

**EIGHTH GRADE****Skill Builders**

# Reading Comprehension

**Grade****8****supports****NCTE  
standards****Includes Critical Thinking Pages!**

Skill Builders are great for keeping students current during the school year or preparing them for the grade ahead during the summer!

**Reproducible****Clear Examples****Fun Format****Skills Include:**

- Comprehension
- Main Idea
- Sequencing
- Details
- Vocabulary
- Reasoning
- Logic

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# Jesse's Gold

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The 1936 Olympic Games were held in Berlin, Germany. These Olympics gave Adolf Hitler a chance to showcase the new Germany. Hitler thought that white Germans were better athletes than people from other nations, and he hoped the Olympic Games would prove his theories of racial superiority.

Hitler built a *grandiose* facility to host the Olympic Games. He wanted to make these games the best ever. He was convinced that German athletes would dominate the games. What he did not know was that an African American athlete from the United States was about to surprise the world.

Jesse Owens won his first gold medal in the 100-meter dash when he matched the world record of 10.3 seconds. The gold medal winner of the 100-meter dash is considered the “world’s fastest human.” Hitler was so upset that he refused to attend the medal ceremony. Jesse won his second gold medal in the long jump. He set an Olympic record. He also won a gold medal in the 200-meter dash, when he set a new Olympic record of 20.7 seconds. He won his fourth gold medal as a member of the United States 4 x 100-meter relay team. The win set a world record at 39.8 seconds. Even the German people applauded Jesse’s performances.

Jesse Owens returned to the United States as a hero. He was the first American athlete ever to win four gold medals in the Olympic Games. In speaking of his Olympic success, Owens said, “It dawned on me with blinding brightness. I realized: I had jumped into another rare kind of stratosphere—one that only a handful of people in every generation are lucky enough to know.”



# Reading Comprehension

1. In which of the following Olympic events did Jesse Owens not win a gold medal?
  - A. pole vault
  - B. long jump
  - C. 100-meter dash
  - D. 200-meter dash
2. Choose another good title for the reading.
  - A. Jesse's Defeat
  - B. A Gold Medal Game
  - C. The Triumph of Track and Field
  - D. The Rise of Nazi Germany
3. Which of the following best defines the word *grandiose*?
  - A. spectacular
  - B. moderate
  - C. modern
  - D. conservative
4. Which of the following events happened second?
  - A. The German people applauded Jesse.
  - B. Jesse Owens returned to the United States as a hero.
  - C. Jesse Owens won the 100-meter dash and was considered the "world's fastest human."
  - D. Hitler wanted to prove that white Germans were a superior race.
5. What do you think Jesse Owens meant when he said that he had "jumped into another rare kind of stratosphere—one that only a handful of people in every generation are lucky enough to know."

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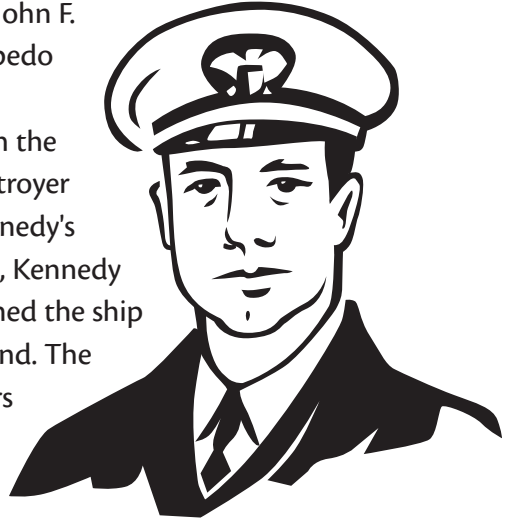
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# The Rescue of JFK

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During World War II, Lieutenant John F. Kennedy (JFK) was in charge of a torpedo boat named *PT-109*. The boat was stationed near the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific. In 1943, a Japanese destroyer rammed into the *PT-109*, cutting Kennedy's boat in half. As *PT-109* gradually sank, Kennedy and 10 other crew members abandoned the ship and began swimming to a nearby island. The future president spent nearly 15 hours helping the survivors to nearby Plum Pudding Island. He then led the crew members in what would become a week-long struggle for survival.



Finding no food or water on Plum Pudding Island, the men swam to Olasana and Nauru Islands in search of help. They found very little on the deserted islands. The crew lived off coconuts for six days. Fortunately, a coast watcher had seen the explosion. Coast watchers were Australian *expatriates* who operated secretly behind Japanese lines. They warned Allied forces of approaching Japanese forces. The coast watcher who saw the explosion contacted two native scouts—Eroni Kumana and Biuku Gasa.

Kumana and Gasa were searching for survivors when they found Kennedy and his men. Kennedy scratched a message on the inside of a coconut husk. The two scouts delivered the message to an Australian military unit in the area. A short time later, Kennedy and his men were rescued.

Kennedy promised Kumana and Gasa that he would meet them again. When he was elected president, Kennedy invited the men to the White House for the presidential inauguration. However, when they arrived at the island airport, they were not allowed to leave because they did not speak English. Almost 60 years later—and about 40 years after the president's death—Kennedy's nephew went to the island to meet Kumana and Gasa. His visit showed that their brave actions had not been forgotten.

# Reading Comprehension

1. During World War II, Lieutenant John F. Kennedy was stationed in the
  - A. North Atlantic.
  - B. Adriatic Sea.
  - C. Indian Ocean.
  - D. South Pacific.

2. Which of the following best defines the word *expatriate*?
  - A. traitor
  - B. renegade
  - C. resident living in a foreign land
  - D. smuggler

3. Number the following events in the order that they happened.

\_\_\_\_\_ The survivors of *PT-109* swam to Plum Pudding Island.

\_\_\_\_\_ Kennedy's torpedo boat was destroyed.

\_\_\_\_\_ The survivors of the *PT-109* were found by two natives.

\_\_\_\_\_ Kennedy's nephew met with his uncle's rescuers.

\_\_\_\_\_ Kennedy scratched a message on a coconut shell.

4. Which of these statements is true?
  - A. A Japanese destroyer sank *PT-109*.
  - B. Kennedy and his crew were rescued three days after *PT-109* sank.
  - C. Two scouts delivered Kennedy's message to an American military unit in the area.
  - D. Kennedy's message was written on a palm-tree leaf.

5. Why do you think Kumana and Gasa risked their lives to rescue Kennedy and his surviving crew?

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# The Great Bambino

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George Herman Ruth has long been a famous baseball hero. When Ruth was seven years old, his father placed him in an orphanage. While he was there, he played many different positions on the baseball team. His two favorite positions were catcher and pitcher.

When Ruth was 19 years old, Jack Dunn, owner of the Baltimore Orioles, recognized his talent. Dunn had a reputation for helping young players with their careers. When players saw Ruth with Dunn, they referred to him as “Jack’s newest babe.” The name “Babe” caught on and became his nickname.

After a few months with the Orioles, a minor league team at the time, Ruth made it to the major leagues with the Boston Red Sox. While he was in Boston, Ruth broke many records for pitching and hitting home runs. After six years, he was traded to the New York Yankees. He became the greatest attraction in baseball, and Yankee Stadium became known as “the house that Ruth built.”

Ruth set records that stood for decades. In 1927, he hit 60 home runs during a single season. Writers attempted to capture a sense of his greatness by giving him catchy nicknames. He was called “The Great Bambino” and the “Sultan of Swat.” Ruth and his teammate

Lou Gehrig were a *dynamic* duo of home-run hitters. During his 22 seasons in the major leagues, Ruth hit a record 714 home runs. Ruth also had a lifetime batting average of .342.

When Babe Ruth died of cancer in 1948, his coffin was placed at the entrance to Yankee Stadium. Thousands of fans filed past to say good-bye to their beloved hero.



# Reading Comprehension

1. Babe Ruth spent most of his major league career as a member of which of these baseball teams?
  - A. Baltimore Orioles
  - B. New York Yankees
  - C. Boston Red Sox
  - D. Chicago Cubs
2. Which of these statements is not true?
  - A. Ruth spent much of his childhood in an orphanage.
  - B. Ruth hit 714 major league home runs.
  - C. Ruth was nicknamed Babe Ruth after a popular candy bar.
  - D. During his youth, Ruth played many different positions.
3. Which of the following events happened first?
  - A. Ruth hit 60 home runs in a single season.
  - B. Ruth was traded to the New York Yankees.
  - C. Ruth signed a contract with the Baltimore Orioles.
  - D. Ruth pitched for the Boston Red Sox.
4. Which of the following best defines the word *dynamic*?
  - A. helpful
  - B. powerful
  - C. motivated
  - D. friendly
5. Why do you think fans were so devoted to Babe Ruth?

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# Analyzing Poetry

## Emily Dickinson

Although Emily Dickinson spent most of her life in seclusion, her poetry made her one of the most famous American poets of all time. Before she died at the age of 55, Dickinson was a prolific poet. She wrote almost 1,800 poems. Only seven of these poems were published during her lifetime. When Dickinson's poems were published *posthumously* in a series of collections, her popularity as a poet began to grow. Initially, publishers corrected Dickinson's unusual punctuation and capitalization. Later, editors and scholars stopped changing Dickinson's poetry. Over time, her unusual use of dashes and capitalization has become a hallmark of her writing.



### 219

- 1 She sweeps with many-colored Brooms –
- 2 And leaves the Shreds behind –
- 3 Oh Housewife in the Evening West –
- 4 Come back, and dust the Pond!
- 5 You dropped a Purple Ravelling in –
- 6 You dropped an Amber thread –
- 7 And now you've littered all the East
- 8 With Duds of Emerald!
- 9 And still, she plies her spotted Brooms,
- 10 And still the Aprons fly,
- 11 Till Brooms fade softly into stars –
- 12 And then I come away –

# Reading Comprehension

1. In poem “219,” Dickinson compares a woman cleaning house to
  - A. the sunset.
  - B. a lake.
  - C. some stars.
  - D. feathers.

2. Who is the “she” in the poem? What clues does Dickinson provide to help you figure this out?

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3. Dickinson is famous for her unusual use of dashes and capitalization. Why do you think she did this?

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4. Which of the following best defines the word *posthumously*?

- A. published by a big group of people
- B. published in a big book of poetry
- C. made public after a person has died
- D. stolen and then published

5. Find another poem by Emily Dickinson on the Internet or at your school or local library. On a separate sheet of paper, compare the two poems. How are the two poems similar? Do they share common themes, imagery, or stylistic elements (such as unusual capitalization)?

# Answer Key

## Page 5, Jesse's Gold

1. A.; 2. C.; 3. A.; 4. C.; 5. Answers will vary. To set records and win gold medals at the Olympics was a huge accomplishment that is only dreamed about by most people.

## Page 7, The Rescue of JFK

1. D.; 2. C.; 3. 2, 1, 3, 5, 4; 4. A.; 5. Answers will vary. The coast watchers and scouts were dedicated to the Allied cause and wanted to help the crew in any way possible.

## Page 9, The Great Bambino

1. B.; 2. C.; 3. C.; 4. B.; 5. Answers will vary.

## Page 11, Analyzing Poetry

1. A.; 2. "She" is the setting sun. Some possible clues include: Dickinson uses the phrase "the Evening West" and the sun sets in the west. She refers to the stars that are becoming visible in the sky, and the colors Dickinson describes are colors found in sunsets.; 3. Answers will vary.; 4. C.; 5. Answers will vary.

## Page 13, Billie Jean King

1. 1968; August, 1973; September 20, 1973; 1974; 1984; 2. B.; 3. King proved that female athletes should not be underestimated and that they can thrive in pressure-filled situations.; 4. D.; 5. Answers will vary.

## Page 15, Alquerque

1. Answers will vary.; 2. D.; 3. A player's piece must be sitting beside an opponent's piece, and the space beyond the opponent's piece must be empty.; 4. T, F—The game is over when a player has captured all of his opponent's pieces or when no more captures can be made by either player., F—players may choose whether to move again after capturing an opponent's piece., F—Alquerque is similar to checkers., T

## Page 17, Sue Hendrickson

1. The *T. rex* skeleton Hendrickson found is the largest, most complete, and best preserved skeleton to date.; 2. B.; 3. A paleontologist studies fossilized plants and animals. An archaeologist studies human history by looking at remains and artifacts.; 4. 1, 3, 4, 5, 2

## Page 19, Man with a Dream

1. D.; 2. C.; 3. C.; 4. A.; 5. Answers will vary.

## Page 21, Two Years in Hiding

1. C.; 2. B.; 3. A.; 4. A.; 5. Answers will vary.

## Page 23, The Berlin Wall

1. B.; 2. B.; 3. C.; 4. C.; 5. Answers will vary. Accept any reasonable answer. From history, the Great Wall of China is a good example.