Instructions for the Student

Read the passage from *Saint Louis Armstrong Beach*. This excerpt describes Saint, an eleven-year-old boy who lives in New Orleans, Louisiana. With his dog Shadow, he heads to a popular place for tourists to play music for them, hoping to earn money. As you read, think about how the author describes the setting, mood, point of view, and characters in the text. In addition, think about the details the author gives and how they show a theme, or big idea. After reading the text, you will answer questions about the information in the text. Then, you will create a set of panels like a comic strip. You will use drawings, speech bubbles, thought bubbles, and written text to create a comic strip to go with the text from the book.

Excerpt from *Saint Louis Armstrong Beach*

1. I felt like I was being cooked in an oven, heat coming at me from every side. Shadow was panting and sweat dripped from my forehead. As usual in August, it was way too hot. I tiptoed into someone’s yard and plucked a ready-to-burst pomegranate from a tree that had so much fruit. I convinced myself it wasn’t really stealing. And when I passed in front of Willie Mae’s Scotch House, I smelled red beans cooking. When my work is done, I thought, I’ll stop there for fries and lemonade.

2. On Moon Walk, across Decatur Street from Jackson Square, I set up. Moon Walk in the summertime had three things I needed: tourists, a few shady trees, and the Mississippi River breeze.

3. First, I found a container I could put water in for Shadow and filled it at one of the drinking fountains. He lapped it up fast, so I filled it again, then took a long drink myself. I tossed my cowboy hat on the ground, threw in a couple of rocks to keep it from blowing away, opened my case, and took out my clarinet. I imagined my hat full of change and dollar bills and me studying at Julliard [an arts school] someday. With Shadow curled nearby, I began to play.


5. I learned that from the one and only Smokey De Leon. Like a priest is a man of the cloth, Smokey De Leon is a man of the flute, at least that’s what he told me. “Knew the flute
was plenty trouble first time I put my lips to it. That was the day I forgot about everything else. Some days I’d even forget to eat. Woulda forgot ‘bout women if they hadn’t chased me night and day.” And when folks ask him how long he’s been playing, he gazes into the sky dreamily and tells them, “Seems like fo’ever.” He’s kind of skinny, probably from not eating, and he’s got a head full of white hair and grown-up grandkids, which makes him—old.

According to Smokey, tourists who’ve been warned to steer clear of some parts of New Orleans at night feel safe strolling almost anywhere in the morning. Plus, he claims, you get them with their wallets full, before they’ve had a chance to spend too much money in the Old French Market or along Royal Street . . .

I stopped playing and listened. Behind me, the Mississippi water quietly rushed and the wind carried the sound of a flute to my ears. My eyes searched the Walk. Though I couldn’t see him, the man of the flute was near.

Then, in the distance, I saw them, three folks strolling toward me. Guessing they were tourists, I put my green Cecilio clarinet to my mouth and blew some blues.

While one smiling tourist lady pointed her camera in my face and took lots of pictures, a bald-headed man wearing shorts and a sun visor that had the words New Orleans printed on it in bright red letters tossed a couple dollars into my hat. The other grinning tourist lady, wearing strands of Mardi Gras beads and chomping a praline stuffed in a five-dollar bill. Inside, I chuckled. The day was off to a very good start. And as soon as I was alone, I snatched the crisp five-dollar bill, folded it neatly, and put it inside the secret money pouch I keep taped around my ankle.

1. How would you describe the setting of this text? How does the setting affect Saint’s actions? List two examples from the text to support your response.

2. How would you describe the mood, or overall feeling, of this text? What does the author’s choice of words, or language, tell you about the mood? Include in your short response at least two descriptions from the passage that show the mood.

3. The author describes Smokey as “a man of the flute” like a priest is “a man of the cloth.” The expression about priests refers to a particular kind of clothing that certain priests might wear. What does this comparison mean about Smokey? How does this comparison show Saint’s view of Smokey?
4. Saint is telling this story and presents a certain point of view. Reread the first three paragraphs of the text. How do the descriptions in those paragraphs show Saint’s point of view? Why is Saint’s point of view important for the reader to understand?

5. What can you conclude about Saint’s personality from this text? Give two specific examples from the text that support your conclusion.

6. What inference can you make about Saint’s skill in playing the clarinet? List details from the text that support your inference.

7. What is the theme of this text? Trace the development of the theme and explain how it is expressed through particular details.

**Use What You Have Learned**

Now it’s time to show what you have learned. You will create a comic strip that shows your understanding of the meaning of the passage. Panels have been provided below for your comic and the first panel has been filled in for you.

8. Complete the comic strip to present the story from the passage though illustrations. Fill in at least four more of the panels. You can make drawings, use speech bubbles and thought bubbles, and add text to the comic. Your set of panels should illustrate the setting and mood, give information about Saint’s motives and point of view, and show the development of the theme of the passage.

A character’s speech or thoughts are often shown in “bubbles.” Thought bubbles can also be pictures without words. Choose the words or pictures for the speech and thought bubbles carefully so they help communicate ideas about the story.

After completing the panels, write a few sentences about each panel (including the first panel that is already filled in) explaining how they show the setting, mood, point of view, character motivation, and theme of the passage. Your sentences should also explain why you made the decisions you did. Remember to cite evidence from the passage to support your choices and to explain your panels.
Remember the finished comic should have at least five panels.