Objective Summary of Informational Texts

Objective Summary: RI.8.2

Directions: Using your article, write a summary of the video below. The summary should be at least 5 sentences. Make sure to include key events from the article. Don’t forget to proofread your summary. Use the rubric to guide your writing.

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<tr>
<td>Includes the title and central idea of the text. Use of chronological order of the article. Essential, important events are included. Use of varied and appropriate transition words No opinions/unbiased At least 5 sentences</td>
<td>Includes the title and central idea of the text Use of chronological order but missing essential, important events or includes essential, important events but not in chronological order Use of varied and appropriate transition words No opinions/unbiased At least 5 sentences</td>
<td>Either missing the title or the central idea of the text No use of chronological order and essential events in the article are missing Use of varied and appropriate transition words No opinions/unbiased Very few transition words used Several grammar/ convention errors that do not obscure meaning Less than 5 sentences</td>
<td>Missing the title and the central idea of the text Confusing or ambiguous ideas No transitional strategies Includes an opinion Too brief to demonstrate knowledge of focus or organization Significant amount of grammar/ convention errors that do not obscure meaning</td>
<td>No attempt made Include only a restatement of the text Includes no transitional strategies The response demonstrates a lack of command of conventions, with frequent and severe errors often obscuring meaning.</td>
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uch!” Twelve-year-old Betsy Bell put her hand to her face. “Stop it!” she screamed, jumping in pain. Both Betsy’s cheeks were flaming, as if someone had slapped her across the face. But who—or what—could have done the slapping? That was the mystery. For Betsy was all alone in the room.

It was not the first time Betsy had been hurt by an invisible attacker. For several weeks, she and other members of the Bell family had been tormented. Their beds were torn apart. Their hair was pulled, their noses were pinched, and their faces were slapped.

According to Williams Bell, Betsy’s brother, the trouble started in 1817, on a warm Indian summer’s night in Tennessee. John Bell and his wife, Lucy, and their eight children had finished supper. Then, as was their custom, they gathered around the hearth. John Bell, a staunch Baptist, liked to read to the family from the Bible. But on this night, loud rapping and scraping noises interrupted his reading. John Bell stared at his children. “Quiet!” he said sternly. “This is no time for pranks.”

The children looked up at him innocently. “We did nothing, Father,” said

This countryside in Robertson County, Tennessee, is the location of the Bell farm and cabin.
Joel. John Bell tried to continue his reading, but the noises persisted. Now he truly looked angry. “Really, Father,” said John, Jr., “the noises are coming from outside.” The boy was right. It was as if someone were clawing at the doors and windows of the house, trying to get in.

After that, the noises were heard every night. Soon they moved indoors. There were sounds of rats gnawing on wood and of a dog’s claws scraping across the floor. Wood seemed to crack and splinter, as if the beds were being torn apart. Then the noises became human. Strangling and choking sounds seemed to come from everywhere. But although the Bells searched the house from top to bottom, they could find nothing amiss.

The Bells kept their problem a secret for almost a year. John Bell was a respected farmer, and he was afraid people would think he was crazy if he told what was going on. But when his children were attacked, he decided to get help. He invited James Johnson, a neighbor who was a lay preacher, to the farm.

Astonished at the sounds he heard, Johnson was convinced that an evil spirit was at work. “Stop, I beseech you, in the name of the Lord!” he commanded. To everyone’s surprise, the noises did stop. But they soon started again, even louder than before. In fact, they were so loud that they fairly shook the house. What is more, the attacks on the Bells became even more vicious.

By that time, news of the strange happenings at the Bell farm had spread throughout Robertson County. Every night the house filled with people who wanted to hear the noises for themselves. They were not disappointed. The source of the noises remained invisible, but along with the sounds, soft whispers began to be heard. At first the words were difficult to understand. Then, gradually, whole sentences became clear.

Of course, now that the presence could speak, listeners asked it to explain who and what it was. A number of answers were given.

“I am a spirit from everywhere— heaven, hell, the earth,” the voice said. “I am in the air, in houses—any place at any time. I have been created for millions of years.” Another time it said, “I am a spirit. I was once very happy, but I have been disturbed.”

The spirit told its audience a number of wild tales. But the story that most interested people concerned a local woman who was thought by many people to be a witch. “I am the spirit of old Kate Batts,” said the voice one evening.

Kate Batts had once done business with John Bell. Claiming afterward that Bell had cheated her, Kate vowed revenge. “I’ll get him!” she swore to all who would listen. But the townspeople were used to Kate’s evil tongue. She was stubborn and bad-tempered. As a result, she had many enemies. People loved the idea that the spirit claimed to be that of old Kate. It did not matter that the woman was still alive. From then on, the spirit was referred to as Kate, The Bell Witch.

Not everyone believed in the spirit, though. Since most of the violence was directed at Betsy, it was suggested that she might be causing the problem. Betsy was accused of ventriloquism, or “throwing her voice.” John, Jr., suggested a test to see if this was true. He asked a visiting doctor to place his hand over Betsy’s mouth at a time when the voice was speaking. The doctor did, and he declared that Betsy certainly was not making the sounds.

There was other proof of Betsy’s innocence. Hoping to spare her further torture from the spirit, the Bells sent Betsy to live with neighbors. But there, too, she was tormented. And while she was away, the Bell household continued to be attacked. There was no way Betsy could have caused the occurrences at the farm. But a spirit could easily manage to trouble two places, said believers.

At some point the Bell Witch tired of Betsy and turned its attentions to John.
Bell. Bell’s tongue grew stiff and swollen, so he could neither eat nor speak for hours. The spirit seemed to enjoy John Bell’s suffering. “I will torment you into your grave!” she threatened.

Kate’s nature was not all evil, however. She loved to quote from the Bible. When ministers visited the Bell farm, she would talk with them at length. She prayed and even sang hymns. Those who heard her said she had a charming voice.

At times Kate even made herself useful. One night Lucy Bell wondered aloud whether her son Jesse had yet returned from a trip. “Wait a minute, Lucy, I’ll go and see for you,” said Kate. A few seconds later, she returned with a report. “He’s home,” she said. “He’s sitting at a table reading by the light of a candle.” Jesse, who lived a mile away, later confirmed Kate’s report.

Lucy Bell was a favorite of Kate’s. When Lucy became ill, the spirit brought her gifts. She cracked nuts and dropped them onto the bed. She brought oranges, bananas, and grapes—fruits that in those days could not be found in Tennessee. Kate claimed she had gotten them in the West Indies.

About that time, Betsy Bell fell in love with a young man named Joshua Gardner. The Bells were delighted with the match. Kate, however, was not. “Betsy Bell,” she said, “do not marry Joshua Gardner.” At first the spirit pleaded sweetly. But when Betsy ignored the warnings, Kate grew furious. She did everything she could to break up their romance.

Kate also began a serious attack on John Bell, whom she called “Old Jack.” The poor man became very ill. The doctors could find no cure. Finally, on December 19, 1820, Williams found his father in a coma. By his side was a vial of strange-looking liquid. When it was tested on the family cat, the animal died almost at once. Their worst fears were realized: poison.

“I put it there!” cried Kate. “I gave Old Jack a big dose of it last night while he was asleep, which fixed him.” John Bell died the next morning, as Kate shouted and sang with glee. She had made good on her threat to torment John Bell to his grave.

For a while after John Bell’s death, the spirit visited less often. The Bells began to think that life might return to normal. However, when Betsy and Joshua became engaged, Kate again pleaded the couple. She said so many horrid things to them in front of their friends that they were embarrassed to be seen in public. Finally Betsy had had enough. She broke her engagement.

This seemed to satisfy Kate, for that spring she announced that she was leaving. Before she left, however, she made one more threat. “Good-bye,” she called out, “I leave for now. But I will return in several years.” With that, something like a cannon ball rolled down the chimney and burst into smoke. Kate had plagued the Bell family for four long years. At last, they were once again at peace.

Seven years later, however, the spirit kept her promise. She returned to the Bell farm and for two weeks scratched at the doors and windows. Needless to say, the Bells were terrified. Luckily, this time Kate didn’t enter the house. However, she did visit the home of John Bell, Jr., who had married and started a family of his own. She had a message to deliver. “I will be back in 107 years!” she declared. Then she left.

Well, 107 years have come and gone. So far Kate has not made another grand appearance at the Bell farm. But the people of Robertson County swear that she never left. Strange, unexplainable occurrences continue to this day. Many of them center around a cave at the edge of the Bell farm. People have reported seeing the figure of a woman floating through the cave. The Bell Witch is pretty much an accepted resident of the area. Whenever something unusual happens, folks just shrug and say, “Kate probably did it.”

If you have been timed while reading this article, enter your reading time below. Then turn to the Words-per-Minute Table on page 71 and look up your reading speed (words per minute). Enter your reading speed on the graph on page 72.

Reading Time: Lesson 1

Minutes  Seconds
A  Finding the Main Idea

One statement below expresses the main idea of the article. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other statement explains only part of the article; it is too narrow. Label the statements using the following key:

M—Main Idea    B—Too Broad    N—Too Narrow

1. Kate tormented John Bell to his grave.
2. The Bell family was tormented for years by a wicked spirit known as Kate.
3. The Bell family were victims of seemingly supernatural occurrences.

Score 15 points for a correct M answer.
Score 5 points for each correct B or N answer.

Total Score: Finding the Main Idea

B  Recalling Facts

How well do you remember the facts in the article? Put an X in the box next to the answer that correctly completes each statement about the article.

1. The story of The Bell Witch takes place in
   □ a. Georgia.
   □ b. South Carolina.
   □ c. Tennessee.
2. John Bell and his wife, Lucy, had
   □ a. two children.
   □ b. six children.
   □ c. eight children.
3. John Bell was a
   □ a. farmer.
   □ b. lay preacher.
   □ c. doctor.
4. Kate Batts was
   □ a. John Bell's sister.
   □ b. a woman John Bell had once done business with.
   □ c. James Johnson's wife.
5. When the spirit left the second time, it promised that it would return in
   □ a. 7 years.
   □ b. 100 years.
   □ c. 107 years.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

Total Score: Recalling Facts
C  Making Inferences

When you combine your own experience and information from a text to draw a conclusion that is not directly stated in that text, you are making an inference. Below are five statements that may or may not be inferences based on information in the article. Label the statements using the following key:

C—Correct Inference    F—Faulty Inference

1. Williams Bell thought the spirit was a hoax.
2. Betsy Bell never married.
3. Kate Batts lied when she said that John Bell had cheated her.
4. The spirit made a strong impression on Williams Bell.
5. Bell’s neighbors were convinced that the spirit was dangerous to them.

Score 5 points for each correct answer.

Total Score: Making Inferences

D  Using Words Precisely

Each numbered sentence below contains an underlined word or phrase from the article. Following the sentence are three definitions. One definition is closest to the meaning of the underlined word. One definition is opposite or nearly opposite. Label those two definitions using the following key. Do not label the remaining definition.

C—Closest    O—Opposite or Nearly Opposite    X = neither

1. “The blows were distinctly heard,” Betsy’s brother Williams later wrote.
   a. never
   b. clearly
   c. vaguely

2. John Bell, a staunch Baptist, liked to read to the family from the Bible.
   a. strict
   b. educated
   c. careless

3. John Bell tried to continue his reading, but the noises persisted.
   a. stopped
   b. continued
   c. grew louder

4. But although the Bells searched the house from top to bottom, they could find nothing amiss.
   a. right
   b. new
   c. wrong
5. Jesse, who lived a mile away, later confirmed Kate's report.
   - a. burned
   - b. denied
   - c. verified

Score 3 points for each correct C answer.
Score 2 points for each correct O answer.
Total Score: Using Words Precisely

Author's Approach
Put an X in the box next to the correct answer.

1. The main purpose of the first paragraph is to
   - a. describe Betsy Bell.
   - b. persuade the reader that Betsy was faking the attack.
   - c. inform the reader about a mysterious force that attacked Betsy.

2. Which of the following statements from the article best describes the Bell Witch's attitude toward those she haunted?
   - a. "The spirit seemed to enjoy John Bell's suffering."
   - b. "She loved to quote from the Bible."
   - c. "Those who heard her said she had a charming voice."

3. What does the author imply by saying "When it [the liquid in the vial] was tested on the family cat, the animal died almost at once"?
   - a. The Bell family blamed the ghost for the death of their cat.
   - b. The Bell family was cruel to all their pets.
   - c. The poison in the liquid must have been very strong.

4. The author tells this story mainly by
   - a. retelling the Bell family's personal experiences with the Bell witch.
   - b. comparing the Bell witch with other spirits in Robertson County.
   - c. telling several families' experiences with the Bell witch.

Number of correct answers
Record your personal assessment of your work on the Critical Thinking Chart on page 74.