

The Windy City

By ReadWorks

It had been four days since Kara and Sam left home for New York City, committing to at least a week spent driving across the country from California. Both had jobs waiting for them in the Big Apple, but neither of them were eager to start as they were busy enjoying their long-awaited road trip. Of course there were the long dark nights lit only by their headlights, but the people they had met along the way more than made up for the hiccups. They switched driving shifts, and had checked in at a few motels when both of them were too tired to drive—only staying long enough to catch up on a few hours of sleep.

As the sun was rising on the fourth day of their trip, Sam spotted another famous skyline. “Look, look, we’re here!” she yelled, tapping Kara on the shoulder. She almost knocked the cup of coffee that Kara was drinking out of her hands. Kara laughed and looked out beyond the road. There it was, the Willis Tower, one of the tallest buildings in the United States. She had seen postcards and pictures of Chicago’s landmark, but never had she seen the famous building in person. It towered above the rest of the city, black and bold, unmistakably marked by the two identical antennae that added 280 feet to its height of 1,450 feet.

Sam once again pulled out a travel book, this time for Chicago. It had become a ritual; Sam reciting facts about the city before they even reached its entrance. Kara could’ve sworn her friend had at least twenty books in her backpack, but she couldn’t imagine how she managed to cram all of them in there. “The Willis Tower, completed in 1973, comes in at 110 stories, putting it among the top 20 tallest buildings in the world,” Sam started. “It has approximately 25,000 visitors per day and took 2,000 workers to build in three years. It was called the Sears Tower until 2009, when Sears Roebuck and Company moved out and Willis Group Holdings, a global insurance broker, replaced it,” she said.

As they drove closer and closer, the building grew taller and taller. They had planned to stop first at Millennium Park, one of the city’s public parks made famous by its postmodern architecture and unique art displays. Sam had seen pictures of her friends posing with “The Bean,” a three-story steel sculpture shaped like a giant legume, and wanted one of her own. The piece, which cost \$23 million to build, was completely reflective, so those standing around it could look at their reflections as if they were looking into a mirror, which made for spectacular photographs.

The two spent the day frolicking around Chicago. They listened to music under the Jay Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park, laying on their backs in the grass, peering up at the impossibly long steel beams that stretched across the lawn. They took an overwhelming number of photographs at The Bean, much to Sam's satisfaction. They met some friends with whom they had gone to university to eat deep-dish pizza for dinner—a Chicago staple. Even before the sun set, Kara and Sam were exhausted. But they still had one thing to do.

By the time they reached Willis Tower, they had completely refueled on energy by reciting interesting facts from their guide to one another about the building. The line to go up to the SkyDeck—the building's observatory deck—was still long, a surprise to the girls, who had thought that the later hour might result in fewer visitors. The man at the entrance warned them that the SkyDeck would be closing soon. "We don't allow any more visitors inside thirty minutes before closing, which is at 10 p.m.," he told them. Kara and Sam hurried along toward the elevators, rushing to make it in time. A group of people was just entering the elevator, and the two girls ran to squeeze in seconds before the doors closed. But just as the metal doors began to slide shut, Kara noticed an elderly woman and a young child—presumably a grandmother and her granddaughter—walking toward the elevator. The little girl was tugging on her grandmother's hand, but the woman was too slow for her energetic granddaughter. Kara whipped out her arm to stop the doors from closing, and waited for the two to enter. "Thank you, honey," the grandmother said to Kara, who responded with a smile.

The people in the lift adjusted themselves to allow the two extra passengers in. As they rode up, Kara noticed that Sam kept opening her mouth wide, as if she were yawning, but then shutting it quickly. "Ears popping?" Kara asked. Sam nodded her head. Eventually, everyone started to do the same, a signal of the change in air pressure as the altitude increased. In the top left corner, a screen flashed interesting facts about the height of the building—at 455 feet, they were at the height of the Great Pyramid of Giza; at 1,250 feet, they were at the height of the Empire State Building. Then, they finally reached the top.

The elevator doors opened to a large room with walls made entirely of glass. Kara and Sam looked at each other with jaws dropped, then back out at the room. They could see the entire city, lit up by tiny lights. A man in uniform guided them toward another line that wound around the room. "If you'd like to go out on the Ledge, please join the line here," he told the group. Kara and Sam had heard about the Ledge when they first bought their tickets to visit the tower—a glass box suspended 1,353 feet in the air, 4.3 feet out from the SkyDeck. Visitors

could step into the box and feel as though they were walking on air. “Oh man, another line?” Sam whispered to Kara. Even though they could hardly wait, they joined the back of the line. Kara noticed that the grandmother and granddaughter walked up behind them.

The two girls waited in silence, anticipating the beautiful view they were about to witness. The granddaughter, Lila, as her grandmother called her, kept bouncing up and down in excitement. She looked about ten or eleven years old by Kara’s estimate. “Grandma, I really don’t want you to leave tomorrow,” Lila mumbled. “It’s okay, we’ll see each other again soon,” her grandmother replied, stroking her hair.

Kara’s eavesdropping was interrupted by the man in the uniform. “All right, everyone, we can only let another ten people in for the night! The rest, we’re very sorry to inform you that the Ledge will now be closed for viewing,” he said. Kara counted the people in front of her. Eight. Lila and her grandmother hadn’t realized it yet, but they wouldn’t be able to go. Kara nudged Sam and was about to explain the situation when Sam turned around and offered their places to the two behind them.

“We’ll just come back another day!” Sam said cheerfully. “Thank you, thank you!” the grandmother said, and Lila smiled. Sam turned back at Kara. “I know you all too well,” she said with a wink, and the two began their long descent.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What city are Sam and Kara visiting in the story?

2. How can the actions of Sam and Kara towards Lila and her grandmother best be described?

3. Sam is excited to arrive in Chicago. What evidence from the text supports this statement?

4. What can be inferred about Sam and Kara's interest in the cities they visit?

They like to learn about the cities and visit their landmark sites.

5. What is the main idea of this story?

6. Read the sentences and answer the question.

"Sam once again pulled out a travel book, this time for Chicago. It had become a ritual; Sam reciting facts about the city before they even reached its entrance. Kara could've sworn her friend had at least twenty books in her backpack, but she couldn't imagine how she managed to cram all of them in there. 'The Willis Tower, completed in 1973, comes in at 110 stories, making it the eighth-tallest building in the world,' Sam started."

What does the word "ritual" mean as used in this text?

7. What word or phrase best completes the sentence?

Sam and Kara's visit many Chicago landmarks, _____ Millennium Park and the Willis Tower.

8. Describe two things Sam and Kara do while visiting Chicago.

9. Explain why Sam and Kara do not end up going out on the Ledge at the Willis Tower.

10. Based on the story, describe at least two personality traits Sam and Kara each have. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
