Think About It!

Critical-Thinking Questions: After reading “Mars Needs Guitars,” think about the whole story to answer the questions below.

1. The author, Geoff Rodkey, never actually reveals whether Lan is a boy or a girl. Why do you think he wrote the story this way?

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2. At the end of the story, the characters still face serious problems. Do you agree with Lan and Mom that making people happy is important? Explain your answer.

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### Directions:
We’ve given you the definitions of five important words from this issue’s story “Mars Needs Guitars.” Look for the words as you read. Then pick out three more words that are new to you. Write their definitions, using context clues or a dictionary to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORD</th>
<th>PAGE NO.</th>
<th>IT MEANS . . .</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. compartment</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>a separate area of a larger space or container</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. ration</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>a particular amount of something, like food, that is given in limited portions when there is not enough of it</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. shortage</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>a condition of not having enough of something that’s needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. temperament</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>a person’s usual attitude or mood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. underestimate</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>to expect little from someone or something</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### MY OWN WORDS:

6. 

7. 

8. 

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Making Sense of Sensory Details

In the story “Mars Needs Guitars,” author Geoff Rodkey uses creative sensory details to make the story come to life. Sensory details tell you what characters see, hear, touch or feel, smell, and taste. They pull you into the story by making you feel as if you’re experiencing the action along with the characters.

For example, on page 13, Lan says about Ila: “A little flicker of life appeared in her eyes.” In plain words, the author means that Ila suddenly looked interested. By using a striking detail about what Ila looked like, the author brings that moment to life for readers.

Directions: Read the lines from the story below. Then answer the questions that follow.

1. “Back on Earth, her whole face used to light up when strangers recognized her.” (p. 11)
   - What sense does this detail describe (sight, sound, touch or feel, smell, or taste)?
   - In plain words, what does “her whole face used to light up” mean?

2. “My heart was thumping with nerves.” (p. 13)
   - What sense does this detail describe?
   - In plain words, what does “my heart was thumping with nerves” mean?

3. “Jens called out in a booming, fake-announcer voice.” (p. 13)
   - What sense does this detail describe?
   - In plain words, what does “Jens called out in a booming, fake-announcer voice” mean?

4. “They all applauded.” (p. 13)
   - What sense does this detail describe?
   - “They all applauded” is written in plain words. Rewrite this line using at least one creative sensory detail.
The Action on Mars

Directions: The action of a story is called the plot. Most plots involve a problem. After some complications and important events, a solution is found. Fill in each block in the pyramid below to identify the problem and solution that make up the plot of “Mars Needs Guitars.” Use the prompts to help you.

1. Setup
Who do you meet at the beginning of the story? Where are they?

2. The Problem
What is Lan’s main problem? How does the problem get more complicated as the story goes on?

3. Climax
What happens that makes Lan decide to solve at least part of the problem?

4. The Solution
What does Lan do to solve the problem?

5. Conclusion
What happens after Lan solves the immediate problem?
## Finding the Theme

### Directions:
The theme of a story is the big, important idea you take away from reading it. Answer each of the questions in the chart below about “Mars Needs Guitars.” Then respond to the questions that follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>At the beginning of the story</th>
<th>By the end of the story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What does Lan believe there is to do on Mars?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>How does fear make Lan feel?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>What expression does Lan see on Ila's face?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>What does Mom tell Lan to do?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5. At the end of the story, when Mom tells Lan, “Keep going,” Lan tells her, “I will.” In your own words, explain what Lan’s promise means.

6. Write one sentence that states the theme, or big idea, of the story.

### Your turn!
Use your responses above to help you answer the writing prompt on page 14: Imagine you are Lan. Write a note to your mom explaining why, at the end of the story, you promised to “keep going.” Include details from the text.
Making Inferences

**Directions:** In the story “Mars Needs Guitars,” the author does not always tell you how characters feel or why they act the way they do. Instead, you must use text clues to make inferences. Read each excerpt from the story. Think about the questions in small type on the sides. Then make an inference to answer each question in bold.

1. Think about these lines from the beginning of the story:

   “There was nothing to do on the Mars station except wait and worry. Ila and I were sitting against the back wall of the station’s rec center, watching the latest arrivals wander in, when two of the new kids came over to us. They were about my age, and they stared down at my sister with that excited look people got when they figured out who she was.”

   What do you think the Mars station is like? Why does Ila stand out in this place?

2. Think about these lines from page 13:

   “We talked some people into letting us take over one of the bigger tables. Jens, Naya, and I pushed it against the wall to make a stage. Then all three of us jumped on top of it. Ila stood in front of us with her arms folded. About a dozen other people were watching too. My heart was thumping with nerves. ‘And now . . .’ Jens called out in a booming, fake-announcer voice, ‘Ed and Fred episode two hundred and . . . something: “Fred Gets a Puppy!”’ We acted out the first two scenes from memory. Naya played Ed. Jens played Fred. I played the puppy.”

   What is Lan nervous about? What adds to Lan’s nervousness?
3. Now think about these lines from pages 13-14:

“By the time we were done, 30 people were watching. They all applauded. We jumped off the stage and went over to Ila.

‘So?’ I asked.

‘That was the dumbest thing I’ve ever seen,’ she said. Then she turned and walked out of the rec center.

Jens’s and Naya’s shoulders slumped.

‘Oof,’ said Jens. Naya sighed. ‘Well, it was worth a shot.’”

Why do Lan, Jens, and Naya feel disappointed, even though 30 people were watching and applauding?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

4. Now think about the end of the story:

“I couldn’t find a guitar,’ I told her. ‘I know,’ she said, pulling me into a hug. ‘But you found something better.’ As we hugged, I realized something: The lump of fear in my stomach was gone.

I knew it’d come back. It wasn’t like we’d solved the food issue or found a new planet to live on. At least for an hour, though, our problems didn’t seem quite as scary. Maybe that mattered only a little. But it mattered.

‘Keep going,’ Mom whispered in my ear.”

How do you think Lan will carry out the promise to “keep going”?

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“Mars Needs Guitars” Quiz

Directions: Read the story “Mars Needs Guitars” in the February 2019 issue of Storyworks. Then fill in the bubble next to the best answer for each question below.

1. How long did the trip from Earth to Mars take for Lan’s family?
   A seven days    C seven months
   B seven weeks    D seven years

2. You can guess that Ila feels ______ since coming to the Mars station.
   A more loving
   B full of energy
   C relaxed and friendly
   D quiet and sad

3. Which line from the story supports your answer to question 2?
   A “. . . talking to my sister these days was like dropping a rock down a well.”
   B “I heard more laughter in an hour than in the whole eight months since we’d left Earth.”
   C “Can you do more?” she asked.”
   D “. . . her whole face used to light up when strangers recognized her.”

4. In the phrase “she couldn’t recharge the battery because of the energy shortage,” the word shortage tells you that there is ______ energy.
   A too much
   B not enough
   C the wrong type of
   D the right type of

5. Which is a major problem for people at the Mars station?
   A All the guitars are broken.
   B They are running out of food.
   C There isn’t enough clothing for everyone.
   D Singing is not allowed.

6. Which statement best expresses the theme, or lesson, of the story?
   A People who are afraid are often unkind.
   B Music makes everything better.
   C Some problems can’t be solved.
   D When you’re feeling afraid and helpless, try to help someone else.

Constructed Response

Directions: On a separate piece of paper, write your answer to each question in a well-organized response. Make sure you support your answers with details from the story.

7. What is life like on Mars for Lan and Ila? How do you know?

8. Explain in your own words how putting on a show in the rec center helps the “lump of fear” in Lan’s stomach go away.
“Mars Needs Guitars” Quiz

Directions: Read the story “Mars Needs Guitars” in the February 2019 issue of Storyworks. Then fill in the bubble next to the best answer for each question below.

1. Which statement best expresses the main idea of the story?
   A. People who are afraid are often unkind.
   B. Music makes everything better.
   C. Some problems can’t be solved.
   D. When you’re feeling afraid and helpless, try to help someone else.

2. Which line from the story supports your answer to question 1?
   A. “. . . just try to make somebody’s life a little happier.”
   B. “It was hopeless. Mars had no guitars.”
   C. “It wasn’t like we’d solved the food issue or found a new planet to live on.”
   D. “That was the dumbest thing I’ve ever seen.”

3. How long did the trip from Earth to Mars take for Lan’s family?
   A. seven days
   B. seven weeks
   C. seven months
   D. seven years

4. Who are Ed and Fred?
   A. Lan’s brothers
   B. the new kids at the Mars station
   C. contestants on the show Pop Singer
   D. characters in a comedy TV show

5. Which is a major problem for the people at the Mars station?
   A. They are running out of air.
   B. They are running out of food.
   C. There isn’t enough clothing for everyone.
   D. They need more people to help with science experiments.

6. In the phrase “Don’t underestimate how important that is,” underestimate means to value something ______.
   A. too much
   B. too little
   C. correctly
   D. almost correctly

7. Why does Lan want to find a guitar?
   A. because Ila says she needs one to sing again
   B. to play during the Mars station talent show
   C. to trade for food rations
   D. because Naya and Jens asked for one

8. When Mom tells Lan to “keep going,” she means that Lan should . . .
   A. go back to Earth.
   B. not give up searching for a guitar.
   C. continue trying to make people feel happier.
   D. leave her alone so she can work.

Constructed Response

Directions: On a separate piece of paper, write your answer to each question in a well-organized response. Make sure you support your answers with details from the story.

9. What does the following sentence mean: “It was like they were rationing their smiles along with the food”?

10. Explain in your own words how putting on a show in the rec center helps the “lump of fear” in Lan’s stomach go away.
Imagine you are Lan. Write a note to your mom explaining why, at the end of the story, you promised to “keep going.” Include details from the text.

Entries will be judged on:

- a clearly stated main idea
- effective use of supporting evidence
- good organization and transitions
- grammar, spelling, and punctuation

Continue on another piece of paper if you need more room.