



# acadience® reading 7–8

## Oral Reading

Student Materials

Grade 7 | Benchmark 3

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# The Challenge

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► Samantha stared at the map detailing the route through the Texas Hill Country. On the map, the 100-mile course looked like a crooked little circle. As she trained each week with Aunt Claire and compared distances, the route appeared manageable. But, straddling her bicycle and gazing around at the mass of people crowding the starting line, Samantha wondered whether she had sufficiently prepared for the event. If necessary, they could ride the 50-mile course instead. She hoped she would have the strength and stamina to complete the entire event. Her sponsors had pledged a certain donation for each mile she rode, which meant there was an incentive to complete the entire course. This bicycling adventure through the countryside was a benefit for the local Humane Society and part of an effort to raise awareness about pet adoption. Samantha was determined not to disappoint her aunt or the numerous pets living in shelters. She thought of Henry, the dog she visited and played with last week when she volunteered at the shelter.

Samantha pushed off to a wobbly start, but she began to feel more confident as she pedaled after her aunt through the outskirts of town. As they continued into the country, cows grazed on the hillsides, and rolled hay bales sat like massive pillows in mowed fields. It would be the perfect home for a dog or cat, Samantha thought.

I can do this, I can do this, Sam chanted to herself as she peddled. She thought how lonely Henry looked last week and how the money she raised would be used to purchase toys and food for the shelter animals. She also wondered how many miles they had ridden, but she managed to keep that question to herself.

Stopping for a morning snack, Claire announced they had completed approximately one third of the 10-mile course. Samantha was surprised; earlier, she would not have guessed that 35 miles would pass so quickly. Claire asked whether she felt capable of continuing on the 100-mile course: this was decision time. Samantha remembered that there would be steep inclines and winding roads on the rest of the course and considered her fatigued muscles and aching backside. Then, she thought about the animals they would be helping. She grinned at her aunt and grabbed her helmet, saying, “Let’s conquer this course...Henry is depending on us!”

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# El Niño and La Niña

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► Perhaps you've heard reports about abnormal weather patterns occurring in different parts of the world. While abnormal weather events are out of our control, science experts are studying their cycles. One of these is known as El Niño. The context under which it occurs has to do with abnormal warming of air at the surface of the ocean and air pressure reversal.

To make sense of an El Niño cycle, we must first grasp normal weather patterns in the South Pacific Ocean. Normally, tropical trade winds that circulate over the ocean surface move from east to west; that is, the winds blow from the eastern shores of South America to the western shores of Indonesia. As the water moves westward, it heats up and warms the air above the ocean, then comes down as rain. As a result of this western water movement, the eastern side of the ocean is much cooler and dryer.

Within an El Niño weather cycle, western Pacific trade winds weaken and change direction. The once warm waters along the western shores of Indonesia now move back toward South America. As the waters move east, it warms the air and alters, or changes, the weather patterns. As the warm air moves east, it creates clouds, rain, and thunderstorms. These rains, which would normally have fallen in the tropics, now flood dry plains.

The abnormal warming of the ocean's surface air has a deep impact, or effect, on the earth's atmosphere. The impact causes varying high and low pressure systems, which are then felt around the world. For example, on the eastern coast of the United States, people feel the effects of warm balmy weather in the dead of winter. Folks living in the southern states feel much colder weather patterns during the winter.

Perhaps most unusual is that this abnormal weather pattern can change again. Where winter conditions were very mild during an El Niño year, extremely harsh cold weather follows a few years later. This reversal effect so soon after El Niño is known as La Niña; a pattern caused by the cooling of the surface water in the Pacific Ocean.

To make sense of these cycles, weather experts collect data from buoys placed in the Pacific Ocean. Data on humidity, air current, and wind speed help make forecasts; useful given the far-reaching effects the cycles have on people.

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# The United States Enters World War II

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► In the early 20th century, after fighting in World War I, the United States wanted to stay out of world conflicts. The government tried to avoid the political and military problems of other countries as Europe prepared for war again in the 1930s. The path followed by the United States into World War II took many twists and turns.

After the terrible losses of World War I, most Americans were not eager to join another war. As Hitler rose to power in the 1920s and 1930s, President Herbert Hoover kept the United States out of Europe's struggles. When Franklin Roosevelt became president in 1932, he and Congress put in place neutrality laws; these laws were meant to keep the United States from being tied to any side in the conflict.

In 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and the Allied, or united, forces of Britain and France went to war against Germany. After these events, it became more difficult for the United States to stand by and watch the world go to war. In March 1941, the United States decided to provide supplies to countries fighting Germany, mainly Great Britain and the Soviet Union. By late summer of that year, the U.S. Navy was helping Allied ships in the Atlantic ocean. The United States also supported China in its war against Japan, who was allied to Germany. The United States, though, was still not officially at war.

This neutral status changed on December 7, 1941. Early that morning, Japanese planes bombed the United States naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The attack was a surprise, and the destruction was serious. Eight U.S. battleships were sunk or badly damaged, and over 300 aircraft were destroyed or damaged. Thousands of Americans were killed. The next day, Congress declared war on Japan, and on December 11th, Congress declared war on Germany. The United States was no longer isolated, or separated, from the war.

The United States was not eager to go to war, but world events led the nation to take a stand. Hitler marched through Europe, and the United States supported countries fighting against him. It was Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, though, that finally forced the United States into the war it had tried to avoid.

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