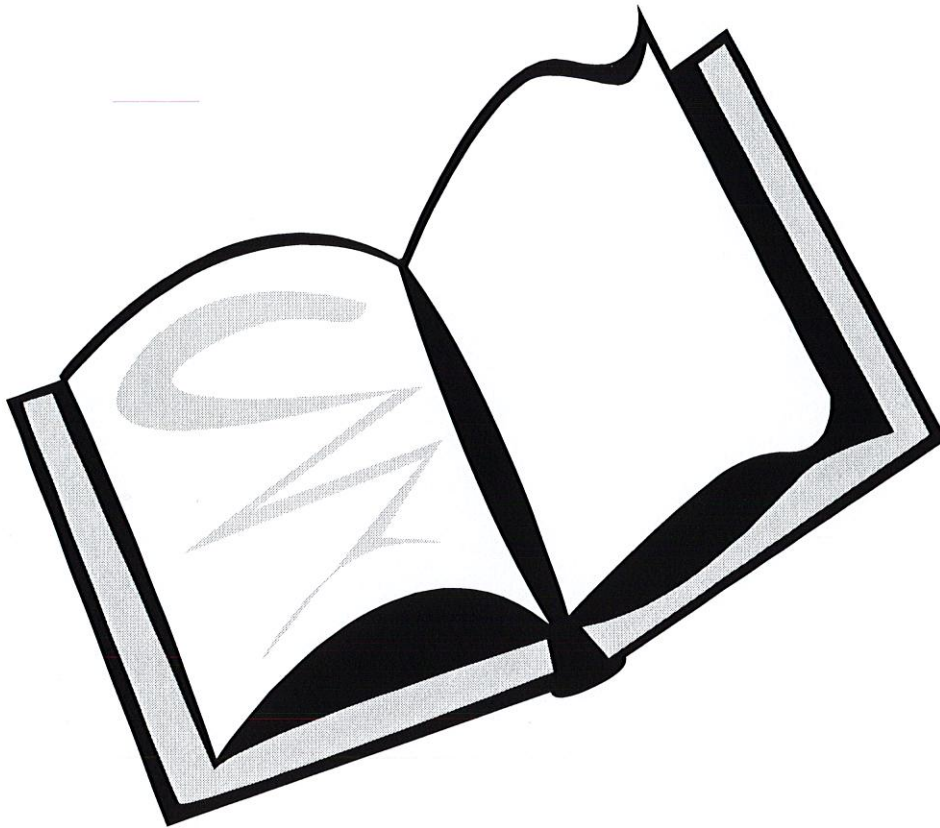


Grade 7 Reading  
Winter Benchmark  
Assessment

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2008-2009

**Grade 7 Reading Winter Benchmark Assessment**

November 3, 1842

Dear Cousin Harriet,

I expect that you are in school now. Mother gave us our lessons this morning aboard the steamboat, somewhere between Cairo and Memphis. Life has changed so since Father received his commission as a steamboat pilot.

Much of our day is spent loading wood. I heard of a boat that ran out of fuel. The crew had to burn floor planks and barrels to make it to the next woodyard! Father says that some day the banks of the Mississippi will be bare, because the steamers consume such vast amounts of fuel.

Yesterday, Father taught me how to take the sounding. This is done to find out how deep the water is, so that we don't run aground. Running aground is only one of the dangers facing paddle-wheelers. There is always the chance of catching a snag on the river bottom, colliding with another steamer, or overheating the boilers and setting the cargo on fire. Steamboats are usually damaged beyond repair within about three years. It's such a profitable business, though, that it's worth the risks.

Mother doesn't like to race other boats, but Father insists that if we didn't race, we wouldn't draw as many passengers. The passengers, by the way, are very interesting. We have had famous entertainers and preachers on board, as well as writers and scientists from Europe. They take the best cabins—the ones with red velvet curtains on the berths.

5 Each time we approach a town, people hear our whistle and come to meet us at the dock. After weeks of isolation, they all want to hear the river gossip.

I can't wait to visit New Orleans. When we return to St. Louis, I'll tell you all about it. Maybe you could even come with us sometime. I think when I grow up, I'll be a steamboat pilot.

Love,

Cousin Laura

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## Grade 7 Reading Winter Benchmark Assessment

### The Advocate, Capitol City Press

Steamboats proved dangerous — fires, sinkings, and boiler explosions limited lives of the early boats to an average of five years — but efficient. They had the power to fight the river. By the middle 1820s, 200 steamboats plied the Mississippi and its tributaries, a number that jumped to almost 1,000 in 1860.

Steamers offered merchants, planters and passengers much greater freedom of movement. Cargo and people flowed both ways on the river. Along the Mississippi and its tributaries, towns like Baton Rouge grew into cities, new settlements sprang up and plantations flourished. The town grew from fewer than 1,500 in 1830 to 3,900 in 1850 and 5,400 in 1860. The steamboat era created a bustling agricultural port and state capital from what had been a little town dozing on the river bluffs.

Pictures from the late 1800s show steamboats all but hidden by bales of cotton stacked 30-40 feet high on their decks. Steamboats also brought the river's most romantic images: luxurious sternwheelers, roguish card players, Southern belles, and the stories of river pilot Mark Twain.

Even when man dared to battle the force of the river's currents with the power of steam, dangers lurked up and down the Mississippi's twisting course. Shifting channels and emerging sandbars threatened grounding. Snags, whole trees that were swept into the river during high water, could rip the bottom out of even the largest steamer.

Capt. Henry Shreve, a pioneer pilot and builder of the steamers' earliest days, developed a special boat to clear those snags in 1829. Four years later, he began a project that took five years, clearing a 160-mile-long raft of logs that choked the Red River. Snag boats cleared another raft on the Atchafalaya and opened that river to navigation. Better, safer river navigation meant more business and continued growth for Baton Rouge.

Work clearing the Mississippi continued into the 1890s as the steamboat era faded into history and the first bridges speeded rail traffic across the river. A handful of paddlewheelers worked the river in and around Baton Rouge well into the 1950s but the steam age was over as the 20th century dawned.

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|--|--|
| <p><b>1</b> In paragraph 1 of the newspaper article, what does <i>plied</i> mean?</p> <p>A Avoided</p> <p>B Discovered</p> <p>C Sailed on</p> <p>D Traveled on</p> | <p><b>2</b> According to the newspaper article, what event ended the steamboat era on the Mississippi?</p> <p>A Bridges enabled railroads to cross the river.</p> <p>B Henry Shreve developed snag boats.</p> <p>C Paddle wheelers were developed.</p> <p>D The Mississippi flooded.</p> |
|--|--|

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**Grade 7 Reading Winter Benchmark Assessment**

- 3 Which of the following is *least likely* to be an advantage of steamboat use in the 1800s?
- A Steamboats could move both ways on the river.
  - B Steamboats enabled settlers to establish towns.
  - C Steamboats offered merchants greater freedom of movement.
  - D Steamboats were extremely expensive and dangerous.
- 4 Which common element appeared in both selections?
- A Running aground was always a dangerous possibility.
  - B The boats would race each other to port.
  - C The steamboats are relentlessly being fueled with wood.
  - D The townspeople enjoyed conversing with the passengers.
- 5 What causes Father to race the steamboat?
- A He enjoys the sport of racing.
  - B He needs to reach port as soon as possible to refuel.
  - C It attracts passengers, which in turn, provides a greater profit.
  - D There is less danger of running aground when the steamboat is traveling fast.
- 6 According to the secondary source selection, what is a snag?
- A A specific type of steamboat
  - B Dangers that lurked up and down the Mississippi
  - C Shifting channels and emerging sandbars
  - D Whole trees that were swept into the river during high water
- 7 What impact did steamboat travel have on Baton Rouge?
- A Baton Rouge became a bustling fishing port.
  - B Baton Rouge grew from a small town to a state capital.
  - C Steamers offered greater freedom of movement.
  - D The population decreased by 3,900 people.
- 8 Why does Laura want to be a steamboat pilot?
- A She enjoys meeting people and traveling.
  - B She is shy and doesn't like to travel.
  - C She'd like to make a lot of money.
  - D She wants to be near her family.

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**Grade 7 Reading Winter Benchmark Assessment****A Strange Sled Race**

Poliahu and her snow maidens one day covered their dazzling snow mantles with mantles of golden sunshine. They took their long, slender sleds to the race course below the snowfields. There a narrow, grassy track had been laid, dropping swiftly toward the sea.

High, tinkling laughter filled the air as the maidens urged the goddess to race. Poliahu was very willing. She made a running start, threw herself upon her sled, and plunged down. Far below she came to a stop, marked the spot, and lifted her sled aside.

One after another the snow maidens followed, but none reached the goddess's mark. As they gathered below they discovered a stranger in their midst, a handsome woman dressed in a black mantle and robe.

Fixing gleaming black eyes upon the goddess of snow, she spoke. "I should like to race with you, but I have no sled."

"You may use one of ours," Poliahu said, and a maiden quickly offered hers.

The stranger took it without a word of thanks. Then she and Poliahu climbed up the mountain slope. The maidens watched from below. The stranger swooped down the slope and flashed past them. There was no doubt she was skillful. Poliahu followed and passed the other's stopping place.

"That sled did not fit me!" said the dark-eyed stranger.

A taller maiden offered her sled. Again the long, slow climb. Again the short, swift descent. Both sleds went farther than before, but Poliahu's still led.

"An inferior sled!" said the woman with scorn.

"We have no inferior sleds," Poliahu replied coldly. "Let us race again, and you shall take mine."

"I have always raced on a longer course," said the woman. "Let us go higher up the mountain. You shall race first this time."

They exchanged sleds and climbed to the snowline. The stranger waited until Poliahu had started down; then she stamped her foot. The earth trembled. A jagged crack split open across the lower part of the racing course.

The snow maidens, watching below, lost sight of their goddess as steam rose from the crack and formed a curtain. They ran up the slope.

For a moment, the steam cleared. They caught a glimpse of Poliahu racing toward the widening crack. The woman in black was close behind her, standing upright on her speeding sled. In horror they saw her black robe turn red and her eyes glow like burning coals. They knew now! She was Pele—the Volcano Goddess.

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## Grade 7 Reading Winter Benchmark Assessment

- 9 Which statement *best* demonstrates the natural event described in the selection?
- A As they gathered below they discovered a stranger in their midst, a handsome woman dressed in a black mantle and robe.
- B High, tinkling laughter filled the air as the maidens urged the goddess to race.
- C Poliahu and her snow maidens one day covered their dazzling snow mantles with mantles of golden sunshine.
- D The stranger waited until Poliahu had started down; then she stamped her foot. The earth trembled.
- 10 What *most likely* happened after the snow maidens realized Pele's true identity?
- A Pele is captured by the snow maidens and is punished for killing Poliahu.
- B Pele is shocked and frightened when the Poliahu emerges, unscathed, from the mountain.
- C Pele laughs at having accomplished her goal, and frightened, the snow maidens run away.
- D Pele, seeing the fear in the snow maidens' faces, saves Poliahu from death.
- 11 In the phrase "eyes glow like burning coals" which correctly notes the literary device used and the author's meaning?
- A Hyperbole – The earth split open to swallow Poliahu.
- B Metaphor – Pele stood upright on her speeding sled.
- C Personification – The earth trembled and upset the maidens.
- D Simile – Pele's evil intentions were revealed.
- 12 How are Pele and Poliahu different?
- A Pele is a more confident racer, whereas Poliahu masks her inferiority by complaining.
- B Pele is evil and rude, whereas Poliahu is helpful and agreeable.
- C Pele is more daring, whereas Poliahu is more cautious.
- D Pele is more skilled at sledding than Poliahu.
- 13 Which statement is the first clue that foreshadows Pele's identity?
- A She has black eyes and wears a black robe.
- B She likes to downhill race.
- C She is a handsome woman.
- D She uses a sled that belongs to one of the maidens.

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## Grade 7 Reading Winter Benchmark Assessment

**Music is My Secret Best Friend.**

- 1 Music blaring, chasing my sadness  
Rhythm and words become the hugs  
Offer comfort; offer love.
- 4 Music caressing, filling the void.  
Melodic sounds of soothing notes,  
Offer relief; offer hope.
- 7 Music playing, providing the canvas.  
Brushstrokes of calming sounds,  
Offer revival; offer reality.
- 10 Music creating, inventing my reasons  
To survive and flourish and never look back.
- 12 Music is my secret best friend.

**14** What is the *most likely* reason the poet repeats the verb “offer” in the first three stanzas?

- A To find a good synonym for that word is limited
- B To create the feeling of a drum beat
- C To emphasize the emotions received from music
- D To maintain the alliteration of “offer”

**15** What is the literary device the poet uses to describe music?

- A Allusion
- B Analogy
- C Personification
- D Simile

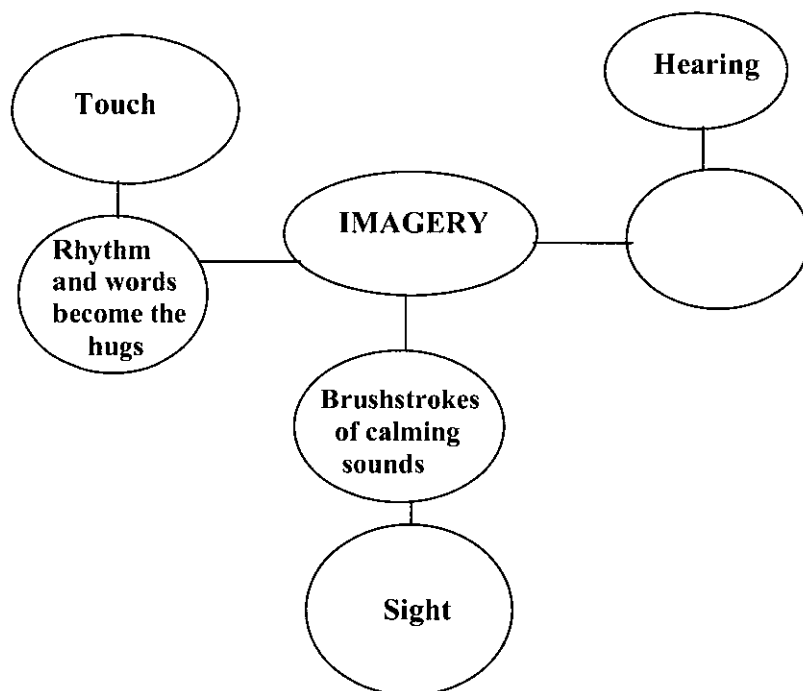
**16** Based on the poem, how does the author feel about music?

- A Music blocks creativity.
- B Music helps relieve problems.
- C Music is an escape from reality.
- D Music should not be played loudly.

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## Grade 7 Reading Winter Benchmark Assessment

17



What phrase *best* completes the graphic organizer?

- A Music creating, inventing my reasons
- B Melodic sounds of soothing notes
- C To survive and flourish and never look back
- D Music caressing, filling the void

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## Grade 7 Reading Winter Benchmark Assessment

### New Girl

The New Girl,  
Clothes a calamity  
Dress a fashion don't  
Shoes just short of style.

5

Hair is a nightmare,  
Too long, too short  
Frizzy, flaky, spaghetti stringy  
Mousy, ratty, porcupine spiky.

10

Can't walk or talk,  
Gawky, graceless  
Conversationally clueless,  
Spastically sputters.

15

Looks all wrong,  
Blemished complexion imperfection,  
Metal-mouthed grimaced,  
Stocky, bulky, hulk.

Oh, how I wish I wasn't

The New Girl.

### A Simple Lesson

"Another bad day at school, m'ijo"<sup>1</sup> my father asked as I came into the room.

"How could you tell? I didn't slam the door or anything," I replied. Over the past two months I had either slammed the door or thrown my backpack across the room every time I came home from school. Papa thinks it has something to do with moving to a new house.

"I know this move has been hard on you. Leaving your friends and cousins behind is tough," Papa said, as he put his arm around my shoulder. "What you must remember is that, with a lot of hard work and some time, you will make new friends."

"You don't know how hard it is. This year my baseball team would have won the championship. They won't even give me a chance to pitch here. All I get to play is right field, and that's the worst!"

Papa turned toward me, "Things will get better, I promise you. Let me ask you, do you know why you were named David Lorenzo?"

"Yes, your name is David and your grandfather's name is Lorenzo."

"Very good, and what makes your grandfather so important, m'ijo?"

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## Grade 7 Reading Winter Benchmark Assessment

“He was the first in the family to come to this country and all that,” I answered.

“That is only partly correct. Your grandfather was a very great man. In Mexico he had been a teacher. When he came to America he could only get manual labor jobs because he didn’t speak the language. It took him two years before he spoke English well enough to be allowed to teach here, but he did it. He never complained because he knew change could be difficult. Did he ever tell you that?” my father asked.

10 I looked down at my feet, ashamed at my behavior. “No. That must have been hard,” I said sheepishly.

“Your grandfather taught your uncles, aunts, and me that if you let people see your talent they will accept you for who you are. I remembered that lesson when I went off to college. When you were born I wanted my son to never forget that great man. I want you to always remember what my father taught me, even if it takes a few years for people to see who you are,” said Papa.

All I could say was, “Okay.” Then I asked, “What should I do now?”

Laughing Papa said, “How about you pitch a few to me? Your curveball needs some work.”

---

1. In Spanish, m’ijo is the colloquial form of mi hijo, meaning “my son”

- 18 What can be inferred about the speaker in “The New Girl”?
- A The speaker has a new hair style and is uncertain about the color.
  - B The speaker is concerned about how others will react to her.
  - C The speaker is making fun of a new student at school.
  - D The speaker is a teacher and is analyzing a new student.

- 19 Which statement would the poet think is *most similar* to “The New Girl”?
- A An adopted kitten becoming used to its surroundings
  - B Clothing designer deciding which models to use
  - C A teen-aged girl having her hair restyled at a beauty salon
  - D A young man delivering newspapers

- 20 Which literary device is *least likely* to be used by the poet in this selection?
- A Alliteration
  - B End rhyme
  - C Free verse
  - D Metaphor

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**Grade 7 Reading Winter Benchmark Assessment**

- 21** Which word *best* describes the mood of the poem?
- A Friendly
  - B Hopeful
  - C Hostile
  - D Worried
- 22** In which stanza does the speaker describe the new girl's speech?
- A 1
  - B 2
  - C 3
  - D 4
- 23** Which is an example of a metaphor?
- A Can't walk or talk
  - B Hair is a nightmare
  - C Looks all wrong
  - D The New Girl
- 24** Why does the poet isolate lines 17 and 18?
- A To emphasize the identity of the speaker
  - B To maintain the rhyme scheme
  - C To introduce a change in tone
  - D To maintain a consistent form
- 25** What can the reader infer about David?
- A He loves to play the position of pitcher in baseball.
  - B He thinks his father lives in the past.
  - C He will continue to dislike school and his new home.
  - D He would rather live with his grandfather.
- 26** In paragraph 10, what does the word *sheepishly* mean?
- A Clumsily
  - B Shyly
  - C Quietly
  - D Slyly
- 27** What stylistic device does the writer use to tell the story?
- A Cause and effect
  - B Fact vs. opinion
  - C Foreshadowing
  - D Use of dialogue
- 28** From which point of view is the story told?
- A First person
  - B Second person
  - C Third person limited
  - D Third omniscient

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