English Comprehension: Medium Practice Paper 2

Read this passage carefully, then answer the questions that follow.

The Knocker-Up

Before clocks were cheap enough for every house to own one, the mill towns of the north paid a knocker-up to wake the workers, tapping at their bedroom windows with a long pole. Martha's grandfather has walked the same round for forty years. On this winter morning he is too ill to leave his bed.

The pole stood behind the door where it had always stood, taller than Martha by a head, with the wires bound to its tip like the ribs of a broken umbrella. Her grandfather had cut it from a single length of ash the year the new mill opened, and in forty winters he had never let another person carry it.

He was still in bed when she came down at half past three. She heard him try to stand, and she heard the cough that stopped him, and she took her coat off the hook without being asked. 'The book is on the shelf,' he said, when she was at the door. 'Mind you keep to it. And Martha — Cropper's window is the small one over the yard, not the front.'

The book was a penny notebook, soft with handling, and every house on the round was in it: a name, a street and a time. Sixty names. Some wanted waking at four for the first shift at the spinning mill, others at five or a quarter past, and the order in the book was the order of the clock and not of the streets, so that it sent her doubling back on herself twice before she reached the top of the hill. Against one name somebody had written 'Hobbs — no money till Friday', and underneath it, in her grandfather's pencil, 'knock anyway'.

Outside, the fog had come down off the moor and settled in the streets like water in a bath. The gas lamps stood in it as dim as pennies at the bottom of a well. Martha counted doors instead of reading them, tapping the wires against each upstairs pane — three taps, never more — and waiting for the shape of a candle to move behind the glass before she went on.

She was quick. She had watched the round from the doorstep for years and she knew the rhythm of it, and by the top of Chapel Street she was three minutes ahead of the book. She allowed

herself to be pleased about that, which was where the trouble began.

On Blackthorn Row every house was the same house: one door, one step, two windows above. She had counted eleven of them and was raising the pole at the twelfth when a window went up behind her and a man's voice, thick with sleep, asked her what she thought she was doing at his glass at ten to five. In the fog she had begun her count from the wrong end of the row. She said she was sorry, twice, and then walked back to the corner and did the whole row again in the right order, and the three minutes she had been so pleased with were gone.

Cropper's was the last house on the round. She was tired by then and the pole had grown heavy, and she had the wires up at the front window before her grandfather's voice came back to her. She lowered them, went quietly round the back, and tapped at the small pane in the thin grey light above the yard. A candle moved almost at once. Cropper's wife worked nights at the infirmary and slept in the front room, and the whole street knew it except the girl who had nearly woken her.

It was ten past six when Martha came back down the hill. The fog was lifting off the rooftops and the mill hooter went while she was still on the step. Her grandfather was up, in his chair, with the kettle on.

'Well?' he said.

'Sixty,' said Martha. 'Nobody late.'

He did not tell her that she had done well. He took the book from her, licked the pencil, and wrote the date at the top of a clean page, the way he had written it four thousand times before. Then he held the pencil out to her and went to see to the tea.

Please answer these questions. (Look at the passage again if you need to.) You should choose the best answer and mark its letter on your answer sheet.

Q1. What do we learn about the pole in the first paragraph?

A. It had been bought new in the year the mill opened.

B. Martha's grandfather had made it himself and had always carried it alone.

C. It had been mended with the ribs of an old umbrella.

D. It was too heavy for anybody but her grandfather to lift.

E. It was kept at the mill and collected each morning.

Q2. 'like the ribs of a broken umbrella' (lines 2–3)

This is an example of…

A. a metaphor

B. personification

C. onomatopoeia

D. a simile

E. alliteration

Q3. 'she took her coat off the hook without being asked' (line 8)

What does this suggest about Martha?

A. She had already decided to walk the round in her grandfather's place.

B. She was cold and wanted to warm herself by the fire.

C. She was annoyed at being sent out so early.

D. She was hoping to slip out before her grandfather noticed.

E. She had been told the night before exactly what to do.

myfreeschool

Q4. ‘Mind you keep to it’ (line 10)

What does the word ‘Mind’ mean here?

A. look after

B. make sure that

C. object to

D. remember me

E. think about

Q5. Why did the round send Martha ‘doubling back on herself’ (line 17)?

A. The fog kept forcing her to turn round and start again.

B. She had to call at some houses more than once.

C. The names in the book were listed by waking time, not by street.

D. She had begun the round at the wrong end of the town.

E. Her grandfather had written the streets down in the wrong order.

Q6. ‘knock anyway’ (line 20)

What do these two words tell us about Martha’s grandfather?

A. He had forgotten which houses had paid him.

B. He expected Hobbs to pay him twice the following week.

C. He wanted Martha to ask the Hobbs family for the money.

D. He would still wake a family who could not pay him that week.

E. He knocked at every house in a street, whether it was on his round or not.

myfreeschool

Q7. ‘settled in the streets like water in a bath’ (lines 21–22)

Why is this a good way of describing the fog?

A. It suggests the fog was warm and comfortable to walk through.

B. It shows that the streets had been flooded during the night.

C. It suggests the fog lay still and filled the streets right up to a level.

D. It shows that the fog was moving quickly down the hill.

E. It tells us the fog would drain away as soon as the sun rose.

Q8. ‘as dim as pennies at the bottom of a well’ (lines 22–23)

What does this tell us about the gas lamps?

A. They were round and made of copper.

B. They had been turned off for the night.

C. They were the only bright things in the street.

D. They could barely be seen, faint and far away through the fog.

E. They were set much lower than usual on their posts.

Q9. Why has the author included the detail ‘three taps, never more’ (line 25)?

A. to show that Martha was in too much of a hurry to knock properly

B. to show that the job was done to a fixed rule she had been taught

C. to explain how the wires were fastened to the pole

D. to suggest that Martha was frightened of waking the wrong house

E. to show that three taps were all the pole could manage

myfreeschool

Q10. Why did Martha wait 'for the shape of a candle to move behind the glass' (lines 25–26)?

A. to be sure that the person really had woken before she moved on

B. because she needed the light to read the next name in the book

C. because she had been told to count the candles in every street

D. to make sure that nobody had seen her at the window

E. because the fog was too thick for her to walk on safely

Q11. 'which was where the trouble began' (lines 30–31)

Why has the author put this here?

A. to explain that Martha was already behind the times in the book

B. to show that her grandfather had grown worse while she was out

C. to warn the reader that being pleased with herself was about to cost her

D. to suggest that the man on Blackthorn Row had been watching her

E. to show that the fog was thickening as she climbed the hill

Q12. What mistake did Martha make on Blackthorn Row?

A. She woke the houses in the right order but at the wrong times.

B. She began counting the houses from the wrong end of the row.

C. She left the row out of the round altogether.

D. She tapped at the downstairs windows instead of the upstairs ones.

E. She lost her place in the book and had to go home for it.

Q13. 'a man's voice, thick with sleep' (line 35)

What does 'thick with sleep' mean?

A. his voice was deep and frightening

B. he was speaking too quietly to be understood

C. his voice was heavy and unclear because he had just been woken

D. he was still dreaming as he spoke

E. he had a bad cold and could hardly speak

myFreeSchool

Q14. What type of word is ‘quietly’ (line 44)?

A. a noun

B. an adjective

C. a verb

D. a preposition

E. an adverb

Q15. Why did Martha tap at the small pane above the yard rather than at the front window?

A. The front window was too high for her pole to reach.

B. Cropper’s wife worked nights and slept in the front room.

C. The front window had been broken earlier that winter.

D. She could not find the front of the house in the fog.

E. Cropper had asked to be woken from the back door.

Q16. ‘before her grandfather’s voice came back to her’ (line 43)

What does this show?

A. She had almost forgotten his instruction and remembered it just in time.

B. Her grandfather had followed her out and called to her from the street.

C. She had never understood what he meant by the small window.

D. She was thinking about him rather than about the round.

E. She had decided to ignore what he had told her at the door.

myfreeschool

Q17. How many adjectives are there in the phrase 'the thin grey light above the yard'? (line 45)

A. 0

B. 1

C. 2

D. 3

E. 4

Q18. 'the girl who had nearly woken her' (line 48)

Why does the author describe Martha in this way instead of using her name?

A. because the people of the street did not know what she was called

B. to show that she was ashamed of what she had nearly done

C. to suggest that she had never been to Blackthorn Row before

D. to remind us that another girl was walking the round as well

E. to stress that she was the only person who did not know what the whole street knew

Q19. 'He did not tell her that she had done well.' (line 55)

What does her grandfather's behaviour at the end of the passage show?

A. He was disappointed that she had lost time on Blackthorn Row.

B. He was too ill to take any real notice of what she had done.

C. He treated it as an ordinary morning's work and trusted her with the round.

D. He was waiting for her to admit that she had made a mistake.

E. He thought she had only finished on time by luck.

Q20. Which of these would make the best alternative title for the passage?

A. The Fog on the Moor

B. The Man at the Window

C. Martha's First Round

D. A Winter of Illness

E. The Broken Umbrella

myfreeschool