



**SAMPLES OF STANDARDS STUDENTS ARE LEARNING THIS NINE WEEKS:**

**8<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA**

**STANDARDS: RL.8.1, RL.8.3, RL.8.4, RI.8.1, RI.8.2, RI.8.3, W.8.2**

**Excerpt from *One-Eyed Cat***

*by Paula Fox*

1 Ned loved snow, the whisper when he walked through it, a sound like candles being blown out, the coming indoors out of it into the warmth, and standing on the register in the big hall through which the dusty, metal-smelling heat blew up, and the going back out again, shivering, cold, stooping and scooping up a handful to make a snowball, packing it hard with wet mittens, hefting it, tossing it as far as he could, and the runners of his sled whispering across it as he sleighed down the slopes which were smooth and glittering and hard, like great jewels.

7 On the first of December, there was a heavy snowfall. When Ned looked out of his window the next morning, the river glowed like a snake made out of light as it wound among the snow-covered mountains.

10 He ate breakfast hastily, too preoccupied to read the story on the cereal box. Mrs. Scallop<sup>1</sup> was broody this morning and left him alone, her glance passing over him as it passed over the kitchen chairs.

13 On the porch, he paused to take deep breaths of air which tasted, he imagined, like water from the center of the ocean, then he waded into the snow, passing the Packard,<sup>2</sup> its windows white and hidden, the crabapple tree with its weighted branches, down the long hill trying to guess if he was anywhere near the buried driveway. By the time he reached Mr. Scully's house, his galoshes were topped with snow and his feet were wet. Mr. Scully's shades were drawn; the house had a pinched look as though it felt the cold.

19 Ned went around to the back until he could see the shed. There were boot tracks in the snow leading to it and returning to the back door. He guessed the old man had taken in the cat's bowl; it was nowhere to be seen. You couldn't leave anything out in this weather, it would freeze. Mr. Scully had told him that finding water in the winter was a big problem for animals. Licking the snow or ice could make them sick.

24 Ned stared hard at the shed. Perhaps the cat was inside, squeezed in behind logs in a tight space where its own breath would keep it warm. He was going to be late to school if he didn't get a move on, but he kept looking hard all over the yard as though he could make the cat appear out of snow and gray sky. Twice, his glance passed over the icebox. The third time, he saw that the

motionless mound on top of it was not only the quilt but the cat, joined into one shape by a dusting of snow.

30 Ned held his breath for a moment, then put his own feet in Mr. Scully's tracks and went toward the shed. The tracks had frozen and they crunched under Ned's weight, but the cat didn't raise its head. Ned halted a few feet away from it—but of course, he realized, it wouldn't hear him because of its deaf ear. He could have gone closer to it than he'd ever been but he had a sudden vision of the cat exploding into fear when it finally did hear him.

35 When he got back to the front of the house, he saw fresh footsteps on the road. He could tell it was the road because of the deep ditches which fell away to either side. He guessed they were Billy's tracks. It was odd to think that Billy, huffing and puffing, had gone past Mr. Scully's place, thinking his own thoughts, while he, Ned, only a few yards away, had been searching for the cat. He found Evelyn's tracks, too, and later on, Janet's, the smallest of all. He felt ghostly as if he'd been left alone on a white, silent globe.

41 Somewhere in the evergreen woods, snow must have slid off a bough, for he heard the loud plop, then the fainter sound of the bough springing up, relieved of the weight. He thought about the cat, visualizing how it had looked on the quilt. How still it had been! Why hadn't he gone right up to it, looked at it close, touched its fur? Why had it been so motionless—still as death, still as a dead vole he'd seen last summer in the grass near the well? He came to the snow-covered blacktop road upon which a few cars had left their ridged tire tracks. He had a strong impulse to turn back, to play hooky for the first time in his life. Mr. Scully, with his poor eyesight, might not spot the cat on top of the icebox, might not, then, set food out for it. Fretting and shivering, his feet numb, Ned went on to school.

50 He tried very hard to concentrate on his lessons, to watch Miss Jefferson's plump, even handwriting on the blackboard as she wrote out the lines from a poem by Thomas Gray that the class was to memorize that week, but try as he might, the image of the unmoving animal on the ragged old quilt persisted. Last week, on a rainy afternoon, the cat had looked at Ned, had cocked its head as though to see him better. Its one eye, narrowed, had reminded him of a grain of wheat.

“The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,

The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea . . .”

57 Ned read the lines several times before copying them down in his copybook. The words made no sense to him. It was this that had made his hours in school so hard ever since he and Mr. Scully had seen the cat last autumn, this drawing away of his attention from everything that was going on around him. He was either relieved because the cat was where he could see it or fearful because he didn't know where it was.

**1 Mrs. Scallop:** Ned's family's housekeeper **2 Packard:** a brand of car that is no longer manufactured

1. Read this sentence from the story.

**Mr. Scully's shades were drawn; the house had a pinched look as though it felt the cold.**

The use of the words "pinched look" contributes to the tone of the story by making the house seem

- A tense**
- B angry**
- C uncertain**
- D disappointed**

**RL.8.4**

**Rationale. Choice A is correct. The words "pinched look" means tense.**

2. Lines 19 through 23 contribute to the development of the plot by

- A** showing that Ned and Mr. Scully are friends
- B** describing the challenges of dealing with heavy snow
- C** suggesting that Mr. Scully has been neglecting the cat
- D** describing weather conditions that can be dangerous for the cat

**RL.8.3**

**Rationale. Choice D is correct. According to the passage, "You couldn't leave anything out in this weather, it would freeze. Mr. Scully had told him that finding water in the winter was a big problem for animals. Licking the snow or ice could make them sick."**

3. Lines 35 through 40 in the story reveal that Ned feels

- A isolated**
- B confused**
- C relieved**
- D confident**

**RL.8.1**

**Rationale. Choice A is correct. Ned felt isolated or alone because he could see everyone else's tracks, but realized that they did not see or hear him and that he did not see or hear them as they passed by.**

## Excerpt from *Birdology*

by Sy Montgomery

At first I was afraid they'd run away or become lost. We had a cozy, secure home for them prepared in the bottom storey of our barn, with wood shavings scattered over the dirt floor, a dispenser for fresh water, a trough for chick feed, some low perches made from dowels, and a hay-lined nest box made from an old rabbit hutch left over from one of the barn's previous denizens, in which they could lay future eggs. Chickens need to be closed in safe at night to protect them from predators, but by day we didn't want to confine them; we wanted to give them free run of the yard. But how could they possibly understand that they lived here now? Once we let them out, would they even recognize their space in the barn and go back in it? When I was in seventh grade, my family had moved, once again, to a new house; my first afternoon there I literally got lost in my own backyard. Could these six-week-old chicks be expected to know better?

Gretchen assured me there would be no problem. "Leave them in the pen for twenty-four hours," she told me. "Then you can let them out and they'll stick around. They'll go back in again when it starts to get dark."

15 "But how do they know?" I asked.

"They just do," she said. "Chickens just know these things."

When before dusk, I found them all perched calmly back in their coop, I saw that Gretchen was right.

20 In fact, chickens know many things, some from the moment they are born. Like all members of the order in which they are classified, the Galliformes, or game birds, just-hatched baby chickens are astonishingly mature and mobile, able to walk, peck, and run only hours after leaving the egg.

25 This developmental strategy is called precocial. Like its opposite, the altricial strategy (employed by creatures such as humans and songbirds, who are born naked and helpless), the precocial strategy was sculpted by eons of adaptation to food and predators. If your nest is on the ground, as most game birds' are, it's a good idea to get your babies out of there as quickly as possible before someone comes to eat them. So newborn game birds hatch covered in down, eyes open, and leave the nest within twenty-four hours. (An Australian game bird known as the malleefowl begins its life by digging its way out of  
30 its nest of decaying vegetation and walks off into the bush without ever even meeting either parent.)

That chickens hatch from the egg knowing how to walk, run, peck, and scratch has an odd consequence: many people take this as further evidence they are stupid. But instinct is not stupidity. (After all, Einstein was born knowing how to suckle.) Nor does  
35 instinct preclude learning. Unlike my disoriented seventh-grade self (and I have not improved much since), young chickens have a great capacity for spatial learning. In scientific

experiments, researchers have trained days-old chicks to find hidden food using both distant and nearby landmarks as cues. Italian researchers demonstrated that at the tender age of fifteen days, after just a week's training to find hidden food in the middle of their cage, chicks can correctly calculate the center of a given environment—even in the absence of distinctive landmarks. Even more astonishing, they can do it in spaces they have never seen before, whether the area be circular, square, or triangular. How? The chicks “probably relied on a visual estimate of these distances from their actual positions,” wrote University of Padova researcher L. Tommasi and co-authors in the *Journal of Comparative Physiology*, “. . . [but] it remains to be determined how the chicks actually measure distances in the task.”

47        We never determined how our first chickens knew their new home was theirs, either. We never knew how they managed to discern the boundaries of our property. But they did. At first, they liked to stay near the coop. But as they grew, they took to following me everywhere, first cheeping like the tinkling of little bells, later clucking in animated adult discussion. If I was hanging out the laundry, they would check what was in the laundry basket. If I was weeding a flower bed, they would join me, raking the soil with their strong, scaly feet, then stepping backward to see what was revealed. (Whenever I worked with soil, I suspect they assumed I was digging for worms.) When my husband, Howard, and I would eat at the picnic table under the big silver maple, the Ladies would accompany us. When my father-in-law came to help my husband build a pen for Christopher Hogwood, then still a piglet, the Ladies milled underfoot to supervise every move. The hens were clearly interested in the project, pecking at the shiny nails, standing tall to better observe the use of tools, clucking a running commentary all the while. Before this experience, Howard's dad would have been the first to say that he didn't think chickens were that smart. But they changed his mind. After a few hours I noticed he began to address them. Picking up a hammer they were examining, he might say, directly and respectfully, “Pardon me, Ladies”—as if he were speaking to my mother-in-law and me when we got in the way.

65        But when their human friends are inside, and this is much of the time, the Ladies explore on their own. A chicken can move as fast as nine miles an hour, which can take you pretty far, and ours are free to go anywhere they like. But ours have intuited our property lines and confine their travels to its boundaries. They have never crossed the street. And for years, they never hopped across the low stone wall separating our land from that of our closest neighbor. That came later—and it was not the result of any physical change in the landscape, but the outcome of a change in social relationships among their human friends.

1. Lines 1 through 11 **best** support the idea that the author

**A** is fearful the chicks will be vulnerable to predators

**B** is unsure about what she can expect the chicks to understand

**C** wants the chicks to explore the yard she has set up for their needs

**D** has not planned how she will teach the chicks to adjust to a new environment

**RI.8.1**

**Rationale.** Choice B is correct. The author is worried that the 6 week old chicks may not recognize their new home.

2. Lines 49 through 59 develop the key idea that chickens raised by humans

**A** are curious about the activities of their caregivers

**B** become a nuisance to the other projects of their owners

**C** grow to prefer the company of people over other chickens

**D** develop their intelligence more than chickens raised by hens

**RI.8.2**

**Rationale.** Choice A is correct. The author points out that the chickens were always close by whenever anything was going outside....from doing laundry, weeding a flower bed, having a picnic, or building a pig pen. They were curious to see what happening.

3. Based on lines 12 through 18, which statement **best** describes the exchange between Gretchen and the author?

**A** Gretchen proves a point, and the author feels embarrassed.

**B** Gretchen gives the author advice, and the author learns from it.

**C** Gretchen comforts the author, and the author feels more confident.

**D** Gretchen shares her personal experiences, and the author criticizes them.

**RI.8.3**

**Rationale.** Choice B is correct. Gretchen tells the author that the chickens will stay around if she leaves them in the pen for twenty-four hours. The author listens, asks questions, and learns from Gretchen's advice.



