Summarizing Text Practice Exercises

by LearningExpress Editors

Read the following study guide for a concept review:

Summarizing Text Study Guide

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Practice 1: The Gift of the Magi

Based on a story by O. Henry

Read the selection; then answer the questions that follow.

(1) One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all she had. And the next day would be Christmas. Della flopped down on the shabby old couch and cried. She wanted so much to get something special for her husband Jim, but she only had $1.87. Della stood and looked at herself in the mirror. Her eyes were red. She didn't want Jim to know she'd been crying. She let her hair fall to its full length, almost to her knees, and began to brush it. Jim loved her soft, long hair. The only thing he liked more was the gold watch that had belonged to his father and grandfather.

(2) Suddenly Della had an idea. She piled her hair on top of her head, put on her old brown jacket and hat, and fluttered out the door and down the steps to the street. She stopped at a door that read: Madame Sofron, Hair Goods. Della ran in and asked, "Will you buy my hair?"

(3) "Take off your hat and let me see," said Madame Sofron. She looked at Della's shiny hair and said, "I can give you 20 dollars."

(4) For two hours, Della went from store to store, looking for a special gift for Jim. At last, she found it . . . a simple gold watch chain. It would replace the old leather strap he now used on his beloved watch!

(5) When Della got home, she fixed her head in short close-lying curls. She looked in the mirror, satisfied with the new look. She had dinner ready by 7 o'clock, but Jim had not come home. Della began to worry; he was never late. At last she heard him come up the steps. The door opened and in walked Jim. "You've cut off your hair!" he said sadly when he saw Della.

(6) "I sold it," said Della. "But I'm still me, aren't I?"

(7) "Of course," Jim said softly as he took a package from his coat pocket. "But if you'll unwrap this package you'll see why I am sad."
Della's fingers tore at the string and paper. Inside she found a set of combs she'd once admired in a shop window. They were beautiful, with jeweled rims that would have looked magnificent in her handsome, long hair.

"Oh, Jim, how lovely," she cried. "I shall wear them when my hair grows. It grows fast. But see," she added happily, "I have a gift for you!"

Della held out the watch chain in her open palm. "I hunted all over town to find it. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it!"

Instead, Jim sat on the couch and began to laugh. "Oh, Della," he said, "I sold my watch to get the money to buy your combs!"

Della sat beside him and together they laughed. They were happy, yet sad, to know that each had given up a prized possession for the love of the other. It was a special Christmas that year, a day filled with love.

1. A summary is a retelling of a story that
   a. is always shorter than the original text.
   b. must be at least two paragraphs long.
   c. has no ending.
   d. gives new information that was not in the story

2. Which is the best one-sentence summary for paragraph 1?
   a. Della is sad because Jim sold his watch.
   b. Della is sad because she doesn't have much money to buy a gift for Jim.
   c. Della is sad because her mother can't come to visit.
   d. Della is sad because she has no new coat to wear.

3. Which would NOT be important to include in a summary of the story?
   a. Della has beautiful long hair
   b. Jim has a gold watch that belonged to his father and grandfather.
   c. Della wanted something special for Jim.
   d. Della and Jim lived in an apartment.

4. Which is the main idea of the story?
   a. Della changes her hairstyle.
   b. Jim and Della plan a special Christmas dinner.
   c. Jim and Della sacrifice to get each other special gifts.
   d. Della only has old clothing to wear.

5. Write a summary of the story. Try to summarize in just a few sentences.

Practice 2: Water, Water, Everywhere!
(1) Is a flood ever good news? How can it be? When river water overflows and floods the land, people can lose their homes . . . even their lives! So to people who live in flood-prone areas, a flood is always bad news. But in ancient Egypt, things were different. The people looked forward to a yearly flood and saw it as good news!

(2) Many Egyptians lived and farmed by the Nile River, which flooded every summer. They eagerly anticipated the event because they knew that when the water receded, the land would be better for crops. That's because floodwaters carry along washed-away soil and sediment, then drop it somewhere else. There, the nutrients in the sediment sink into and nourish the land. Then the farmland is richer and ready for crops.

(3) The Egyptians weren't sure why the flood came each year. Many believed it was a gift from the spirits, who sent great clouds of rain to fall near the source of the Nile. But actually, that wasn't the case. The annual flood was caused by natural events that began high in the mountains of Ethiopia.

(4) In June, strong winds from the South Atlantic Ocean blow over the rainforests of Africa. When the winds reach Ethiopia's mountains, some of which are 13,000 feet (4,000 m) high, giant rain clouds drop their contents in huge thunderstorms. The rain continues and mountain streams fill to the brim. Then the streams join together to form a sizeable river. It speeds along to meet the Nile, carrying lots of soil and sediment with it. By July, the rushing water reaches Egypt, where it produces a flood in the Nile.

(5) The yearly flooding of the Nile wasn't all good news. Sometimes buildings and fences were swept away and property lines disappeared. But landowners just marked off their territories and put up new fences for another year.

(6) Today, floodwaters from Ethiopia are stopped soon after they reach Egypt. A large dam on the river holds back the rushing, rising water and forms a large lake. This is good news. Now buildings and fences aren't swept away. And today farmers can plant two crops a year instead of just one.

(7) But the dam is bad news, too. The waters of the yearly flood always kept the fields fertile. Today, farmers use fertilizers that get into the mud and water of the Nile. Fish that once thrived in the Nile are gone. And a serious disease is spread by snails that live in the slow-moving waters of the great river.

(8) So back to our original question: Is a flood ever good news? As you can see, it can be, if the good benefits outweigh the bad.

6. Which is the best one-sentence summary for paragraph 2?
   a. A yearly flood in Egypt did a lot of damage.
   b. A yearly flood in Egypt brought sediment that helped the land.
   c. A yearly flood brought more people to Ethiopia.
   d. A yearly flood in Egypt was caused by rain over the Pacific Ocean.

7. Which is the best summary for paragraph 4?
   a. Winds from the Atlantic drop rain on Egypt at the source of the Nile. The rain floods large cities near the river.
   b. Rain over the Atlantic comes on shore in Egypt and floods the Nile.
   c. Rain in France forms a river that travels to Egypt and dumps into the Nile. Then the Nile floods Egyptian farmland beside the river.
Winds from the Atlantic drop rain on Ethiopia and rain-filled streams form a river. It dumps into the Nile, which floods Egyptian farmland beside the river.

8. Which would be an important detail to include in a summary of the article?
   a. The Nile River is in Egypt.
   b. People sail boats on the Nile.
   c. The capital of Ethiopia is Addis-Ababa.
   d. The Mississippi River also floods sometimes.

9. Write a summary of the whole article. Try to summarize in just two or three sentences.

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Practice 3: Foods Around the World

Read the selection, and then answer the questions that follow.

1) Why do people in different places eat different foods? One reason is that humans store energy as starch or fat. People eat local plants that provide starch and fat, but not all plants grow everywhere!

2) Europe and the Middle East For thousands of years, people have used wheat, a wild grass, as their main starch. In the Mediterranean, people use olive oil to provide fat. In the north, few plants produce oils, so people use animal fat.

3) Asia Rice, a wild grass, is the main starch of Southeast Asia. In northern Asia, it's too cold to grow rice, so people use wheat. The Chinese cook with soybean or peanut oils. In India, people use butter or sesame seed oil.

4) The Americas Potatoes are the main starch in Peru and other places. Corn, or maize, was once the main starch in North America. It still is in Mexico.

5) The Tropics Wheat, rice, corn, and potatoes are hard to grow in the tropics. So many people use a starchy tuber called a yucca, manioc, or cassava. Palm and coconut oil are also popular forms of fat in tropical regions.

10. Which is the best one-sentence summary of the section about Europe?
    a. Most people eat yucca and get fats from corn oil.
    b. Most people use rice to make bread and get fats from olives.
    c. Most people use wheat to make bread and get fats from olive oil.
    d. Most people use corn to make bread and get fats from yucca oil.

11. Which is the best summary of the whole article?
    a. Local plants supply starch and fat for humans. So people in different regions eat different foods, depending on what grows in their area.
    b. Corn grows only in some places. People who can't get corn eat olives to get