

## Keep Looking



By the time they parked, paid the station meter, bought their train tickets, and stepped onto the long silver train it was 10:24 a.m. Luckily the second car was almost empty. They plopped down into the cool maroon and navy leather seat, happy they had made it.

Just as Netty's mom let out a sigh of relief, a bell, sounding like an old telephone, rang for a few seconds solid. The train jerked backwards, then jolted forward towards New York City. In a few hours they would be home with Daddy and their pup!

The last three days had been filled from morning to night with people speaking about math. Her mom had taken Netty upstate to the Hudson Valley for a big meeting with math teachers from all over the country. The math teachers were meeting to share their teaching styles and learn from each other, like a huge, math-y show-and-tell.

Netty's mother was very popular at the meeting. People were very excited to meet her, and seemed to know a lot about the beautiful shapes she made using a special kind of math called "geometry." Netty's mother made big, colorful stars with lots of points out of paper or metal. Some of her shapes even looked like gigantic snowflakes. Many of them were on display at the meeting. Netty loved seeing the crowds of math teachers looking amazed, and talking excitedly about her mother's stars.

The math meeting had been fun, but as the train rolled them smoothly towards home, Netty felt glad it was over. Also, the train ride was a great way to see the countryside. It had big windows and moved slow enough so that things weren't too blurry.

They had traveled to the meeting at night, so Netty hadn't noticed all the tree-covered mountains, little lakes with lily pads, and streams flowing with fresh water. It was so nice to look out at all the scenery passing by like a movie in the quiet train car and not hear anything about math. At least for a little while!

Then the train conductor made his entrance. He wore a sturdy blue uniform, punchy hip-pack around his waist, and the special black-brimmed hat with red stripes all conductors wear. He was definitely older than Netty's mom, but not yet an old man. Netty liked the way he smiled as he spoke. It felt like he was a stand-up comedian whose act was divided into personal one-minute episodes for each customer as he collected his or her tickets.

As he clicked the riders' tickets he made small talk with each of the passengers. Some of them must have known him, since he greeted them by name and asked them about their work or families. Every once in a while he sang out the snippet of a song as he clipped ticket after ticket.

He even quacked at one of the passengers.

"How are you?" she'd asked him.

"*Quack, quack!*" he'd replied. "Just ok, I'm not going to lie too much to you. *Quack!*"

"I feel about the same," she confessed.

"I have to watch out. As a duck I don't want to get cooked. Don't want to be somebody's Peking Duck, if you know what I mean. *Quack!* Don't want to end up roasted."

"I hear ya," the woman agreed.

Netty hoped the funny conductor didn't get roasted either. Netty's mother had a rule against eating duck anyhow. She always said they were such sweet animals that they didn't deserve to be eaten. Netty agreed with her mother.

When the conductor waddled over to take their tickets, though, he must have no longer felt like a duck. He didn't quack once at Netty or her mother.

Instead he took one look at Netty's widening eyes and asked, "Do you like big birds?"

Netty nodded yes.

"Well, have you ever seen a Blue Heron?"

Netty shook her head no.

"Oh, you're in for a treat, my friend," he sang.

Then he whistled, "They're kind of like a pelican or stork minus all the white."

Then he pointed out the window, his own eyes widening as he looked into the passing trees.

"Just keep looking out there about ten feet up into the trees. That's where they build their nests—up high where no one can touch them."

Netty and her mom looked out, almost expecting to see nests everywhere among the trees. After a few minutes of searching the branches together they still didn't see anything, though. All they saw were the trees themselves, growing higher than some city buildings out of a patch of swampy waters.

The conductor said, "Keep looking. They're out there."

That was the end of his routine with them, since next he made his exit into the neighboring car, preparing to entertain more passengers.

While Netty kept searching the woods for a Blue Heron, her mother took out a camera in case they did actually see something. She had only just removed the lens cover when Netty saw it.

"Look!" Netty cried, pointing up at a large nest, high up on an approaching tree.

As it came closer, Netty saw the nest, and in it the largest, most beautiful bird she had ever seen. Its beak was slender and long, its body lean and covered in a shiny brown, grey, and blue coat of feathers.

It stared at them as the train passed by. Netty felt as if it was staring right at her. Maybe it was. Maybe it thought the train was some kind of nest on wheels and Netty some kind of freshly hatched chick whose mother fed her math instead of worms.

Netty's mother instantly flipped on her camera and started snapping. *Click! Click! Click!* went her shutter as the proud mama bird guarding her nest floated out of sight.

"I think I got one with you both!" Netty's mother crowed with her own pride.

"We'll see," she concluded, returning her camera to its bag.

Soon the green countryside gave way to more and more houses, followed by bigger and bigger buildings.

They briefly glimpsed Manhattan's mammoth skyline before the train dove underground towards its final stop. They reached Grand Central Station in New York and then transferred to a subway train that took them to their neighborhood in Brooklyn. When they climbed to street level at their stop, Netty's Dad and pup were both right there, waiting in their car to pick them up.

They all hugged, so happy to be together again. Then they went home for lunch, where Netty's mother made fresh lemonade and sandwiches for everyone.

The following week Netty came home from school one afternoon and found an envelope sitting next to her bed. She opened it to discover a stunning photograph of Netty and the Blue Heron. Her mother had gotten one!

In the picture you could see the amazement in Netty's profile looking out the train's window at the enormous mother bird sitting elegantly on her nest in the background.

Netty bolted to show her father.

Climbing up the stairs, she burst out with delight, "Daddy, have you ever seen a Blue Heron?!"

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What does Netty see from the train window?

- A a pup
- B a pelican
- C a stork
- D a Blue Heron

2. Where does most of this story take place?

- A at a meeting for math teachers
- B on a train
- C at Grand Central Station
- D in Brooklyn

3. Netty and her mother are hoping to see a Blue Heron from the train.

What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A "The train was leaving at 10:26 a.m., so Netty and her mother had to dash back out onto the platform into a less crowded car when they realized there were no seats in the first one."
- B "When the conductor waddled over to take their tickets, though, he must have no longer felt like a duck. He didn't quack once at Netty or her mother."
- C "While Netty kept searching the woods for a Blue Heron, her mother took out a camera in case they did actually see something."
- D "The following week Netty came home from school one afternoon and found an envelope sitting next to her bed. She opened it to discover a stunning photograph of Netty and the Blue Heron."

4. How does Netty feel when she sees the Blue Heron?

- A excited and amazed
- B worried and scared
- C sad and disappointed
- D tired and bored

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A the difficulty of geometry
- B the importance of telling the truth
- C the fear of death
- D the excitement of discovery

6. Read the following sentence: "Netty's mother instantly flipped on her camera and started snapping. *Click! Click! Click!* went her shutter as the proud mama bird guarding her nest floated out of sight."

Why does the author write *Click! Click! Click!* in the sentence above?

- A to give readers a clear idea of what a Blue Heron sounds like when surprised by human beings
- B to give readers a clear idea of what that moment in the story was like by recreating its sound
- C to make readers think about buying a camera and taking pictures of birds themselves
- D to make readers realize that taking pictures with a camera is more difficult than most people think

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Netty keeps looking out the train window for a Blue Heron \_\_\_\_\_ all she sees at first are trees.

- A for example
- B finally
- C never
- D although

8. What does the Blue Heron look like when Netty sees it?

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9. What does Netty do after a few minutes of looking for a Blue Heron and not seeing one?

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10. Why might the author have chosen "Keep Looking" as the title of this story? Explain your answer using evidence from the passage.

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## Teacher Guide &amp; Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 940

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8. What does the Blue Heron look like when Netty sees it?

**Suggested answer:** The Blue Heron is a large, beautiful bird with a long, slender beak and a lean body. It has shiny brown, grey, and blue feathers. Students need not reproduce this description from the story in its entirety, but their answers should incorporate at least some of it.

9. What does Netty do after a few minutes of looking for a Blue Heron and not seeing one?

**Suggested answer:** Students may respond that Netty keeps searching the woods for a Blue Heron. Additionally or alternatively, they may respond that Netty cries out and points to a nest.

10. Why might the author have chosen “Keep Looking” as the title of this story? Explain your answer using evidence from the passage.

**Suggested answer:** Answers may vary. Students could take the title literally, pointing out that Netty has to “keep looking” for a Blue Heron. Student may also recognize that to “keep looking” has broader implications—the author is drawing attention to the importance of continuing to look for something when you do not find it at first.