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Summarizing Literary Text



Introduction

THEME: >>> People Who Matter

A **summary** of a text is a brief account of the text’s key events and supporting details. It identifies the main characters and describes the major events. An **objective summary** does not include opinions about or reactions to a text. It paraphrases the events in a text without commentary or judgment about those events.

Read the passage.

Tyler removed his headphones, annoyed at yet another interruption by his younger sister, Callie. His favorite band had just released their new album and all he wanted to do was listen to it in peace. When he gave Callie a book to read, she finished it in five minutes. When he gave her a puzzle, she insisted he work on it with her. When he got her a snack, she made him sit in the kitchen with her while she ate it. Now she was jumping up and down on his bed trying to get his attention. Suddenly, he had an idea. He went to his desk and found his old headphones and plugged them into his music device. Then he put them around Callie’s ears. She squealed in utter delight as they shared the same music, and she settled down into Tyler’s lap. *Finally, I can relax,* Tyler thought.

Fill in the table below to summarize the passage.

Characters	Important Events	Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tyler • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tyler is able to quiet down his sister Callie by allowing her to listen to his music.

Read the first part of the story. Then answer the questions.

Trial by Fire

from *Emily of New Moon*

by *Lucy Maud Montgomery*

1 Aunt Elizabeth drove Emily to school the next morning. Aunt Laura had thought that, since there was only a month before vacation, it was not worth while for Emily to “start school.” But Aunt Elizabeth did not yet feel comfortable with a small niece skipping around New Moon, poking into everything insatiably, and was resolved that Emily must go to school to get her out of the way. Emily herself, always avid for new experiences, was quite keen to go, but for all that she was seething with rebellion as they drove along. Aunt Elizabeth had produced a terrible gingham apron and an equally terrible gingham sunbonnet from somewhere in the New Moon garret, and made Emily put them on. The apron was a long sack-like garment, high in the neck, with sleeves. Those sleeves were the crowning indignity. Emily had never seen any little girl wearing an apron with *sleeves*. She rebelled to the point of tears over wearing it, but Aunt Elizabeth was not going to have any nonsense....

2 Aunt Elizabeth was too cross to speak all the way to the schoolhouse. She introduced Emily to Miss Brownell, and drove away. School was already “in,” so Emily hung her sunbonnet on the porch nail and went to the desk Miss Brownell assigned her. She had already made up her mind that she did not like Miss Brownell and never would like her.

3 Miss Brownell had the reputation in Blair Water of being a fine teacher—due mainly to the fact that she was a strict disciplinarian and kept excellent “order.” She was a thin, middle-aged person with a colorless face, prominent teeth, most of which she showed when she laughed, and cold, watchful gray eyes—colder even than Aunt Ruth’s. Emily felt as if those merciless agate eyes saw clean through her to the core of her sensitive little soul. Emily could be fearless enough on occasion; but in the presence of a nature, which she instinctively felt to be hostile to hers she shrank away in something that was more repulsion than fear.

Think About It

What is the best summary of this part of the story? First, identify the key events that have taken place so far.

Read the supporting details in the left-hand column of the table below and fill in the key events that support each detail.

Supporting Details	Key Events
Aunt Elizabeth does not want Emily to be roaming around town without anything to do.	
Aunt Elizabeth makes Emily wear a gingham outfit with sleeves, despite Emily's protests.	
Emily views Miss Brownell as a very intimidating person with a hostile nature.	

Summarize this part of the story in your own words.

A CLOSER LOOK

Analyze paragraph 4. Underline the details that help you determine the central idea of the paragraph.

Continue reading the story. Then answer the questions.

4 She was a target for curious glances all the morning. The Blair Water school was large and there were at least 20 little girls of about her own age. Emily looked back curiously at them all and thought the way they whispered to each other behind hands and books when they looked at her very ill-mannered. She felt suddenly unhappy and homesick and lonesome—she wanted her father and her old home and the dear things she loved.

5 “The New Moon girl is crying,” whispered a black-eyed girl across the aisle. And then came a cruel little giggle.

6 “What is the matter with you, Emily?” said Miss Brownell, suddenly and accusingly.

7 Emily was silent. She could not tell Miss Brownell what was the matter with her—especially when Miss Brownell used such a tone.

8 “When I ask one of my pupils a question, Emily, I am accustomed to having an answer. Why are you crying?”

9 There was another giggle from across the aisle. Emily lifted miserable eyes and in her extremity fell back on a phrase of her father’s.

10 “It is a matter that concerns only myself,” she said.

11 A red spot suddenly appeared in Miss Brownell’s sallow cheek. Her eyes gleamed with cold fire.

12 “You will remain in during recess as a punishment for your impertinence¹,” she said—but she left Emily alone the rest of the day.

¹impertinence: disrespect

What are the key details of the passage?

Which of the following is a good objective summary of the story?

- A Miss Brownell acts harshly toward Emily, which does not make Emily feel at home on her first day of school.
- B Emily sees the other students looking at her and whispering. She thinks they are very impolite. It seems to me that they are bullying Emily.
- C The Blair Water school is large. There are at least 20 girls the same age as Emily.
- D Emily has a difficult first day at school due to the actions of her aunt, her teacher, and her fellow students.

What is *not* a key detail of the story?

Cite one detail from Part 2 of the story that can be left out of a summary.



DISCUSS IT

Review what a summary should include. Then, turn and talk to another student about what makes a good objective summary. Choose an answer choice from above that is not objective and discuss why.

A CLOSER LOOK

What is the central conflict in the passage? Underline key details that contribute to the conflict.

Read the story. Then answer the questions.

The Making of a Leader

- 1 The sun beamed through the yellow curtains in Hannah's bedroom onto her eyelids, slowly waking her. She walked over to the window and, peeling the curtains back, noticed the particular beauty of the delicate crystal blue sky. Today was an important day. She and Kevin would have their last debate in the afternoon as they vied for the position of class president, and then tomorrow the votes would be cast. The polls showed it was a very competitive election, with both candidates preferred equally among classmates.
- 2 Hannah had known Kevin since kindergarten. Over the years, they played on each other's swing sets, kept each other company at the school bus stop, and helped each other with homework. Now, some ten years later, they were in high school and their friendship was slightly strained, due to the fact they were both vigorously campaigning for class president.
- 3 After school ended, Hannah was with her campaign manager, Jackson. The debate was taking place on stage in the school auditorium in just 20 minutes.
- 4 "Great news, Hannah," Jackson said. "The polls show you pulling ahead of Kevin—quite far ahead, actually!"
- 5 "Wow, that's fantastic, Jackson! I wonder what made the students change their minds?" she asked.
- 6 Jackson, ordinarily a fast talker who was never short on replies, only shrugged his shoulders. His behavior struck Hannah as odd.
- 7 "Really? You, of all people, have absolutely no idea why the sudden turn around?" Hannah said in disbelief.
- 8 Jackson said nothing and just continued looking over the notes for the ensuing debate. His unusual behavior prompted Hannah to inquire more sternly, and after a few pauses, Jackson's face went red.
- 9 "There's a rumor going around that Kevin cheated on his last physics test," Jackson said rather sheepishly.
- 10 "Well that's a stupid rumor," Hannah replied. "Kevin has always been fantastic in science class. I know he's helped me a bunch of times over the years as I struggled with the subject. Who started the rumor?"



11 What happened next was not pretty. Hannah learned that it was her very own campaign manager who started the rumor. She was furious and embarrassed to be connected to such behavior. “Jackson, becoming class president under false circumstances is worthless. I wanted to be elected fair and square!” she yelled.

12 Just then, Mr. Maynard, the moderator of the debate, entered. “OK, folks. Debate time!”

13 Hannah shot a fuming look in Jackson’s direction, grabbed her notes, and walked on stage. The auditorium was packed with students. She felt the gravity of the position of class president—how important it was to set a good example, to be honest, and to work hard on behalf of all. Kevin shook her hand and sat down next to her. There was a noticeable coolness between them now.

14 Mr. Maynard asked the first question, and when it was Hannah’s turn to respond, she deviated from the topic and confessed that someone on her team had started the false rumor about Kevin. The auditorium grew incredibly quiet as she apologized. When she returned to her seat, Kevin’s face softened and he smiled at her. The debate continued.

15 The next day, votes were cast, and Kevin won. He would be the next class president. Hannah was disappointed at first, but that soon changed. She was proud of Kevin and the person he had become, and apparently the feeling was mutual. During his acceptance speech, Kevin talked about the importance of integrity and described Hannah as an exceptional person and leader whom everyone should imitate. In reply, the entire student body gave her a standing ovation. Hannah was extremely moved at Kevin’s willingness to overlook what had happened during the campaign, and she was glad to once again call him a friend.

What are the key events of the story?

1 Which events would be important to include in an objective summary of the passage? From the list, identify the four most important events and write them in chronological order in the table.

- a. The bright sun awoke Hannah on the day of the debate.
- b. Hannah and Kevin were both running for class president.
- c. Hannah and Kevin had known each other since kindergarten.
- d. Jackson was a fast talker who was never short on replies.
- e. Jackson confessed he started a false rumor about Kevin.
- f. Hannah announced to the entire student body that her team was responsible for the false rumor.
- g. Kevin’s acceptance speech greatly moved Hannah.

1.
2.
3.
4.

Which detail is *not* essential to understanding the story?

2 Which is *least* appropriate to include in a summary of the passage?

- A** Kevin was elected class president.
- B** Hannah took responsibility for Jackson’s act.
- C** Competing for class president put a strain on Hannah and Kevin’s friendship.
- D** Mr. Maynard asked the first question in the debate.

What is the story about? Who are the characters, and what happens to them?

3 Summarize the passage “The Making of a Leader” on the lines below.

Read the story. Then answer the questions.

Two Incidents on Empire Boulevard

by Kayla Owens

- 1 It was the week of my daughter's wedding, D-day minus three. Guests had been arriving since the previous weekend, and I'd been juggling my job with playing hostess and mother-of-the-bride. This was my morning for errands: to the bakery, to the caterer, to Clodagh's Alterations to pick up Denise's wedding gown. I could feel the tension throughout my body as I inched along Empire Boulevard. That was before the car died on me.
- 2 There I was, stuck in the middle of the busiest road in the North End, drivers glaring and beeping their horns, my insides twisted in knots, wishing that Denise and Mark had decided to elope. Fortunately, a nice police officer happened by. He stopped traffic and helped me get my car to the curb until the tow truck came. That seemed to take six hours, but it was probably only one. They towed my car to a repair garage and got me a rental; I phoned everyone to tell them I'd be late, and got on with my busy day.
- 3 Later that afternoon, I was heading home, exhausted. I found myself once again on Empire Boulevard. I was stopped at a traffic light when there came a tap at the passenger-side window. I looked up, startled. There was a homeless man in a dirty gray coat, gaunt, bearded—you've seen him before, though you probably avoided looking at him very closely, same as I had. I sighed, took a couple dollars from my purse, opened the window, and handed it to him. He muttered something that might have been "Thank You," but he didn't stop there. He launched into an involved explanation of his life and how he'd come to be in such a state. I wondered whether the light was ever going to turn green. "Please," I said, cutting him off. "I'm having a very bad day."
- 4 The homeless man took a step back. He looked at me incredulously. "You're having a bad day?" he said. "*You're* having a bad day?? Lady, *look at me!*"
- 5 Then the light changed, and I was outta there.
- 6 You see people like that in every city. They all have their own story. Thinking of what his life must be like didn't make my bad day any better. Yet that Sunday, amid all the wedding festivities and joy, my mind couldn't help coming back to that man and when the last time might have been that he'd had anything to be joyous about.

1 Which of these sayings *best* expresses the main theme of this essay?

- A Every "you" is an "I."
- B A smile is only a frown turned upside down.
- C The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.
- D I had no shoes and complained, until I met a man who had no feet.

2 How does the author develop her theme over the course of the text?

3 Which of these sentences is *best* left out of a summary of the passage?

- A The author's car breaks down on a busy street.
- B The author's daughter has a joyous wedding after all.
- C The author realizes that her problems are not so terrible.
- D The author is in a rush to do errands for her daughter's wedding.

4 Summarize the passage in your own words.
