

Pilsen is an old community in Chicago with a long history. This part of Chicago started small and got bigger, as most neighborhoods in the city did. Its cultural history is about moving, changing, and connecting. Many people have moved there over the decades. This movement started when immigrants chose to settle in this part of the city when Chicago was growing rapidly. An immigrant is a person who moves from one country to another. Pilsen's first people spoke German. They had moved from Germany. If you go to Pilsen today you will see some of the places they built. But when they first moved there, it had just a few homes. Then immigrants continued to migrate there; newcomers moved to Pilsen so they could be near people who came from the same country.

Many immigrants found homes and jobs in Pilsen, and it was a time of challenge and change for them. They had to figure out how to live in the new country. They had to find a place to live, and they needed employment for income. They worked on railroads and on docks along the Chicago River, loading and unloading lumber, and in factories, too. They had a lot to do to make a home in their new country, and it was not easy to accomplish the changes. Cooperation and collaboration were important for the progress of each family and the whole community.

The newcomers built churches, created gardens, opened stores, and set up newspapers. The newspapers were published in their own language, and they were a way to educate the newcomers about their own community and the city through articles and editorials. Many entrepreneurs opened businesses, and soon the community was bustling. Some social workers supported this progress, they guided the immigrants who kept coming to the community. They set up settlement houses, where people could learn English and get help finding work and housing. But then there was movement out of the community, it was a local migration to suburbs and other parts of the city. People were looking for more opportunities. As the population declined, businesses closed.

Then there was another movement into Pilsen, which you'll see a symbol of if you go to 1831 South Racine today. There you will find Casa Aztlán, which is a Mexican-American center. About 50 years ago, many Mexican-Americans moved to Pilsen from another part of Chicago—so the community was renewed. They liked the buildings, they wanted to create a Mexican-American community. They joined the churches of Pilsen. To avoid conflict, leaders of the Mexican Americans and European Americans talked about ways to collaborate to continue Pilsen's progress. One way the two groups worked together was to create murals, which are enormous paintings on walls. Pilsen has many beautiful murals created during that period. When you see those murals you will notice that there are symbols of Germany and other European countries as well as representations of Mexican history. They are inter-cultural art that represents the connections that were made through that collaboration.

Pilsen used to be called the "Heart of Chicago" when people first settled there, then there was an exodus. But through the second migration, it became the "Heart of Chicago" again, this time for families from Mexico. People opened businesses, and Mexican American community groups supported the community's families. Now as in the past there still are organizations that help people who move to this part of Chicago.

A heritage is a legacy; it comes from the past and influences the present. The Mexican Americans have a rich heritage from their own country and from their experience in Pilsen. Each August, the community has a special day. It is the Fiesta Del Sol, a gathering that includes the Mexican Americans and people from all over the metropolitan area. People who used to live in Pilsen return come and see the changes. They see their own heritage, as well, in the murals.

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question.

1. What is the main idea of the first paragraph?

- a. Many people moved to Pilsen.
- b. Pilsen is a community of immigrants.
- c. Pilsen is old.
- d. Pilsen is in Chicago.

2. What is the main idea of the second paragraph?

- a. Immigrants liked Pilsen
- b. Immigrants built new lives in Pilsen.
- c. Immigrants moved out of Pilsen.
- d. Immigrants found jobs in Pilsen.

3. What is the main idea of the whole passage?

- a. Pilsen has a great history.
- b. Many people live in Pilsen.
- c. Immigrants have moved to Chicago.
- d. Mexican Americans live in Pilsen today.

4. What is another good title for the passage?

- a. Living in Chicago: Then and Now
- b. Moving to Pilsen
- c. Work and Homes in Chicago
- d. A Community of Murals

5. *Write your own answer to this question.*

How do you figure out the main idea of a nonfiction passage?

TEACHER NOTES: Develop Students' Skills: Exercise Thinking

These questions have not been validated, so decisions about student's achievement should not be made based on their responses. They are intended to exercise skills. Recommended activities include: students work in pairs to choose the best response; give students the questions without the responses so they generate their own answers; students make up additional questions; students make up questions like these for another passage.

Answers: *You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.*

Item	1	2	3	4
Answer	b	b	a	a

Question 5 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.

5. Answers should include: look at the title; look at the kind of information.

Skill: Infer and Support the Main Idea

John's Bright Idea

7th Grade Fiction

Source: Public Domain, adapted by Center for Urban Education, may be used with citation.

This is an old story. It was written 100 years ago. So you will find it has a different style from stories people read and write today. For example, you'll read that the children sell popcorn for 5 cents a bag and are thrilled. Today, that's not enough money to buy much.

Mrs. Meredith was a most kind and thoughtful woman. She spent a great deal of time visiting the poor. She knew they had problems. She wanted to help them. She brought food. She brought medicine, too.

The family lived in a small community with some people who were poor and others who were rich. In the town, some people worked but others had no jobs, and families needed money to pay their bills. Some families were poor because the parents had lost jobs, and the economy was in decline. People tried to help each other meet these challenges.

One morning she told her children about a family she had visited the day before. There was a man sick in bed, his wife, who took care of him and could not go out to work, and their little boy. The little boy--his name was Bernard--had interested her very much.

"I wish you could see him," she said to her own children, John, Harry, and Clara, "he is such a help to his mother. He wants very much to earn some money, but I don't see what he can do."

After their mother had left the room, the children sat thinking about Bernard. "I wish we could help him to earn money," said Clara. "His family is suffering so much."

"So do I," said Harry. "We really should do something to assist them."

For some moments, John said nothing, but, suddenly, he sprang to his feet and cried, "I have a great idea! I have a solution that we can all help accomplish."

The other children also jumped up all attention. When John had an idea, it was sure to be a good one. "I tell you what we can do," said John. "You know that big box of corn Uncle John sent us for popping? Well, we can pop it, and put it into paper bags, and Bernard can take it around to the houses and sell it."

When Mrs. Meredith heard of John's idea, she, too, thought it a good one. Very soon, the children were busy popping the corn, while their mother went out to buy the paper bags. When she came back, she brought Bernard with her.

In a short time, he started out on his new business, and, much sooner than could be expected, returned with an empty basket. Tucked into one of his mittens were ten nickels. He had never earned so much money before in his life. When he found that it was all to be his, he was so delighted he could hardly speak, but his bright smiling face spoke for him. After he had run home to take the money to his mother, John said, "We have corn enough left to send Bernard out ever so many times. May we do it again?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Meredith, "you may send him every Saturday morning, if you will pop the corn for him yourselves. John, will you agree to take charge of the work?"

"Indeed I will," replied John, and he kept his word. For many weeks, every Saturday morning, no matter what opportunities there were to play, he saw that the corn was all popped, the paper bags filled, and arranged in the basket when Bernard arrived.

People began to watch for the "little pop-corn boy," and every week he had at least fifty cents to take home, and often significantly more, income that supported his family. All of this was because of the way John carried out his bright idea.

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question.

6. What is the main idea of the second paragraph?

- a. Mrs. Meredith was poor.
- b. Many people are poor.
- c. Mrs. Meredith helped poor people.
- d. Mrs. Meredith was worried.

7. What is the main idea of the third paragraph?

- a. They lived in a small town.
- b. People helped each other.
- c. Poor people lost jobs.
- d. Many people lived in their town.

8. What is the main idea of the whole passage?

- a. Helping someone to earn money is better than giving them money.
- b. Making popcorn and selling it is a good way to make money.
- c. People in a community help each other.
- d. The children figured out a way to sell popcorn.

9. What is a good title for the story?

- a. How Bernard Earned Monday
- b. How One Family Helped Another
- c. Small Town Life
- d. Helping the Poor

10. *Write your own answer to this question.*

How do you figure out the main idea of a story?

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Answers: *You can remove this answer key and then give it to students and ask them to figure out the basis for the correct response.*

Item	6	7	8	9
Answer	c	a	a	b

Question 10 is open-ended. Here is a suggested response.

10. Answers should include, you look at the title, you think about the events.