

Interpreting Characters: The Heart of the Story

Grade 4: Fiction, Unit 1

Preassessment Sample Responses

Following are sample responses for each question, at a range of levels. These samples will help students notice if they have done similar work in their responses, and thus will be a helpful part of their self-assessment. These can also serve as mentor texts to help your students to identify specific ways they can lift their work to the next level.

Question	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<p>1. What kind of person is Mr. Tillian?</p> <p><i>Inferring About Characters and Other Story Elements: Character Traits, Supporting Thinking with Text Evidence</i></p>	<p>Mr. Tillian is upset.</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>Mr. Tillian is kind.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level may confuse traits with feelings. Or students could supply a trait, especially if the trait is explicitly named in the text.</i></p>	<p>Mr. Tillian is kind. He doesn't get mad at his son for not coming to the store with his friends.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level tend to identify a character trait and to use evidence to support this thinking.</i></p>	<p>Mr. Tillian seems very understanding. He doesn't make Harry feel bad for not visiting the store now that he is older. He makes the best of things. But he is really lonely so he gets a bird named Rocky who keeps him company.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level tend to show how characters are complicated. They discuss more than one trait and/or motivation. Students also use and discuss details from different parts of the text to support their answers.</i></p>
<p>2. Reread the lines below. These lines represent a turning point for Harry. How did Harry change from the beginning to the end of the story and why?</p> <p>"I'm here, you stupid bird! I'm here!" Harry yelled. He threw the peppermints at the cage, and the bird screamed and clung to its perch.</p> <p>Harry sobbed, "I'm here." The tears were coming.</p> <p>Harry leaned over the glass counter.</p> <p>"Papa." Harry buried his face in his arms.</p> <p>"Where's Harry?" repeated the bird.</p> <p>Harry sighed and wiped his face on his sleeve. He watched the parrot. He understood now: someone had been saying, for a long time, "Where's Harry? Miss him."</p> <p><i>Character Response/Change</i></p>	<p>Harry feels sad because his dad is sick and the bird keeps saying, "Where's Harry?"</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>Harry feels sad so he cries. He didn't cry before.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level tend to mention a change in feelings or actions and provide a surface-level reason for the change.</i></p>	<p>Harry feels bad when he hears the bird say his name and say that he misses him. Harry knows his Dad must have missed him even though he didn't say anything.</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>Harry thought his dad was weird for talking to a bird. But when he hears the bird say, "Where's Harry? Miss him," he gets that his dad has been saying that to the bird. And he feels bad.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level may focus on changes in character feelings, actions, or traits. They typically point to one key event from earlier in the story to explain the change.</i></p>	<p>When Harry hears the bird say, "Where's Harry? Miss him" over and over he realizes that his Dad must have asked for him over and over. This makes Harry realize how much his Dad missed him. This is a big change for Harry because at the beginning he didn't really think about his dad's feelings and now he does.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level address change across the whole story. They often include discussion of how other story elements (other characters, setting, problem, key events) play a part in causing the change. In cases where the character changes because he or she has learned a life lesson, student responses may talk about the lesson or theme.</i></p>

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<p>3. Reread the lines below. Why might the author have included this part?</p> <p>At home things were different. Harry and his father joked with each other at the dinner table as they always had—Mr. Tillian teasing Harry about his smelly socks; Harry teasing Mr. Tillian about his blubbery stomach. At home things seemed all right.</p> <p><i>Analyzing Parts of a Story in Relation to the Whole</i></p>	<p>The author included this part because it shows that the dad and Harry spend time together at home. That's different than at the store.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level discuss how a particular part in the story fits into the story's sequence of events. Students may tell what came before the part and/or what came after.</i></p>	<p>The author included this part because it shows that the problem with Harry and his dad is only at the store. At home, they spend time together. Their relationship is different.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level tend to name which story element was featured in a particular part in the story (in this case, "the problem"). Student responses also include the importance of the particular part to the rest of the story.</i></p>	<p>The author included this part because it shows that the problem with Harry and his dad is only at the store. Mr. Tillian and Harry still have a good relationship at home. This shows that they care. This makes it even sadder when Harry hears the parrot talking and learns how much his dad missed him.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level discuss how a particular part affects or is affected by other parts of the story. Students name the story element that is featured in this part and also include specific details from other parts of the story, perhaps to explain a decision or change.</i></p>
<p>4. Write about a theme (or life lesson) that this story develops. Use details from the story to support your answer.</p> <p><i>Determining Theme/Cohesion</i></p>	<p>Your dad might die. Harry didn't know his dad would be sick but then his dad was in the hospital. He might DIE.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level tend to focus on the story itself rather than on a universal theme that the story develops. Students may simply retell a part of the story or they may name a lesson they learned from it or a reaction—or feeling—they had.</i></p>	<p>A life lesson Harry learns is that he should be good to his father. When Harry's dad got sick, Harry felt bad that he hadn't been good to his dad. Harry even yelled at the parrot because he was so mad. He was upset because he knows his dad misses him and he should have visited more.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level tend to name a life lesson that a character in the story learns, most likely at the end. Students can tell about a part of the story that shows this lesson.</i></p>	<p>A theme this story develops is that people should be good to their families. Early in the story, Harry visited his dad's nut shop a lot, and was good to him. But then Harry stopped visiting. When Harry's dad got sick Harry felt bad that he hadn't visited his dad. This taught him that he should have been good to his dad.</p> <p><i>Responses at this level explore one theme across the story. Students are not yet able to name multiple themes, but can explain how one theme emerges in more than one part of the text. Some students may do this by showing the absence of the theme at the start of the story, and the presence of it by the end, while other students may cite a couple examples of the theme developing across the story.</i></p>