

Just for Boys!

Reading Comprehension

Grades 6-8

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Table of Contents

At a Glance.....	2
Assessment Rubric – Teacher	4
Assessment Rubric – Student Self-Assessment.....	5
Read Aloud Observation Form.....	6
Teacher Suggestions.....	7
Grade 6 Fiction	
Lost	8
Crazy Legs	13
That’s Why They Call It Savage Hill	18
Grade 6 Nonfiction	
Giving a Speech	23
Smoking in the Washroom	28
Snowboarding: An Interview with Ingmar “Ice Buster” Schtickler	33
Grade 7 Fiction	
The Halloween Scrooge	37
The Boy in the Red Plaid Coat.....	42
Christmas with Aunt Libby.....	47
Grade 7 NonFiction	
Airport Security	52
Working on the Railway: My First Summer Job.....	57
Sex Ed Class	61
Grade 8 Fiction	
The Bridge.....	66
Defiance Peak	71
Mutiny in Space	76
Grade 8 Nonfiction	
Let’s Roll – The Story of Todd Beamer, Hero of 9/11	81
Downloading Songs	85
Tsunami Wreaks Havoc.....	89
Answer Key.....	94

THE HALLOWEEN SCROOGE

Eric Jensen got up from the old wicker arm chair and walked to the edge of the porch. The cool autumn breeze felt good on his face as he gazed down the darkened street. Never could he remember a warmer, brighter Halloween night in all his thirteen years. Yet it still felt like he was sitting on pins and needles. Both of his parents had been called back to work after dinner, and his older sister, Shannon, was still out trick-or-treating with little Joey.

"Man oh man," groaned the other boy on the porch. "If this isn't the deadest Halloween of all time. Are hick towns always this dull?" His friend, Kyle, rummaged through the almost-empty bag of treats they had been passing out to trick-or-treaters.

Eric had thought it would be fun to invite his friend from the city to spend Halloween weekend with them, but things sure weren't working out as he'd hoped. "As soon as Shannon and Joey get back, we can take a walk around town and see what's happening," he suggested.

"Sure, but first maybe we can do something really exciting – like cut open Joey's apples and inspect them for worms, or count his bags of chips. Awesome!"

Eric turned away from his friend, his face burning. Ever since Kyle arrived this afternoon he'd been putting everything and everybody down, and Eric was quite sick of it.

"Look at the treats I got, Eric," Joey shouted, tripping over the last step. He opened his candy bag so Kyle and Eric could properly appreciate his triumph.

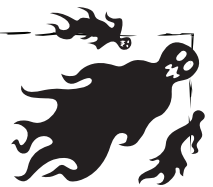
"Big deal," Kyle said with a sneer. "In the city we get twice that much."

Shannon moved up beside her brother, swinging back her long hair. "You have a lot more places to go than we do. We covered the entire town – every house."

"Yah," Joey piped up. "Even that old lady who just moved here, Eric. The one you



Why might the old woman not have answered the door?



THE HALLOWEEN SCROOGE

told us about on the edge of town.”

“Did she give you anything?” Eric asked. Shannon tossed her head back again and reached for the screen door.

“Are you kidding? She wouldn’t even come to the door. What a witch.” She disappeared inside.

“Kyle and I are heading out now,” Eric called after her. “You look after Joey.” He bounced down the porch steps.

“Come on, Kyle.”

“A witch,” Kyle was muttering to himself. “A witch right here in this little hick town!”

“She’s just an old lady that moved here a couple of weeks ago. I helped her put up her storm windows last Saturday.”

“You gotta take me to her house,” Kyle said.

It wasn’t a long walk to the lonely cottage on the edge of town. Eric trudged the entire way, a worried look creasing his face. What was Kyle up to anyway?

“There it is,” Eric said as they approached the dilapidated picket fence running around the house.

“What a dump,” Kyle muttered. “If she ain’t a witch, she sure oughta be.”

“She’s just poor.”

“Come on,” Kyle said. “Let’s see if she’s home.” Kyle banged on the door and yelled. “Trick or treat!” Then he and Eric ran and hid behind a large bush by the steps.

There wasn’t a sound from inside the cottage.

“Where’s she keep her garbage cans?” Kyle asked.

Eric led him around to the back of the house. “She probably just went to bed.”

Beside the back steps stood a dented garbage pail. “Happy Halloween, Witch!” Kyle lifted the lid and tipped the garbage can upside down, dumping its contents all over the steps. “Let’s get out of here!”

Eric found it difficult to sleep that night and when he awoke the next morning he had a sinking feeling. Maybe the old woman didn’t come to the door because she was sick or had a heart attack.

He was the last one up. Kyle, Shannon and Joey were already in the living room playing Xbox.

“I’m gonna go check on something,” Eric said, slipping on his shoes and jacket. “Tell Mom I’ll have breakfast when I get back.”

The cool morning air did a lot to clear the last of the cobwebs from his brain as he

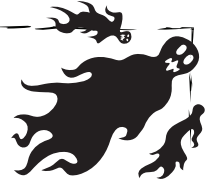


THE HALLOWEEN SCROOGE

jogged over to the old house.

No smoke from the chimney. Bad sign. He walked up to the front porch. "Hello!" He rapped briskly on the door. "Anybody home?" He heard a sound from the back of the

Why might the fact that she has no fire be important?



house. He sprinted down the steps and around the side of the building. At the back stoop, muttering softly to herself, an elderly, frail-looking woman was cleaning up the last of the garbage.

"Here let me help you," Eric said.

The old lady jumped at the sudden voice. "Goodness, you gave me quite a start, Eric," she said, straightening around to face him. She had a drawn, friendly face, and smiling hazel eyes.

"I'm sorry," Eric stammered. "I'm afraid a friend of mine did this, and it's partly my fault," he pointed to the garbage. "I'll help you clean it up."

"Ah well, that's nice of you." The old lady smiled. "Can't say I was surprised when I saw the mess. I didn't give out any treats last night, you know."

Eric knelt down by the steps and helped scoop up the last few bits of trash. "I noticed there was no smoke coming from your chimney."

"I've been so busy I just haven't had a chance to hire someone to bring me a load of firewood yet."

Eric paused, collecting his thoughts. "Listen, Ma'am, I was telling my folks about you moving into the neighborhood and my mother said that I should ask you over for dinner the next time I was talking to you. Would you be able to come over to our place for supper tonight? It would help make up for me being so dumb." He pointed to the garbage can.

"You are very thoughtful, Eric." She hesitated.

"Please," he said. "I have a friend staying with us for the weekend and I'm dying for him to meet you. It will do him a world of good."

The smile returned to her face.

"I'll pick you up at five-thirty then." Giving her a little wave, he trotted off toward home.

No firewood. No Halloween candy. Goodness knows how much food was in the house. She's definitely not a witch - just a nice old lady who needed help . . . and a friend.





THE HALLOWEEN SCROOGE

1. Why hadn't Eric enjoyed having Kyle over for the weekend?

2. Why did Shannon call the old woman who lived on the edge of town a witch?

3. Describe what the old woman's house looked like.

4. Because she didn't live in a nice house, Kyle thought the old woman was a _____.

5. Eric thought the old woman lived in a run-down house for a different reason than Kyle. What was it?

6. Why did Eric find it difficult to sleep that night?

7. Read the last paragraph again. What can Eric do to help this woman? (two suggestions)