

8th Grade Progress Monitoring

March–May Student Packet

Texas Middle School Fluency Assessment—Version 2.0 © 2010 Texas Education Agency, University of Houston, and The University of Texas System

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The Writing Pencil

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Josh had to write a story for school. Time was running out. He had to turn in his paper in two days. He was beginning to worry. “What if I can’t think of a good story?” he wondered. Josh thought of flying cars and tall mountains and faraway lands. He picked up the new pencil that was a present from his aunt. Then he looked at the clean, white paper. No ideas came to him.

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Josh went to sleep. He had a dream about a pencil that could write wonderful stories. All Josh had to do was hold the pencil on the paper.

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When Josh woke up the next morning, he looked at his new pencil. He knew what he would write about. He wrote so fast that the pencil seemed to be writing the story all by itself!

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What Was Amanda’s Message?

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Once there was a village beside a river. The lovely river flowed quietly to the sea. The river gave the people of the village water to drink. It also gave them water for their plants and animals.

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In this village lived a family with a young daughter named Amanda. She was quiet like the river.

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Amanda often walked through the forest near her house. She loved looking at all the beautiful

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trees. Her favorite was the willow tree. Its branches bent toward the ground as if reaching down to her.

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Amanda had a special ability. She noticed things that other people did not. Walking through the

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forest, she would see a squirrel sitting on the highest branch of a tree. She would notice the first

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golden leaf as summer turned to fall. During spring Amanda was the first to notice that wildflowers

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were beginning to bloom.

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One year there was very little rain. By summer the river had dried up. The people of Amanda’s

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village dug a well, but they did not find water. They had to go to another village far away to get

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water. It was a long, hard journey. Sometimes the people could not carry as much water as they

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needed. This caused them to worry.

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While walking through the forest one day, Amanda noticed the leaves of the trees. Without rain

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they had turned dry and brown. Then she came upon the willow tree. Its branches still had tender

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green leaves!

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“The willow’s leaves are still soft and green, but all the other leaves are dry and brown,” she said

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to herself. “Perhaps the willow’s roots can seek and find water that other trees cannot.”

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Amanda ran home as fast as she could. She couldn’t wait to relay what she had noticed to her

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family. When she reached her house, she saw that other people from the village were there. They

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were talking about how to find water.

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“The leaves of the willow tree are still green,” Amanda announced eagerly. “We should dig a well

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where the willow’s roots end. We might find water there.”

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The people of the village stared at Amanda in surprise. She was generally very quiet. In fact,

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many villagers had never heard her speak. They knew that her message must be important, so they

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followed Amanda to the willow tree. There they dug a deep well where the willow's roots stopped.

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Water filled the well just as Amanda had promised.

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The people of the village were happy. They began to sing and dance around their new well.

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Amanda was happy, too. She and the willow tree had helped save her village.

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Mistippee

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In November 1825 a group of Creek Indians met with men who worked for President John Quincy Adams. The Creek men needed help because people were taking their land. The following letter is from James, the son of one of the men who went to the meeting.

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November 30, 1825

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Dearest Mama,

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I went with Papa today to meet with the leaders of the Creek Indians. Papa needed me to help him with the horses. There were many Creek men sitting at the table when we walked into the meeting place. The Creek men sat tall and straight. They were very quiet. Their eyes were kind, and their voices were gentle. Papa told me that the man sitting at the head of the table was a chief.

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Standing behind him was a boy who looked 12 years old, like me. The first thing I noticed about the boy was his clothes. He wore a white cotton shirt, like mine. However, he also wore boots, a vest, and pants all made from deerskin. These clothes were very different from mine. I was wearing pointed black leather shoes, a button-down coat, and wool pants. The Creek boy had markings on his face. There was a line of blue dots painted on each side of his face and an orange sun painted above his nose. Papa told me later that each mark had a meaning.

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Papa and the boy's father told us to go outside while the men talked. The boy spoke perfect English. He said that he could read and write in English, too. He told me his name was Mistippee. He said that his father had educated him. Mistippee wanted to know everything about me and asked a lot of questions. I told him about our small farm where we grow wheat. I also told him that I share a room upstairs with my three brothers. Then he asked about my school. I told him that I go to school in the same room as my brothers even though we are not the same age. I also asked Mistippee many questions. He answered them all very politely. He told me his family has two houses built near each other. One is used in winter and one in summer. The winter house is made of wood and mud. Mistippee said that it is very warm. The summer house is made of wood and grass. It has open sides to let the air in. Mistippee told me his people fish and hunt. They hunt animals such as rabbits and deer for both food and clothing.

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His family grows corn, beans, and pumpkins. Some Creek children help their mothers dig in the fields, plant seeds, and gather crops. His people also gather berries and many other wild plants for food. Mistippee said he must help chop firewood and take care of the horses. I told him that I had

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to do those things, too. He laughed when I told him about how I almost got kicked by my horse the first time I tried to put a horseshoe on it. He said he had almost been kicked by a horse once, too.

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Before long, it was time to leave. Mistippee shook my hand and said farewell. On the way back to the inn where we would stay the night, I told Papa all about Mistippee. I hope that I get to see Mistippee again. Papa told me we should be on our way home in a few days. I miss you.

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Your son,

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James

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A Friend on the Trail

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Doodle the rooster usually crowed at sunrise, but this morning Elizabeth awoke to the sounds of other birds. She poked her head through the curtain of her family’s covered wagon and gazed at the unfamiliar surroundings. Late in the spring of 1856, her family had joined a train of covered wagons. They had begun their long journey to make a new home in the West. That was more than four months ago. Soon they would reach their destination.

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After breakfast Elizabeth checked the cage tied to the back of the wagon. This was where Doodle and their three hens rode. Each night Doodle and the hens were allowed to roam freely. They had always returned by morning. Today, however, Doodle was not in the cage.

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“Doodle, where are you?” Elizabeth muttered. She looked in all directions.

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“Why don’t you walk down to the stream,” her mother suggested. “You need to get water for the day’s journey. Perhaps you’ll find Doodle there.”

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Grabbing the bucket, Elizabeth headed for the stream. She crossed through a field of lovely wildflowers. Along the stream’s bank she saw a Native American girl. The girl wore a round hat made of woven grass. She dipped her hat into the water and took a drink. Looking up, the girl smiled.

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“My name is Sisika,” she said. “I’m Elizabeth. I’ve come to get water and to find my rooster,” Elizabeth explained.

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Together they began searching. They did not have to look long before they found Doodle. He was feasting on large crickets in the tall grass.

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“Doodle, you’ve found a good breakfast,” Elizabeth remarked.

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“These are tasty crickets,” Sisika replied. “My mother dries them, and we make delicious cricket soup.”

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“I like to help my mother cook, too,” Elizabeth said. With these words Elizabeth realized something. It occurred to her that she and Sisika might have many things in common. She wished that she could stay and visit longer. Elizabeth carefully picked up Doodle in her arms. Then she remembered her empty bucket.

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“I can help,” Sisika offered. “I’ll fill your bucket and carry it for you.”

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Together Elizabeth and Sisika walked back to the wagon. Elizabeth returned Doodle to the cage.

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The restless oxen tugged on the wagon, signaling that they were ready to depart. Elizabeth reached

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into the wagon for her favorite doll. With a sad smile of good-bye, she gave it to Sisika. Then

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Sisika placed her necklace around Elizabeth’s neck. Just then a man rode up on a beautiful spotted

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horse.

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“This is my father,” Sisika explained to Elizabeth. The man helped Sisika climb up onto the horse.

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Then he noticed the doll that she was holding. He also recognized the necklace Elizabeth was

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wearing.

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“The river up ahead can be treacherous. There are places where it is deep and the waters are fast,”

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he said to Elizabeth. “Tell your father that Sisika and I will lead your wagons safely across the

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river.”

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Sisika and Elizabeth waved to each other. Then Sisika and her father rode to the front of the

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wagon train. Moments later the wagons jerked forward. The wagon train began to roll westward

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again.

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Crossing the river, Elizabeth studied her new necklace happily. She had made a friend on the trail.

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Suni

My name is Suni. I am a Chinese White Dolphin. Do you know what's special about the Chinese White Dolphin? I'm pink. Most people have never heard of, or seen, a pink dolphin.

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I want to tell you about a serious problem that we are all facing. But first, let me describe myself.

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I live off the shores of Hong Kong and Southern China. This area is called the Pearl River Delta.

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There are less than 200 of us here. We are not born pink. In fact, when we are born, we are black.

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As we get older, our color turns to gray. Then it becomes pinkish gray with spots. It is when we

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enter adulthood that we become pinkish white and our spots fade. As adults, we usually reach a

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length of eight to nine feet. Unfortunately, most of the calves born today don't reach adulthood.

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Thus, they never get to show off their beautiful pink color. We could live up to 40 years, but

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because of the many hazards we face most of the calves don't even survive. We are endangered.

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Our population is dwindling.

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The water we live in is unhealthy. Raw sewage has been routinely dumped into our waters. There

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are so many fishermen that sometimes we get stuck in nets or hit by boats. I have a scar on my

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right side from when a boat hit me. Some nice humans found me. They helped me get well again.

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My wound hurt a lot, but I was one of the lucky ones. I've known dolphins that haven't survived

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that type of accident. The high numbers of fishermen pose another threat to us as well. They're

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catching so many fish that there aren't enough to sustain all of us here.

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We can't leave the area. It is part of our nature to stay close to the shore and to be in these types of

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waters. Legislation in Hong Kong has attempted to keep us safe, but that has not helped much. To

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raise money to help keep us safe, Hong Kong has started a dolphin-watching program. They bring

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people out on boats to watch us. We don't like that very much. We're kind of shy around people.

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We tend to go away from boats coming toward us, especially since so many of us have been hurt

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by them. However, sometimes we do perform and let them see us jump and dive.

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I want everyone to know about us. I want us all to be protected. We all want our calves to live and

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grow to be adults. We hope that these rules and many more new ones will help us survive. We

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don't want to be extinct.

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A Wonderful Friendship

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Helen Keller was a young girl who couldn't see or hear. Alexander Graham Bell was the famous scientist who invented the telephone. These two famous people not only knew each other, but together they also opened up new worlds of conversation.

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Helen Keller was born in 1880. When she was a baby, she lost her sight and hearing. Because of her inability to hear, she did not learn how to speak. Even so, it was clear that she was an intelligent child and was eager to learn. Keller's family did everything they could to find a way to educate her.

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When Helen Keller was six years old, her parents took her to see Alexander Graham Bell. He was well known for his inventions. He was also a teacher of deaf people. He considered teaching to be his most important work.

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Bell recognized Keller's intelligence. At his suggestion her parents hired a private teacher named Anne Sullivan. She worked with Keller every day. Through her persistence Sullivan was able to teach Keller words and their meanings. With a great deal of constant work, Sullivan taught Keller how to read and write. One of the first letters Keller wrote was to Bell.

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Bell encouraged Keller to learn as much as she could. Sometimes they would go on rides or visit the zoo. They also shared a love of books. Bell would tell her stories by using his fingers to spell the letters of words in her hand.

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One day Bell told Keller about his invention called the telephone. He explained how it was enriching lives. People all over the world benefited by being able to talk to each other when they were in separate places. Although Keller could not use the phone without help, she understood that it was important.

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Bell opened a school for deaf students and formed an information center to help people understand the needs and abilities of deaf people. Keller was very interested in Bell's work with deaf children.

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Keller had worked hard and set goals for herself. Because she wanted to help Bell by telling other people about his work, she decided to take lessons to learn to speak. When she felt comfortable speaking in public, she gave a speech at Bell's information center. She told the audience how happy she was to be able to speak to them about Bell's work with deaf people.

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Bell's invention of the telephone helped hearing people talk to each other. His teaching helped deaf people talk to each other and to the hearing world. His support and instruction helped Keller express herself by writing and even speaking. Helen Keller went on to finish college and became a well-known writer.

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When she wrote a book about her life, Helen Keller dedicated it to Alexander Graham Bell. This was a symbol of their lasting friendship.

Mrs. Mason's Gift

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Gina climbed the steps to Mrs. Mason's porch. She enjoyed visiting the former schoolteacher and listening to her stories. Mrs. Mason was sitting with a book on her lap, surrounded by her cats and the many plants she tended. Today was the day Gina would say good-bye until next summer. School would start next week. Her stay with her grandmother and the afternoons spent with her grandmother's neighbor Mrs. Mason were over for this year. Gina's parents were waiting for her in the car.

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"Thanks for all the cookies and stories, Mrs. Mason. From what you've told me, school sure must have been different when you were teaching. It's hard to believe that computers weren't around then."

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Mrs. Mason smiled and said, "I have something for you." She handed Gina the book she was holding. The pages were blank. The word Journal was printed on the cover.

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After waving good-bye to her grandmother and thanking Mrs. Mason for the gift, Gina settled down in the back seat for the long drive home. She opened the journal Mrs. Mason had given her and found a letter inside. After reading it carefully, she knew she would soon fill her journal with memories of the summer and hopes for the new school year.

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Dear Gina,

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Use this journal as a tool to focus on yourself and the world around you. You can write about your thoughts, memories, and daily life. Your journal will then be a personal record of things that are important to you. To keep a journal, follow these simple steps. 1. Set aside a time to write every day. Decide what time of day is best for you. 2. Write about things that interest you. People, places, and everyday happenings are good topics. You may choose to stick to prose or try some poetry. 3. Write the day's date before each entry. What you write will become more interesting to you as time goes by. Later you'll have fun reading your first entries. Once you start writing, you will get more ideas. I hope this little book will lead to many years of journal writing. See you next summer.

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Your friend,
Mrs. Mason