

Reading Toolkit: Grade 7 Objective 3.A.7.a

Standard 3.0 Comprehension of Literary Text

Topic A. Comprehension of Literary Text

Indicator 7. Analyze the author's purposeful use of language

Objective a. Analyze how specific language choices contribute to meaning

Assessment Limits:

Significant words (e.g., idioms, colloquialisms, etc.) with a specific effect on meaning

Denotations of above-grade-level words used in context

Connotations of grade-appropriate words and phrases in context

Selected Response (SR) Item

Question

Read this story titled "[Nathan's Choice.](#)" Then answer the question below.

In paragraphs 21 and 22, why does the author describe the making of nails in such great detail?

- A. to explain why many employers are strict
- B. to teach a reader how to use tools properly
- C. to help a reader understand a blacksmith's work
- D. to compare daily life of long ago with daily life today

Correct Answer

- C. to help a reader understand a blacksmith's work

Question

Read this story titled "[Nathan's Choice.](#)" Then answer the question below.

In paragraphs 21 and 22, why does the author describe the making of nails in such great detail?

- A. to explain why many employers are strict
- B. to teach a reader how to use tools properly
- C. to help a reader understand a blacksmith's work
- D. to compare daily life of long ago with daily life today

Handouts

Nathan's Choice

by Sharon Hart Addy

Nathan shouldered his bundle and studied the blacksmith shop across the rutted dirt road.

Jeremy, the fellow he'd met at the edge of the village, stood beside him. "Orrin Gunderson's a hard man," Jeremy said. "You'll be sorry you took up with him."

"He's my uncle," Nathan answered. "My mother's kin. I'm here to learn enough ironworking to make repairs. I aim to be a frontiersman."

Jeremy chuckled. "A trapper and explorer like Daniel Boone? You think a lot of yourself."

"Other men make a life in the wilderness. I will, too."

"So you consider yourself a man! You're no older than me."

"I'll be a man when I finish here," Nathan said confidently.

Jeremy laughed. "Gunderson will pound you to size. When you've had enough, let me know. We'll go to sea together." Jeremy tipped his tricorne hat and sauntered off.

Nathan crossed the road. He paused under the maple tree beside the shop's open doors.

¹⁰Inside the shop, his uncle used long-handled tongs to heft a hunk of glowing iron from the red-hot coals of the hearth. He positioned the iron against an anvil and picked up his hammer. The air rang with his strikes. When he finished, he grunted his satisfaction and thrust the ax head into a water trough.

Through the sizzling steam, Nathan saw his uncle's brown eyes on him.

"You must be my sister's boy," the blacksmith growled. "If you are, you're here to work. Pump the bellows."

At noon, Nathan collapsed beneath the maple tree. He ached from bending and stretching at the bellows and turning the grindstone as his uncle sharpened the ax head. Uncle Orrin dropped bread and cheese into Nathan's lap. Nathan gulped the food and drank from the bucket of creek water.

All afternoon Uncle Orrin barked orders. When he tossed bread and cheese to his nephew for supper, Nathan was too tired to lift it to his mouth.

"Eat!" Uncle Orrin roared. "There's work to do."

As the sun set, Uncle Orrin took off his leather apron. "Another bucket of water, boy."

Nathan stumbled down to the creek, then trudged up the hill, sloshing half the water from the bucket.

Uncle Orrin took the half-empty bucket and pointed to a pile of straw he'd had Nathan dump in a corner. "You sleep there."

Nathan fell onto the straw, thinking of home and the cornhusk bed he shared with his two younger brothers. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and concentrated on the creek's gurgling. His dreams filled with sailing ships and clean, clear air.

Nathan woke to the rhythm of the hammer. Uncle Orrin pounded the glowing midsection of a long, narrow shaft. Turning it as his hammer struck, he created spirals. At one end, he shaped a loop. At the other, a point.

²¹"See, boy," Uncle Orrin held the fireplace poker high, "you could do this someday. But you must be strong and know how to work iron. This afternoon I'll set you to making nails."

²²As shadows lengthened, Uncle Orrin beckoned Nathan from the bellows to the hearth. He turned the two-foot nail rod he was heating. "Watch the color," Uncle Orrin ordered. "Deep red means the iron's ready." He moved the rod to the anvil. With four blows he produced a sharp, four-sided tip. He cut the nail to length and bent the blunt end as a head.

Nathan took the rod Uncle Orrin handed him and held it in the coals. His uncle grunted as Nathan judged the heat correctly and moved the rod to the anvil. Nathan slammed the heavy hammer against the rod, angling one side. He turned the rod and struck again. Too hard. The rod flattened.

One morning Nathan found Jeremy waiting at the creek. "So, Daniel Boone," Jeremy taunted, "have you had enough? Are you ready for the sea?"

Nathan had no answer.

At noon Nathan slumped under the maple. Uncle Orrin towered over him. "Blacksmithing's hard work," he said. "So is sailing. On a ship the captain gives orders. No captain worth his salt puts up with slackers."

Uncle Orrin's words stuck to Nathan like a thistle bur. He was no slacker and he'd prove it. He flew to his tasks. He raced each time Uncle Orrin shouted for him to pump the bellows, turn the grindstone, or dip a bucket of water. Nathan found that meeting his uncle's needs cut the insults short. He continued the frantic pace.

Between stepping to his uncle's tune, Nathan made nails. His blows grew surer, the nails straighter, the points cleaner, but still Uncle Orrin scoffed and refined them with graceful ease. Nathan watched, noting his uncle's grip on the hammer, the angle of the iron, the slant of the blow. Duplicating them, his own nails grew truer, and his uncle's grunts came less frequently.

Nathan grinned when he showed Uncle Orrin a handful of perfect nails.

Uncle Orrin examined them and snarled, "They're only nails."

Nathan's pride vanished like steam above the water trough. He'd never please his uncle.

At dusk a few days later, Nathan found Jeremy at the creek. Jeremy asked, "Are you waiting for him to break your back? You'll never make a frontiersman. Think of the sea, man! The splashing waves and billowing sails! We'll see sights no man here has ever seen."

Nathan agreed. "The sea seems a better choice."

Uncle Orrin glared at Nathan when he entered the shop. He swung a beefy hand towards Jeremy's retreating back. "He talks as if sailing's all adventure. It's not!" His bushy brows met over hard eyes. "Forget the sea. You're bound to me by an agreement between your mother and me."

"She doesn't know my misery." Nathan answered. Drooping, he turned away.

His uncle's voice caught him again. "Your mother sent you to follow your dream. Leave if you want to. I won't hold it against her. Decide at the end of the week."

When Nathan met Jeremy at the creek, they worked out their plans. The days passed quickly. Nathan applied himself to making nails and produced a pile that pleased him. Pride surged through him when he discovered he could correct his bungles as easily as his uncle did. Uncle Orrin then set him to making larger nails used for rafters.

The night before the week was up, Nathan announced his decision. "The *Henrietta* sails in a week. Jeremy and I leave at midday tomorrow."

Uncle Orrin turned away. "It's your choice."

In the morning, Nathan woke to the clang of the hammer. He followed the familiar pattern of pumping the bellows and pounding out nails, sometimes working side by side with his uncle, at other times working alone, always jumping to Uncle Orrin's sharp orders.

At noon, Jeremy called to Nathan. "Hurry! I found us a ride."

Nathan picked up his bundle. He scanned the hearth, the bellows, his straw bed, and his uncle at the anvil repairing a harness ring. Nathan watched, noting the angle of the iron, anticipating the strike, figuring the result. Smiling to himself, he knew that with training he could do as well. He didn't need Uncle Orrin to tell him so.

Jeremy asked, "Are you coming?"

Nathan followed him to the road where a farm wagon waited. Jeremy climbed aboard.

Nathan hesitated. "I'm staying."

"I wish you luck," Jeremy said. "Gunderson's a hard man."

"You're right. He is," Nathan replied, "but I need the skills he can teach me. I wish you luck, too."

Nathan shook Jeremy's hand, then returned to the blacksmith shop. Throwing his bundle to a corner, he grabbed the handle of the bellows.

The steady ringing of Uncle Orrin's hammer stopped as he glanced at Nathan. "So you're staying?" he asked.

Nathan answered, "Yes."

Uncle Orrin rubbed a hand across his face, but Nathan saw the smile in his eyes.

"Then pump the bellows, boy. We have work to do!"