



New York State Testing Program

English Language Arts Test Reading

Grade **7**

2009 Scoring Guide

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The Herring Choker¹

*by William Kent Krueger
illustrated by Loren Long*



Thirteen-year-old Karl has always wanted to fish for herring like his father. His father has recently been injured in a fall, but is ready to return to fishing. For the first time, he has asked Karl to go along to help him. In this part of the story, they are in the fishing boat. They have caught many herring.

By the time we finished, herring covered the bottom of the boat as deep as my calves. For the first time in days, my father seemed happy.

Then he looked at the western sky, and his smile faded.

They are called Northwesters. They're storms that sweep out of Canada hard and fast. No one can predict their arrival. All fishermen fear them.

"We're going back," my father said.

He started the motor, wincing from the pain as he pulled the cord.

We were only two miles out, but the shoreline looked to me to be as far away as the moon. Over the distant hills, black clouds galloped toward us like wild horses. My father set a course directly for them.

¹**herring choker:** a term for a person who fishes for herring, referring to the way the herring are pulled out of the nets

We made it only halfway home before we met the storm.

The wind came first. It lifted the lake in whitecaps. The weight of the herring made us ride low in the water, and the waves broke over our bow. The spray was icy cold, needles against my face. I grasped the gunwales² as the boat bucked. In the stern, my father struggled to hold us on course. I'd put on my slicker,³ but I had no life jacket. Most commercial fishermen don't carry life jackets in their boats. Wrong or right, they figure that if your boat goes down, a life jacket is useless. Even if you don't drown, the cold of the water will quickly kill you.

By the time the rain came, we'd put more distance behind us. Although we were now only half a mile from shore, the rain fell so hard we couldn't see the land. The boat was filling with water. I began to bail.

I was scared, but I saw my father sitting erect in the stern, holding the boat steady into the wind, and I felt hopeful. He didn't look hurt at all.

I was starting to think we were going to make it. That's when the motor died. My father jerked the cord desperately, but the motor wouldn't catch. I saw that the boat was coming about, broadside to the wind. I knew what that meant. We would swamp in no time. We would go down.

My father didn't fight the motor long. He leaped to the middle of the boat, beside me. "Grab an oar," he hollered above the wind.

He always carried two oars for just such an emergency.

We set the oars in the locks and began to pull hard. My father grunted, from pain or effort I couldn't tell. He dug his oar into the churning lake, bringing the boat around, bow into the wind again. With all my strength, I pulled on my own oar.

The wind pushed hard against us. We seemed to be fighting the anger of the whole lake. I was tired. My arms felt heavy and on fire. I didn't know how much longer I could shove that oar through the water.

As if he heard my thinking, my father called to me, "I need you, Karl. Only a little longer."

So I kept stroking.

Just when I thought I had no more strength, I heard it. The sound of waves breaking against the shore. We moved into the shelter of our small cove and rode the swells toward the landing.

My mother rushed through the rain to greet us. "I've been so worried," she said. She hugged me and then my father.

"Nothing to worry about," he assured her. He put his hand on my shoulder. "You did well, son. How do you feel?"

Tired as I was, I managed a smile. "I feel like a herring choker."

²**gunwales:** upper edge of a boat's side

³**slicker:** a rain jacket

Reading Rubric Key Points

Reading Task: “The Herring Choker”

Question 28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl’s father help them get back to shore safely? Use details from the passage to support your answer.

Possible Exemplary Response:

As soon as Karl’s father sees the storm, he heads for shore. He then holds the boat steady in the wind and keeps it on course. When the motor dies, he tells Karl to help him row the boat to shore.

Possible details to include in answer:

- As soon as Karl’s father sees the storm, he starts for shore.
- He holds the boat steady in the wind.
- When the motor dies, instead of fighting it, he leaps to the middle of the boat, tells Karl to grab an oar, and begins rowing.
- He encourages Karl to keep rowing when Karl gets tired.
- other relevant text-based detail

Rubric:

2 points	The response is accurate, complete, and fulfills all the requirements of the task. Necessary support and/or examples are included, and the information given is clearly text-based. Any extensions beyond the text are relevant to the task.
1 point	The response includes some correct information, but may be too general or overly specific. Some of the support and/or examples may be incomplete or omitted.
0 points	The response is inaccurate, confused, and/or irrelevant, or the student failed to respond to the task.

NOTE: If the item is left blank, apply Condition Code A.

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely?
Use details from the passage to support your answer.

The decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely. Since the boat's motor died, Karl's father decided to use the emergency oars and row home. As Karl grew tired, and his arms felt heavy, his father convinced him to keep rowing, which eventually led them, safely, home.

text detail

text detail

This response is complete and accurate, and it fulfills all the requirements of the task. The student has provided correct text-based details to describe what Karl's father does to get them back to shore safely ("decided to use the emergency oars and row home"; "convinced him [Karl] to keep rowing, which eventually led them, safely, home").

Reading Score Point 2

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely?
Use details from the passage to support your answer.

He knows how to steer the boat and
keep it steady.

text detail

This response includes some correct information. The student has provided one correct text-based detail to describe what Karl's father does to get them back to shore safely ("knows how to steer the boat and keep it steady"), but additional text-based support is needed to fully answer the question.

Reading Score Point 1

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely?
Use details from the passage to support your answer.

He made shore that they
didn't ~~be~~ do anything
that they shodn't do, and helped
them get food.

This response is inaccurate and shows confusion. The student has given one vague answer (“made shore [sure] that they didn’t do anything that they shodent do”) and one irrelevant answer (“helped them get food”). Neither answer responds to the task of describing what Karl’s father does to get them back to shore safely.

Reading Score Point 0



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2009 Practice Set

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely?
Use details from the passage to support your answer.

In a storm like that anyone would panic but Karl's father, he kept his head focus on getting to shore and drove the boat steady but soon enough the motor dies and he was smart enough to keep emergency oars just in case. (another good action was noticing that the storm was coming)

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely?
Use details from the passage to support your answer.

Karl's father seemed to always be
happy no matter what happens or what
they are.

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely?
Use details from the passage to support your answer.

Karl's father's decisions help them
get back to shore because he
uses his knowledge and knows
a storm is coming so they
leave early, to get a head
start.

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely?
Use details from the passage to support your answer.

Karl's father encouraged him to keep
stroking, and to work together.

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely? Use details from the passage to support your answer.

First, as soon as Karl's dad realizes a Northwest is heading towards them, he knows it's time to go back. Then when the motor dies, Karl's dad starts rowing even though he's injured. This keeps the boat going until they reach shore. It was a good thing that Karl's dad had oars otherwise he and Karl would have been goners.

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely?
Use details from the passage to support your answer.

They staid comme and
worked together

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely?
Use details from the passage to support your answer.

The decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely because he is always positive. This makes Karl never give up even though he wanted to.

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely?
Use details from the passage to support your answer.

The decisions and actions Karl's father made helped them get back to shore because the dad knew what he was doing and if he didn't like tell Karl and stuff. They probably wouldn't have made it back and safe.

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely? Use details from the passage to support your answer.

The decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely. This is because, after the motor died, his father decided not to spend long trying to fix it, but immediately begin to row back to shore. He also encouraged Karl to keep rowing, & fight through his pain. That was what got Karl & his father back to shore safely.

28

How do the decisions and actions of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely? Use details from the passage to support your answer.

The decisions and action of Karl's father help them get back to shore safely because he had faith in himself that they would make it back.

7th GRADE READING

PRACTICE SET ANSWER KEY

Name: _____

PS 1	(0-2)	
PS 2	(0-2)	
PS 3	(0-2)	
PS 4	(0-2)	
PS 5	(0-2)	
PS 6	(0-2)	
PS 7	(0-2)	
PS 8	(0-2)	
PS 9	(0-2)	
PS 10	(0-2)	

PS 11	(0-2)	
PS 12	(0-2)	
PS 13	(0-2)	
PS 14	(0-2)	
PS 15	(0-2)	
PS 16	(0-2)	
PS 17	(0-2)	
PS 18	(0-2)	
PS 19	(0-2)	
PS 20	(0-2)	

