



SAINT PIERRE
LEARNING RESOURCES

GRADE 7 | ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

The Empty Garden Grade 7 Theme and Evidence Reading Packet

FREE SAMPLE | 8 PAGES

STANDARD / LEARNING FOCUS

Selected practice for NC 2017 RL.7.1: use several textual details to support analysis and inferences about a character.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Complete Empty Garden story
- Activity 1 evidence-and-inference organizer
- Matching teacher example and classroom-use license

This sample contains selected pages from the packet. Original page references are retained. Selected-skill practice; this packet does not establish complete standard mastery.

Official reference: NC DPI Grade 7 ELA standards and clarifications

The Empty Garden

Name _____ Date _____

Read the numbered paragraphs. Annotate words, details, and changes that you can use in your responses.

1 On the first Saturday of June, Maya stood at the edge of her grandmother's backyard and stared at what had once been the most beautiful garden on Willow Street. The wooden fence leaned slightly to one side, weeds crowded the stone path, and dry vines clung to the old trellis. Maya had seen photographs of the garden from years earlier. In those pictures, enormous sunflowers towered over children, tomatoes hung from green vines, and purple flowers spilled across the fence. Now the yard looked forgotten.

2 Grandmother Celeste stepped onto the porch carrying two glasses of lemonade. She followed Maya's gaze and gave a small sigh. "It wasn't always like this," she said. "I know," Maya answered. "Mom showed me the pictures." Grandmother Celeste handed her a glass. "Your grandfather and I worked in this garden every summer."

3 Maya knew that her grandfather had died three years earlier. She also knew that her grandmother rarely mentioned him. Whenever someone brought up his name, Grandmother Celeste's smile seemed to disappear as quickly as a match flame in the wind. "Why don't you plant it again?" Maya asked. Her grandmother looked toward the garden but said nothing for several seconds. "Some things are easier to leave alone," she finally replied.

4 Maya did not ask another question. Still, throughout the afternoon, she kept thinking about the abandoned garden. She imagined the bright rows of vegetables and flowers from the photographs. More importantly, she remembered the way her grandmother had looked at the ground when she spoke about it. The following morning, Maya found an old gardening glove beneath the porch steps. That gave her an idea.

5 Without announcing her plan, Maya began pulling weeds. At first, the work seemed simple. She tugged at small plants growing between the stones. Soon, however, she discovered that the largest weeds had roots buried deep beneath the soil. They resisted every pull. Maya wrapped both hands around one thick stem and leaned backward with all her weight. The weed refused to move.

The Empty Garden continued

6 "You'll lose that battle if you keep pulling straight up." Maya turned. Her grandmother was standing on the porch. "Then what am I supposed to do?" Maya asked. Grandmother Celeste hesitated before walking toward her. "You loosen the soil around the roots first," she said. "Otherwise, the root stays underground and grows again."

7 Grandmother Celeste picked up a small garden fork. She pushed it carefully into the soil and moved it around the plant. Then she nodded toward Maya. "Now try." Maya pulled. The entire weed slid from the ground. "That was easier." "Most things are," her grandmother said quietly, "once you understand what's underneath." Maya wondered whether her grandmother was still talking about weeds.

8 They worked together for nearly an hour. Grandmother Celeste showed Maya how to distinguish young flower shoots from weeds. She explained why some plants needed full sunlight while others survived in the shade. At first her instructions were brief and practical, but gradually her voice became more animated. "Your grandfather could grow peppers larger than my hand," she said suddenly. Maya smiled but did not interrupt. "He used to brag about those peppers to everyone who walked past the house."

9 By noon, Grandmother Celeste had told three stories about him. Maya realized something important. Working in the garden did not seem to increase her grandmother's sadness. Instead, each memory seemed to lift something invisible from her shoulders. The garden, Maya thought, had not been abandoned because her grandmother no longer cared about it. Perhaps she had cared too much.

10 Over the next several days, Maya returned to the garden every morning. Sometimes her grandmother joined her immediately. Other mornings, she watched from the porch before eventually putting on her gloves. Together they cleared the stone path, removed dead vines, and repaired the leaning trellis. Progress was slow. Maya wanted the garden transformed quickly, but Grandmother Celeste refused to rush. "A garden doesn't care about your schedule," she reminded her. "Things grow when they're ready."

The Empty Garden continued

11 On Wednesday, a summer storm swept through Willow Street. Heavy rain struck the windows, and strong winds bent the trees nearly sideways. The next morning, Maya rushed outside. One side of the repaired trellis had fallen, and several small plants they had carefully protected were flattened beneath broken branches. Maya stared at the damage. "All that work," she muttered.

12 She kicked at a piece of wet wood. "We might as well stop. Another storm could destroy everything again." Grandmother Celeste stood beside her. For a moment, Maya expected her grandmother to agree. Instead, Grandmother Celeste lifted the broken trellis. "Get the hammer." Maya frowned. "Didn't you hear me?" "I heard you." "Then why are we fixing it?" Her grandmother studied the damaged garden. "Because something being damaged doesn't mean it has no future."

13 The words silenced Maya. She carried the hammer from the shed and knelt beside her grandmother. They worked most of the morning rebuilding what the storm had destroyed. This time, Grandmother Celeste added another wooden support to the trellis. "Stronger than before," Maya said. "That's the idea."

14 By the middle of July, green leaves filled the spaces that had once been bare. Tomatoes ripened along the fence. Tiny peppers appeared beneath broad leaves. Marigolds formed golden circles near the walkway. Neighbors began noticing. Mr. Howard from across the street stopped one afternoon. "Celeste," he called, "I thought we'd never see this garden again." Grandmother Celeste looked around at the plants. "Neither did I."

15 One evening, Maya found her grandmother sitting quietly beside a row of sunflowers. Their yellow heads were beginning to open. "He planted sunflowers every year," Grandmother Celeste said. "Grandpa?" She nodded. "For a long time, I thought working out here would make me miss him more." "Did it?" "Oh, yes," her grandmother replied. Maya was surprised. Grandmother Celeste smiled gently. "But missing someone isn't always something you have to escape."

The Empty Garden continued

16 Maya sat beside her. Grandmother Celeste touched one of the sunflower leaves. "I spent three years trying not to remember because remembering hurt. What I didn't understand was that avoiding the memories didn't remove the hurt. It only removed the good memories along with it." Maya thought about the stubborn weed she had tried to pull weeks earlier. Sometimes, she realized, problems stayed beneath the surface when people refused to loosen the soil around them.

17 By August, the garden had become lively again. Butterflies hovered above the flowers. Tomatoes filled baskets faster than Maya and her grandmother could eat them. Neighbors stopped by for peppers and herbs. But the garden was not identical to the one in the old photographs. Grandmother Celeste planted roses where her husband had once grown beans. Maya added strawberries near the porch. They painted the old fence pale blue.

18 At first Maya wondered whether changing the garden would make her grandmother uncomfortable. Instead, Grandmother Celeste seemed pleased. "We aren't trying to rebuild the exact garden we had before," she explained. "We're making the garden we need now."

19 On Maya's final evening before returning home, she and her grandmother sat on the porch drinking lemonade. The garden glowed beneath the fading sunlight. "You brought it back," Maya said. Grandmother Celeste shook her head. "We brought something back," she replied. "But not just the garden."

20 Maya looked across the yard. She finally understood. The garden had changed because they had cared for it. Her grandmother had changed for the same reason. Neither had returned to exactly what it had been before the loss and the years of neglect. They had grown forward instead.

Activity 1 Evidence of change

Name _____ Date _____

How does Grandmother Celeste’s response to memories change? State an inference, then support it with three details from different parts of the story.

My inference

Paragraph and evidence	How it supports the inference

Explain the change in two or three sentences

Key for Activity 1

Inference example

Celeste changes from avoiding memories of her husband to accepting painful and happy memories as part of moving forward.

Beginning paragraph 3

Her smile disappears and she says some things are easier left alone. This shows avoidance.

Middle paragraphs 8-9

She tells several stories as her voice becomes more animated. Shared work begins to make remembering less burdensome.

End paragraphs 15-18

She explains that avoiding hurt also removed good memories and welcomes a changed garden. This shows acceptance rather than exact restoration.

Synthesis example

At first, Celeste withdraws from reminders of her husband (3). While working with Maya, she begins sharing memories (8-9). By the end, she accepts that remembering can hurt while still preserving joy and making room for change (15-18).

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