

Skill: Summarize Nonfiction and Fiction

What is your own big plan?

8th Grade Nonfiction

These are excerpts from the speech by President Barack Obama, Arlington, Virginia, September 8, 2009.

... at the end of the day, we can have the most dedicated teachers, the most supportive parents, and the best schools in the world – and none of it will matter unless all of you fulfill your responsibilities. Unless you show up to those schools; pay attention to those teachers; listen to your parents, grandparents and other adults; and put in the hard work it takes to succeed.

And that's what I want to focus on today: the responsibility each of you has for your education. I want to start with the responsibility you have to yourself. Every single one of you has something you're good at. Every single one of you has something to offer. And you have a responsibility to yourself to discover what that is. That's the opportunity an education can provide. Maybe you could be a good writer – maybe even good enough to write a book or articles in a newspaper – but you might not know it until you write a paper for your English class. Maybe you could be an innovator or an inventor – maybe even good enough to come up with the next iPhone or a new medicine or vaccine – but you might not know it until you do a project for your science class. Maybe you could be a mayor or a Senator or a Supreme Court Justice, but you might not know that until you join student government or the debate team.

And no matter what you want to do with your life – I guarantee that you'll need an education to do it. You want to be a doctor, or a teacher, or a police officer? You want to be a nurse or an architect, a lawyer or a member of our military? You're going to need a good education for every single one of those careers. You can't drop out of school and just drop into a good job. You've got to work for it and train for it and learn for it. ...

You'll need the knowledge and problem-solving skills you learn in science and math to cure diseases like cancer and AIDS, and to develop new energy technologies and protect our environment. You'll need the insights and critical thinking skills you gain in history and social studies to fight poverty and homelessness, crime and discrimination, and make our nation more fair and more free. You'll need the creativity and ingenuity you develop in all your classes to build new companies that will create new jobs and boost our economy.

We need every single one of you to develop your talents, skills and intellect so you can help solve our most difficult problems. If you don't do that – if you quit on school – you're not just quitting on yourself, you're quitting on your country. Now I know it's not always easy to do well in school. I know a lot of you have challenges in your lives right now that can make it hard to focus on your schoolwork.... Where you are right now doesn't have to determine where you'll end up. No one's written your destiny for you. Here in America, you write your own destiny. You make your own future.

So today, I want to ask you, what's your contribution going to be? What problems are you going to solve? What discoveries will you make? What will a president who comes here in twenty or fifty or one hundred years say about what all of you did for this country?

Your families, your teachers, and I are doing everything we can to make sure you have the education you need to answer these questions. I'm working hard to fix up your classrooms and get you the books, equipment and computers you need to learn. But you've got to do your part too. So I expect you to get serious this year. I expect you to put your best effort into everything you do. I expect great things from each of you. So don't let us down – don't let your family or your country or yourself down. Make us all proud. I know you can do it.

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question.

1. What kinds of information do you include in a summary?

- a. Facts you think are interesting.
- b. Information that helps explain what is important.
- c. Things you didn't know.
- d. Questions about things you want to learn.

2. What is an important idea in the first paragraph?

- a. Parents will help you.
- b. School is hard work.
- c. You are responsible for your actions.
- d. Schools are important.

3. What is an important fact in the last paragraph?

- a. The President is going to improve schools.
- b. The country is proud of the children.
- c. Families need computers.
- d. Barack Obama is President.

4. How do you figure out what is most important in a passage?

- a. You list all the facts.
- b. You find out by reading the first and last sentence.
- c. You ask yourself questions as you read.
- d. You answer the questions at the end.

5. *Write your own answer to this question. Write a short summary of the 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	c	a	c

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

5. Summaries should include the theme of the speech—student responsibility.

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My Summer

8th Grade Fiction

Center for Urban Education

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1 My maternal grandmother resides in Phoenix, Arizona. It has been roughly ten years since she relocated there. In fact, I was only 2 years old when she moved from Chicago. It was necessary for her to move to a warmer climate, because the winters in Chicago were far too cold for her to handle. She made an appointment with her doctor, who told my grandmother that she could not remain in such a cold climate. My grandmother was extremely disappointed to leave Chicago, especially because her friends and family lived there. However, soon enough she was able to make several new friends in Phoenix. So she was content.

2 My mother frequently visits her in wintertime, but unfortunately, I'm unable to go then since I have to be in school. This past summer, though, I went for a lengthy visit. I stayed for the summer. I had never been away from home more than a few days before.

3 I traveled by plane to Phoenix, alone, even though I had never flown on an airplane before. My mother cried at the airport, but I was all smiles. What a trip. I smiled all the way. Once we landed, the pilot informed us that it was 110 degrees outside. I thought there was absolutely no way I had heard him clearly. It had never been nearly that hot in Chicago.

4 I deplaned and immediately spotted my grandmother. We were both so thrilled that I had finally arrived. She gave me a big, long embrace before we went to retrieve my suitcase from the baggage claim. It took approximately 10 minutes to receive it, and I was getting increasingly worried that the airline had somehow lost my luggage. However, it eventually appeared at the top of the baggage carousel.

5 Afterwards, we stepped outside, and I was simply astonished. It felt exactly like walking into a heater. It was hotter than I had ever felt: 110 degrees.

6 We walked to the bus stop, and thankfully, the bus came instantly. I boarded the bus and was so relieved that it had come so quickly. Also, the bus was nice and cool since it was air-conditioned. It took us nearly 30 minutes to arrive on my grandmother's block. I didn't mind the long ride, because it was very interesting to view the city outside the window. I noticed that residents had brown grass, most likely because it had all dried out from the heat. They didn't have trees, but they did have really large cactus plants.

7 When we stepped off the bus, we had to walk an additional three blocks before making it to my grandmother's apartment. Once again, I felt extremely hot. I turned to my grandmother and asked her, "How can you possibly live in such a hot place?"

8 "Oh, you get accustomed to it," she told me. We adapt. We change the way we organize our day. You'll see that most people are not out during the sunniest parts of the day. It turned out she was right about that. Although it took a few weeks, I finally adapted to the heat. However, we stayed indoors when it was hottest, and only ventured out in the cooler mornings. In the evenings, it actually felt a little chilly.

9 When the summer came to an end, it was time for me to return back home. Yes, my second plane trip. I was sorry to leave my grandmother, and I promised I would return sooner than next summer. My cousin met me at the airport, and she retrieved my suitcase. We both climbed aboard the bus, where she inquired about my trip. I exclaimed, "It is always wonderful to spend time with grandma, but next time I think I'll go back in winter." When we got home, I wrote a letter to my grandmother.

Questions developed by Center for Urban Education for use by Chicago Public Schools 2010.

Directions: Choose the best answer for each question.

6. What is the best summary of the first paragraph?

- a. My grandmother lives in Phoenix.
- b. I miss my grandmother.
- c. My grandmother moved to Phoenix several years ago.
- d. My grandmother is part of my extended family.

7. Which characters would you include in a summary of the story?

- a. the grandmother, grandchild, and mother
- b. The grandmother, grandchild, pilot, and mother
- c. The grandmother and grandchild
- d. The grandmother, pilot, grandchild, and bus driver

8. What is the best summary of paragraph 8?

- a. People in Phoenix stay inside during the hot hours.
- b. It is cooler in the evening.
- c. The grandmother adjusted her schedule to the climate.
- d. It is always hot during the day.

9. What is the best summary of paragraph 9?

- a. She returned home and stayed in contact with her grandmother.
- b. She promised to return in winter.
- c. She took her second plane trip.
- d. It had been a long, hot summer.

10. *Write your own answer to this question. Write a summary of the 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	c	c	a

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

10. Summaries should include the difficulty of adjusting to the heat.