Name: _____ Date: _____

Storm Watch

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 537 words

Maya woke on Thursday to the sound of her mother's phone buzzing at five in the morning. Her mother, a forecaster at the weather office, was already pulling on her jacket. "A storm is growing over the ocean," she said. "I need to be at the maps." Maya, who had loved weather ever since she could read a thermometer, asked if she could come along. Her mother looked at her, then smiled. "Get your shoes."

At the weather office, one wall was covered with maps and screens, and in the middle of the biggest screen was a swirl of white cloud, with a clear dot at its center. "That dot is the eye," her mother said. "A hurricane has a calm, clear center, surrounded by a ring of thunderstorms called the eyewall, where the winds are strongest." Maya traced the swirl with her finger. It looked like a giant cinnamon roll.

"How does it start?" Maya asked. "A hurricane forms over tropical ocean water that is very warm, at least eighty degrees Fahrenheit," said her mother. She pointed to a map of the sea, colored from blue to red. The storm sat on a red patch, like a spinning top on a hot plate. Satellites that circle the Earth had been watching it from the time it began, and the screens flickered as new pictures arrived every few minutes.

Around noon, a different kind of news came in. A plane was flying right into the storm. "Those are Hurricane Hunters," said her mother. "Crews fly airplanes into storms, even through the eyewall, to gather information for forecasters." On the screen, a small dot slipped through the white swirl and drifted out the other side. Little probes called dropwindsondes dropped from it and sent back wind, pressure and temperature. Maya's mother copied the numbers into a log, line after line.

The numbers were serious. The storm's winds had reached seventy-four miles an hour, the speed that makes a storm a hurricane. It had been given a name from the list the forecasters kept: Hurricane Ines. "Atlantic storm names come from six lists that are used in order," said her mother. "A name makes it easier to talk about one storm at a time." Maya wrote the name in her notebook.

By Saturday, the forecast was clear enough to share. The mayor called a meeting, and Maya's mother showed everyone the maps. The town was in an evacuation zone, so the officials told families to leave early and showed them where to go. Down the street, neighbors loaded cars and helped one another. Maya's family packed too, and she tucked her notebook into her backpack. "Listen to the officials in charge, and follow their instructions," her mother always said.

The storm turned and brushed past the coast, and by the next morning the sky was a clean, pale blue. When the officials said it was safe, the families drove home. The houses stood as they had been left, and the yards were quiet. Maya's mother, tired but smiling, sat down next to her. "The forecast gave everyone time to get ready," she said. "That is the whole point." Maya leaned against her shoulder and watched the maps go quiet.

Questions

1. What is the eye of a hurricane?

A. A strong wind
B. A calm, clear center
C. A kind of cloud

2. How warm must ocean water be for a hurricane to form?

A. Exactly 50 degrees
B. About freezing
C. At least 80 degrees Fahrenheit

3. What did the Hurricane Hunters do?

A. Flew planes into the storm to gather information
B. Watched from the beach
C. Named the storm

4. Why did the officials ask families to leave early?

A. The storm was over
B. They were bored
C. The town was in an evacuation zone

5. Why was everyone safe at the end?

A. The storm turned into snow
B. They had time to get ready
C. They stayed home

6. What does "evacuation" mean?

A. Leaving a place for safety
B. Staying in a basement
C. A kind of map

Words to know

forecaster: a person who predicts weather
eyewall: the ring around the eye
satellites: spacecraft that circle Earth
evacuation: leaving a place for safety

probes: small measuring tools
instructions: steps to follow

Answer key: Storm Watch

1. B. A calm, clear center
2. C. At least 80 degrees Fahrenheit
3. A. Flew planes into the storm to gather information
4. C. The town was in an evacuation zone
5. B. They had time to get ready
6. A. Leaving a place for safety