

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.

Summarize Nonfiction

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

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.

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.

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.

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