

The Figures on the Receipt

PASSAGE · FICTION

SKILLS TRAINED

Working memory

Delayed recall

Critical analysis

HOW TO USE THIS SHEET

About 25 minutes

- 1 Read the passage twice, slowly. Take about seven minutes.
- 2 Turn to the next page and cover this one. No looking back.
- 3 Write what you remember, then mark it on the last page.

The argument had been going on since February, and it was conducted almost entirely in practical sentences.

Pipaluk's uncle Aqqaluk had found a snowmobile for sale in Tasiilaq, three years old, and had worked out that the money could be raised by selling the sledge and eight of the eleven dogs. He put the figures on the back of a fish-buyer's receipt and left it on the table where his mother would find it.

Anaana read it twice. "And in fog?" she said.

"In fog you stay home."

"You stay home. The halibut do not."

This was the shape of it for weeks. Aqqaluk's case was all arithmetic and he never raised his voice making it. A snowmobile does the forty kilometres out to the longline ground in under two hours, against six or seven behind the dogs. It eats nothing between November and June, while eleven dogs eat all summer whether the ice is there or not, and the summer feeding was most of what they earned. One person can take it out alone. It does not fight, it does not need to be fed before the driver eats, and it can be left standing for a month. He had also noticed that two of the three men in the settlement who still ran teams were older than his mother.

Anaana's case was not arithmetic and that was the trouble with answering it. Petrol runs out at a distance from home that is precisely known in advance; dogs do not. A team that has been out to the longlines two hundred times will take you back to the settlement in weather where a driver cannot see the lead dog, and will refuse ice that is thinner than it looks while a machine will drive onto it at speed. Dogs can be fed on what the sea gives you. And eight of the eleven were descended from a bitch her own father had driven.

"Sentiment," Aqqaluk said once, carefully, and his mother did not take it as an insult. Pipaluk noticed that neither of them ever mentioned the two hours. Her uncle counted them and her grandmother did not think they were the point.

“Partly,” she agreed. “Not the ice.”

Pipaluk, who was fifteen and had driven the team since she was eleven, found she could not get to the bottom of it. Everything her uncle said was true. The dogs were a tax that fell in the months with no income, and she had spent August of every year she could remember hauling buckets of mackerel heads along the chain line while her friends in the town had been doing nothing of the kind. She had also been out on the ice in April in a whiteout, sitting still with her hood up, while the team took a route nobody had asked them for and brought the sledge up the beach forty metres from her own door.

The two things did not cancel. They were both just there, the way two currents are both there.

In the end the receipt stayed on the table under a mug for most of March, and then the ice went out early, which decided nothing at all but ended the conversation for the year. Aqqaluk did not buy the snowmobile. He also did not say he had changed his mind, and nobody asked him to, and the dogs went on eating through the summer.

The snowmobile in Tasiilaq was sold in April to somebody else, which Aqqaluk reported at supper in four words and did not return to.

In October, when the sea began to take, Pipaluk found the receipt still folded in the drawer with the spare harness buckles. The figures on it were correct. She put it back.

Cover the passage before you start.
Looking back turns this into a copying exercise. Getting it slightly wrong from memory is what makes it work.

PART A **Tell it back**

Write down everything you can remember about the argument in Pipaluk's family — what Aqqaluk proposed, the reasons on each side, and how the spring ended. Order does not matter. Keep writing until you run out.

PART B **7 questions**

- 1 How many dogs were in the team, and how many would have had to be sold to pay for the snowmobile?

- 2 Why does Anaana answer the figures on the receipt with the single question “And in fog?”

- 3 Why is Anaana's case described as “not arithmetic”, and why does that make it hard to answer?

- 4 Pipaluk thinks of the dogs as “a tax that fell in the months with no income”. What does calling them a tax capture that calling them expensive would not?

- 5 What is the emotional temperature of this family disagreement, and how does the writer establish it?

- 6 Weigh up the two cases. Whose is stronger, and on what does the answer depend?

- 7 Nothing is decided: the ice goes out, Aqqaluk does not buy the snowmobile and does not withdraw his case. Evaluate what the writer gains by ending it that way.

PART C Mark your own work

Now go back to the passage. Tick every answer you got right. You do not need the same words as the answer below — if you wrote the same idea in your own words, it counts.

- ☐ 1 · There were eleven dogs in the team. Eight of them would have had to be sold, along with the sledge.
- ☐ 2 · Because her objection is not about cost or speed but about what happens when conditions are bad, which the arithmetic leaves out. The question forces her son to admit that his machine only works in weather good enough to navigate by sight, whereas the fishing does not wait for such weather.
- ☐ 3 · Her reasons are about reliability in rare conditions and cannot be converted into numbers: a team that finds its way home in a whiteout, refuses thin ice, and can be fed on the catch. Because there is no figure to compare against Aqqaluk's hours and fuel costs, his kind of argument has nothing to push against, even though hers describes the situations that matter most.
- ☐ 4 · A tax is a cost you cannot avoid, that arrives on a fixed schedule whether or not you can afford it. That is exactly the dogs' summer feeding: unavoidable, predictable, and falling in the season when no money is coming in — which expensive, meaning merely dear, would not convey.
- ☐ 5 · It is calm, respectful and unresolved rather than heated. The writer notes that Aqqaluk never raises his voice, that the word “sentiment” is said carefully and not taken as an insult, and that the exchanges are short and practical; the receipt sitting under a mug for a month does more to convey the deadlock than any outburst would.
- ☐ 6 · Aqqaluk's case is stronger on everything that can be counted: three times the speed to the longline ground, no feeding costs through the summer when there is no income, and one person able to work alone. Anaana's is stronger on everything that only matters occasionally — navigation in fog, judgement about thin ice, and fuel that cannot run out because the team feeds on the catch. The answer therefore depends on how often the bad conditions occur and how costly they are when they do: if a whiteout on the ice is survivable without the dogs, the arithmetic wins, and if it is not, then a saving that is reliable most of the time is being traded for a risk that only has to arrive once. Neither character has that figure, which is why neither can finish the argument.
- ☐ 7 · It keeps both arguments intact, which a resolution would not. Had the dogs been sold or the machine refused, the story would read as a verdict on tradition against technology, and the reader would stop weighing the evidence and start taking a side. Instead the ending matches what Pipaluk has already worked out — that the two sets of reasons do not cancel, like two currents — and the closing image of the correct figures being folded away rather than torn up says the question is postponed, not answered. The risk is that an unresolved ending can feel like an evasion, but here the detail of the kept receipt signals that the writer has made a choice rather than avoided one.

FACTS RECALLED IN PART A

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QUESTIONS CORRECT

— / 7

DATE

THE STRATEGY Map the argument

When a passage holds two positions, stop reading as one voice and sort it into two columns: each claim on the side that made it, and the kind of reason it rests on. You will see at once where the

two sides are actually disagreeing and where they are simply talking about different things. Do it from memory afterwards as well — reconstructing who said what is harder than recognising it, and that difficulty is what makes the structure stick.

WHERE YOU ALREADY DO THIS

Think of a disagreement you have been in where both people were partly right. If you split it into two columns now, what was each of you actually arguing about?

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER · This sheet trains delayed recall, not reading speed. Let your teenager read the passage once, then cover it completely before Part A — no glancing back and no prompting, because the effort of hauling a half-remembered fact out of memory is what fixes it there. At this level mark the thinking rather than the wording: the answers given for the inference, tone and analysis questions are one good response each, not the only one.