

Reading Comprehension Worksheet: Compare and Contrast

Read the short story and answer each question.



The Clockmaker's Apprentice

In 1880s Prague, Eliska worked in her grandfather's clock shop. Gears clicked, bells chimed, and Master Horvath expected every second to be perfect. Eliska admired his skill—but dreamed of more. She wanted to build a machine that could reverse time. One day, she found a dusty blueprint labeled **Time Gear** hidden under old tools. Her grandfather had given up on it long ago, saying, "Time should not be tampered with." But Eliska had a reason—she had hurt a friend with cruel words and wished to undo her mistake. At night, she secretly worked on the machine. Her hands blistered, her eyes stung, but she didn't stop. One evening, Master Horvath followed the light and found her in the backroom. "Why are you trying to change the past?" he asked. "Because I hurt someone," Eliska whispered. He sat beside her. "We cannot change what's done. But we can shape what comes next." Eliska abandoned the **Time Gear**. Instead, she built a clock that played soft music when wound—a **Memory Clock**. At the festival, the townspeople loved it. She didn't reverse time. But she made something that helped people remember what mattered.

The Voice in the Willow

Every afternoon after school, Mateo sat beneath the twisted willow tree at the edge of the park. He didn't talk much in class, and he didn't play many games. But the willow didn't mind. One windy day, as the leaves hissed above him, he heard a whisper—not from a person, but from the tree. "You are not as small as you think," it said. Mateo jumped up, heart pounding. "Who said that?" The branches quivered. "I did." Over the next few weeks, the tree spoke again. Never loud. Never cruel. Just quiet encouragement when Mateo needed it. When he had to give a class presentation, the willow whispered, "Speak like you're telling the wind a secret." When kids made fun of his old sneakers, the tree murmured, "The ground doesn't care what shoes you wear." Mateo never told anyone. But something changed. He stood taller. He spoke up. One day, the whispers stopped. But Mateo still visited. He sat beneath the willow and whispered encouragement to himself.



Name: _____

The Clockmaker's Apprentice & The Voice in the Willow

1. What is a common theme shared by both stories?

- A. Both characters learn something about themselves that helps them grow.
- B. Both characters travel across the world on a magical quest.
- C. Both characters build machines that change time.
- D. Both stories focus on school competitions and winning prizes.

2. How are the characters' journeys of self-discovery different?

- A. Eliska tries to fix the past through invention, while Mateo gains quiet confidence through magical encouragement.
- B. Both characters rely on friends to solve their problems.
- C. Mateo builds a clock, and Eliska talks to a tree.
- D. Both learn to run away from their mistakes.

3. Fill in the blank:

Eliska builds a musical clock that helps people _____ what matters.

4. How do Eliska and Mateo each grow through their experiences with magic?

5. Which story's approach to personal growth did you connect with more, and why?



Parent and Teacher Guide

Guide Reading Level: U

Lexile Level: 925L-1075L

Grade Level: 5th Grade, Middle of the Year

Genre: Fantasy

Introducing the Text

“These two fantasy stories use magical elements to explore the theme of self-discovery. As students read, they’ll compare how Eliska and Mateo each grow through unique magical encounters, and how their responses to those experiences reflect different paths to inner growth.”

Vocabulary: blueprint, apprentice, whisper, encouragement, memory

Before Reading Discussion Questions

1. What do you expect from a fantasy story about a magical object or voice?
 2. Have you ever learned something important from an unexpected place?
 3. How might two characters grow in different ways even when facing similar emotions?
-

During Reading Discussion Questions

1. What does Eliska hope to accomplish by building the Time Gear?
 2. How does the willow tree help Mateo change over time?
 3. How do magical elements in each story connect to the characters’ emotions?
-

After Reading Discussion Questions

1. What is similar about the way both stories explore growth and change?
 2. How do the characters’ responses to magical experiences help reveal who they are?
 3. How might these stories inspire readers to reflect on their own inner strengths?
-

Activity Idea

Ask students to draw or describe their own “magical guide”—an object, voice, or creature that might help someone through a hard time. Then, write a short paragraph about what advice or lesson that guide would give, just like the Time Gear or the whispering tree.

