

Reading Work Sample Assessment

Fear in the Swamp

Instructions:

Read the following excerpt carefully and **make notes in the margin** as you read. Your notes should include:

- Comments that show that you **understand** the selection. (A summary or statement of the main idea of important ideas may serve this purpose.)
- Questions you have that show what you are **wondering** about as you read.
- Notes that show what you can tell about **main ideas, details, character interactions and beliefs**
- Observations about the **writer's strategies** (organization, figurative language, dialogue, word choice, point of view) and how the writer's choices affect the meaning.

Your **margin notes** are part of your score for this assessment.

Student _____

SSID _____

Teacher _____

Class Period _____

School _____

School District _____

The novel FRECKLES by Gene Stratton Porter is set around 1900 in the Limberlost swamp in Indiana, a huge swamp where valuable timber grows. The main character, Freckles, is nearly 20 years old. He was raised in an orphanage in Chicago. Now, after walking alone to Indiana, he has been hired by the Grand Rapids lumber company to walk the perimeter of the company's land twice a day to watch for timber thieves.

The following passage comes near the beginning of the book. In it, we see Freckles, who has lived his entire life in the city, facing his fears as he begins his new job.

Fear in the Swamp

Next morning found Freckles in clean, whole clothing, fed, and rested. Then McLean outfitted him and gave him careful instruction in the use of his weapon. The Boss showed him around the timber-line, and engaged him a place to board with the family of his head teamster, Duncan, whom he had brought from Scotland with him, and who lived in a small clearing he was working out between the swamp and the corduroy. When the gang was started for the south camp, Freckles was left to guard a fortune in the Limberlost. That he was under guard himself those first weeks he never knew.

Each hour was torture to the boy. The restricted life of a great city orphanage was the other extreme of the world compared with the Limberlost. He was afraid for his life every minute. The heat was intense. The heavy wading-boots rubbed his feet until they bled. He was sore and stiff from his long tramp and outdoor exposure. The seven miles of trail was agony at every step. He practiced at night, under the direction of Duncan, until he grew sure in the use of his revolver. He cut a stout hickory cudgel, with a knot on the end as big as his fist; this never left his hand. What he thought in those first days he himself could not recall clearly afterward.

His heart stood still every time he saw the beautiful marsh-grass begin a sinuous waving AGAINST the play of the wind, as McLean had told him it would. He bolted half a mile with the first boom of the bittern, and his hat lifted

Notes on my thoughts, observations, reactions and questions:

Freckles is pampered and well, not ready for the work he is about to face.

*--intense heat
--unfitted boots
--stiff and sore from the trek*

There must've been a big change.

--creatures hide in the grass

with every yelp of the sheitpoke. Once he saw a lean, shadowy form following him, and fired his revolver. Then he was frightened worse than ever for fear it might have been Duncan's collie.

The first afternoon that he found his wires down, and he was compelled to plunge knee deep into the black swamp-muck to restring them, he became so ill from fear and nervousness that he scarcely could control his shaking hand to do the work. With every step, he felt that he would miss secure footing and be swallowed in that clinging sea of blackness. In dumb agony he plunged forward, clinging to the posts and trees until he had finished restringing and testing the wire. He had consumed much time. Night closed in. The Limberlost stirred gently, then shook herself, growled, and awoke around him.

There seemed to be a great owl hooting from every hollow tree, and a little one screeching from every knothole. The bellowing of big bullfrogs was not sufficiently deafening to shut out the wailing of whip-poor-wills that seemed to come from every bush. Nighthawks swept past him with their shivering cry, and bats struck his face. A prowling wildcat missed its catch and screamed with rage. A straying fox bayed incessantly for its mate.

The hair on the back of Freckles' neck arose as bristles, and his knees wavered beneath him. He could not see whether the dreaded snakes were on the trail, or, in the pandemonium, hear the rattle for which McLean had cautioned him to listen. He stood motionless in an agony of fear. His breath whistled between his teeth. The perspiration ran down his face and body in little streams.

Something big, black, and heavy came crashing through the swamp close to him, and with a yell of utter panic Freckles ran, how far he did not know; but at last he gained control over himself and retraced his steps. His jaws set stiffly and the sweat dried on his body. When he reached the place from which he had started to run, he turned and with measured steps made his way down the line. After a time he realized that he was only walking, so he faced that sea of horrors again. When he came toward the corduroy, the cudgel fell to test the wire at each step.

Sounds that curdled his blood seemed to encompass him, and shapes of terror to draw closer and closer. Fear had so gained the mastery that he did not dare look behind him; and just when he felt that he would fall dead before he ever reached the clearing, came Duncan's rolling call: "Freckles! Freckles!" A shuddering sob burst in the boy's dry throat; but he only told Duncan that finding the wire down had caused the delay.

The next morning he started on time. Day after day, with his heart pounding, he ducked, dodged, ran when he could, and fought when he was brought to bay. If he ever had an idea of giving up, no one knew it; for he clung to his job without the shadow of wavering. All these things, in so far as he guessed them, Duncan, who had been set to watch the first weeks of Freckles' work, carried to the Boss at the south camp; but the innermost, exquisite torture of the thing the big Scotchman never guessed, and McLean, with his finer perceptions, came only a little closer.

Notes on my thoughts, observations, reactions and questions:

--he's afraid of Duncan's authority.

--he spent so much time going slow at his work (because he was afraid) that by the time he was done, night had fallen and the creatures awoke.

Setting description
--different animals

--he's deathly afraid of snakes.
--he stood motionless

He ran away from an unknown creature—was it Duncan?

--gained control and retraced his steps.

--he kept trudging through and trying not to give in to fear.

Duncan didn't get told of his fears, or that Freckles ran.

After a few weeks, when Freckles learned that he was still living, that he had a home, and the very first money he ever had possessed was safe in his pockets, he began to grow proud. He yet side-stepped, dodged, and hurried to avoid being late again, but he was gradually developing the fearlessness that men ever acquire of dangers to which they are hourly accustomed.

Notes on my thoughts, observations, reactions and questions:

His heart seemed to be leaping when his first rattler disputed the trail with him, but he mustered courage to attack it with his club. After its head had been crushed, he mastered an Irishman's inborn repugnance for snakes sufficiently to cut off its rattles to show Duncan. With this victory, his greatest fear of them was gone.

He is proud and wants to show the person closest to him.

Demonstrate Understanding

- 1. Summarize this story, so someone who has not read it would have a clear idea of what it is about.

In “Fear in the Swamp” by Gene Stratton Porter, a young man, Freckles, encounters his fears when experiencing his first job out in the Limberlake Swamp. Unlike his sheltered city life as an orphan, the Limberlake Swamp contained creatures hiding behind every creaky old tree and lurking within the shadows. As Freckles makes his rounds securing the perimeter and checking the fence for faults, darkness sweeps and swamp noises run his imagination a muck. After a frantic fix and a night of running aimlessly, he finally makes it back (late). With this experience, he is later able to confront his fear and kill a snake as well as go on with his job more confidently.

Demonstrate Understanding

- 2. List 6 specific challenges/fears that Freckles faces.

His fear of the unknown.	Fixing the broken wired fence.	His fear of snakes.
The physical endurances of the job. (bleeding feet, heat, ect.)	The transition from his old life to this new one.	Getting back to Duncan on time. (before he collapsed from fear)

Demonstrate Understanding

3. Freckles uses his cudgel, a strong stick, to check the wire fences along the timber-line and make sure they are still tight. If a wire fence has come unstrung, Freckles is expected to repair it on the spot. Describe what Freckles goes through on his first repair job.

He is fearful and thinks that he will lose his footing or a creature of the swamp will get him. He takes his time and repairs slowly. His hands shook and he was afraid. This caused him to lose precious time and night fell shortly.

Develop an Interpretation

4. Out of all the natural sounds, plants, and animals that frighten Freckles, which seems to be the most frightening to him? How can you tell? Include **evidence from the text** to support your answer.

Although he was startled by the large, black, heavy thing that crashed, his fear was ultimately built up by the thought of snakes on the path. "He could not see if the dreaded snakes were on the trail, or, in the pandemonium, hear the rattle for which McLean had cautioned him to listen. He stood motionless in an agony and fear." pg. 2 p.4

It also mentions in the end that he faced on of his fears, pointing out that it was a rattlesnake..."when his first rattles disputed the trail with him, but he mustered courage to attack it with his club." pg3 p.2, with this victory, his greatest fear of them was gone." pg. 3 p. 2

Develop an Interpretation

5. What seems to be the relationship between Freckles and Duncan, the head teamster? How do they feel towards each other? How can you tell? Include **evidence from the text** to support your answer.

Freckles and Duncan have a very close relationship. At night, Duncan would guide and teach Freckles how to use a revolver. "...under the direction of Duncan, until he grew sure in the use of his revolver." pg. 1 p. 2. During his ordeal, he'd shot at an unknown creature in the grass. However, he was more afraid that he shot Duncan's collie than the creature itself. The night he returned late and almost let fear win, Duncan's call brought him back. "And just as he felt he would fall dead before ever reaching the clearing, came Duncan's rolling call..." pg. 2. p. 6.

Analyze Text

6. The author describes the swamp by saying, “The Limberlost stirred gently, then shook herself, growled, and awoke around him.” What makes this sentence effective? Discuss its impact at this point in the passage.

This sentence makes The Limberlost alive and gives it the character of a wild animal. It strikes fear in Freckles because his setting rapidly changes and the “beast awakens.”

Analyze Text

7. Discuss the development of Freckles’ character in the passage. Does he change from the beginning to the end, and if so, how? **Include text evidence** that supports your thinking about this character.

In the beginning, Freckles was very fearful of his job and weak when alone. He would let his fears get the best of him. “He became so ill from fear and nervousness that he scarcely could control his shaking hand to do the work.” pg. 2 p. 2. After going through the pain and agony of fear, he learns how to cope and is more confident with his job. “...he was gradually developing the fearlessness that men ever acquire of danger to which they are hourly accustomed.” pg. 3 p. 2