



Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Grade 8

Answer Key

The Understudy

I had memorized every line of the school play for one reason: I never expected to say them onstage. As the understudy for the lead role, my job was to sit backstage, mouth the words along with Jordan, our star performer, and quietly hope no one ever needed me. So when the stage manager grabbed my arm ten minutes before curtain and told me Jordan had a fever of 102, I felt the floor tilt beneath me like a boat in rough water.

"You know the lines," she said, already pinning the costume to my shoulders. "That's the whole point of an understudy." I wanted to remind her that knowing lines alone in my bedroom mirror was nothing like saying them in front of three hundred people, but there was no time to argue. The curtain rose, and I stepped forward into a spotlight that felt far too bright and far too warm.

The strange thing was, once I started speaking, the fear did not disappear, but it stopped being the only thing I felt. I noticed, for the first time, how much I actually loved the story we were telling. By the final scene, the audience rose for a standing ovation, and I realized with a kind of dizzy disbelief that I, the person who had trained for months to remain invisible, had just become impossible to look away from. Jordan texted me the next morning: "Guess the understudy wasn't so understudy after all." I laughed, but I also understood, for the first time, what the role had actually been preparing me for all along.

Circle the Correct Answer

1. What was the narrator's original expectation about their role as understudy?

Answer: b) That they would never actually perform onstage

2. Why did the narrator suddenly need to perform?

Answer: b) Jordan had a fever and could not go on

3. According to the story, what changed for the narrator once they started speaking onstage?

Answer: b) The fear remained, but it was no longer the only thing they felt

4. How does the story end?

Answer: c) The narrator receives a standing ovation and a teasing text from Jordan

True or False

5. The narrator had never memorized the lines to the play.

Answer: False

6. Jordan became sick right before the performance.

Answer: True

7. The narrator felt no nervousness at all once the curtain rose.

Answer: False

Fill in the Blank

8. The narrator felt the floor tilt like a _____ in rough water.

Answer: boat

9. By the final scene, the audience rose for a standing _____.

Answer: ovation

Think and Explain

10. This story is an example of situational irony, where the outcome of events is the opposite of what was expected. Explain what makes this story ironic, using details from the text.

Sample answer: Accept reasonable answers noting that the irony lies in the narrator training specifically to remain unnoticed as an understudy, yet ending up the center of attention and praised for the exact performance they never expected to give.

11. The narrator says the role had been "preparing me for all along" something they only understood at the very end. What do you think the narrator means by this? Use evidence from the story to support your answer.

Sample answer: Accept reasonable answers suggesting the narrator means that the months of quiet preparation and memorization were not wasted time, but exactly what allowed them to succeed once given the chance, and that being ready matters even when a moment feels unlikely to come.