

The Ice Has Something to Say

PASSAGE · FICTION

SKILLS TRAINED

Working memory

Delayed recall

Inference

HOW TO USE THIS SHEET

About 18 minutes

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

Nina's grandfather had one rule about the lake in winter: never walk on it without listening.

By February the ice off their village was more than half a metre thick, clear as window glass in places, so that you could lie down and see stones far below. Lorries drove across it on a marked road. And still, every morning, her grandfather stood at the edge with his head tilted and his mittens off.

“Listening to what?” Nina asked.

“To what it is doing.”

The ice was noisy. That was the first thing she had to learn. It groaned like a door in an empty house. Sometimes a crack ran away from her boot with a *twang* like a plucked wire.

“Loud is not dangerous,” her grandfather said. “Loud means thick. Thick ice has to move, and moving makes noise. It is the quiet patches you walk around.”

He taught her his four signs, and made her say them back in order until she could do it without stopping.

One: colour. Grey-white and dull, with air trapped in it, is young ice, and young ice is thin. Dark and clear is old and strong, though it looks more frightening.

Two: the hollow note. Rap your boot heel down. A short, flat knock is solid. A deeper, drummier sound means water has drained away underneath and left a gap, so the ice above it is unsupported.

Three: snow. A clean swept patch has usually been swept by wind that also thinned it. Worse, snow sitting oddly flat and grey may be slush.

Four: the cracks. Cracks that cross one another in a wide net have already settled. A single long new crack, with water bright in the groove, has not.

In March, Nina went out with her cousin Pasha, who was fifteen and in a hurry. He set off across a bay, following old tyre tracks, because tracks meant a lorry had managed it.

Nina stopped. She could not have said why at first. Then she worked it out: the bay was silent. Not one groan. She had crossed this ice all winter to the sound of distant popping, and the popping had stopped. She put her heel down. The knock came back deep and drummy.

“Pasha,” she called. “Walk back along your own footprints. Walk backwards.”

He did it, grumbling the whole way, which she decided was fine. Grumbling meant he was talking, and talking meant he was listening to her.

That evening she told her grandfather about the silence in the bay. He did not say well done. He said, “Which sign did you use?”

She thought about it. “The one you can't see.”

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 grandfather's four signs and about what happened in the bay. Order does not matter. Keep writing until you run out.

PART B 5 questions

- 1 What are the grandfather's four signs for reading the ice?

- 2 According to the grandfather, why is loud ice not dangerous?

- 3 Why was Pasha wrong to trust the old tyre tracks?

- 4 At the end Nina says she used “the one you can't see”. Which sign does she mean, and why does she describe it that way?

- 5 The deep knock means the ice is “unsupported”. What does unsupported mean here?

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 • Colour, the hollow note when you knock your heel down, the snow cover, and the pattern of the cracks.
- ☐ 2 • Loud means thick. Thick ice has to move, and moving makes noise, so the quiet patches are the ones to walk around.
- ☐ 3 • The tracks showed only that the ice had held a lorry at some earlier time. It was now March, and the ice could have thinned or lost its support since then.
- ☐ 4 • The sound — the silence of the bay, and then the drummy note under her heel. It is the sign you hear rather than look at, and it is the one she noticed before she could explain it.
- ☐ 5 • It means nothing is holding it up from below — the water has drained away and left a gap of air under the ice.

FACTS RECALLED IN PART A

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QUESTIONS CORRECT

— / 5

DATE

THE STRATEGY Spread it out

If you want to keep something for weeks rather than hours, do not learn it all in one sitting. Test yourself today, again tomorrow, then after three days, then after a week. Each time you let the memory go slightly faint before you haul it back, it comes back stronger — which is why the grandfather makes Nina say the four signs again and again on different mornings, not forty times on one.

WHERE YOU ALREADY DO THIS

Is there something you were taught a long time ago — a route, a phone number, a set of rules — that you still know? When did you last have to use it?

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER • This sheet trains delayed recall, not reading speed. Let your child read once, then cover the passage completely before Part A — no peeking back, and no prompting, because the struggle to retrieve a half-remembered fact is what builds the memory. At this level expect the inference answers to be worded loosely; reward the reasoning rather than the phrasing.