

Forty-One Buckets

PASSAGE · FICTION

SKILLS TRAINED

Working memory

Delayed recall

Inference

HOW TO USE THIS SHEET

About 15 minutes

- 1 Read the passage twice, slowly. Take about four 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.

Marguerite woke to the sound of her grandfather knocking snow off his boots. It was still dark outside, and the thermometer by the kitchen window read minus four.

“Perfect,” he said. “Freezing at night, thawing by day. The trees will run today.”

They walked up through the sugar bush with the sled rattling behind them. Forty-one maple trees stood along the slope, each one with a metal spout tapped into its trunk and a bucket hanging underneath. Marguerite had painted the numbers on the lids herself, one to forty-one, in bright red.

Bucket seven was almost full. The sap inside was clear as water, and when she dipped a finger and tasted it she pulled a face. It was barely sweet at all.

“It takes forty buckets of that to make one bucket of syrup,” her grandfather said. “The rest is just water going up the chimney.”

They poured bucket after bucket into the barrel on the sled. By the time they reached number thirty-nine, Marguerite's arms were aching and her mittens were soaked.

Then she stopped. Bucket forty was lying on its side in the snow, empty, and the snow around it was printed with wide round tracks.

Her grandfather crouched down and studied them for a long moment.

“Raccoon,” he said. “A very sticky raccoon, somewhere out there.”

In the sugar shack the boiling pan hissed and the room filled with steam so thick that Marguerite could not see the far wall. Her grandfather watched the froth and the thermometer, and said nothing for nearly an hour.

At last he lifted the ladle, let a thread of syrup fall back, and nodded.

He poured a little onto clean snow in a tin tray. It stiffened at once into a soft golden ribbon. Marguerite peeled it up and ate it, and this time she did not pull a face.

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 Marguerite's morning in the sugar bush.

PART B 5 questions

1 How many maple trees were tapped, and what had Marguerite done to the buckets?

2 How many buckets of sap does it take to make one bucket of syrup?

3 What had happened to bucket forty?

4 Why did Marguerite pull a face at the sap but not at the syrup?

5 Her grandfather said, "The trees will run today." What does "run" mean in that sentence?

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 • Forty-one trees. She had painted the numbers one to forty-one on the bucket lids in bright red.
- ☐ 2 • Forty.
- ☐ 3 • It was lying on its side in the snow, empty, with wide round tracks around it. Her grandfather said a raccoon had done it.
- ☐ 4 • The sap was almost all water and hardly sweet. Boiling it for a long time drove the water off and left the sugar behind, so the syrup tasted much sweeter.
- ☐ 5 • That the sap would flow out of the trees through the spouts, because the nights were freezing and the days were thawing.

FACTS RECALLED IN PART A

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QUESTIONS CORRECT

— / 5

DATE

THE STRATEGY Make a film of it

As you read, play the passage in your head like a film — the dark window, the red numbers on the lids, the tipped-over bucket, the steam in the shack. Giving each fact a picture means your memory has two ways to find it instead of one. When you come to recall it, run the film from the beginning rather than hunting for words.

WHERE YOU ALREADY DO THIS

Think of somewhere you have been that you can still picture clearly. What do you see first when you remember it?

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER · This sheet trains recall, not reading speed. Let your child read the passage twice if they wish, then cover it completely before Part A begins — do not prompt, and do not let them look back. The vocabulary question asks what a word meant in the passage, so an answer in their own words is better than a dictionary definition.