

8th Grade Passages

Between BOY and MOY Student Packet

Passage 1 *Laura*

Passage 2 *The King's Gold*

Passage 3 *The Return of the Boomerang*

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Laura

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Laura Ingalls Wilder is a famous author. She wrote children’s books about pioneer life in the late 19th Century. Laura was born in 1867 in a log house in Wisconsin. She was the second daughter of Charles and Caroline Ingalls. Laura had an older sister named Mary. They were very close. The Ingalls family moved frequently. They went wherever their father could find a job. Shortly after Laura’s birth, the family moved to Missouri. A few years later, they moved to Kansas to start their own farm. A third daughter, Carrie, was born there. When Laura was 13, they left Kansas and returned to Wisconsin to be near family.

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The girls were happy to be there, but their father longed to farm again. So, four years later, in 1874, the family moved to Walnut Grove, Minnesota. They built a house and farmed the land. The three girls had many adventures there. But the family suffered many tragedies as well. During their first year there, Charles had grown a good wheat crop. It was destroyed by grasshoppers. This was repeated the next year as well. The family was blessed by a baby boy in 1875, but he died of an illness at only 9 months. The family suffered yet another tragedy when Mary lost her eyesight as a result of a stroke. That same year, Charles took a job with the railroad. They moved to De Smet in the Dakota Territories. When the railroad job was finished, they acquired some land. He began to farm again. A harsh winter made farming difficult that first year. But they persevered and were able to save enough money to send Mary to a school for the blind.

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When Laura was 15, she earned her teaching certificate. She began teaching at a small school several miles from her home. It was at this time that she met a farmer named Almanzo Wilder. They married three years later. They had a healthy baby girl named Rose. They had many misfortunes as well, however. Severe storms ruined their crops. This forced them into debt. Almanzo worked hard in the fields, but he got sick and became crippled. During this time, Laura was pregnant with their second child. He died shortly after birth, unnamed. Soon after, their house burned down when something in the kitchen caught fire.

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The family then moved to Florida, where the warm conditions improved Almanzo’s health. They eventually returned to De Smet. But, in 1894, they relocated to Missouri. Here they would spend the rest of their lives. They bought a farm there and prospered.

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Laura was a great storyteller. Her daughter Rose convinced her to write her stories so that other children could enjoy them too. Laura did so. In all, she wrote seven children’s books. These comprised her Little House series. They have been widely read and admired. She and Almanzo

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spent the rest of their lives at their Missouri farm. Laura died in 1957, at the age of 90. Their farm is now open for people to visit.

The King's Gold

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The king's castle was only a day's walk from the edge of the forested mountains. Everyone who lived in the area had heard stories of the king's great wealth. One morning the king woke to find that many of his gold coins were missing. He immediately summoned every guard and soldier in his castle.

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"Search the countryside!" demanded the king. "Some of my gold has disappeared, and I want the thief brought to justice. I will greatly reward the one who brings me the wrongdoer." The room quickly cleared as every guard and soldier left to find the guilty person.

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One of the castle guards went to search the king's cocoa plantation. He angrily questioned dozens of workers as they snipped ripe cocoa pods from the trees. Then he marched over to two men who were breaking open cocoa pods and placing the beans in baskets.

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"What are you doing?" the guard asked the first man, who sat quietly next to his basket.

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"I am opening cocoa pods," he answered. "I am weak, so it takes me a long time to fill one basket. I cannot move about as quickly as my partner."

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"I see," snapped the guard. He watched the second man moving busily from one basket to the next and slipping cocoa beans into his pockets. "These two baskets are completely filled with beans. And your pockets are quite heavy."

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"It takes several hundred beans to make a pound of chocolate, so I must work quickly," the second man said, nervously moving away from the guard.

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"Not so fast," the guard ordered. "Empty your pockets!" The man followed the guard's instructions, and hundreds of cocoa beans spilled to the ground.

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"You thief!" the guard shouted. "How dare you steal the king's cocoa beans!"

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"No, please listen. There are not enough baskets," the man stammered. "I don't want to stop working, so I often fill my pockets with beans until the wagon comes. Then I empty everything and begin again."

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“I find your methods extremely questionable,” said the guard. “And you’re as jumpy as a cat.”

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“I am just a simple peasant, and I am not used to being questioned by guards,” the man replied.

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Just then the guard spotted a gold coin lying on the ground between the two men. “Aha! This

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proves it!” shouted the guard as he picked up the coin. “Come with me, thief,” he demanded. “The

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king will want to know where you’ve stashed the rest of the gold.” The guard left hastily with the

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second man. The guard was eager to receive the great reward the king had promised.

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The first man watched until the two men had vanished into the distance. Then he stood up and

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slowly walked away, careful not to spill the heavy gold coins he had hidden in his pockets.

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The Return of the Boomerang

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Nothing says “Summer is here!” quite like the smack of a baseball as it is caught in a baseball glove. But what if no one is available to play catch? Then maybe it’s time to trade in the baseball and glove for a boomerang. Over the past decade boomeranging has become increasingly popular. All over the world, this activity is capturing the interest of young and old. Even those who have seen a boomerang still marvel that a curved stick can circle back to the person who threw it.

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Boomerangs have been around for thousands of years. Many peoples, including the ancient Egyptians, the people of southern India, and the Hopi Indians, used throwing sticks that were similar to boomerangs. But it was the natives of Australia, known as Aborigines, who developed the amazing returning version. The Aborigines used boomerangs for hunting and as digging tools.

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It wasn’t until the mid-1800s that people began to study the scientific principles behind boomerang flight. Perhaps one reason it took so long to understand the science of boomerangs is that not all boomerangs fly in exactly the same way. Because early boomerangs were made by hand, it was virtually impossible to produce two boomerangs with exactly the same wing surface. The ability of all boomerangs to return results essentially from two scientific principles.

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The first of these principles is that the shape and curve of a boomerang produce lift. Much like airplane wings, a boomerang is flat on one side and curved on the other. As air flows over the slope of the curved surface of the boomerang’s wing, it forces the curved edge upward. At the same time, the air flowing under the wing’s flat surface pushes it up from the bottom. The result of these forces is lift. Thus, the principles of aerodynamics can be applied to the boomerang to help understand its flight.

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The second factor affecting the boomerang’s ability to return is that it spins like a gyroscope. A good example of a gyroscope is a toy top. Tops are easily set to spinning, but once spinning, they are very hard to move. In fact, if pushed while spinning, a gyroscope will twist at a right angle from the direction in which it was pushed. For instance, a spinning top pushed to the north will actually tilt to the east. When a boomerang is thrown, the force of the lift causes it to turn toward one side rather than straight up. As it spins and moves forward, air flows faster over the top surface of the boomerang and gives it more lift. This extra lift tries to twist the boomerang off course. Since it is spinning very fast, the boomerang begins turning away from the twisting force. As a result, it arcs back to its thrower with relative exactitude.

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Just because a well-designed boomerang can return nearly to its point of origin does not mean that it automatically does so. Learning to throw a boomerang so that it will return is a challenge. Catching a boomerang spinning at speeds of up to 60 miles per hour takes even more practice. For anyone who masters the art of throwing and catching a boomerang, playing catch with a baseball may have forever lost its thrill.