

# English Comprehension: Hard Practice Paper

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

## The Girl Behind the Curtain

by Charlotte Brontë

*From the opening chapter of Jane Eyre (1847). Jane is ten years old and an orphan, brought up at Gateshead Hall by her aunt, Mrs. Reed, alongside her three cousins – Eliza, John and Georgiana. Her aunt has just told her to sit somewhere quietly and stay silent, since she is not fit company for contented, happy children. Bessie is the nursemaid. This extract has been shortened in places.*

1 There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been  
wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning;  
but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early)  
the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a  
5 rain so penetrating, that further outdoor exercise was now out of  
the question.

A breakfast-room adjoined the drawing-room, I slipped in there. It  
contained a bookcase: I soon possessed myself of a volume, taking  
care that it should be one stored with pictures. I mounted into the  
10 window-seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a Turk;  
and, having drawn the red moreen curtain nearly close, I was shrined  
in double retirement.

Folds of scarlet drapery shut in my view to the right hand; to the  
left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating  
15 me from the drear November day. Afar, it offered a pale blank of  
mist and cloud; near a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with  
ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable  
blast.

I returned to my book—Bewick's History of British Birds: the  
20 letterpress thereof I cared little for, generally speaking; and yet  
there were certain introductory pages that, child as I was, I could  
not pass quite as a blank. They were those which treat of the haunts  
of sea-fowl; of "the solitary rocks and promontories" by them only  
inhabited; of the coast of Norway, studded with isles from its  
25 southern extremity, the Lindeness, or Naze, to the North Cape.

With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy: happy at least in my way.  
I feared nothing but interruption, and that came too soon. The

breakfast-room door opened.

"Boh! Madam Mope!" cried the voice of John Reed; then he paused: he  
30 found the room apparently empty.

"Where the dickens is she!" he continued. "Lizzy! Georgy! (calling to his sisters) Joan is not here: tell mama she is run out into the rain-bad animal!"

"It is well I drew the curtain," thought I; and I wished fervently  
35 he might not discover my hiding-place: nor would John Reed have found it out himself; he was not quick either of vision or conception; but Eliza just put her head in at the door, and said at once—

"She is in the window-seat, to be sure, Jack."

40 And I came out immediately, for I trembled at the idea of being dragged forth by the said Jack.

"What do you want?" I asked, with awkward diffidence.

"Say, 'What do you want, Master Reed?'" was the answer. "I want you to come here;" and seating himself in an arm-chair, he intimated by  
45 a gesture that I was to approach and stand before him.

John Reed was a schoolboy of fourteen years old; four years older than I, for I was but ten: large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin; thick lineaments in a spacious visage, heavy limbs and large extremities. He gorged himself habitually at table,  
50 which made him bilious, and gave him a dim and bleared eye and flabby cheeks. He ought now to have been at school; but his mama had taken him home for a month or two, "on account of his delicate health."

John had not much affection for his mother and sisters, and an  
55 antipathy to me. He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh in my bones shrank when he came near. The servants did not like to offend their young master by taking my part against him, and Mrs. Reed was blind and  
60 deaf on the subject: she never saw him strike or heard him abuse me, though he did both now and then in her very presence.

Habitually obedient to John, I came up to his chair: he spent some three minutes in thrusting out his tongue at me as far as he could without damaging the roots: I knew he would soon strike, and while

65 dreading the blow, I mused on the disgusting and ugly appearance of him who would presently deal it. I wonder if he read that notion in my face; for, all at once, without speaking, he struck suddenly and strongly. I tottered, and on regaining my equilibrium retired back a step or two from his chair.

70 "That is for your impudence in answering mama awhile since," said he, "and for your sneaking way of getting behind curtains, and for the look you had in your eyes two minutes since, you rat!"

Accustomed to John Reed's abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it; my care was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow  
75 the insult.

"What were you doing behind the curtain?" he asked.

"I was reading."

"Show the book."

I returned to the window and fetched it thence.

80 "You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you to rummage my bookshelves: for they are mine; all the  
85 house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows."

I did so, not at first aware what was his intention; but when I saw him lift and poise the book and stand in act to hurl it, I instinctively started aside with a cry of alarm: not soon enough,  
90 however; the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp: my terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded.

"Wicked and cruel boy!" I said. "You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!"

95 I had read Goldsmith's History of Rome, and had formed my opinion of Nero and Caligula. Also I had drawn parallels in silence, which I never thought thus to have declared aloud.

"What! what!" he cried. "Did she say that to me? Did you hear her, Eliza and Georgiana? Won't I tell mama? but first—"

100 He ran headlong at me: I felt him grasp my hair and my shoulder: he had closed with a desperate thing. I really saw in him a tyrant, a murderer. Aid was near him: Eliza and Georgiana had run for Mrs. Reed, who was gone upstairs: she now came upon the scene, followed by Bessie and her maid Abbot. We were parted: I heard the words—

105 "Dear! dear! What a fury to fly at Master John!"

"Did ever anybody see such a picture of passion!"

Then Mrs. Reed subjoined—

"Take her away to the red-room, and lock her in there." Four hands were immediately laid upon me, and I was borne upstairs.

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. Why was there no walk that afternoon? (lines 1-6)

- A. The wind had brought heavy cloud and driving rain
- B. Mrs. Reed had forbidden the children to leave the house
- C. The shrubbery had lost every one of its leaves
- D. Dinner had been served far later than it usually was
- E. The narrator had told the others that she disliked walking

Q2. "possessed myself of a volume" (line 8)

**What does the narrator mean by this?**

- A. She bought a book of her own
- B. She hid a book so that nobody else could read it
- C. She was given a book by one of her cousins
- D. She had a book she knew by heart
- E. She helped herself to a book from the bookcase

Q3. "I was shrined in double retirement" (lines 11-12)

**What is she describing?**

- A. That she was sitting alone in a room nobody else used
- B. That she had been shut away as a punishment for the second time
- C. That she was hidden twice over: by the window recess and by the drawn curtain
- D. That the curtain was made of two thicknesses of heavy cloth
- E. That she felt as safe as she would have felt in a church

Q4. What did the narrator think of Bewick's History of British Birds? (lines 19-22)

- A. She thought the whole book far too difficult for a child
- B. She generally cared little for the printed text, but some of the opening pages held her
- C. She read every word of it and knew the book almost by heart
- D. She looked only at the pictures and never read a line of it
- E. She had always found the book dull until that afternoon

Q5. "I feared nothing but interruption, and that came too soon" (line 27)

**Why has the author put this sentence here?**

- A. To show that the narrator was a nervous child who feared almost everything
- B. To explain why the narrator had chosen a book full of pictures
- C. To warn the reader that the quiet is about to be broken
- D. To show that the narrator had been waiting for John Reed all afternoon
- E. To suggest that the narrator had done something she should not have done

Q6. "tell mama she is run out into the rain-bad animal!"  
(lines 32-33)

**What do John Reed's first words show about the way he treats the narrator?**

- A. He is genuinely worried that she has gone out in the wet
- B. He speaks of her with contempt, as though she were not a person
- C. He is playing a game of hide-and-seek with her
- D. He is trying to keep her out of trouble with his mother
- E. He is repeating something his sisters have told him to say

Q7. "he was not quick either of vision or conception" (lines 36-37)

**What is the narrator telling us about John Reed?**

- A. That he was neither sharp-eyed nor quick-witted
- B. That he was slow to lose his temper
- C. That he had poor eyesight and needed spectacles
- D. That he never looked at anybody directly
- E. That he had not been taught properly at school

Q8. "She is in the window-seat, to be sure, Jack." (line 39)

**Why has the author included Eliza's remark?**

- A. To show that Eliza was trying to protect the narrator
- B. To show that the narrator had been careless about hiding
- C. To show that Eliza had been in the breakfast-room all along
- D. To show that the narrator has no ally in that house, even among the girls
- E. To show that Eliza was frightened of her brother

Q9. "with awkward diffidence" (line 42)

**How did the narrator speak to John Reed?**

- A. Rudely, hoping to annoy him
- B. Cheerfully, as though nothing were wrong
- C. Shyly and uncertainly, having no confidence
- D. Very quietly, so that his sisters would not hear
- E. Slowly, because she was thinking what to say

Q10. "Say, 'What do you want, Master Reed?'" (line 43)

**Why does John insist on being answered in this way?**

- A. Because that is how his sisters are made to address him
- B. Because he is forcing her to admit that he is her master, not her cousin
- C. Because his mother has ordered the children to be more polite
- D. Because he has not heard what she said the first time
- E. Because he is older than her and is teaching her good manners

Q11. "large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin" (lines 47-48)

**How many adjectives are there in this description?**

- A. Two
- B. Three
- C. Four
- D. Five
- E. Six

Q12. Why has the author put the words "on account of his delicate health" (lines 52-53) inside quotation marks?

- A. Because a doctor had written them in a letter about John
- B. Because they are Mrs. Reed's excuse, which the narrator does not believe
- C. Because they are the words of Mr. Miles, the schoolmaster
- D. Because John himself had used them to explain why he was at home
- E. Because they were the words printed in the school's rules

Q13. "an antipathy to me" (lines 54-55)

**What does this tell us about John Reed's feelings towards the narrator?**

- A. He was jealous of her cleverness
- B. He hardly ever thought about her at all
- C. He was uneasy in her company but wished her no harm
- D. He liked her better than he liked his own sisters
- E. He felt a settled dislike of her

Q14. Why did nobody in the house put a stop to John's bullying? (lines 58-61)

- A. Nobody knew about it, because it always happened out of doors
- B. The servants dared not offend him, and Mrs. Reed refused to see it
- C. Bessie had tried to stop it and had been dismissed for doing so
- D. The narrator had never told anybody what was happening to her
- E. Mrs. Reed believed that the narrator had brought it on herself



Q15. Which of these does John Reed give as one of his reasons for striking her? (lines 70-72)

- A. That she had taken a book from the bookcase
- B. That she had run out into the rain
- C. That she had refused to call him Master Reed
- D. That she had answered his mother earlier in the day
- E. That she had told Bessie what he had done to her

Q16. "you are a dependent" (line 80)

**What does John Reed mean by this?**

- A. That she is too young to look after herself
- B. That she has to depend on the servants for everything
- C. That she lives at his family's expense and has no money of her own
- D. That she can be trusted to do as she is told
- E. That she is not strong enough to fight back

Q17. "my terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded" (line 92)

**What has happened to the narrator?**

- A. The blow has frightened her so much that she can no longer think
- B. Her fear has reached its height and given way to something else
- C. She has been hurt so often that she no longer feels anything
- D. She has decided that she must hide from him again
- E. She is beginning to feel sorry for John Reed

Q18. "You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!" (lines 93-94)

**What kind of language is the narrator using here?**

- A. Metaphors, because she says he is these things
- B. Similes, because she compares him to them using the word like
- C. Personification, because she gives human feelings to something that has none
- D. Alliteration, because the words begin with the same sound
- E. Onomatopoeia, because the words imitate sounds

Q19. What do the words of the grown-ups at the end of the passage show? (lines 105-109)

- A. That they had watched the whole quarrel from the doorway
- B. That they blamed the narrator without asking what had happened
- C. That Mrs. Reed intended to punish John as well
- D. That Bessie was secretly on the narrator's side
- E. That they were most concerned about the cut on her head

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

- A. A Rainy Day in the Shrubbery
- B. The Book of British Birds
- C. An Afternoon of Games
- D. No Corner of My Own
- E. The Kindest House in England