

The Meadowlands

By ReadWorks

When they described the swamp at the end of Schuyler Avenue, the adults in Sarah's life seemed confused. Whenever she asked about it, Sarah's dad would chuckle.

"You'd better stay away from the Meadowlands," her father said.

Sarah's sixth grade teacher, Mr. Morrison, said only parts of the Meadowlands are swamps. He explained to the class that the Meadowlands are precious wetlands, one of the last places near New York City where birds migrating from Florida could stop and rest.

"The Meadowlands once had a lot of garbage dumps, which polluted the water pretty badly," Mr. Morrison said. "But most of the dumps are closed now. And the habitat for wild birds is recovering."

From her yard in the winter, the Meadowlands was as her dad described: brown, dead-looking weeds with Doritos bags lying at the water's edge. By springtime, however, the reeds turned green and flowers grew along the shoreline.

So which one is it, Sarah wondered. Is the Meadowlands a big, ugly, dangerous swamp? Or is it a beautiful oasis of birds and flowers? Despite her dad's warnings to stay away, Sarah wanted to see for herself. She went under the porch and dragged out her dad's old fiberglass canoe. She threw the paddle and an old pink life jacket into the boat and dragged it across the yard, down Schuyler Avenue to the edge of the swamp.

Whatever it was, she saw now, the Meadowlands was big. Sarah always thought of it as the swamp at the end of her street. Now she realized that the wetlands actually stretched to the north and south, and she couldn't see either end. Directly across the water, the skyscrapers of Manhattan seemed to line the opposite shore, even though they were actually twelve miles away.

Sarah could feel the fear in her throat. But she didn't want to drag the canoe back up the hill. She zipped the life vest up to her neck, pushed the boat into the water and jumped in.

Past the reeds, she found herself paddling in a shallow pond surrounded by muddy islands. She saw ducks, swallows, yellow flowers, purple flowers, white egrets. A blue heron, disturbed by the splashes of Sarah's paddle, jumped into the air, uncurled its long wings and flapped away.

"This is all so beautiful!" Sarah thought.

The canoe slowed down, as if caught by invisible hands. Sarah looked down and saw the boat was scraping along the muddy bottom. Clouds of brown mud rose to the surface with every paddle stroke, and inside each cloud little bubbles of gas burst when they hit the surface. It smelled like a combination of old paint and rotting food. Sarah nearly threw up.

Soon she was stuck. She tried paddling backward to free the canoe from the mud, but each stroke released an overwhelming gas smell. She started to cry.

Just then something heavy and dark crashed through the weeds in front of the canoe.

A hand pulled the reeds apart, and out poked the head of Sarah's dad.

"Sarah! What are you doing out here?" he called.

Sarah tried to explain, but all she could do was cry.

"Well, it's a good thing you dragged the canoe—you left a trail in the gravel a mile wide," her dad said. "Here, take this rope."

He threw a yellow plastic rope, and after a few tries, Sarah grabbed it. Her dad pulled, and the boat skidded over the mud to shore.

Sarah worried that her father would be furious. But when he offered his hand to help her out of the boat, he laughed.

"I did the same foolish thing when I was your age," he said. "Did I ever show you the otter den?"

Sarah wiped tears from her cheek and shook her head no.

"Well, c'mon. I'll show you," her dad said. "The swamps can be pretty disgusting, but there's some beautiful stuff in here. You just have to know where to look."

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. The adults in Sarah's life seem confused about what?

- A) New York City
- B) garbage dumps
- C) birds and wildlife
- D) the Meadowlands

2. Sarah takes her dad's canoe to explore the Meadowlands. What motivates Sarah's actions?

- A) She wants to know if the Meadowlands are an ugly swamp or a beautiful oasis.
- B) She wants to prove that her dad is wrong about the danger of the Meadowlands.
- C) She wants to study the Meadowlands to complete a class project.
- D) She wants to show her dad that she is brave and adventurous by exploring on her own.

3. There are different, contrasting opinions about the Meadowlands. What evidence from the story best supports this statement?

- A) Sarah doesn't know what the Meadowlands are really like, so she decides to go and see for herself.
- B) The Meadowlands used to be polluted by garbage dumps, but now the Meadowlands are recovering.
- C) Some say the Meadowlands are a dangerous swamp; other say they are a precious habitat for birds.
- D) Sarah's father warns her not to go to the Meadowlands, but Sarah ignores his warnings and visits them anyway.

4. Based on the story, what can you conclude about the Meadowlands?

- A) The Meadowlands are dangerous and should be left alone.
- B) The Meadowlands can be both beautiful and disgusting.
- C) The Meadowlands are always a beautiful and flowering oasis.
- D) The Meadowlands are still too polluted for animals to live there.

5. What is this story mostly about?

- A) Sarah goes to the Meadowlands, and her father gets mad at her.
- B) Sarah discovers that the Meadowlands are dangerous and ugly.
- C) Sarah asks her teacher about the history of the Meadowlands.
- D) Sarah goes to the Meadowlands to learn more about them.

6. Read the following sentences: “Well, the Meadowlands once had a lot of garbage dumps that polluted the water pretty badly. But most of the dumps are closed now. And the habitat for wild birds is **recovering**.”

As used in this sentence, what does the word “**recovering**” most nearly mean?

- A) getting better
- B) getting smaller
- C) getting older
- D) getting sick

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Sarah wants to see what the Meadowlands are like, _____ she takes her dad’s canoe and paddles into the swamp.

- A) soon
- B) namely
- C) so
- D) but

8. According to Mr. Morrison, why are the Meadowlands precious?

9. Why does Sarah start to cry in the Meadowlands?

10. In the story, there are two different views of the Meadowlands: 1) the Meadowlands are a dangerous and ugly swamp, and 2) the Meadowlands are a beautiful and precious oasis. Which of these views (if any) accurately describes the Meadowlands? Support your answer using information from the story.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 830

1. **D** *the Meadowlands*
2. **A** *She wants to know if the Meadowlands are an ugly swamp or a beautiful oasis.*
3. **C** *Some say the Meadowlands are a dangerous swamp; other say they are a precious habitat for birds.*
4. **B** *The Meadowlands can be both beautiful and disgusting.*
5. **D** *Sarah goes to the Meadowlands to learn more about them.*
6. **A** *getting better*
7. **C** *so*
8. **Suggested answer:** *The Meadowlands are precious because they are one of the last places near New York City where birds migrating from Florida can stop and rest.*
9. **Suggested answer:** *Sarah starts to cry because her canoe gets stuck in the mud, and when she tries to paddle away, her paddle releases an overwhelming gas stench.*
10. **Suggested answer:** *Answers may vary and should be supported by the story. Students should indicate that both of the views accurately describe the Meadowlands, because there are two sides to the wetlands. In some places and at some times, the Meadowlands are beautiful--Sarah sees flowers and wildlife and thinks, "This is all so beautiful!" However, the Meadowlands can also be ugly and dangerous--Sarah gets stuck in the mud, which smells "like a combination of old paint and rotting food." Like Sarah's dad says, "The swamps can be pretty disgusting, but there's some beautiful stuff in here. You just have to know where to look."*