

Hi-Lo Passages to Build Comprehension

Grades 7–8

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A Note for Teachers

Reading is the key to learning, and today's students read materials from an ever-increasing number of sources. They must understand what they read in traditional forms of fiction and nonfiction, such as stories and textbooks. They must also comprehend newer forms of text, such as Web sites and e-mail on the Internet. Many students can benefit from more practice in reading, but finding good examples of hi-lo texts for instruction at the appropriate grade level can be challenging.

How to Use This Book

The main purpose of this book is to provide high-interest passages for students to read. All the passages in this book are intended to be motivating and interesting to seventh- and eighth-grade students, but they are written for readers one to two grade levels behind. You can find the readability score for each passage in the table of contents. (Passages were scored using the Dale-Chall scoring criteria and range in level of difficulty from 5.10 to 7.00.) These passages can be used for practice and instruction in reading and to help prepare students for taking tests. Most important, they can help students enjoy what they read.

This book provides 25 grade-appropriate passages in a wide variety of genres, including informational articles, letters, interviews, e-mail correspondence, and how-to guides. The passages target comprehension skills, such as making inferences or comparing and contrasting. Each passage has three or five comprehension questions based on skills. The questions are intended mainly to help students think about what they have read. (If you want to check students' responses, you may refer to the Answer Key at the back of the book.)

These questions will also help you assess students' comprehension of the material and allow students to practice answering test questions. There are multiple-choice and short-answer questions. Some of the passages include writing prompts to elicit longer responses.

Extending Activities

For some of these passages, you may want to have students go beyond answering the questions that are provided. For example, for any given passage you could have students write a summary of the selection in their own words or rewrite the passage from a different point of view. For some pairs of texts, you might have students compare and contrast the two selections. For other passages, you might want to create writing prompts and have students write full-length essays about what they have learned. Students will benefit from reading and analyzing these passages, discussing them in class or in small groups, and writing about them in a variety of ways.

Passage 1 Cause and Effect

Frog Fest

Gwen opened the door to the biology lab. Biology was a subject she liked. They did cool things in this class, and she liked learning about how life worked.

As she walked toward her seat, Gwen saw her friend Cody sitting with Justin. "I can't wait to cut into that frog!" Justin was saying. "It is going to be so cool!"

Gwen noticed that Cody looked a bit green. "Yeah," he mumbled. "It'll be great."

Gwen shot Cody a look. She knew that Cody hated the sight of blood. Also, he loved animals of all kinds. Cody returned her look with a sick smile and stared down at his desk.

It was frog day. Actually, Gwen wasn't too excited either. Why did they have to kill the frogs? The worms hadn't bothered her much, but she liked frogs.

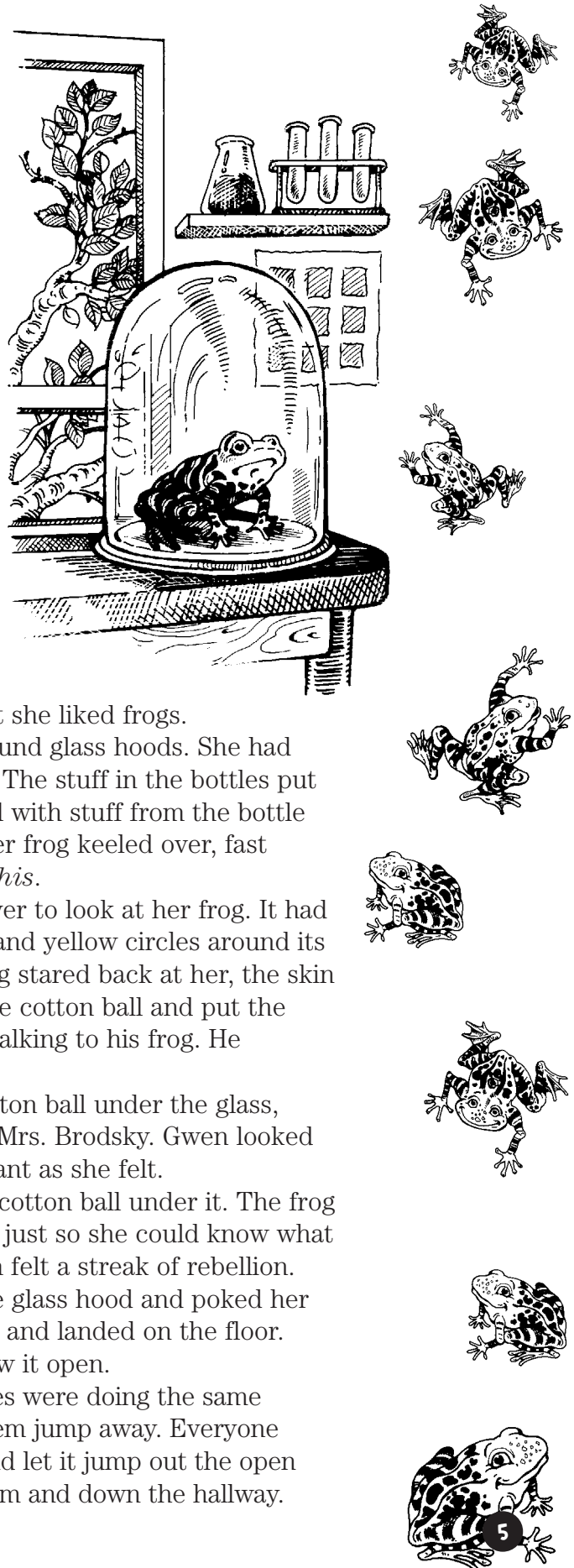
Mrs. Brodsky had lined up the frogs under round glass hoods. She had placed bottles next to each student's lab station. The stuff in the bottles put the frogs to sleep. Mrs. Brodsky wet a cotton ball with stuff from the bottle and stuck it under the glass hood. Pretty soon her frog keeled over, fast asleep. *Ugh*, thought Gwen. *I don't want to do this.*

Gwen walked to her lab station and leaned over to look at her frog. It had dark green and brown stripes, thin yellow lines, and yellow circles around its eyes. She put her nose next to the glass. The frog stared back at her, the skin of its throat moving in and out. She picked up the cotton ball and put the liquid on it. Down the row she could hear Cody talking to his frog. He sounded totally miserable.

"Come on, everyone. If you don't put that cotton ball under the glass, we'll never get to cutting these fellows up," said Mrs. Brodsky. Gwen looked at her classmates. Most of them looked as reluctant as she felt.

Gwen sighed and tilted the hood to stick the cotton ball under it. The frog stared at her, unblinking. Soon it would be dead, just so she could know what its liver and its heart looked like. Suddenly Gwen felt a streak of rebellion. "No!" she said aloud, "I won't!" She picked up the glass hood and poked her frog. "Be free!" she shouted. Her frog took a leap and landed on the floor. Gwen raced toward the classroom door and threw it open.

All of a sudden she noticed that her classmates were doing the same thing. Everyone was poking the frogs to make them jump away. Everyone was shouting. Gwen saw Cody pick up his frog and let it jump out the open window. Frogs were hopping all over the classroom and down the hallway. It was total chaos.





“Gwendolyn Boyd!” Mrs. Brodsky roared over the noise. Her face was a strange shade of purple. “What in the world are you thinking?”

Gwen walked over to Mrs. Brodsky. “I’m sorry, Mrs. Brodsky,” Gwen answered. “I just couldn’t do it. I didn’t expect everyone else to let theirs go, too.”



Mrs. Brodsky took a deep breath as her face began to turn back to its normal color. “All right,” she said more calmly. “You will receive a zero for today.”

Gwen nodded. That was fair. She had ruined the class.

“And,” Mrs. Brodsky said, “you will spend your free time looking for those frogs. They are probably in every corner of the school by now. I do not want them jumping out of a corner in the middle of Mr. Cree’s English class. He screams at the sight of frogs. When you have found 30 frogs, minus the one Cody let out the window, you may take them to the park and let them go. I think we have had more than enough of frogs in this class for the year!”

“Thank you, Mrs. Brodsky,” Gwen said. Cody stood there smiling broadly. “I’ll help!” he said, “and I bet some other kids will too.”

“Good, I’ll need the help,” said Gwen as she walked down the hall, headed for English with Mr. Cree. She wondered how she would keep from giggling through the whole class as she waited to see a frog jump out right at his feet. School should be this exciting every day!



1. In the fourth paragraph, why did Cody look at Gwen?

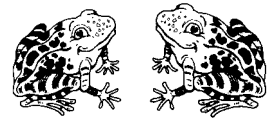
- (A) She called his name.
- (B) She tapped him on the shoulder.
- (C) She shot him a look.
- (D) He hated the sight of blood.



2. Why did Mrs. Brodsky’s frog keel over, fast asleep?

3. What caused the frogs to jump away?

- (A) poking them
- (B) noise
- (C) wet cotton balls
- (D) saying, “Be free!”



4. Why did Gwen receive a zero?

5. What is one thing that causes Mr. Cree to scream?



Passage 2 Author's Purpose and Point of View

On Being Yourself

Everyone likes to feel that he or she is special. Unfortunately, many of us grow up believing that we're not special at all. We wish that we could be better at sports or more attractive. We wish we had nicer clothes or more money. Like the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, or the Cowardly Lion from *The Wizard of Oz*, we believe we're not good enough just as we are. In the movie, the Scarecrow wishes that he had a brain. The Tin Man wishes he had a heart, and the Lion wants courage. In the end, each of them realizes that he already has what he needs.

Most parents want us to be the best we can be. They sometimes try to encourage us to do better by comparing us to others. They mean well, but the message we often get is that we're not good enough. We begin to believe that the only way we can be special is by being better than someone else, but

we are often disappointed. There will always be someone out there who is better than we are at something. There are plenty of people around who may not be as smart as we are but who are better at sports. Or they may not be as good-looking, but they have more money. It is impossible for us to be better than everyone else all the time.

Like the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion, we all want what we believe will make us better people. What we don't realize is that often we already have inside us the very things that we seek. Parents sometimes forget to tell us that we *are* special, that we are good enough just as we are. Maybe no one told them when *they* were growing up, or maybe they just forgot. Either way, it's up to us to remind them from time to time that each of us, in our own way, is special. What we are is enough.

1. This essay was most likely written by a —

- (A) young person. (C) teacher.
(B) parent. (D) coach.

2. The author of this essay believes that —

- (A) not everyone can be special.
(B) smart people are more special than others.
(C) the richer you are, the better you are.
(D) we are all good enough just the way we are.

3. Why does the author discuss characters from *The Wizard of Oz* in this essay? What point is the author trying to make?

Passage 3 Sequence

SNIP, SNIP

Angela hurried in the front door and headed for the stairs, clutching a plastic bag in her hand.

"Let's see what you bought at the mall," Mom called from the kitchen.

"No, I'd rather not show you yet," Angela replied. "Wait till I try them on."

"Well, now I know it's something to wear," her mother teased. "I can't wait to see what you picked out, and Grandma will want to know how you spent your birthday money too."

Angela closed her bedroom door, dropped the bag on her bed, and kicked off her sneakers. She pulled on the new pair of jeans. Then she looked in the mirror. *They fit perfectly, she thought. Just a teeny bit too long, but I know how to fix that.*

Quietly, Angela walked down the hall to Mom's bedroom and found a pair of sharp scissors next to the sewing machine. Angela picked them up carefully and carried them back to her room. Then, she cut into the fabric at the bottom of her jeans. Slowly she began to trim an inch of cloth from the bottom edge of the left leg. When the front was done, she twisted her leg, trying to reach the back. I guess I'll have to take them off, she thought.

With the jeans in her lap, Angela finished trimming an inch from the bottom of the left leg. Then she put the pants on again and looked in the mirror. She had done a good job. The cut leg looked nice and even, but it was still a bit too long.

I'll do the second leg now and make it a little shorter, Angela thought. Then I'll redo the first leg. She carefully cut two inches from the bottom of the right leg. But when she tried the jeans on, they still looked long. By this time, Angela was becoming impatient. She took off the jeans, grabbed the scissors, and cut off two more inches from the right leg. Now the right leg was shorter by four inches!



“Oh, no!” cried Angela when she looked at herself in the mirror and saw that the right leg was way too short. She could never wear the jeans now! What would she tell Grandma?

“My, you are slow! Aren’t you changed yet?” called her mother from downstairs.

Angela quickly took off the new jeans. She got a ruler and, with white chalk, drew two lines on the jeans. Here goes nothing, she thought, and cut along the lines. Then Angela put the new jeans on once more and ran down the stairs . . . wearing shorts!

1. What did Angela do first in this story?

- Ⓐ She tried on her new jeans.
- Ⓑ She hurried in the front door.
- Ⓒ She spoke to her mother.
- Ⓓ She closed her bedroom door.

2. What did Angela do right after she closed the door and kicked off her sneakers?

- Ⓐ She pulled on her new jeans.
- Ⓑ She headed for the stairs.
- Ⓒ She cut the left leg.
- Ⓓ She spent her birthday money.

3. Before Angela cut the first piece from her jeans, she _____.

- Ⓐ showed the jeans to Mom
- Ⓑ put them on for the second time
- Ⓒ carried scissors to her room
- Ⓓ drew a line with chalk

4. When did Angela use a ruler?

- Ⓐ before she did any cutting at all
- Ⓑ after she went downstairs
- Ⓒ before looking in the mirror
- Ⓓ after she cut the jeans too short

5. Tell what Angela did to her jeans by writing the steps she took in the correct order.

Passage 4 Making Inferences and Predictions

On Top of the World



July 15

Dear Mom,

We climbed up to Baxter Peak, at the top of Mount Katahdin. That's the highest peak in Maine. Joni, my counselor snapped a photo of each of us as we reached the summit. She took a group shot, too. I'll show you the photos when I get home.

The night before our climb, Joni told us about the different trails on Katahdin. We talked about them and then took a vote on our route. Most of us wanted to go up the Knife Edge trail, which is really difficult. In some places the trail is only a few feet wide and the ground slopes down steeply on both sides. The drop is about 2,000 feet—and this goes on for a mile!

I voted for the Knife Edge because it's the most famous trail on the mountain. Still, when the votes were counted, I was pretty nervous. I really wondered if I could manage it.

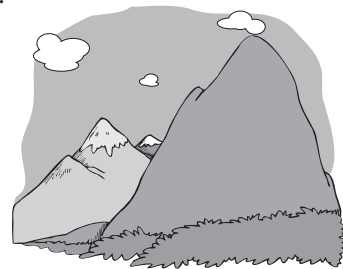
Well, the photos are living proof that I did! It was an amazing experience. We got up at 5:00 in the morning. We knew it would be a long day. I think everyone was a bit nervous—even Lee. The counselors had done this dozens of times before. They were excited, but not nervous. They told us over and over that we could do it, no sweat. Joni took me aside and said, "You are well prepared for this climb. You can do it, and you will love it!" She was right. I did love it, and I'll never forget what a great feeling it was to reach the top.

To reach the Knife Edge, we started out on the Chimney Pond Trail, which was easy at first. It got more rugged as we climbed, and before long we were clambering up and over huge boulders. On the Knife Edge, we inched our way along carefully. We had to go single file. That's how narrow the trail was. I was shaking, but I made it! All 12 of us made it. I think these guys are going to be my best friends for life after what we went through together!

It was a clear day, and the view from the top was spectacular. We stopped, rested, ate, and gazed at the view for about an hour. Then Joni reminded us that it would take us another six hours to get back down.

I'll have lots more to tell when I see you. Don't worry, Mom. I am taking good care of myself.

Love,
Cary



1. Where do you think Cary was when she wrote this letter?

- Ⓐ at her best friend's house
- Ⓑ at school
- Ⓒ at summer camp
- Ⓓ at Joni's house

2. You can guess that Cary's friend Lee usually is ____.

- Ⓐ shy
- Ⓑ confident
- Ⓒ nervous
- Ⓓ smart

3. Why do you think the counselors kept telling the group that they could do it?

- Ⓐ because the group didn't listen the first time
- Ⓑ because the counselors forgot that they'd already told them
- Ⓒ so the group wouldn't be scared
- Ⓓ to make sure everyone could hear them

4. Why do you think Cary was shaking on the Knife Edge?

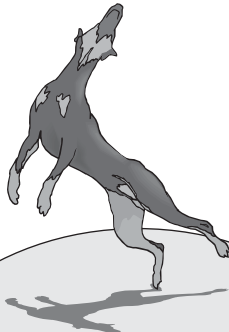
5. When Cary returns home, what will she probably do first?



Passage 5 Comparing and Contrasting

The Dog for You

Are you thinking about getting a dog? Find the dog that's right for you!



Doberman Pinscher

Height: 24–28"

Weight: 66–88 lbs.

short, thick hair; long legs;
muscular body; smart; aggressive;
good watchdog; not good
with small children or
in apartments

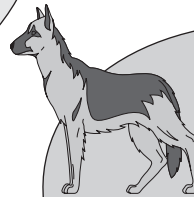


Dachshund

Height: 5–9"

Weight: 9–32 lbs.

small, muscular dog
with short legs and short
hair; cheerful; good
with children;
good watchdog;
good for apartments



German Shepherd

Height: 22–26"

Weight: 60–95 lbs.

strong; sheds fur often; owners
must vacuum often; smart; trains
easily; obeys; good with children;
good watchdog; not for
small apartments

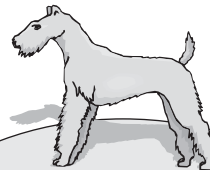


Old English Sheepdog

Height: 20–24"

Weight: about 66 lbs.

strong body; long, thick coat
must be brushed often to avoid
snarls; good with children; good
at herding; not for
small apartments



Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier

Height: 17–20"

Weight: 30–45 lbs.

strong, muscular dog; fine in bad
weather; long, thick, wavy coat;
good hunting and herding dog;
good in apartments; not for
small children

Welsh Terrier

Height: 14–15.5"

Weight: 20–21 lbs.



coat must be brushed often;
good for apartments;
good watchdog



1. Which breed is the tallest?

- Ⓐ German shepherd
- Ⓑ Old English sheepdog
- Ⓒ Welsh terrier
- Ⓓ Doberman pinscher



2. Name three breeds that are good for apartments.



3. Name four breeds that make good watchdogs.

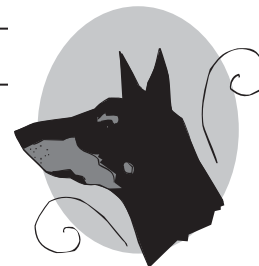


4. If you want a dog with short hair that is cheerful, which breed would probably be best?

- Ⓐ German shepherd
- Ⓑ Old English sheepdog
- Ⓒ Welsh terrier
- Ⓓ Dachshund



5. Name three breeds that would be good for a family with children.



Writing Prompt: On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph telling which breed you think you'd like most and which you'd like least. Use details to explain your choices.



Passage 6 Making Inferences and Predictions

The Snowball

Bik woke up with a feeling of excitement. It was the first day of winter and that meant snow. Bik watched the first large flakes fall on the green grass.

Bik dashed out in his bare feet and pajamas. He grabbed a handful of snow and tried to form it into a ball, but it kept falling apart. The government just couldn't get the formula right. He'd seen kids making snowballs in old movies.

Mr. King came strolling down the street.

"Oh, brother," thought Bik, "here come stories of the good old days."

"Before global warming, we used to have real snow!" exclaimed Mr. King.

"Did you always have it precisely on the first day of winter?" asked Bik.

"No," admitted Mr. King, "but snow was cold, and we had to dress warmly."

"Was it fun to throw snowballs?" asked Bik.

Mr. King nodded. "I'll be right back," he said. Several minutes later he returned with something in his mittened hand. The mitten was wet and dark.

"What's that?" asked Bik.

"It's an authentic American snowball," said Mr. King. "It's probably the last in America. It's been in my freezer for over 20 years, but I want you to have it."

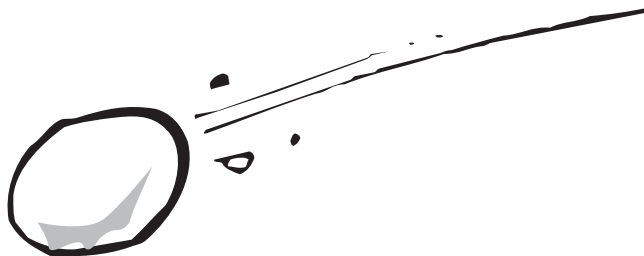
"Thanks!" said Bik, taking the snowball. "Can I do whatever I want with it?"

Mr. King grinned. "I presume you know what snowballs are for," he said.

Bik eyed the side of the house.

1. When does this story take place?

- (A) thousands of years ago
- (B) hundreds of years ago
- (C) today
- (D) in the future

**2. What is strange about the weather in this story?**
_____**3. What will Bik probably do next?**

- (A) throw the snowball at the house
- (B) eat the snowball
- (C) throw the snowball at Mr. King
- (D) put it in his freezer