

Grade 4 – English Language Arts

This task asks students to read a passage and consider how the author built the theme of the story.

Read the passage below – “Kira-Kira” by Cynthia Kadohata.

Then answer these questions. (Answers to questions follow text.)

QUESTIONS:

Part A: How are the events in paragraphs 1 and 2 important to the theme of the story?

- A. They list the many lessons that Lynn taught her younger sister, Katie.
- B. They explain that Katie’s family had very high expectations of her when she was young.
- C. They show how strong the relationship is between Katie and Lynn.
- D. They introduce the idea that Katie and Lynn want to learn more about the Japanese language.

Part B: Which sentence from the story provides the best support for the answer in Part A?

- A. “My sister, Lynn, taught me my first word: *kira-kira*.”
- B. “When I grew older, I used *kira-kira* to describe everything I liked: the beautiful blue sky, puppies, kittens, butterflies, colored Kleenex.”
- C. “She was dismayed over how un-Japanese we were and vowed to send us to Japan one day.”
- D. “I didn’t care where she sent me, so long as Lynn came along.”

Kira-Kira

By Cynthia Kadohata

1. My sister, Lynn, taught me my first word: *kira-kira*. I pronounced it *ka-a-ahhh*, but she knew what I meant. *Kira-Kira* means “glittering” in Japanese. Lynn told me that when I was a baby, she used to take me onto our empty road at night, where we would lie on our backs and look at the stars while she said over and over, “Katie, say ‘*kira-kira, kira-kira.*’” I loved that word! When I grew older, I used *kira-kira* to describe everything I liked: the beautiful blue sky, puppies, kittens, butterflies, colored Kleenex.
2. My mother said we were misusing the word; you could not call a Kleenex *kira-kira*. She was dismayed over how un-Japanese we were and vowed to send us to Japan one day. I didn’t care where she sent me, so long as Lynn came along.
3. I was born in Iowa in 1951. I know a lot about when I was a little girl, because my sister used to keep a diary. Today I keep her diary in a drawer next to my bed.
4. I like to see how her memories were the same as mine, but also different. For instance, one of my earliest memories is of the day Lynn saved my life. I was almost five, and she was almost nine. We were playing on the empty road near our house. Fields of tall corn stretched into the distance wherever you looked. A dirty gray dog ran out of the field near us, and then he ran back in. Lynn loved animals. Her long black hair disappeared into the corn as she chased the dog. The summer sky was clear and blue. I felt a brief fear as Lynn disappeared into the cornstalks. When she wasn’t in school, she stayed with me constantly. Both our parents worked. Officially, I stayed all day with a lady from down the road, but unofficially, Lynn was the one who took care of me.
5. After Lynn ran into the field, I couldn’t see anything but corn.
6. “Lynnie!” I shouted. We weren’t that far from our house, but I felt scared. I burst into tears.
7. Somehow or other, Lynn got behind me and said, “Boo!” and I cried some more. She just laughed and hugged me and said, “You’re the best little sister in the world!” I like it when she said that, so I stopped crying.
8. The dog ran off. We lay on our backs in the middle of the road and stared at the blue sky. Some days nobody at all drove down our little road. We could have lain on our backs all day and never got hit.
9. Lynn said, “The blue of the sky is one of the most special colors in the world, because the color is deep but see-through both at the same time. What did I just say?”
10. “The sky is special.”
11. “The ocean is like that too, and people’s eyes.”

12. She turned her head toward me and waited. I said, "The ocean and people's eyes are special too."
13. That's how I learned about eyes, sky, and ocean: the three special, deep, colored, see-through things. I turned to Linnie. Her eyes were deep and black, like mine.
14. The dog burst from the field suddenly, growling and snarling. Its teeth were long and yellow. We screamed and jumped up. The dog grabbed at my pants. As I pulled away, the dog ripped my pants and his cold teeth touched my skin. "Aaahhhh!" I screamed.
15. Lynn pulled at the dog's tail and shouted at me, "Run, Katie, run!" I ran, hearing the dog growling and Linnie grunting. When I got to the house, I turned around and saw the dog tearing at Lynn's pants as she huddled over into a ball. I ran inside and looked for a weapon. I couldn't think straight. I got a milk bottle out of the fridge and ran toward Lynn and threw the bottle at the dog. The bottle missed the dog and broke on the street. The dog rushed to lap up the milk.
16. Lynn and I ran toward the house, but she stopped on the porch. I pulled at her. "Come on!"
17. She looked worried. "He's going to cut his tongue on the glass."
18. "Who cares?"
19. But she got the water hose and chased the dog away with the water, so it wouldn't hurt its tongue. That's the way Lynn was. Even if you tried to kill her and bite off her leg, she still forgave you.
20. This is what Lynn said in her diary from that day:
 21. *The corn was so pretty. When it was all around me, I felt like I wanted to stay there forever. Then I heard Katie crying, and I ran out as fast as I could. I was so scared. I thought something had happened to her!*
 22. *Later, when the dog attacked me, Katie saved my life.*
23. I didn't really see things that way. If she hadn't saved my life first, I wouldn't have been able to save her life. So really, she's the one who saved a life.

ANSWERS & RATIONALES:

Part A Answer Choice Rationales: Option A is incorrect, as the lessons that Lynn taught Katie are spread throughout the story and must be inferred due to their implicit nature, not listed in paragraphs 1 and 2. Option B is incorrect, as the paragraphs do not define high expectations for Katie nor are high expectations part of the theme. Option D is incorrect because although the paragraphs show that the sisters lack an understanding of Japanese language, they do not introduce that the sisters want to learn more; in fact, they seem uninterested. Option C is the correct answer, as paragraphs 1 and 2 show that the sisters have a strong bond, which is the theme of the text.

Part B Answer Choice Rationales: Although options A, B, and C are all sentences from the text, they do not help establish the connection of paragraphs 1 and 2 to the theme of the text. Only option D shows the strong relationship between the sisters. Note that some of the answers in Part B tie closely to incorrect answers in Part A so that students cannot use the process of elimination to get to the correct answer in Part A.