Reading Comprehension Workbook

Level 10

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Discovery on a Dead Planet

Learn the Key Words

emit (i mit ')
send out; issue
The strange object, it was learned, could emit energy.

evaluate (i val' yu ât)
appraise; determine the value of
The jeweler would evaluate the quality of the stone for us.

illogical (i loj' o kål)
not logical; not reasonable
His reason for leaving home was illogical.

immeasurable (i mezh' or o bål)
boundless; cannot be measured
The void of space, for now, is immeasurable.

legacy (leg' o sê)
things handed down from ancestors or older relatives
His legacy includes a large estate and all of his uncle's money.

tabulate (tab' yô lât)
arrange in lists; to figure out
She had to tabulate her expenses for the year.

Preview:
1. Read the title.
2. Look at the picture.
3. Read the first five paragraphs of the selection.
4. Then answer the following question.

You learned from your preview that
_____ a. McGrath and Farren were naturally pale.
_____ b. McGrath and Farren were originally from Earth.
_____ c. the men were heading for a galaxy known as DST-1.
_____ d. the solar system was devoid of life.

Turn to the Comprehension Check on page 4 for the right answer.

Now read the selection.
Read to find out about the ending of one planet in the solar system.
In a deserted part of the solar system, two scientists discover a civilization's final legacy.

The ruby-red light from the master control panel reflected pink off McGrath’s pasty-white face. After eleven years in deep space, with only two hours a week under a sunlamp, McGrath and his navigator, Lieutenant Farren, had lost most of their natural skin color.

Their ship was a DST-1, launched as part of the Traveler Program, and was designed to conduct scientific experiments and to evaluate the data in the farthest reaches of space. Both scientists had signed up for the seventeen-year mission knowing that when they finally returned to their base, most people they had known would be dead or at least forgotten. The desire to explore an unknown sector of the galaxy was overwhelming, and neither man had ever regretted his decision to leave everything he had ever known to spend seventeen years on a craft that measured two miles in length and a half mile across.

“We’re entering the solar system,” McGrath said, matter-of-factly.

Farren flipped several switches and began to take readings of the planets that revolved around the single, medium-sized sun. Almost immediately, the on-board computer system began to tabulate the findings and print them out on the glowing screen before the navigator.

“So far there are no life forms on any of the planets,” he reported to the Commander. “I am picking up large amounts of radioactive material, though, from one planet closer to the sun.”

McGrath rose from his chair and walked over to look at Farren’s data screen.

“Interesting phenomenon,” McGrath said. “It’s unusual for any planet to emit such high levels of radiation in its natural state. Plot a course, and let’s take a closer look.”

The navigator punched in a course that would put the DST-1 in a close orbit around the barren, lifeless planet and let the computer do the rest. As they passed the outer planets, Farren continued to scan them for life forms or other interesting data that would merit a closer examination, but each one was a textbook case—too far from the sun to support life. It was a standard finding in every solar system they explored; only the second, third and fourth planets from the sun could support life, depending on their distance from the life-giving star.

“The computer estimates that we’ll be in stable orbit around the radioactive planet in two hours and eleven minutes,” Farren said, sounding bored.

“Get the shuttles ready. I want to go down to the surface to take some samples while we’re there.”

Farren took the elevator down to the shuttle launch platform, activated the controls of the craft and returned to the control center in less than an hour. When he took his seat and scanned the data screens, his eyes widened.

“That planet’s as hot as a pistol! It’s emitting more radioactivity than our instruments can show! It’s immeasurable—right off the dial!”

McGrath looked over his navigator’s shoulder.

“Did you put the hot suits in the shuttle? We’re going to need them. That radioactivity would
kill us in an hour.”

“You better believe I did. What do you make of it?”

“I’m not sure. It’s illogical to assume that a planet would give off that much radiation all by itself, but I have seen stranger things.”

The two scientists spent the next hour preparing to leave the DST-1 and land on the unfamiliar planet that they were now circling every seventy minutes.

The shuttlecraft was one of those two-man, scientific sub-stations left over from the Data-probe series of explorations and made several centuries before. It was almost an antique, but McGrath and Farren loved it like a baby. When they were both strapped in, McGrath programmed their landing co-ordinates into the computer.

“We’ll land on that plain next to those mountains,” he said pointing to the old-fashioned data screen in front of Farren. Farren plotted the course that would gently set them down on McGrath’s coordinates and pressed the launch button that shot the shuttle from the mother ship and sent it out into the blackness of space.

“Estimated landing time is 078136,” Farren read out.

“Will you look at that,” McGrath said, his voice filled with awe.

Farren looked as the craft entered the thin atmosphere that surrounded the dead planet. The cameras on the shuttle were sending back images of the planet’s surface. The red rock stretched out for miles with no sign of life. It was a lonely, desolate scene.

Soon, the shuttle was hovering over the plain that McGrath had selected as a landing site.

“Set her down,” he said.

Farren followed the commander’s orders and gently lowered the shuttle to the flat surface of hard rock and both men unbuckled their safety harnesses. Like two eager children, they rushed to get into their hot suits that would protect them from the immeasurable radiation that the hostile planet gave off.

McGrath was the first to set foot on the surface.

“Bring the analyzers,” he said through the radio in his helmet. “I want to evaluate the soil. It may explain this radioactivity.”

Within minutes, the analyzers were scurrying about on their oversized tires, digging, probing, and tabulating their findings for the big computer on the DST-1.

“Let’s take a look around,” McGrath said.

Slowly, the two men lumbered off toward a hill. Their hot suits made walking hard. When they reached the summit, they stood silently and stared at the jagged rocks and barren soil that stretched to the horizon. Above, the yellow sun burned down and both men began to perspire inside their suits, even though they were air-conditioned.

“There’s nothing here. I doubt there ever was,” Farren said, sounding a little disappointed.

“What’s this?” McGrath said, falling to his knees. Before him, Farren saw a rock that had been roughly shaped into a cube.

“Those are right angles,” McGrath shouted, pointing to the rock. “Right angles don’t occur naturally. This cube was made by someone or something.”

Quickly, both men dug the stone free and held it up. It was about seventeen inches long and eleven inches high. Part of it had been broken off, but they could clearly see the perfect right angles that indicated that life had at least visited the wasteland.

“Let’s dig some more,” Farren urged, delighted at their startling discovery. With shovels, they dug for an hour and finally McGrath shouted over his radio.

“Hey! I found something!”

Farren ambled to McGrath’s side and examined the metal dish the commander held in his gloved fingers. It was a small, plain plate, made of an unknown metal, with several strange markings on the underside that neither scientist could interpret.

“There were people here,” the Commander sighed, “but this is their only legacy—one metal dish and a carved cube of stone.”

The two explorers dug for several minutes more before returning to the shuttlecraft with their findings, loading up the analyzers and returning to the DST-1 that circled above.

Once aboard the mother ship, the two men hurried to the laboratory and began evaluating their findings.

“You know,” McGrath finally said, “it’s illogical to assume that any life could exist on a planet with such high levels of radiation, so I have to conclude that at one point the planet could support life and that radiation destroyed the civilization.”

“But where did the radiation come from?”

“You got me. All I know is that nothing could survive down there now,” McGrath said, manipulating the radioactive dish behind the glass with the mechanical arms.

“What do you make of those markings?” Farren asked.

“That’s another good question. I’m not sure if they’re picture symbols or maybe letters. I just don’t know,” the commander replied. “Whatever they are, though, I’ve got to enter them in the ship’s log.”

Carefully, McGrath copied the strange markings onto a piece of paper in front of him. He duplicated the symbols, just as they appeared on the dish. When he’d finished the painstaking job, he held the paper up to show Farren.

“Here they are,” McGrath said.

Farren looked at the markings—MADE IN USA—and shook his head.

“That’s some legacy for an entire civilization,” he said sadly. “I wonder what the people were like.”
DISCOVERY ON A DEAD PLANET

COMPREHENSION CHECK

Choose the best answer.

1. McGrath and Farren were interested in the planet close to the sun because it
   ___a. was barren and cold.
   ___b. showed signs of life.
   ___c. was emitting high levels of radioactivity.
   ___d. was spinning at a high rate of speed.

2. McGrath and Farren visited the dead planet in
   ___a. a missile.
   ___b. a shuttlecraft.
   ___c. a robot.
   ___d. the DST-1.

3. In order to protect themselves, the two men
   ___a. stayed in the spaceship.
   ___b. sent a machine down ahead of them.
   ___c. covered themselves with a special liquid.
   ___d. wore special suits to keep them cool.

4. Analyzers were
   ___a. robot-like computers.
   ___b. antique scientific substations.
   ___c. special kinds of hot suits.
   ___d. scientific tools.

5. The first clue to life on the dead planet was the
   ___a. unearthing of a flat metal plate.
   ___b. sighting of a man-made cave.
   ___c. discovery of a cube-shaped rock.
   ___d. the existence of mountains.

6. McGrath and Farren were
   ___a. sorry they had ever taken the long mission.
   ___b. away for more than their scheduled time and were homesick.
   ___c. traveling in their own familiar galaxy.
   ___d. daring and adventurous men stimulated by a challenge.

7. The material of the plate and the writing on it were
   ___a. familiar to the space travelers.
   ___b. made by some future culture.
   ___c. were foreign to the space travelers.
   ___d. hidden by the earth people intentionally.

8. The radioactive dead planet was
   ___a. a sun.
   ___b. the earth.
   ___c. the moon.
   ___d. a star.

9. Another name for this selection could be
   ___a. "The Challenge of the Universe."
   ___b. "The Legacy."
   ___c. "A New Sun."
   ___d. "Radioactivity to Heat the World."

10. This selection is mainly about
    ___a. two space travelers searching for life on planets.
    ___b. a large space craft moving through the universe.
    ___c. the tragic remains of a planet and its people.
    ___d. the damaging effects of an advanced society.

11. Develop your own sentences using any four key words found in the box on the following page.

Check your answers with the key on page 53.
VOCABULARY CHECK

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<th>illogical</th>
<th>immeasurable</th>
<th>legacy</th>
<th>tabulate</th>
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I. Choose the correct key word from the box above to complete the following sentences.

1. Mr. Mason's________________________ was his many novels and poems.
2. John's reasoning in the matter was________________________ to his associates.
3. One must________________________ a situation before rendering an opinion.
4. The accountant will________________________ the company's gross profits for their tax return.
5. A high watt bulb will________________________ a great deal of light.
6. A parent's love for a child is________________________.

II. Are the underlined words used correctly? Check True or False.

1. To evaluate something is to appraise it. ______ True ______ False
2. If something is immeasurable, it can be measured easily. ______ True ______ False
3. A legacy is something that is handed down from an ancestor. ______ True ______ False
4. To be illogical is to be not reasonable. ______ True ______ False
5. The sun does not emit heat or light. ______ True ______ False
6. A computer cannot tabulate information. ______ True ______ False

Check your answers with the key on page 55.