. You can also try to crawl out on your hands and knees.

If floating or crawling doesn't work, try moving your legs as much as possible. Moving your legs allows more water to mix in with the sand, making it easier to pull your legs out. The next time you are watching a movie where someone disappears into quicksand, point out to your friends that it is impossible to get sucked all the way under.

The main idea of this story is:

A. how to escape from quicksand.
B. how to avoid getting stuck in quicksand.
C. what quicksand looks like.
D. how quicksand is formed from cement.

We can make a picture of what quicksand looks like by thinking about the water, sand, and clay but this story is mostly about steps on how to get out of quicksand. Unfortunately, it doesn't tell us how to avoid getting stuck in the first place.

From this story, you can conclude that:

A. people often panic when they get caught in quicksand.
B. there is no such thing as quicksand.
C. people die when they are sucked all the way down in quicksand.
D. kicking your legs will cause you to float.

We learned in the first paragraph that you won't get sucked all the way down in quicksand, and also that you will float. We can also guess that not many of us have fallen in quicksand and since it is such an unusual event, we might panic.

Quicksand is created by:

A. water rising from below, suspending clay and sand.
B. water falling through sand.
C. frozen water melting down into sand.
D. sand particles quickly drying together to make a kind of cement.

The first sentence in the story tells us that "Quicksand is created when water coming up from below ground holds sand and clay in suspension".

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

From this story, you can predict that:

A. getting caught in quicksand could be very frightening.
B. getting caught in quicksand is a lot of fun.
C. it is impossible to get caught in quicksand.
D. snakes cannot get caught in quicksand.

Now that we've read this paragraph we know how to get out of quicksand. If you hadn't read this paragraph it might be even more frightening to get caught in quicksand. Having some knowledge beforehand would help, but it still could be a pretty frightening experience.

Something to think about:
How would you keep yourself from panicking if you got caught in quicksand?

The Scimitar-horned Oryx

The scimitar-horned oryx is a member of the antelope family that once thrived on the African Savanna. People have reported seeing herds of 1,000 animals. The oryx looks like a small horse with two long curved horns. Ancient Egyptians bound the oryx's horns together so that the horns grew into one. Some people believe that we get our stories about unicorns from people seeing an oryx with one horn. The scimitar-horned oryx can allow its body temperature to rise to 116 degrees in order to avoid sweating. Not sweating allows the oryx to conserve water on the very dry African plains.

Unfortunately, this fascinating animal no longer roams those African plains. The oryx is now extinct in the wild. Hunting, poaching, using open land for farming, grazing, and changing climate wiped the oryx out in the late 1980s. Luckily, there are still oryx alive in zoos all over the world. Conservation groups have launched a plan to breed the remaining oryx in hopes of one day releasing oryx back into the wild.

This story is mostly about:

A. the oryx.
B. why the oryx sweats so much.
C. unicorns and fairies.
D. how the wild oryx population is growing.

We learned that the oryx conserves water by not sweating. We also learned that it is extinct in the wild—that means that there are none left. The title of a story should give you a clue to the main idea of the story and this story is mostly about the oryx.

From this story, you can tell that the oryx:

A. is extinct in the wild because of man.
B. would have died out in the wild anyway.
C. mostly lives near streams.
D. is better off in the zoo than in the wild.

In the second paragraph we learn that the oryx is extinct in the wild and the human activities of hunting,

poaching, farming, grazing and climate change have made it so.

Where does the oryx live now?

A. in zoos.
B. on the African plains.
C. in Egypt.
D. in China.

In the last paragraph we learn that the oryx is not completely extinct, and that many are still alive in zoos all over the world.

From this story, you can guess that:

A. it will be a while before oryxs can live in the wild again.
B. oryx are an ugly animal.
C. oryx meat tastes like chicken.
D. there are no oryx in zoos.

We can guess that the human activities that changed the habitat of the oryx will need to be changed before oryxs can live in the wild. Changes that big usually take time.

Something to think about:
What rules should be set on the African plains before oryx are released there?

High Tech Rescue

In Chile, in 2010, 33 miners were trapped when a gold and copper mine caved in. The men spent 17 days in an underground shelter before rescuers were able to use a probe to drill a hole and find the trapped miners. The miners were able to send a note back with the probe saying that all 33 of them were alive. Rescuers were then able to use the narrow hole to send medication, food, and water to the men. They also sent down special gel packs like the ones that astronauts use in space. These gel packs gave the men important vitamins.

Once the rescuers knew the miners were alive, they came up with a plan to get the miners out. The miners were trapped almost a half-mile below ground so drilling a hole wide enough to get them out was a major challenge. The Chilean government brought in three different drills. It was essentially a race between those drills to see who could reach the miners first. The winner, after almost 50 days, was a drill that used hammers to crush the rock ahead of the drill bit.

The next part of the rescue involved a capsule to bring the men to the surface. The rescue hole was only about two feet wide. Because it was such a narrow but long hole, the rescuers were afraid rocks would fall and hurt the men if they weren't in a capsule. The capsule was designed so that if it got stuck, the man inside could split the top away from the bottom and be lowered back down into the shelter in the bottom half of the capsule.

Even though the miners were trapped a half-mile below ground, they were able to talk to their families on

video, and through letters brought up and down by the probe. Officials said that the miners were trapped longer than anyone else has ever been trapped—69 days. Officials also said this was a good opportunity to use knowledge we learned in space and apply it to people who need help here on Earth.

The main idea of this story is that:

A. technology helped rescue 33 men who were trapped a half-mile underground.
B. it is possible to stay alive underground for two months without food and water.
C. mining is very safe work.
D. astronauts have to eat gel packs.

The miners in the story were trapped underground for two months, but there was a narrow hole that was used to send down food and water. The main idea of the story is the technology that helped to rescue the men.

You can conclude that the Chilean government:

A. was willing to do whatever it took to save the miners.
B. has a lot of money to spend.
C. wasn't interested in saving the miners.
D. doesn't keep its citizens safe.

Since no one really knew which drilling method was going to work, the concerned government tried three different ways to get the miners out. It did cost a lot of money, but this demonstrated that the government was willing to do whatever it needed to do to keep the citizens safe and bring them home to their families.

Why was a capsule used to get the miners out of the hole?

A. To protect the miners from falling rock.
B. Because the miners were weak and couldn't hold onto a rope.
C. To show off Chilean technology.
D. So the miners wouldn't get lost on the way out.

The third paragraph talks about the importance of the capsule. This capsule had protection from rocks falling on the miner inside, as well as, an escape hatch if necessary.

How do you the families of the miners felt during the 69 days the miners were trapped?

A. Scared but hopeful.
B. Hungry.
C. Happy.
D. Jealous and mean.

We can guess that they were scared because that is a typical emotion when the situation is life-threatening and we are unsure of the outcome. We can also assume they were hopeful because it seemed like the government was doing everything it could to get the miners out.

Something to think about:

Imagine being trapped for two months underground. For two months, you have been sitting in 90-degree heat, unable to see the sun or the stars. What do you think it would feel like to finally reach the surface and be free again?

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

Swept Away

The Johnstown flood happened in a prosperous Pennsylvania town of about 30,000 people. Johnstown experienced regular floods, and the residents were used to having to move their belongings to higher floors of their homes. Johnstown sat at the bottom of a narrow valley, right above the point where two streams join to make a river. Fourteen miles above town was the South Fork Dam, which held back a lake.

On May 31, 1889, Johnstown began to flood and people began moving their possessions to higher ground. Both of the creeks were at flood stage (over their banks) when the South Fork Dam burst. A wall of water 35 feet high, moving 40 miles per hour slammed into the town. Entire houses were shattered by the force of the water, killing the inhabitants, or sending them into the water to drown or cling to debris, as they were swept away. Down stream, a massive debris field was forming as lumber and rocks and trees rammed into a stone bridge. Many people were killed at the bridge when the debris caught fire.

Two thousand two hundred and nine people were killed in the Johnstown flood. Ninety-nine families were completely wiped out. Angry survivors blamed the owners of the dam, but no lawsuits against the owners were successful. Johnstown flooded again in 1936 and a third time in 1977. The third major flood seemed to break the little town, and Johnstown never fully bounced back from it. Every year thousands of people visit the memorial and flood museum in Johnstown.

This story is mostly about:

A. a flood that wiped out a town in Pennsylvania.
B. a town that keeps suffering from drought.
C. a dam bursting in South Dakota.
D. a natural disaster at a bridge.

While the words, “bridge, dam, and South” were used in the story, careful reading of the first sentence tells you that Johnston, a town in Pennsylvania, was wiped out by the flood.

You can conclude that:

A. the people of Johnstown expected the dam to hold.
B. the dam was built downriver from Johnstown.
C. everybody abandoned the town after the flood.
D. nobody survived the flood.

We know that water flows down hill, so if the dam was downriver the water would not have had the town in its path. We learned that “Johnstown never fully bounced back from it” which implies that people still live there. The story does talk about survivors, and three separate floods but the conclusion is that people expect that a dam built to hold water back will really work.

How many people died in the Johnstown Flood of 1889?

A. 2209
B. 1936
C. 99
D. 1977

The first sentence of the third paragraph states, “two thousand two hundred and nine people were killed”. Another way to write that is 2,209 people.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

What probably happened after the flood?

A. People stayed in Johnstown and rebuilt.
B. The dam was rebuilt out of wood.
C. The federal government shut down the town.
D. People were afraid to visit Johnstown.

We learned that there were two more significant floods that hit the town. We can guess that many people stayed and rebuilt their houses. We learned that "Johnstown never fully bounced back from it" which implies that some people still live there.

Something to think about:
The dam that burst was part of a Fishing and Hunting Club that had many wealthy and famous members. How do you think the public felt when the dam owned by these men destroyed a town?

What to do in an Electrical Storm

Watch for clouds forming that have a flat top. These often mean that a thunderstorm is coming. As soon as you hear thunder, you should seek shelter. Sound travels about one mile in five seconds, so even if you can count to ten between the lightning strike and the thunder, it is only two miles away! Lightning strikes can happen two or three miles apart, so even if the last strike didn't seem very close, the next one could hit you. The best shelter is a substantial building—not a shed, gazebo, or dugout. Once you are safely inside, find a place that is away from windows and metal pipes. Do not take a shower or talk on a landline phone. If a telephone pole is struck by lightning, the electricity can carry through the phone lines to your phone. Stay away from electrical outlets and appliances, especially your TV. A car is a safe shelter as long as it has a metal top. Don't touch anything metal in your car.

If you cannot get inside a building or a car, stay away from anything tall and anything made of metal. If you are in an open field, crouch down on the balls of your feet. Do not lie on the ground. Make yourself as small as possible and lower your head. If you are in a forest, find the shortest trees and kneel. Don't get too close to the tree trunks. If you are on a mountain, seek shelter in a cave, but avoid touching the sides of the cave and keep your backpack far away from you because it probably has metal in it. If you cannot find a cave, sit on a wide ledge, get your backpack away from you and touch as little of the mountain as possible.

The main idea of this story is:

A. how to survive an electrical storm.
B. how to tell how far away lightning is.
C. when to talk on a landline phone.
D. why hiking is dangerous.

We learned when not to talk on a landline—during a thunderstorm. And we learned that we need to take precautions when hiking in a thunderstorm. This is a "how to" story that give many helpful hints about what to do in a electrical storm.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

From this story, you can conclude that:

A. it is very dangerous to be caught in a thunderstorm away from shelter.
B. landline phones are always very dangerous.
C. it is dangerous to take your backpack hiking.
D. flat-top clouds mean a tornado is coming.

From the examples in the story we learn that we should immediately seek shelter. The story tells us several things that can be harmful even if we have taken shelter, We can infer that is is dangerous to be caught in a thunderstorm.

If you are in the forest when a thunderstorm hits:

A. find the shortest trees and kneel without getting too close to the trunks.
B. find the tallest trees and kneel away from the trunks.
C. run through the forest as fast as you can.
D. find the shortest trees and rest your back on their trunks.

The second paragraph of the story tells us exactly what to do: Find the shortest trees and kneel. Don't get too close to the tree trunks.

You can predict that:

A. people caught on a mountain in a storm might be in danger.
B. people in their car during a storm are in severe danger.
C. people inside their houses are in severe danger from a thunderstorm.
D. people should run inside whenever they see clouds in the sky.

We learned that a car can be a safe shelter and that doing some things inside is not safe during a thunderstorm. We can infer that being away from shelter is dangerous and that there may not be good shelter on a mountain.

Something to think about:

You are mountain climbing with friends when you notice flat-topped clouds building in the distance. You tell your friends that there is a thunderstorm approaching. Your friends want to keep climbing. How could you explain the danger to them? Do you go with them if they still want to continue?

Acadia National Park

Acadia National Park is made up of Mount Desert Island and smaller islands just off the coast of Maine on the east coast of the United States. Originally, the park was going to be named Mount Desert National Park, but the members of Congress, who decide what becomes a national park, were confused. They didn't want a desert to be a national park. The park founders explained that the word "desert," was being used to mean only that there were no people living on it. When we say that a building is deserted, we don't mean that it is hot and dry, we mean that there are no people in it.
In order to persuade Congress to approve the new national park, the founders changed the name to Lafayette National Park. Lafayette was a famous French general. On February 26, 1919, Congress passed

a bill creating Lafayette National Park. Ten years later the name was changed to Acadia National Park. Acadia is the French word for "heaven on earth".

This story is mostly about:

A. how Acadia National Park got its name.
B. a famous French General.
C. an island off the coast of Nova Scotia.
D. how Congress got confused.

At one time the park was to be named Mount Desert Island but the name was changed because Congress was confused by the word "Desert". It was named after a French General, but the name was changed to its current name Acadia National Park. The main idea of the story is how the park got its name.

From this story, you can guess that:

A. nobody wanted to live on Mount Desert Island.
B. French people once lived on the island.
C. members of Congress spoke French.
D. Maine is not near the coast.

We learned that Mound Desert Island is off the coast of Maine and that its name means that no people were living on it. That implies that no French people were living on it and that Maine must be near the coast. We don't know why but we can infer that no one wanted to live on the island.

What three names were given to the park?

A. Mount Desert Island, Lafayette, Acadia.
B. Deserted Mountain Island, Acadia, Lafayette Island.
C. Mount Desert Island, Lafayette, Heaven on Earth.
D. Maine, Acadia, Desert Island.

The story tells us that Mount Desert Island, Lafayette, and Acadia were names given to the park.

From this story, you can predict that:

A. Congress approved of the name Acadia National Park.
B. Congress liked Mount Desert Island National Park the best.
C. Nobody in Congress can speak French.
D. Maine only has one national park.

Since Congress gave the park its original name, we can infer that it must have approved of the name change. Otherwise, it would have passed a law changing it back.

Something to think about:

Do you think that the name of a national park is important?

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

A Long Way from the Model T

Our cars today come with some pretty fancy gadgets. Things like navigation systems, satellite radios, and DVD players weren't even in cars 20 years ago. Over 100 years ago, Ford came out with the Model T. The Model T was the first car that could be owned by families that weren't rich. In fact, 15 million Model Ts were sold in the 19 years it was produced.

So, what would it be like to drive a Model T? First of all, you would have to leave early because the Model T was only capable of speeds up to 45 miles per hour. The roads in 1908 were not the paved ones we are used to now, so the Model T was built to be flexible. You could even feel it bending when you went over bumps at an odd angle. If it rained, you were in trouble because the Model T had no windshield wipers. There weren't even doors on the car!

We are used to getting a lot of information from our dashboard, but not so with the Model T. There was no gas gauge, so you had to keep track of how much gas was left. Also, it was probably a good thing the car only went 45 miles per hour, because there was no speedometer to tell you how fast you were going. Riding in the Model T would have been a very different experience than the ride to school this morning!

This story is mainly about:

A. how cars now are different than the Model T.
B. how many Model Ts were sold.
C. why there was no gas gauge in the Model T.
D. what cars have in them now.

The story does tell us how many Model Ts were sold and that they had no gas gauge but each paragraph in the story tells us how different the Model T is from cars today. So that is the main idea of the story.

From this story, you can conclude that:

A. our cars are safer now than they were 100 years ago.
B. more people had 100 years ago than today.
C. cars are better looking now than 100 years ago.
D. cars haven't changed a lot in 100 years.

The story tells us that "the Model T was the first car that could be owned by families that weren't rich", so it's not likely that more people had cars 100 years ago than today. The story is all about how cars have changed in 100 years. Whether they are better looking now is a matter of opinion. But we can infer that cars with speedometers, doors, and windshield wipers are probably safer than cars without them.

The Model T didn't have:

A. doors, windshield wipers, or a speedometer.
B. doors, windshield wipers, or tires.
C. horns, doors, or brakes.
D. a steering wheel.

The story tells us that the Model T didn't have doors, windshield wipers, or a speedometer.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

You can predict that the Model T:

A. was an improvement over the horse and buggy.
B. killed many people when they fell out of their car.
C. caused a lot of smog.
D. never ran out of gas.

From our point of view the Model T is primitive, but the horse and buggy that it replaced didn't have wipers or doors either! And the Model T could go 45 mile per hour—much faster than a horse.

Something to think about:
What if we never had a car that everyone could afford? How would the United States be different today?

Pizza

Pizza means different things in different parts of the United States. When you order pizza in New York, you get a very different meal than when you order pizza in Chicago. New York pizza is known for its chewy crust. In New York, the pizza has few toppings and often only cheese. The sauce is just tomato sauce without a lot of extra herbs and spices. Some New Yorkers say that you can only have true New York pizza in New York because it is the water there that makes the crust special.

Pizza in Chicago is entirely different from pizza in New York. In Chicago, the crust is up to an inch thick. Cheese is sprinkled directly on the crust, then lots of toppings are added. Next, chunky pizza sauce is poured over the toppings and another layer of cheese is added. Chicago pizza has to be baked in a dish with high sides to hold in all of the cheese and toppings. Italian sausage is the most traditional topping for Chicago style pizza.

California pizza is sometimes called gourmet pizza or West Coast Pizza. California pizza tends to have a thinner crust than Chicago pizza. Unlike New York pizza the crust is crispy instead of chewy. California style pizza isn't really known for its crust, but for its toppings. California pizza often has unusual toppings like pineapple, artichoke hearts, and spinach.

The type of pizza you prefer probably depends on where you grew up. If you grew up in New York, you may not like California pizza. If you grew up in Italy, the birthplace of pizza, you may not like any American pizza.

This story is mainly about:

A. different types of pizza in the United States.
B. different types of pizza around the world.
C. the best type of pizza.
D. why pizza is made differently in different places.

The story talks about pizza in New York, Chicago, California. All of these places are in the United States.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

This story suggests that:

A. people prefer the pizza they grow up with.
B. people in Italy never eat American pizza.
C. California pizza is gross.
D. Chicago pizza is the best.

While it may not be true, the story claims that "The type of pizza you prefer probably depends on where you grew up".

Chicago pizza is layered in the following way:

A. crust, cheese, toppings, sauce, cheese.
B. crust, cheese, toppings, cheese, sauce.
C. crust, cheese, toppings, cheese, cheese, sauce, cheese.
D. cheese, crust, sauce, topping, cheese.

The story contains three "how" paragraphs. The second paragraph describes how pizza is made in Chicago and lists the ingredients as being added in the following order: Crust, cheese, toppings, sauce, and then more cheese.

Which pizza are you most likely going to find in Oregon?

A. California pizza
B. New York pizza
C. Chicago pizza
D. Italian pizza

California pizza is also called West Coast Pizza and since Oregon is on the West Coast of the United States, it is likely that you would find California pizza there.

Something to think about:
Why do you think pizza is so different in different parts of the country?

The Pacific Garbage Patch

About a thousand miles from Hawaii, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, there is an island that is twice the size of Texas. This is not an island you want to visit on vacation though, because it is made up entirely of trash! This island is called the Pacific Garbage Patch. The Pacific Garbage Patch was created when trash got caught in currents, which are like streams that run through the ocean. Many currents meet up in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and swirl around like a whirlpool. When trash washes into the ocean from the beach or the streets, it gets caught in currents and floats along until it is finally caught up in all the other trash that is stuck in the Pacific Garbage Patch.

Scientists who study the Pacific Garbage Patch say that whales, dolphins, fish and birds get confused and end up eating the plastic that is floating around in the ocean. The plastic fills up their stomachs and they can starve to death. Also, there are toxic chemicals in the plastic that can make the animals sick. Once,

scientists found a fish with 84 pieces of plastic in its stomach.

It is estimated that cleaning up the Pacific Garbage Patch would cost billions of dollars, and since the trash comes from many different countries, people don't want to be the ones responsible for cleaning it up. Environmentalists say that we can all help by making sure that we throw away our trash, use reusable grocery bags, and try to use as little plastic as possible.

The main idea of this story is:

A. there is an island made of trash in the Pacific Ocean.
B. if we don't stop using plastic, the whole ocean will be filled with trash.
C. the Pacific Garbage Patch is killing all the whales and dolphins.
D. plastic is always poisonous.

When we see a statement like, "the Pacific Garbage Patch is killing all the whales and dolphins" we have to be careful. The story tells about how "some" but not all whales and dolphins end up eating the garbage. Likewise, the whole ocean is unlikely to be filled with garbage.

From this story, you can conclude that:

A. the Pacific Garbage Patch poses a risk to marine life.
B. the Pacific Garbage Patch is not our fault.
C. the Pacific Garbage Patch will be a vacation spot someday.
D. fish like plastic.

We learned that scientists say that some whales, dolphins, fish and birds get confused and eat the trash. These are marine animals so we know that it is a risk to marine life.

The Pacific Garbage Patch is:

A. 1,000 miles from Hawaii.
B. almost as big as Texas.
C. in the Atlantic Ocean.
D. a nutritious food source for marine animals.

The first sentence tells us that "About a thousand miles from Hawaii, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, there is an island that is twice the size of Texas".

From this story, you can predict that:

A. the Pacific Garbage Patch will continue to grow until we change our habits.
B. the Pacific Garbage Patch will break down and go away on its own.
C. there is nothing we can do about the Pacific Garbage Patch.
D. the Pacific Garbage Patch is the only one in the world.

We learn at the end of the story that since the trash comes from many different countries, people don't want to be the ones responsible for cleaning it up. So if no one feels responsible, it is likely to continue to grow.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

Something to think about:
What can you do to make sure nothing you use ends up in the Pacific Garbage Patch?

Tomatoes

Today we take the tomato for granted. It is in our salads, in our soup, in our ketchup, and often in our gardens. Tomato juice is a refreshing way to get a serving of vegetables. However, our relationship with the tomato was once a very different matter.

Let's start with ketchup, an American food staple. We dip our fries in it, pour it on our burgers, slather it on our hot dogs, and eat our eggs with it. In the 1700s, "ke-tchup" was widely used in China and British sailors took the sauce back to Great Britain with them. It wasn't made from tomatoes though, it was a sauce made out of pickled fish. Chefs in Great Britain often used mushrooms and walnuts as the main ingredient.

Tomatoes became popular in America because of ketchup, but not until almost the 1800s. Before then tomatoes were considered poisonous and people did not eat them! Tomatoes were called "love apples" and belong to the "nightshade" family, which includes some very toxic plants. The tomato plant has a tiny bit of poison in the leaves and unripe fruit, but not enough to hurt a person. Before the 19th century, Americans mostly grew the tomato as a decorative garden plant. Eventually word spread that tomatoes were not toxic, and they ended up in ketchup.

Today tomatoes are a delicious vegetable for our soups and salads. However, it turns out that tomatoes are not a vegetable at all but a fruit. Tomatoes come from the middle of a flower on the tomato plant and contain the seeds of the plant so therefore are a fruit. However, even the Supreme Court of the United States said that tomatoes should count as a vegetable. The Court heard a case involving the taxing of vegetables. There was an argument about whether tomatoes were a fruit or vegetable. The Supreme Court decided that for legal purposes, the tomato would be classified as a vegetable because it is eaten with dinner and not dessert. One hundred years later, the state of Arkansas got in on the fun when they made the tomato the official state fruit and the official state vegetable!

So the next time you are opening a tiny packet of ketchup to enjoy with your fries, or eating the cherry tomato off of your salad, remember all the history behind the tomato.

The main idea of this story is that:

A. ketchup has an interesting history.
B. ketchup was once made out of pickled pigs.
C. tomatoes are poisonous.
D. tomatoes were once called "ground apples".

In the third paragraph, we learned that tomatoes were once called "love apples" and at one time were thought to be poisonous, but we know differently now. Ketchup was once made out of pickled fish, not pigs. Whether you agree or not that the history of ketchup is interesting, it is the only answer that could possibly be correct.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

From this story, you can conclude that:

A. people no longer believe that tomatoes are toxic.
B. tomatoes are not very popular.
C. eating a tomato could make you sick.
D. tomatoes do not grow well in the United States.

We can infer from the story that since tomatoes are in salads, soup, and ketchup that they have overcome the myth that they are toxic.

The tomato is:

A. a fruit by nature and a vegetable by law.
B. a vegetable.
C. poisonous.
D. heavily taxed.

We learned that the tomato fits the botanical definition of a fruit, but the Supreme Court ruled that for tax purposes it is a vegetable.

From this story, you can predict that:

A. tomatoes grow well in Arkansas.
B. ketchup still contains pickled fish.
C. there are 57 varieties of tomato.
D. Americans prefer cherry tomatoes to regular tomatoes.

Since Arkansas named the tomato its official state fruit and the official state vegetable it is likely that it grows well there.

Something to think about:

What foods have you changed your mind about? Are you glad that people's feelings about tomatoes changed?

Blown Away

The worst hurricane ever in the United States hit Galveston, Texas in 1900. Galveston was a city built on an island. In 1900, Galveston was the biggest city in Texas. Much of the town was only eight or nine feet above sea level and there was no seawall to protect the city from crashing waves.

The residents of Galveston had been warned that there could be a storm on the way, but they were fooled by clear skies and calm winds. By the time the storm hit, it was too late for the residents to evacuate their island homes. Most people tried to move to the center of the city, furthest away from the waves that were pounding coastal homes. The water was also lower because the ground on the middle of the island was higher. As many as 50 people huddled in the upper floors of one home.

Throughout the night, the winds hit 130 miles per hour, and the homes that weren't destroyed by the

waves and the water were torn apart by the wind. People were tossed out into the water from their homes to drift on debris or drown. People were crushed when their homes collapsed.

When the sun came up the next morning, the water had already begun to recede. Survivors were met with the terrible sight of their city destroyed. Bodies had to be burned because there were too many to bury. Between 6,000 and 8,000 people died in the Galveston Hurricane. Nearly every building on the island was destroyed. The Galveston Hurricane of 1900 is considered the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States.

The main idea of this story is:

A. the Galveston Hurricane was a terrible natural disaster.
B. Galveston was not prepared for a drought.
C. it would have been safer for people to wait out the storm in a boat than a house.
D. poor building standards doomed the people of Galveston.

The story tells of immense waves pounding the city, so it is likely that boats would also have been torn apart by the storm. The last sentence tells us that it was the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States.

The hurricane:

A. caught the people of Galveston by surprise.
B. lasted five days.
C. only hit the island of Galveston, but not the mainland of Texas.
D. had mild winds.

The story tells about the damage in Galveston, but a storm that big would have certainly reached the mainland as well. We learned that even though they had been warned about the storm, clear skies and calm winds fooled them.

What caused the destruction in Galveston?

A. high wind and waves
B. very high wind
C. poorly build houses
D. fires

We learned that “homes that weren’t destroyed by the waves and the water were torn apart by the wind”.

What changes do you think the people of Galveston made after the hurricane?

A. They built a seawall and raised the island by dumping sand and dirt before rebuilding.
B. They only built single-story houses.
C. They hired a new weatherman.
D. They built their houses on boats.

Since much of the town was only a few feet above sea level and the survivors were in the upper stories of houses, it would make sense to build up the island and build a barrier in the sea so that future storms wouldn’t cause as much damage.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

Something to think about:
Galveston was a thriving city before the hurricane. After the hurricane, companies took their business to different ports. Why do you think these businesses abandoned Galveston, and how do you it affected the people who lived there?

Escape from a Forest Fire

Forest fires are very dangerous because they move quickly and can cover large areas of land—making escape difficult. If you are camping in the wilderness and spot the billowing smoke of a forest fire, what should you do? If you are in your house and you can't leave, what should you do?

When you are packing for camping, think about what you are going to wear. Remember that natural fibers like cotton will simply burn off of you, while synthetic, or manmade fibers like polyester will melt to your skin causing severe burns. Consider the material your backpack is made of, if it heats up in a fire, will it melt to your back?

Dry and windy weather increases the chance of a wildfire starting. Lightning with little or no rain can quickly start multiple fires at once, making it hard to find a safe escape route. Above average rainfall the previous winter or spring means that there will be taller grass, which is fuel for a wildfire.

It is important to have thought through what you will do if you need to evacuate an area so that time isn't wasted when you are in a hurry. When formulating a plan, it is important to consider some principles of fire. The first is that fire burns uphill much more quickly than it burns downhill. Do not try to run uphill to escape a fire. Remember that a canyon or ravine with narrow sides will act like a chimney as the fire burns through it, and you can be quickly overcome by smoke, ash and flame. Do not wet your clothing, the water can heat up and burn your body. Cover your mouth with a dry cloth to avoid inhaling as much smoke. Do not cover your mouth with a wet cloth because the water can turn to steam and damage your lungs.

If you are on foot, find an area with as little fuel as possible—this means that it will burn quickly and pass quickly. A rocky area or creek bed are your best options. Cover yourself with a blanket made of natural fiber, like wool. Be prepared to hold your breath for a couple of minutes and try not to panic. Lie facedown facing away from the direction the fire is coming from.
If you are at home, evacuate as soon as you are told to. Early evacuation can save your life. If you are unable to leave, go to a room in the leeward side of the house, that is the side of the house furthest away from where the wind is blowing. Choose a room with an exit to the outside. Your house is unlikely to burn, and if it does, the fire will start on the other side of the house, giving you time to escape through your exit. When the fire passes, leave the area by sticking to the blackened areas because there is likely little fuel left to burn.

The best way to remain safe is to evacuate early, as soon as you see smoke if you are in the wilderness, and as soon as you are told to if you are at home. Don't forget that others are likely to be evacuating too and roads can become crowded. The sooner you are out the better. If fire overcomes you while you are in your car, close the window and air intake, lie down on the floorboards and cover yourself with a blanket made

of natural fibers. Exit the vehicle after the fire passes as it is likely filled with gasses and/or smoke.

The main idea of this story is:

A. how to escape from a forest fire.
B. what to do if you are camping and a fire starts.
C. why you should always put out your campfire.
D. why thunderstorms are dangerous.

The story does tell us what to do if you are camping and a fire starts, but the story is about much more than that. It is a "how" story that tells you what to do any time you are near a forest fire.

From this story, you can conclude that:

A. early evacuation is the key to surviving a fire.
B. you should only wear synthetic fabrics.
C. you should never go camping in the wilderness.
D. fires aren't dangerous as long as you stay downhill from them.

The story gives tips on how to survive if you are caught in a fire, but the last paragraph gives the best tip of all, "The best way to remain safe is to evacuate early". Evacuate means to leave a place of danger, so early evacuation would get get you out of danger.

The reason a creek bed or rock outcropping are safest is that:

A. the fire should pass through these places more quickly because there is less fuel for the fire.
B. it will be easier for firefighters to see you.
C. it will be softer to lie in these places.
D. they won't be crowded.

We learned that we should find an area with as little fuel as possible and creek beds and rock outcroppings have less fuel than other places.

You can predict that:

A. people who get caught by a fire are in life-threatening danger.
B. most people are able to survive a fire by throwing water at it.
C. you should stay with your home after being told to evacuate.
D. you should never camp in an area with dry grass.

While the story doesn't specifically say so, we can easily see that a forest fire raging all around us would be life threatening.

Something to think about:

Defensible space is the area around your home that is free from trees and bushes. Why do you firefighters call this defensible space? Why do you think defensible space is important? How can you defend your home from fire?

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

The Liberty Bell

The Liberty Bell is one of the most famous symbols of the United States. Even the crack in the Liberty Bell is famous. We have all heard the story of how the Liberty Bell was rung for the reading of the Declaration of Independence. Here are some facts about the bell that you might find surprising.

The Liberty Bell was not made in the United States. It was made in Great Britain by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. A foundry is a place where they melt down metal and pour it into a mold to make things like bells. The Whitechapel Bell Foundry has been manufacturing bells since the 1500's and continues today! When the bell arrived, it sat around for about six months before they hung it. Unfortunately, when they rang the 12-foot wide bell for the first time, it cracked.

They sent the cracked bell to John Pass and John Stow who worked in the local foundry. Pass and Stow melted down the bell and added more copper. When they finished, the bell was rehung. The bell sounded horrible to the people of Philadelphia. They made fun of Pass and Stow until Pass and Stow took the bell back to fix again. In the meantime, city officials ordered a second bell from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in England.

Pass and Stow recast the Liberty Bell for a second time and when they finished, the Liberty Bell was rung alongside the second bell from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry. The people of Philadelphia thought both bells sounded bad and decided it didn't matter which bell was used. So the Liberty Bell was hung and used to call people to meetings and the second bell was used to chime the hour.

The Liberty Bell's most famous moment was when it was rung to gather people around for the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence. This did not happen on July 4th though. It happened on July 8th, 1776.

The crack that we see in the bell happened during a celebration of George Washington's birthday. The sound was so bad after the crack that they stopped using the Liberty Bell. One historian claims that they tried to sell the bell as scrap metal, but nobody wanted it!

Until the Civil War, the Liberty Bell was really just a bell hanging in the Statehouse in Philadelphia. It wasn't famous and it wasn't called the Liberty Bell. The first person to call it the Liberty bell was an abolitionist (person trying to end slavery) during the Civil War. The Liberty Bell was given its name and used as a symbol of freedom.

Over 3 million people visited the bell in 1976 to celebrate the United States' bicentennial (200th anniversary) which is amazing when you consider the fact that the bell wasn't considered special until well after it stopped working! You can still go to see the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The story is mostly about:

A. the history of the Liberty Bell.
B. when the Liberty Bell was rung the most times in one day.
C. why the Liberty Bell is famous for its sound.
D. how the Liberty Bell cracked during the Civil War.

The story tells us how the Liberty Bell was made, cracked, and how it became famous.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

You can conclude from this story that:

A. sometimes we don't know the whole story about famous objects.
B. the Liberty Bell never existed.
C. George Washington liked the Liberty Bell so much he wanted it for his home.
D. The people of Philadelphia have too many bells.

Did you know all of the details about the Liberty Bell that were presented in this story. I sure didn't. If you didn't know all of these details, it's likely that there are other famous objects that we don't know the whole story about.

What year was the Declaration of Independence read?

A. 1776
B. 1876
C. 1976
D. 1704

According to the story it was read in Philadelphia on July 8th, 1776.

Based on this story, you can predict that:

A. there may be things today that won't be thought of as special for a long time.
B. people won't like the Liberty Bell in the future.
C. the Liberty Bell will be fixed again so that it works.
D. someone will steal the Liberty Bell.

Just about everyone in America knows about the Liberty Bell and it's famous crack, so it is unlikely to be fixed and unlikely to be forgotten. Since it wasn't a popular symbol until the Civil War, it is likely that there may be other things that we don't know much about now that may become symbols in the future.

Something to think about:

Does knowing the truth about history make you like history more or less? Are there other stories from history that you think might not be true?

The Great Earthquake

In the early morning hours of April 18, 1906, a huge earthquake rocked San Francisco, California. The shaking continued for almost 30 seconds. It is estimated that the earthquake was a 7.9 on the Richter scale. The earthquake ruptured 296 miles of the San Andreas Fault (the Loma Prieta 1989 quake ruptured only 25 miles). The earthquake was felt as far north as Oregon, as far south as Los Angeles, and as far east as Nevada. An instrument in Germany used for measuring earthquakes picked up movement from the San Francisco earthquake.

People were thrown from their beds. One woman was lying in bed when a tower fell from the building next door. The tower crashed through her roof and sent her, in her bed, crashing down to the first floor of her house. The woman was fine, but her husband died when he wandered into her room to check on her

and fell through the hole.

It wasn't the earthquake that really destroyed San Francisco. It was the fire that erupted after the earthquake that caused the damage. During the earthquake, water lines were broken, so there was no water available to residents or firefighters. The earthquake caused gas lines to burst, stoves to fall over, chimneys to topple, and chemical jars to break. Over 50 fires broke out in the city. The fires consumed entire city blocks all across the city because there was no water to stop them.

The earthquake that lasted 30 seconds led to three days of fire. It is believed that as many as 3,000 people may have died. It is estimated that 225,000 people were homeless out of a population of 400,000. Over 20 fire stations were burned. Yet the people of San Francisco rebuilt and are proud of their city.

The main idea of this story is:

A. an earthquake and fire destroyed much of San Francisco in 1906.
B. the strongest earthquake ever recorded hit San Francisco in 1916.
C. firemen in San Francisco can't even keep their fire stations from burning down.
D. people in San Francisco should find a safer place to live.

The story starts by telling us that the earthquake happened in 1906. Later in the story we learn that most of the damage was caused by the fire.

Although many fire stations burned, not a lot of equipment was lost. This is likely because:

A. the equipment was out of the buildings being used to fight fires.
B. the firefighters were able to get the equipment out of the stations before the fire arrived.
C. much of the equipment was metal, so did not burn.
D. they didn't have equipment in those days.

We were told that the fires started after the earthquake hit the city, so most of the fire equipment was probably out in the street fighting fires and not in the stations when they burned.

How many people became homeless?

A. Over half of the people in the city
B. 20 fire stations worth
C. 1906
D. Everyone

We learned that 225,000 people were homeless out of a population of 400,000. If half of the population were homeless, that would be 200,000 people. Since 225,000 people were homeless, more than half were homeless.

What changes do you the city should have made when they rebuilt?

A. Strengthen the building codes.
B. Build with bricks instead of wood.
C. Move the city inland in case of tsunamis.
D. Outlaw fires inside the home.

While brick homes wouldn't burn as easily, they would be more likely to be damaged in an earthquake. And since the fires were also caused by gas lines, outlawing fires inside the home wouldn't have helped

much. While people didn't know as much about building earthquake-safe buildings then, it's possible that some things could have been improved.

Something to think about:
Imagine that you had just lived through a horrible earthquake and three days of fire. You lost your store and your home. Will you stay and rebuild or move away?

The Mermaid Hoax

People all around the world have mermaid stories. Most of the mermaids in these stories have long flowing hair, the upper body of a woman, and the lower body of a fish. Most people don't believe that mermaids are real, but back in 1842 a man claimed to have the petrified remains of a mermaid.

P.T. Barnum was famous as an entertainer. He is the "Barnum" in the Barnum & Bailey Circus that is still touring today. There was also a traveling museum that was run by P.T. Barnum. Barnum purchased what he called the FeJee Mermaid, claiming that it was found washed up on the beach in Fiji. Mr. Barnum was told by a naturalist (someone who studies nature) that the mermaid was not real, but Mr. Barnum went ahead and put the FeJee Mermaid in his museum.

Mr. Barnum had some letters sent to the editors of various New York newspapers telling about the amazing mermaid. Of course he didn't sign his own name to those letters. Mr. Barnum then had an employee pretend to be a doctor in possession of the mermaid. The doctor's presence in New York caused a lot of public interest.

When P.T. Barnum put the FeJee Mermaid on display in his museum, people came from all around to see the treasure. It was, of course, just a hoax. The mermaid was the petrified skeleton of a monkey sewn to the tail of a fish. Today, people will occasionally still try to pass off half-monkey, half-fish creations as mermaids, and because of Mr. Barnum, the hoaxes are now all referred to as FeJee or Fiji Mermaids.

The main idea of this story is that:

A. P.T. Barnum convinced people that he had the remains of a real mermaid.
B. it is possible to sew the head of a monkey to the tail of a fish.
C. people in New York see mermaids all the time.
D. never believe what you see in a museum.

Since people were willing to pay to see a mermaid, they must not have been all that common in New York at that time. If people paid money to see one they must have been convinced that it was real.

From this story, you can conclude that:

A. not everyone fell for the hoax.
B. everyone fell for the hoax.
C. P.T. Barnum was a naturalist.
D. mermaids are real.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

We learned that a naturalist told P.T. Barnum that the mermaid was not real, so not everyone fell for the hoax.

What town did the hoax start in?

A. New York City
B. Fiji
C. FeJee
D. Charlotte

The story tells us that he called the mermaid the FeJee Mermaid and put it on display in his museum. Since he sent letters to the newspapers in New York and the doctor came to New York, we can infer that the museum was in New York City.

From this story, you can infer that:

A. P.T. Barnum made money by fooling people.
B. people in New York are easily fooled.
C. everybody enjoys the circus.
D. everyone likes mermaids.

Since the mermaid was a hoax and people paid to see it, we can infer that he made at least some of his money by fooling people.

Something to think about:

If you saw a FeJee Mermaid in a museum, would you believe it was real? Why or why not?

A Grand Business Plan

The Grand Canyon in Arizona is one of America's most spectacular national parks. The canyon is a mile deep, more than 15 miles across at some points, and over 250 miles long. Although originally thought to be worthless, it is now a very popular spot. Ralph Henry Cameron was a businessman from England, and he saw the value of the Grand Canyon as soon as he laid eyes on it.

When Cameron showed up at the Grand Canyon, President Roosevelt had already made it a national monument, but it was not a national park. This meant that people could file claims on property in order to mine ore, like gold and silver. Cameron filed many mining claims in places with a pretty view, and places along important trails.

One important trail that people took from the rim of the canyon to the river at the bottom was Bright Angel Trail. Cameron filed a mining claim part way down the trail and set up a camp where he charged tourists high prices for water and then charged them again to use the bathroom. Cameron also filed a claim at the top of the trail, put up a gate, and charged people to use the trail.

Eventually, Cameron was ordered to abandon most of his mining claims because they weren't producing any ore, and so were not valid claims. Congress was getting close to passing a bill creating Grand Canyon National Park. Cameron didn't pay any attention to what he was told and went on the sue over President

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

Roosevelt's creation of the national monument.

Cameron ended up losing his lawsuits and claims. However, he certainly demonstrated that he was a businessman who didn't shy away from opportunities to make money, even if the United States' government was an obstacle.

This story is mostly about:

A. how one man made money at the Grand Canyon.
B. how to delight tourists.
C. Grand Canyon National Park.
D. hiking and camping.

While the story does talk about hiking and camping in Grand Canyon National Park the tourists were not likely to be delighted by the high prices he charged. Most of the story is about how one man, Cameron, made money at the canyon.

From this story, you can conclude that:

A. Cameron felt he had the right to do business the way he wanted.
B. tourists aren't very smart.
C. the first person on a piece of land has the right to do what he wants with it.
D. there is no bad way to make money.

Since Cameron sued over the creation of the national park, it is likely that he felt that he should be allowed to continue to do business his way.

How did Cameron put a claim on the land?

A. He filed mining claims even when he didn't intend to mine ore.
B. He put a fence around it.
C. He put up a sign that said "Cameron's land".
D. He bought it.

The third paragraph tells us that Cameron filed a mining claim part way down the trail and later on we learned that he had to abandon his claims because his mines weren't producing any ore.

You can predict that:

A. others in the area may not have liked Cameron's tactics.
B. Mr. Cameron never left the Grand Canyon.
C. there was plenty of water available at the Grand Canyon.
D. Mr. Cameron was good friends with President Roosevelt.

Since he charged people for water it is not likely that there was plenty of water along the trail. And since he sued over Roosevelt's creation of the park, we can guess that they were not good friends. We can guess that abusing the rules for mining claims to get money out of tourists would not make others in the area very happy.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

Something to think about:
Do you think Ralph Henry Cameron was a great businessman or a man of questionable morals? Do you think it is okay to do whatever you have to do to make money? Was anyone harmed?

The Goldilocks Planet

In 2010, astronomers announced the discovery of an unusual new planet. The planet does not orbit around our sun. This type of planet is called an exoplanet. The planet is named Gliese 581g (sounds like Gliza). The most exciting part of this discovery is that this is the first planet found by astronomers that may have life on it.

Scientists are calling Gliese 581g a "Goldilocks" planet because its orbit, or path around its star, lies between two other planets. One of the planets is too close to the star and would be too hot for life. The other planet is too far from the sun and would be too cold for life. Gliese 581g's temperature would be just right!
There are two things a planet needs to be able to sustain, or support, life. The first is an atmosphere. Gliese 581g is dense, or heavy enough, to create gravity and hold an atmosphere around it, just like Earth. A planet must also have a temperature that allows liquid water. Gliese 581g's average temperature is between –24 and 10 degrees Fahrenheit which is too cold for liquid water. but it could exist on parts of the planet.

There are some differences between Gliese 581g and Earth. The Earth orbits around the sun every 365 days, but it only takes Gliese 581g 37 days to orbit around its star. Earth spins on its axis, which creates night and day for us. Gliese 581g doesn't spin like the Earth, so if you are on the sunny side of the planet it is always light out. If you are on the side of the planet that faces away from the star, it is always dark. The dark side of the planet is probably very cold and the light side of the planet is probably very hot. Astronomers think that if there is life on Gliese 581g, it is probably in the area of the planet that is neither directly facing the star, nor facing totally away from the star.

Even though this is the first habitable (livable) planet to be discovered, astronomers that there are probably many more out there that haven't been found yet. Also, just because there could be life on these planets doesn't mean we would want to live there.

The main idea of this story is that:

A. a planet was discovered that may have life on it.
B. there is no way that other planets could have life on them.
C. aliens will be invading Earth soon.
D. scientists have found a better place to live.

We learned from the story that scientists think that in order to be able to support life a planet must have an atmosphere and liquid water. Gliese 581g is the first planet to be discovered that may have the conditions for life.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

From this story, it can be concluded that:

A. scientists don't know whether there is life on Gliese 581g.
B. scientists know that there is life on Gliese 581g.
C. scientists think that three bears live on 581g.
D. scientists don't think there could be life on Gliese 581g.

The story tells us that this planet has conditions that we think are necessary for life, not that we have found evidence of life on other planets.

It is true that Gliese 581g:

A. has a year that is 37 Earth days long.
B. is just like Earth.
C. revolves around our Sun.
D. is close to Earth.

We learned in the fourth paragraph that it only takes Gliese 581g 37 days to orbit around its star.

You can infer from this story that:

A. living on Gliese 581g would be very different from living on earth.
B. there is life on Gliese 581g.
C. you would age faster on Gliese 581g because the years are shorter.
D. the atmosphere on Gliese 581g has oxygen in it.

Since one side of the planet is always dark and one side light, that would be one difference from earth. Also the average temperature is between -24 and 10 degrees Fahrenheit so it would be colder than most places on earth.

Something to think about:

Can you imagine living in a place with no separate daytime or nighttime? Can you imagine living in a place where it never gets warmer than 10 degrees outside? Would you like to live on another planet?

A New Way of Thinking

George Washington Carver was born into slavery at the end of the Civil War. He worked very hard to pay his way through school. Mr. Carver was a very talented man who earned the nickname "plant doctor". He healed plants that were brought to him from all over the county. He thought that the best way to spend his life would be to help sharecroppers and poor farmers improve their crops.

Mr. Carver developed a system called crop rotation. In the South, cotton was the main crop. But growing cotton year after year caused important nutrients in the soil to get used up. Fewer nutrients meant a poor cotton crop. Mr. Carver taught people that growing peanuts, soybeans and sweet potatoes put nutrients back into the soil. The idea was to plant peanuts, soybeans or sweet potatoes one year and then cotton the next. Sometimes farmers would have to grow peanuts, soybeans or sweet potatoes for a couple of years to fix the soil.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

The South already had places to sell their cotton, but what were they going to do with all of the peanuts, soybeans and sweet potatoes they were growing? George Washington Carver worked out a solution to that too. He came up with over 300 uses for the peanut! He used the peanut to make things like makeup, dyes, ink, soap, flooring, medicine, milk, flour, and more. He invented ways to use the sweet potato to make flour, ink, rubber, postage stamp glue, and more. Mr. Carver even worked with Henry Ford to develop a car fuel made from soybeans.

Mr. Carver created a wagon filled with lab equipment and traveled around teaching people how to be better farmers. He taught at the famous Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers, where he passed on his knowledge of agriculture to his students. Mr. Carver spent his whole adult life inventing uses for different plant parts and teaching people ways to make more money from farming. He believed that economic independence was the key to black people being truly free.

The main idea of this story is:

A. how George Washington Carver helped farmers improve their soil and make more money.
B. what George Washington Carver did with the peanut.
C. how George Washington Carver helped the world.
D. why a man liked peanuts better than soybeans.

While he did come up with over 300 uses for the peanut, he also introduced crop rotation and taught people how to make more money from farming. The story ends by telling us that "He believed that economic independence was the key to black people being truly free".

You can conclude that:

A. George Washington Carver grew up poor.
B. George Washington Carver loved teaching people about cars.
C. George Washington Carver became rich.
D. George Washington Carver was the tallest kid in his class.

We learned that he was born a slave which implies that he grew up poor.

Mr. Carver discovered a way to make rubber out of:

A. sweet potatoes.
B. peanuts.
C. soybeans.
D. car tires.

We read in the fourth paragraph that "He invented ways to use the sweet potato to make flour, ink, rubber, postage stamp glue, and more".

What effect do you think Mr. Carver had on the people of the South?

A. He helped them make more money.
B. He made them love peanut butter.
C. He taught them how to run a lab.
D. He inspired them to invent new uses for minerals.

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Reading Comprehension at the Paragraph Level

By teaching people to be better farmers he helped them make more money from farming. And by inventing new uses for crops, he made it easier to make money from crops that could be grown in the South.

Something to think about:
If you were the President after the Civil War, what would you have done about sharecropping?

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