

Read the selection. Then answer the questions that follow.

Rocks in My Pocket

by *Barbara Bockman, Hopscotch*

1

Sophie swiped away a tear and stifled a sob as the two men dragged away her piano. Mama clutched the money as if it were a life line. Turning to look out the tenement window, Sophie let the noises of the neighborhood crowd into her thoughts: buggies and push carts; trolleys and motor cars; vendors and shoppers. New York City in 1913 was never quiet, never still. Now the comforting serenity of her piano was gone.

"I'm sorry, Sophie," said Mama, touching her shoulder. "Maybe we will be able to buy back the piano someday."

3

The future was dim, but the problems of today were real. Papa's injury at work meant no money coming in until he recovered. Her brothers and sisters had to be fed, and the back rent had to be paid. I have to help my family, thought Sophie. She struggled inwardly. I don't want to quit school, but I must get a job.

Grabbing her shawl, Sophie rushed to the door. "Where are you going?" asked Mama.

"Down to Judith's." My school chum will know what to do, thought Sophie, as she knocked on the door of the first floor rear apartment.

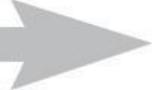
"I hear they are hiring at the coat factory," said Judith, after Sophie had explained her troubles. "What you need is a work permit. But you are such a skinny little thing, I don't think that you will come up to the weight requirement."

"I'm old enough; I'm almost 14."

"That's not the point. You have to weigh 90 pounds."

Sophie was discouraged for only a moment. "I will put rocks in my pockets. That's what Elsie did."

Judith laughed. "That might work. Go down to the City Hall with me tomorrow when I go to apply for a work permit."

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Sophie was nervous when she and Judith entered the City Hall and asked for the labor department. The weather was really too warm for the coat she was wearing, but it was the best way to conceal the rocks that would insure her success.

The man who helped Sophie fill out the papers was kind enough. She was glad that he did not seem to take much interest in her. To him, she was just a number. She stood in the line trying to look mature.

While Sophie and Judith stood in line, they talked about playing duets on the piano. "You are really good, Sophie," said Judith. "You know all of the popular tunes."

"I love to play," said Sophie, trying not to think about the absent piano.

When it came Sophie's turn at the scale, the official said, "Take off your coat, please."

Sophie shook her head. "I'm fine," she said and felt herself blush from guilt.

"You're sweating, so I don't think you need the coat. You girls think you can fool me, but I've seen this trick before. You're carrying rocks, aren't you?"

He simply ripped up the paper and said, "Come back when you're ten pounds heavier."

Sophie walked dejectedly homeward, depositing rocks in each trash can that she passed. When she told the family what had happened, Papa was shocked. "You should not have done a dishonest thing."

"I'm sorry, Papa."

"We will make out, somehow," said Mama. The "somehow" was a surprise to Sophie. Day by day, and in secret, each member of the family slipped Sophie a little of his or her own food. . . . Pound by pound, Sophie gained the necessary weight.

"You are as fat as one of the chickens hanging in Mr. Hammer's butcher shop," said Judith one fine day.

"Then it's time for me to go back to the labor office," said Sophie.

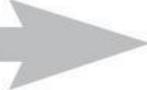
This time Sophie did not have to deceive the official. Standing on the scale, she was poised and smiling.

"Ninety pounds," said the official. "Heavy enough. And the cheeks are rosier too."

So he had noticed her before.

"Are they still hiring at the coat factory?" asked Sophie.

"Afraid not, little lady. But that's not the job for you. They need a pianist at the movie house on Delancy Street."

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"You mean, I can get a job playing the piano?"

"That's what I'm saying. Come over to the desk and get your worker's permit."

31

Sophie walked home on a cloud, the precious piece of paper snuggled safely in the pocket of her pinafore. She could hardly believe her good fortune. This was going to be so much fun. Much better than working in a factory. Daydreaming, she pictured the feast she would provide for her family when she brought home her first paycheck. "Maybe that day in the future when I get my piano back isn't so far off after all."

1 Read this sentence from paragraph 1 of the selection.

"Sophie swiped away a tear and stifled a sob as the two men dragged away her piano."

What does the word *stifled* mean in this sentence?

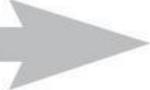
- A began a series of
- B expressed loudly
- C felt embarrassed by
- D tried to hold back

2 What is meant by the phrase "the future was dim" in paragraph 3?

- A Paying for electricity may be difficult in the future.
- B Thinking about the future can provide a moment of relief.
- C It is unclear what will happen in the future.
- D The future tends to be better than the present.

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- 3 Sophie feels defeated after the official denies her request for a work permit. Which sentence from the selection supports this statement?
- A "Sophie was nervous when she and Judith entered the City Hall and asked for the labor department."
 - B "She was glad that he did not seem to take much interest in her."
 - C "Sophie walked dejectedly homeward, depositing rocks in each trash can that she passed."
 - D "When she told the family what had happened, Papa was shocked."
- 4 How does the setting influence Sophie's hopes and dreams?
- A Sophie and her family live in a city apartment building.
 - B Sophie dreams of playing piano at a famous New York City concert hall.
 - C Sophie hopes she can fool the official at City Hall in New York City.
 - D Sophie wants her piano back because it gives her peace in a noisy city.
- 5 How does the author show that Mama and Papa share Sophie's feelings about getting a job?
- A Both sneak extra food to Sophie so she can meet the weight limit.
 - B Mama is curious about where Sophie is going in such a rush.
 - C Papa says Sophie "should not have done a dishonest thing."
 - D Mama tells Sophie that they will "make out, somehow."

Go to the next page. 

- 6 Why does the official tell Sophie to take off her coat?
- A He cannot tell how old she is when she is wearing a coat.
 - B He suspects she is using her coat to increase her weight.
 - C He knows that she will be too hot in a coat.
 - D He sees her put the rocks in her coat pockets.
- 7 In paragraph 31, what does the author mean when she says that Sophie “walked home on a cloud”?
- A She was so happy she felt as if she were floating.
 - B Her walk home was spoiled by a brief rainstorm.
 - C Her thoughts were fuzzy from her experiences.
 - D She walked carefully to keep her work permit safe.

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