



# acadience® reading 7–8

## Oral Reading

Student Materials

### Grade 8 | Progress Monitoring 2

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# Chugging Through the Alps

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► My family and I live in the city of Zurich, which is far from the peaks and valleys of the Alps most people envision when they think of Switzerland. My mother was recently attending a business seminar and it was decided that my father and I would travel with her. During the time she was occupied with business, we passed the hours wandering around museums, exploring cathedrals, and lounging at sidewalk cafes. It was certainly pleasant, but after 4 days, I was itching to see the mountains.

So when mother's business finally wrapped up and she made reservations for us on the Glacier Express, I was very excited. This mountain railroad travels from Zermatt, at the foot of the Matterhorn, to St. Moritz, a picturesque mountain village popular with tourists and skiers. To reach St. Moritz, the Glacier Express winds its way through 181 miles of Alpine landscape.

We arrived in Zermatt several hours before our scheduled departure time, so we strolled around the tiny town. It was so pretty we were almost tempted to stay right there and forego the Glacier Express! But we knew we would miss out on many spectacular sights, so we readily climbed aboard. Once we left the train station, any regret at leaving such a charming spot melted completely away.

So many beautiful sights competed for our interest, such as craggy, snowcapped mountain peaks stretching as far the eye could see, and green fields dappled with edelweiss, a tiny beautiful white flower. Tiny villages were nestled snugly in deep valleys, their buildings as dainty as dollhouses. Serene cows wearing gigantic bells gazed into the distance as we chugged along at 20 miles per hour.

Perhaps my favorite part of the trip, however, was going through the countless tunnels that had been blasted through the mountainsides. Entering a mountainside tunnel would plunge us into total darkness, and we made a game of guessing how long it would take to reach the end. As the train exited the tunnel, the sunlight would explode into our car and another spectacular view would present itself to us.

The 8-hour journey flew by, and although I was almost sorry to debark in St. Moritz and end the train portion of the trip, I was eager to hit the hiking trails and experience the mountains up close.

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# The Reason for Seasons

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► We all notice that temperatures change with the seasons. This change in seasons is caused by the earth's axis tilting toward or away from the sun as the earth revolves in its orbit around the sun. The earth's axis is an imaginary line through the North and South Poles around which the earth rotates. The earth's axis tilts at a constant angle of  $23.5^\circ$ . As the earth orbits the sun, the tilt does not alter, but the direction of the tilt relative to the sun continuously shifts.

The tilt of the axis toward or away from the sun affects the insolation, or the duration and intensity of sunlight that reaches the planet's surface. With greater insolation, more solar radiation is absorbed and converted to thermal energy, which causes the earth to increase in temperature. During winter, the Northern Hemisphere, or northern half of the planet, tilts away from the sun. Fewer hours of daylight occur and the sun's penetrating rays are dispersed over a broader area, so insolation is lower. During summer, the Northern Hemisphere tilts toward the sun and receives more direct sunlight over longer days, resulting in greater insolation. When the Northern Hemisphere tilts toward the sun, the Southern Hemisphere tilts in the opposite direction. As the north warms, the south cools, thus the seasons are reversed.

Summer and winter begin on the solstices; the longest and shortest days of the year. The solstices also mark when the sun appears at its most northern or most southern position in the sky. At the December solstice, the sun appears at its most southerly point. The Northern Hemisphere experiences the fewest daylight hours of any period during the year and winter begins; the Southern Hemisphere experiences its longest day and summer commences. At the June solstice, the conditions are reversed. The north sees its longest day as summer begins, and the south witnesses its longest night as it announces the start of winter.

Spring and fall begin at the two periods called equinoxes, when the sun appears directly overhead at the equator and both hemispheres experience equal hours of daylight and nighttime. The March equinox marks spring's start in the northern latitudes and fall in the southern latitudes. In September, the equinox marks fall's start in the north and spring in the south. Every year, the cycle of seasons repeats as the earth circles the sun.

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# First Impressions

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► In 1872, a French artist named Claude Monet created a painting titled “Impression: Sunrise.” A reviewer suggested that the painting was only an impression, or sketch, but not a finished work of art. This did not bother Monet and other artists who used a similar style. They began calling themselves Impressionists and continued to make paintings that would shake the art world and change the course of art history.

At that time, the art world was dominated, or controlled, by the French Academy of Fine Arts. The Academy taught painters to use soft shades of brown and gray to paint scenes from history with subjects that looked realistic, or lifelike. These elements defined “real art” for much of society at that time. Monet and the others rejected this old style of painting. They wanted their paintings to capture a passing moment in time. Instead of using soft shades to create a formal scene, they used bright, sunny colors to suggest the role light plays as it bounces off moving surfaces. Instead of clear lines and tiny details, they used shapes that blurred and blended into one another, much like the shapes you see when your eyes are unfocused. They also used short brush strokes to create a mix and layering of color. When viewed from a distance, these layers became familiar objects.

Often, Impressionists painted common objects and people. Monet became famous for his paintings of flowers, haystacks, and ponds, while others painted bright colorful city scenes of crowded sidewalks, railroad stations, and factories. Other painters emphasized people enjoying fun activities such as boating or swimming. The thread that tied all these paintings together was the painters’ depiction of very ordinary people carrying on everyday activities, suggesting that even the common things we see are important.

The Impressionists proved they were worthy of attention and went on to develop other styles that would influence a wide range of artists into the 1900s. Indeed, much of the art of the 20th century can be traced back to a key premise of Impressionism: that we all see and experience the world in different but equally good ways.

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