

Summarizing Literary Texts

Theme: *Puzzles and Mysteries*

When you tell someone about your day, you include the important people, places, and events but leave out the little details. Similarly, a **summary** of a story is a brief retelling. It includes only the main characters, setting, conflict, and important events.

When reading a story, you might have **personal opinions**, or feelings, about it. You might also make **judgments** about the story—whether it’s believable, well-written, and so on. Although it’s fine to have opinions and make judgments, don’t include them in a summary. A summary is supposed to be objective, or tell only the facts.

These pictures tell a story. What details would you include in a summary of the pictures?



Now read the summary below. Cross out phrases that seem like opinions or judgments.

In an unrealistic story, a boy and girl enter a living room and see drips coming from the ceiling. Although confused at first, they at least have the sense to check the bathroom above the living room. There, they discover the water is from an overflowing bathtub.

So, what did you cross out? A version of this summary without judgments and opinions would read like this: “A boy and girl enter a living room and see drips coming from the ceiling. Although confused at first, they check the bathroom above the living room. There, they discover the water is from an overflowing bathtub.”

Remember that a summary of a literary text includes only its most important aspects. It’s perfectly fine to have opinions and make judgments about what you read. When summarizing a story, though, just stick to the facts.



Read the first part of a mystery story about a boy and his brother.

Genre: Mystery

Where Is Lady Fish Pants? *by Anita Benton*

“I want to see the lady with the fish pants!” cried Ted. The day was scorching hot, and my four-year-old brother was driving me crazy. We had seen every exhibit in Oceanside Aquarium. Each time, Ted would look around and then yell, “Sam, where’s the lady with the fish pants!”

I tried to convince him that there was NO lady with fish pants there, but he just shook his head and said, “She is too here!”

“Let’s go back and look at the jellyfish exhibit,” I told him. “Maybe she’ll be there.”

(continued)

Explore how to answer these questions: “What would be a good summary of this story? What would it include and not include?”

Remember: A summary is a brief retelling. It does not include your opinions or judgments.

Below is a student’s draft of a summary. Read the draft carefully. There are three statements that do not belong. Cross out those statements in the draft that do not belong in the final summary.

In this well-written part of the story, Sam and his brother Ted visit Oceanside Aquarium. Ted says he wants to see the lady with the fish pants and acts like a spoiled brat. Sam says that there is no lady with fish pants, but Ted insists she’s there. Ted should listen to his brother.

In the chart, list what you crossed out. Then explain why they don’t belong in the summary.

Statements That Don’t Belong	Why They Don’t Belong
“In this well-written part of the story”	It gives a judgment about how the story was written.



Close Reading

Underline the names of the characters and any clues that help you understand the story’s setting and events.

Hint

A good summary describes characters, setting, and important events.

Continue reading the mystery “Where Is Lady Fish Pants?” Use the Close Reading and the Hint to help you answer the question.

(continued from page 78)

At the jellyfish exhibit, Ted screamed, “Sam! There’s no lady with fish pants here!” Everybody looked at me, and I quickly rushed him out the door.

“Look,” I told him, “Mom’s picking us up soon. Let’s hang out in the gift shop until she gets here.”

“Will the lady with the fish pants be there?”

“Sure, maybe,” I said. We walked in, and I expected to hear Ted scream—but instead he was smiling. He held up a stuffed mermaid for me to see. “See! Lady with the fish pants!”

Circle the correct answer.

Which sentence best summarizes this part of the story?

- A** Sam should have realized that Ted was telling the truth about the lady with the fish pants.
- B** The mystery of the lady with the fish pants is solved when Sam and Ted visit the gift shop and Ted sees the stuffed mermaid.
- C** Sam and Ted’s mother is supposed to pick them up soon.
- D** Sam got tired of listening to Ted whine so he took him into the gift shop.



Show Your Thinking

Explain why the other answer choices are not good summaries of the text.



With a partner, take turns summarizing the end of the story in your own words. Include characters, setting, and important events, and avoid giving any opinions or judgments.



Read the text. Use the Study Buddy and Close Reading to guide your reading.



Because this is a mystery, I know there will be a question and clues that lead to the answer.

Close Reading

How did Harrison's camera get to the top of the control tower? **Circle** a sentence that offers an explanation.

What are some key events in the story? **Underline** evidence in the text that tells what led up to the mystery being solved.

Genre: Mystery

Mystery on “The Blue Ghost” *by Saj Mobi*

- 1 “Let’s pack up,” Mr. Sanchez told the twenty students in the gigantic aircraft carrier, the U.S.S. *Lexington*. To become acquainted with life aboard a Navy ship during World War II, they had slept in the floating museum’s narrow bunks.
- 2 Suddenly, Harrison cried out, “My camera—it’s gone!” He emptied his duffel bag and pawed through his possessions.
- 3 “When did you last see it?” said Mr. Sanchez.
- 4 “On the flight deck, when we were watching pelicans.”
- 5 Mr. Sanchez sighed. The carrier’s flight deck could hold three football fields, but at least it narrowed things down.
- 6 “Maybe the blue ghost took it,” teased Victoria.
- 7 “Forget about the ghost stories you heard. Why is the aircraft carrier really called ‘The Blue Ghost?’” Mr. Sanchez asked. One student answered that during World War II, the U.S.S. *Lexington* was reported to have sunk four times, so the Japanese gave it its ghostly nickname.
- 8 “Right. Now, to the flight deck, class!” The students trudged up the stairs. “There it is!” shouted Harrison. He pointed to the control tower, which rose 150 feet high. Dangling from a tall antenna was a silver rectangle.
- 9 “Nobody could have gotten way up there!” said Victoria.
- 10 “Perhaps not, but look!” exclaimed Mr. Sanchez. Near the dangling camera, a pelican flapped lazily toward the outer bay, scanning the water for the silver flash of a tasty fish.



Hints

Remember, summaries should not contain judgments. Which choice does not contain a fact about the story?

Which sentence explains what actually happened to the camera?

Where does this story take place? Who are the main characters? What events lead to the mystery being solved?

Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.

- 1** A student wrote the following summary of the story.
- Mr. Sanchez’s class visits the aircraft carrier *Lexington*. When it’s time to leave, Harrison can’t find his camera. He should have kept the camera in his bag. The class looks for the camera on the flight deck. They find it dangling from a tall antenna near a pelican.

Which sentence should not have been included?

- A “Mr. Sanchez’s class visits the aircraft carrier *Lexington*.”
- B “When it’s time to leave, Harrison can’t find his camera.”
- C “He should have kept the camera in his bag.”
- D “The class looks for the camera on the flight deck.”

- 2** Which sentence best summarizes how the mystery was solved?

- A The carrier is called “The Blue Ghost” because it was reported to have sunk four times during World War II.
- B The class figured out that the pelican had mistaken the silver camera for a fish.
- C Harrison brilliantly realized that the camera was on an antenna.
- D Harrison should not have brought his camera with him because it created a big problem.

- 3** Write a brief summary of the story “Mystery on ‘The Blue Ghost.’” Include information about the characters, setting, and events.



Read the story. Then answer the questions that follow.

from *The Magician's Elephant*

by Kate DiCamillo

1 At the end of the century before last, in the market square of the city of Baltese, there stood a boy with a hat on his head and a coin in his hand. The boy's name was Peter Augustus Duchene, and the coin that he held did not belong to him but was instead the property of his guardian, an old soldier named Vilna Lutz, who had sent the boy to the market for fish and bread.

2 That day in the market square, in the midst of the entirely unremarkable and absolutely ordinary stalls of the fishmongers and cloth merchants and bakers and silversmiths, there had appeared, without warning or fanfare, the red tent of a fortuneteller. Attached to the fortuneteller's tent was a piece of paper, and penned upon the paper in a cramped but unapologetic hand were these words: *The most profound and difficult questions that could possibly be posed by the human mind or heart will be answered within for the price of one florit.*

3 Peter read the small sign once, and then again. The audacity of the words, their dizzying promise, made it difficult, suddenly, for him to breathe. He looked down at the coin, the single florit, in his hand.

4 "But I cannot do it," he said to himself. "Truly, I cannot, for if I do, Vilna Lutz will ask where the money has gone and I will have to lie, and it is a very dishonorable thing to lie."

5 He put the coin in his pocket. He took the soldier's hat off his head and then put it back on. He stepped away from the sign and came back to it and stood considering, again, the outrageous and wonderful words.

6 "But I must know," he said at last. He took the florit from his pocket. "I want to know the truth. And so I will do it. But I will not lie about it, and in that way, I will remain at least partly honorable." With these words, Peter stepped into the tent and handed the fortuneteller the coin.

7 And she, without even looking at him, said, "One florit will buy you one answer and only one. Do you understand?"

8 "Yes," said Peter.

9 He stood in the small patch of light making its sullen way through the open flap of the tent. He let the fortuneteller take his hand. She examined it slowly, moving her eyes back and forth and back and forth, as if there were a whole host of very small words inscribed there, an entire book about Peter Augustus Duchene composed atop his palm.

10 "Huh," she said at last. She dropped his hand and squinted up at his face. "But, of course, you are just a boy."

11 "I am ten years old," said Peter. He took the hat from his head and stood as straight and tall as he was able. "And I am training to become a soldier, brave and true. But it does not matter how old I am. You took the florit, so now you must give me my answer."



- 12 “A soldier brave and true?” said the fortuneteller. She laughed and spat on the ground. “Very well, soldier brave and true, if you say it is so, then it is so. Ask me your question.”
- 13 Peter felt a small stab of fear. What if, after all this time, he could not bear the truth? What if he did not really want to know?
- 14 “Speak,” said the fortuneteller. “Ask.”
- 15 “My parents,” said Peter.
- 16 “That is your question?” said the fortuneteller. “They are dead.”
- 17 Peter’s hands trembled. “That is not my question,” he said. “I know that already. You must tell me something that I do not know. You must tell me of another—you must tell me . . .”
- 18 The fortuneteller narrowed her eyes. “Ah,” she said. “Her? Your sister? That is your question? Very well, she lives.”
- 19 Peter’s heart seized upon the words. He closed his eyes. He concentrated. “If she lives, then I must find her, so my question is, how do I make my way there, to where she is?”
- 20 He kept his eyes closed; he waited.
- 21 “The elephant,” said the fortuneteller.
- 22 “What?” Peter said. He opened his eyes, certain that he had misunderstood.
- 23 “You must follow the elephant,” said the fortuneteller. “She will lead you there.”
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Answer the following questions.

- 1** Which two sentences express opinions?
- A** Peter has a coin that belongs to his guardian.
 - B** Peter sees a fortuneteller’s sign pinned to a tent.
 - C** Peter learns that his sister is still alive.
 - D** Peter makes a good decision in giving up his coin.
 - E** Peter decides he will remain partly honorable.
 - F** Peter acts foolishly when he believes the fortuneteller.



2 This question has two parts. Answer Part A, and then answer Part B.

Part A

Which sentence **best** summarizes paragraphs 4 through 6?

- A** Peter walks around the fortuneteller’s red tent.
- B** Peter worries about telling a lie to his guardian, Vilna Lutz.
- C** Peter has trouble deciding whether to visit the fortuneteller.
- D** Peter tells himself that the truth is definitely worth knowing.

Part B

Which quote illustrates the answer for Part A?

- A** “But I cannot do it,”
- B** “He put the coin in his pocket.”
- C** “Peter stepped into the tent and handed the fortuneteller the coin.”
- D** “He took the florit from his pocket.”

3 Write a brief summary of the excerpt. Include at least **three** details from the story.

 **Self Check** Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 44.