



Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Grade 9

Answer Key

Threshold

*The hallway stretches longer than it did in memory,
lockers lined up like a hundred closed doors
I have not yet learned the codes to.
Somewhere behind me is a building I outgrew
without noticing the exact day it happened.*

*I keep touching the strap of my backpack
the way sailors are said to touch the mast
before the ship leaves the harbor,
not because it will help,
but because my hands need something to hold
while the rest of me walks forward anyway.*

*Nobody warns you that growing up
looks less like a doorway
and more like a threshold worn smooth
by everyone who crossed it before you,
their footsteps invisible now,
but somehow still shaping
where your own feet learn to land.*

*I am not afraid, exactly.
I am something closer to a compass
before it finds north:*

*spinning, uncertain,
and quietly, stubbornly, sure
that it will settle
into a direction worth walking.*

Circle the Correct Answer

1. What does the speaker compare the lockers to in the first stanza?
Answer: a) A hundred closed doors whose codes are not yet known
2. What comparison does the speaker use for touching their backpack strap?
Answer: b) Sailors touching the mast before a ship leaves harbor
3. According to the poem, what does growing up look more like than a doorway?
Answer: b) A threshold worn smooth by those who came before
4. What does the speaker compare themselves to in the final stanza?
Answer: a) A compass before it finds north

True or False

5. The poem is written in the first person.
Answer: True
6. The speaker describes feeling completely afraid, with no other emotion present.
Answer: False
7. The poem uses a nautical (sailing) comparison at one point.
Answer: True

Fill in the Blank

8. The poem says the hallway stretches longer than it did in _____.
Answer: memory
9. The speaker describes being "quietly, stubbornly, _____" that they will find a direction worth walking.
Answer: sure

Think and Explain

10. This poem uses an extended metaphor, a single comparison that develops across multiple stanzas, built around thresholds and movement (hallways, harbors, doorways, compasses). Trace this extended metaphor across the poem and explain what it reveals about the speaker's feelings toward change.

Sample answer: Accept reasonable answers tracing the metaphor's progression from a hallway and closed lockers, to a sailor leaving harbor, to a worn threshold, to a compass finding north, explaining that this progression suggests the speaker experiences change as disorienting but ultimately purposeful, moving from uncertainty toward a settled sense of direction.

11. Identify the poem's title, 'Threshold,' as it relates to the poem's central image. Why might the poet have chosen this specific word as the title, rather than a more literal title like 'First Day of School'?

Sample answer: Accept reasonable answers noting that 'threshold' captures a moment of transition and liminality, being between two states rather than fully in either one, which reflects the poem's theme of ongoing change more precisely and poetically than a literal, situational title would.