

# 8th Grade Passages

## Middle of Year (MOY) Student Packet

Passage 1      *A Great Comet*

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## A Great Comet

For six months in 1997, people watched a glowing  
9 object in the night sky. Comet Hale-Bopp made a  
19 show in the sky that lasted from January to June.  
29 Its head shone as brightly as a star. Its tail swept  
40 back like a fan. Some people thought it might be  
50 the best comet to pass by Earth in 20 years.

60 Comets begin as dirty chunks of rock in an icy  
70 fog. Some of these rocks move toward the sun  
79 when its gravity pulls them. Once the rocks get  
88 near the sun, they begin to look like comets. Each  
98 comet forms a tail and a round head that are  
108 characteristic of all comets. The round head and  
116 tail make a comet easy to recognize. Comets travel  
125 in orbits, or circles, around the sun. These orbits  
134 can be big or small. Comets that make small orbits

144 around the sun come near Earth every 200 years  
153 or less. They are not very bright, but we see them  
164 more often.

166 Hale-Bopp is a comet that makes big orbits around  
176 the sun. It will not pass near Earth again for about  
187 2,400 years.

189 In the 1990s about 12 comets a year were  
198 discovered. Most of these could not be seen in the  
208 sky without special equipment because they did not  
216 come very close to Earth. Even though Hale-Bopp  
225 was far away from Earth, it could be seen because  
235 its head was huge. The heads of most comets  
245 are no larger than six miles in diameter. Hale-  
254 Bopp's head was about 25 miles across. Because  
263 of its size, Hale-Bopp glowed brightly. Most of  
272 the famous comets have had long, thin tails that  
281 streamed for millions of miles. Hale-Bopp's tail was  
290 wider and shorter.

291 People enjoyed watching Hale-Bopp for several  
298 reasons. It glowed brightly. Hale-Bopp could be  
306 seen without a telescope for six months, from an  
315 hour after sunset until an hour before sunrise each  
324 day. Everyone had sufficient time to see this bright  
333 traveler. There were plenty of chances to look at it.  
343 There will continue to be many more comets for us  
353 to see. Like Hale-Bopp, they will look like glowing  
363 balls in the night sky.  
368

## Let's Do It Again

My heart was beating so loudly that I was sure  
10 everyone could hear it over the slow rumbling of  
19 the motor. I jumped into the water and put on my  
30 skis. Slowly the boat crept forward, tightening up  
38 the ski rope. I held on for dear life to the handle on  
51 the end of the rope while Mom smiled encouragingly  
60 at me from the back of the boat.

68 I was trying very hard to recover my earlier feelings  
78 of excitement about learning to water-ski. "Whose  
86 bright idea was this anyway?" I asked myself  
94 anxiously. I sat in the cool water bobbing gently  
103 in my bright orange life jacket. I tried to keep the  
114 tips of my water skis pointing up out of the water  
125 as I had been shown. A wave of fear washed over  
136 me. There were just too many instructions to

144 remember. My little sister Nikki cheered as she  
152 jumped up and down in the back of the boat next to  
164 Mom.

165 Nikki had learned to water-ski at a very young  
175 age. I, on the other hand, always liked underwater  
184 sports such as scuba diving. Moving on top of  
193 the water was going to be very different for me.  
203 But once I mastered this, we would have another  
212 activity that the whole family could enjoy together.

220 "Deep breath," I reminded myself. Dad pulled back  
228 the lever to open up the throttle. The motor roared  
238 to life. "Here we go," I thought wildly.

246 Mom gave me a big thumbs-up, and the boat  
256 lurched forward and gave a mighty pull. I pushed  
265 up on my legs as hard as I could and let out a  
278 yell. I was actually standing on my skis, skimming  
287 across the water, but not for long. I fell forward

297 and landed facedown in the water. Thank goodness  
305 I remembered to let go of the rope. My skis came  
316 off, and my life jacket kept me floating on the  
326 surface of the lake.

330 "I don't believe it," I thought, flipping over to my  
340 back with a grin. "I almost felt like I was flying."

351 "Let's do it again," I called to Dad as he circled the  
363 boat around to pick me up.

369

## The Parthenon

The Parthenon, a building in Athens, Greece, is

8 perhaps one of the most memorable structures on

16 Earth. Built 25 centuries ago, it is one of the great

27 architectural achievements of the ancient world.

33 There are many reasons for its greatness.

40 Athens was the most important city in ancient

48 Greece. In 480 B.C. Greece was under attack by

57 both the Persian army and the Persian navy. The

66 Athenian commander, Themistocles, knew that

71 his forces could not defeat the Persian army then

80 marching toward Athens. Hoping instead to make a

88 stand against the Persians at sea, Themistocles and

96 his forces fled Athens for a nearby island. Although

105 the Persian army overwhelmed Athens and left

112 it in ruins, the Greek navy, led by Themistocles,



121 annihilated the Persian fleet. This victory by the  
129 Greeks led all Persian forces to retreat within one  
138 year. About 30 years later the building of the  
147 Parthenon began. Construction took place between  
153 447 and 432 B.C. during the rule of Pericles. The  
163 Parthenon was constructed on the same site as an  
172 unfinished structure intended to honor the men  
179 who had lost their lives in an earlier battle against  
189 the Persians. The Parthenon would stand as a  
197 symbol of the strength and importance of the Greek  
206 people.

207 Many important cities in ancient Greece had  
214 an acropolis, or “high city,” on which people  
222 constructed important buildings. The acropolis was  
228 the highest and most defensible location, so it also  
237 served as a fortress in the event of enemy attack.  
247 The Parthenon is located about 500 feet above  
255 the city of Athens. Before the Parthenon could be  
264 built, some areas of the acropolis had to be leveled

274 down, and other areas had to be built up. Then  
284 a large, solid foundation was constructed out of  
292 limestone blocks. The entire area was buttressed by  
300 a reinforcing wall.

303 The Parthenon is a rectangular structure consisting  
310 of two inner areas surrounded by columns. There  
318 are eight columns at each end and seventeen  
326 columns along each side. It is a large structure,  
335 considering when it was built. It is about 200 feet  
345 long and about 100 feet wide. It stands about 60  
355 feet high.

357 One extraordinary aspect of the Parthenon is its  
365 construction. It required between 20,000 and  
371 30,000 tons of marble that had to be precisely  
380 carved so that huge blocks of it could be fitted  
390 together without mortar to form the columns and  
398 the interior walls.

401 Perhaps even more impressive are the “optical  
408 corrections” that were used. The columns bulge  
415 slightly in the middle because experience had  
422 shown the Greeks that perfectly straight columns  
429 would not look straight to the viewer. Because  
437 corner columns normally appear smaller than  
443 others, the corner columns of the Parthenon were  
451 made slightly thicker and were placed closer to the  
460 other columns. The columns were also designed to  
468 lean inward slightly because perfectly perpendicular  
474 columns seem to slant outward. Furthermore, the  
481 platform on which the Parthenon sits was made  
489 to curve upward in the middle because a perfectly  
498 level floor would appear to sag in the center.

507 The Parthenon stands today despite the centuries  
514 that have passed. It is a timeless tribute to the  
524 enduring culture of the Greek people and is  
532 considered a model of excellence in concept and  
540 construction. It established the classic style of

547 architecture seen today in many public buildings,  
554 such as the White House and the Lincoln Memorial  
563 in Washington, D.C. This architectural style is a  
571 lasting gift from the ancient Greeks to the modern  
580 world.  
581