A Night at the Observatory

Grade 3 reading · vocabulary in context

Name: Date: Score: / 10



A Night at the Observatory

1 Dad woke Theo at nine o’clock, which never happened on a school night. “The sky is clear,” he said. “Not one cloud. Get your coat.” They drove up the hill to the **observatory**, a round building with a roof that slides open so a telescope can look straight up.

2 Inside, the telescope was **enormous** — longer than Theo was tall and as thick around as a tree trunk. A woman named Dr. Oyelaran showed him where to sit and where to put his eye.

3 At first he saw nothing but grey. Dr. Oyelaran **adjusted** the knob on the side, turning it slowly back and forth, and the grey blur sharpened until the moon had edges.

4 The moon was covered in round dents. “Those are **craters**,” she said. “Every one of them is a hole where a rock crashed into the moon.” Some were bright and sharp. Others were so **faint** that Theo could only see them by looking a little to one side of where they were.

5 He wanted to see Saturn as well, but it had not come up yet. “You will have to be **patient**,” Dr. Oyelaran said. “Everything up there arrives on its own schedule.” Theo drew the moon in his notebook while he waited, and by eleven o’clock Saturn had climbed above the trees with its rings tipped towards him.

You are not meant to know these words already. Work each one out from the sentences around it.

1. **observatory** *(paragraph 1)* — circle one letter.
   - **a** a kind of telescope
   - **b** a building made for looking at the sky
   - **c** a school for astronauts
   - **d** a map of the stars
2. **enormous** *(paragraph 2)* — what does it mean? What is your clue?

3. **adjusted** *(paragraph 3)* — circle one letter.
   - **a** broke it
   - **b** cleaned it
   - **c** changed it a little to make it right
   - **d** took it off
4. **craters** *(paragraph 4)* — explain it in your own words.

5. **faint** *(paragraph 4)* — circle one letter.
   - **a** very bright
   - **b** hard to see
   - **c** perfectly round
   - **d** brand new
6. **patient** *(paragraph 5)* — what does it mean? What is your clue?

7. Write your own sentence using the word **enormous**.

Use the words. Write the best word from the bank in each gap.

WORD BANK

adjusted **faint** **patient**

1. Dad _____ the mirror before he started the car.
2. The writing on the old sign was so _____ that we could hardly read it.
3. You have to be _____ when you are waiting for bread to rise.

A Night at the Observatory — Answer Key

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1. **observatory** — **b, a building made for looking at the sky.** The clue is in the same sentence: “a round building with a roof that slides open so a telescope can look straight up.”
2. **enormous** — **very big.** Clue: it was “longer than Theo was tall and as thick around as a tree trunk.”
3. **adjusted** — **c, changed it a little to make it right.** Clue: she turned the knob slowly back and forth until the picture got clearer.
4. **craters** — **round holes made where rocks crashed into the moon.** The passage defines it in the next sentence, which is the easiest kind of context clue to spot.
5. **faint** — **b, hard to see.** Clue: those craters could only be seen by looking slightly to one side, and they are contrasted with the ones that were “bright and sharp.”
6. **patient** — **willing to wait calmly without complaining.** Clues: Saturn had not come up yet, she says everything arrives on its own schedule, and Theo fills the time by drawing instead of giving up.
7. Own sentence using *enormous*: **Answers vary.** Accept any sentence where *enormous* clearly means very big.

Use the words

1. Dad **adjusted** the mirror before he started the car.
2. The writing on the old sign was so **faint** that we could hardly read it.
3. You have to be **patient** when you are waiting for bread to rise.

> The six words are not equally hard, and that is deliberate. *Craters* is defined in the very next sentence, *enormous* is explained by a comparison, and *faint* has to be worked out from a contrast with “bright and sharp.” Those are three different kinds of context clue. A student who can name which kind they used has a strategy; a student who simply got them right may have known the words already.