

8th Grade Passages

Between MOY and EOY Student Packet

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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 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.

My Invisible Summer

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When my application for an internship at the local hard-rock radio station was accepted, I was overjoyed. My friends would be flipping burgers at fast-food restaurants all summer, but I was going to be a disc jockey, a real DJ. I would use my best DJ voice, and I would be admired by millions of fans. In no time I would be on my way to fame and fortune.

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It didn't take me long to learn that working in radio was not exactly the way I had pictured it. In the movies, radio stations are always situated in gigantic impressive structures in the middle of bustling cities. The radio station where I worked was located in a lonely-looking building on the edge of town. Only the 361-foot antenna made it look at all unusual. The boss explained that the large antenna was necessary for broadcasting at 680,000 megahertz. I tried to look interested as she explained frequency and other electrical terms, but all I really wanted to do was meet the DJs.

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When I was finally introduced to the DJs I had idolized for years, I was shocked. For some reason I had pictured DJ Kirk Krimson as the kind of person who might star in an action movie, but he didn't look much like a motion-picture star. He told me that when he began in radio, disc jockeys played music on vinyl records, not on compact discs; that really made him seem old. I didn't have much chance to be disappointed in my DJ heroes, though, because I almost never saw him.

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My job was to run the station from midnight to 6:00 A.M., and all the DJs worked during the day. They recorded their shows, and I just played tapes of their voices and song choices. Between tapes I plugged in recorded commercials. My favorite commercial was one about a new video game. Three times a night I got to talk on the air for five seconds—but only to read the call letters, the four-letter name that the Federal Communications Commission had assigned to the station. I never even got to say my own name! Maybe I'll try flipping burgers next summer.