

English Comprehension: Medium Practice

Paper 5

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

Whitewashing the Fence

by Mark Twain

From The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876). Tom Sawyer lives with his Aunt Polly in a small village beside the Mississippi river in America. He has been in trouble, and his punishment is to whitewash the long fence in front of the house - to cover it with a thin white paint made of lime and water. The story is American, so the pavement is called the sidewalk, and the boys speak in the dialect of the place: "ain't" for isn't, "druther" for would rather, "lemme" for let me and "personating" for pretending to be. This extract has been shortened in places.

1 Saturday morning was come, and all the summer world was bright and fresh, and brimming with life. There was a song in every heart; and if the heart was young the music issued at the lips. There was cheer in every face and a spring in every step. The locust-trees were in
5 bloom and the fragrance of the blossoms filled the air. Cardiff Hill, beyond the village and above it, was green with vegetation and it lay just far enough away to seem a Delectable Land, dreamy, reposeful, and inviting.

Tom appeared on the sidewalk with a bucket of whitewash and a
10 long-handled brush. He surveyed the fence, and all gladness left him and a deep melancholy settled down upon his spirit. Thirty yards of board fence nine feet high. Life to him seemed hollow, and existence but a burden. Sighing, he dipped his brush and passed it along the topmost plank; repeated the operation; did it again; compared the
15 insignificant whitewashed streak with the far-reaching continent of unwhitewashed fence, and sat down on a tree-box discouraged.

He began to think of the fun he had planned for this day, and his sorrows multiplied. Soon the free boys would come tripping along on all sorts of delicious expeditions, and they would make a world of
20 fun of him for having to work—the very thought of it burnt him like fire. He got out his worldly wealth and examined it—bits of toys, marbles, and trash; enough to buy an exchange of work, maybe, but not half enough to buy so much as half an hour of pure freedom. So he returned his straitened means to his pocket, and gave up the idea
25 of trying to buy the boys. At this dark and hopeless moment an inspiration burst upon him! Nothing less than a great, magnificent inspiration.

He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work. Ben Rogers hove in sight presently—the very boy, of all boys, whose ridicule he had
30 been dreading. Ben's gait was the hop-skip-and-jump-proof enough that his heart was light and his anticipations high. He was eating an apple, and giving a long, melodious whoop, at intervals, followed by a deep-toned ding-dong-dong, ding-dong-dong, for he was personating a steamboat. As he drew near, he slackened speed, took
35 the middle of the street, leaned far over to starboard and rounded to ponderously and with laborious pomp and circumstance—for he was personating the Big Missouri, and considered himself to be drawing nine feet of water.

"Stop her, sir! Ting-a-ling-ling!" The headway ran almost out, and
40 he drew up slowly toward the sidewalk.

Tom went on whitewashing—paid no attention to the steamboat. Ben stared a moment and then said: "Hi-Yi! You're up a stump, ain't you!"

No answer. Tom surveyed his last touch with the eye of an artist,
45 then he gave his brush another gentle sweep and surveyed the result, as before. Ben ranged up alongside of him. Tom's mouth watered for the apple, but he stuck to his work. Ben said:

"Hello, old chap, you got to work, hey?"

Tom wheeled suddenly and said:

50 "Why, it's you, Ben! I warn't noticing."

"Say—I'm going in a-swimming, I am. Don't you wish you could? But of course you'd druther work—wouldn't you? Course you would!"

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said:

"What do you call work?"

55 "Why, ain't that work?"

Tom resumed his whitewashing, and answered carelessly:

"Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain't. All I know, is, it suits Tom Sawyer."

"Oh come, now, you don't mean to let on that you like it?"

60 The brush continued to move.

"Like it? Well, I don't see why I oughtn't to like it. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth—stepped back to note the
65 effect—added a touch here and there—criticised the effect again—Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed. Presently he said:

"Say, Tom, let me whitewash a little."

Tom considered, was about to consent; but he altered his mind:

70 "No—no—I reckon it wouldn't hardly do, Ben. You see, Aunt Polly's awful particular about this fence—right here on the street, you know—but if it was the back fence I wouldn't mind and she wouldn't. Yes, she's awful particular about this fence; it's got to be done very careful; I reckon there ain't one boy in a thousand, maybe two
75 thousand, that can do it the way it's got to be done."

"No—is that so? Oh come, now—lemme just try. Only just a little—I'd let you, if you was me, Tom."

"Ben, I'd like to, honest; but Aunt Polly—well, Jim wanted to do it, but she wouldn't let him; Sid wanted to do it, and she wouldn't let
80 Sid. Now don't you see how I'm fixed? If you was to tackle this fence and anything was to happen to it—"

"Oh, shucks, I'll be just as careful. Now lemme try. Say—I'll give you the core of my apple."

"Well, here—No, Ben, now don't. I'm afeard—"

85 "I'll give you all of it!"

Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while the late steamer Big Missouri worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the
90 slaughter of more innocents. There was no lack of material; boys happened along every little while; they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash. By the time Ben was fagged out, Tom had traded the next chance to Billy Fisher for a kite, in good repair; and when he played out, Johnny Miller bought in for a dead rat and a string to
95 swing it with—and so on, and so on, hour after hour.

And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth. He had besides the things before mentioned, twelve marbles, a piece of blue bottle-glass to look through, a key that wouldn't
100 unlock anything, a fragment of chalk, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six fire-crackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass door-knob, a dog-collar—but no dog—the handle of a knife, four pieces of orange-peel, and a dilapidated old window sash.

He had had a nice, good, idle time all the while—plenty of
105 company—and the fence had three coats of whitewash on it! If he hadn't run out of whitewash he would have bankrupted every boy in the village.

Tom said to himself that it was not such a hollow world, after all. He had discovered a great law of human action, without knowing
110 it—namely, that in order to make a man or a boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain.

The boy mused awhile over the substantial change which had taken place in his worldly circumstances, and then wended toward headquarters to report.

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. How did Tom feel once he had looked the fence over?

- A. Pleased, because the morning was so bright and fresh.
- B. Proud that he had been trusted with such a long fence.
- C. Gloomy, because the job in front of him was so large.
- D. Angry with Aunt Polly for spoiling his Saturday.
- E. Impatient to start, so that he could finish it quickly.

Q2. "melancholy" (line 11)

What is another way of saying this word?

- A. a deep sadness
- B. a sudden temper
- C. a heavy sleepiness
- D. a nervous excitement
- E. a quiet pride

Q3. "the far-reaching continent of unwhitewashed fence"
(lines 15-16)

Why does the author call the fence a continent?

- A. Because the fence was painted to look like a map of the world.
- B. To show how endless the unpainted part seemed to Tom.
- C. Because the fence ran the whole way round the village.
- D. To remind the reader that the story is set in America.
- E. Because Tom had walked a long way to reach it.

Q4. "the very thought of it burnt him like fire" (lines 20-21)

This is an example of

- A. a simile
- B. a metaphor
- C. personification
- D. alliteration
- E. onomatopoeia

Q5. Why did Tom put his marbles and bits of toys back into his pocket?

- A. He was saving them to swap for Ben's apple later on.
- B. Aunt Polly had told him not to play while he was working.
- C. They were not worth enough to buy even half an hour of freedom.
- D. He had decided to give them away to the other boys as presents.
- E. He was afraid the other boys would steal them while he worked.

Q6. "tranquilly" (line 28)

What type of word is this?

- A. an adverb
- B. an adjective
- C. a noun
- D. a verb
- E. a pronoun

Q7. "Ben's gait was the hop-skip-and-jump" (line 30)

What does this tell the reader about Ben?

- A. That he was in high spirits with nothing to worry about.
- B. That he was hurrying home because he was late.
- C. That he had hurt his foot and could not walk properly.
- D. That he was creeping up so that Tom would not see him.
- E. That he was a good deal younger than Tom.

Q8. "Tom's mouth watered for the apple, but he stuck to his work." (lines 46-47)

What does this sentence show about Tom?

- A. He had missed his breakfast and was very hungry.
- B. He had forgotten that Ben was standing beside him.
- C. He had begun to enjoy whitewashing the fence after all.
- D. He wanted the apple but would not risk showing it.
- E. He was too shy to ask Ben for a bite.

Q9. "That put the thing in a new light." (line 63)

Which of Tom's remarks had this effect on Ben?

- A. "Why, it's you, Ben! I warn't noticing."
- B. "What do you call work?"
- C. "Well, maybe it is, and maybe it ain't."
- D. "Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?"
- E. "No-no-I reckon it wouldn't hardly do, Ben."

Q10. "Tom considered, was about to consent; but he altered his mind" (line 69)

What was Tom's real reason for refusing to let Ben whitewash?

- A. He was genuinely afraid that Ben would spoil the fence.
- B. Aunt Polly had forbidden anyone else to touch that fence.
- C. Saying no would make Ben want the job even more.
- D. He had already promised the next turn to Billy Fisher.
- E. He wanted to finish the whole fence before dinner.

Q11. "Aunt Polly's awful particular about this fence" (lines 70-71)

What does "particular" mean here?

- A. fussy and hard to satisfy
- B. fond of having visitors
- C. careless about small details
- D. generous with her money
- E. unusual in appearance

Q12. What finally persuaded Tom to hand over the brush?

- A. Ben offered him the whole apple instead of just the core.
- B. Ben promised not to tell Aunt Polly what they had done.
- C. Ben said he would give Tom a kite in good repair.
- D. Tom's arm had grown too tired to go on painting.
- E. Aunt Polly called Tom indoors and he had to go.

Q13. "with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart" (lines 86-87)

What does this contrast tell us?

- A. Tom was sorry to stop painting but glad of the rest.
- B. Tom could not make up his mind whether to give up the brush.
- C. Tom pretended to be unwilling while he was secretly delighted.
- D. Tom was worried about what Aunt Polly would say to him.
- E. Tom had grown fond of Ben while they were talking.

Q14. "the late steamer Big Missouri" (line 87)

Who is the author talking about?

- A. Tom, who is now sitting on the barrel
- B. Ben, who had arrived pretending to be a steamboat
- C. Billy Fisher, who traded a kite for his turn
- D. Johnny Miller, who paid with a dead rat
- E. A real steamboat passing along the river

Q15. Why does the author call Tom "the retired artist" (line 88)?

- A. Tom had been painting pictures along the fence.
- B. Tom had once been paid to paint for Aunt Polly.
- C. Tom was older than any of the other boys there.
- D. Tom was too tired to hold the brush any longer.
- E. Tom had given up a job he had made sound like a fine skill.

Q16. "they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash" (lines 91-92)

What does this mean?

- A. The boys arrived to laugh at Tom and ended up doing the work.
- B. The boys were made by Aunt Polly to stay and help Tom.
- C. The boys shouted at Tom until he agreed to let them go.
- D. The boys watched Tom for a while and then went off to swim.
- E. The boys painted the fence badly on purpose to annoy Tom.

Q17. "a kitten with only one eye, a brass door-knob, a dog-collar-but no dog" (lines 101-102)

Why does the author list things like these?

- A. To show the reader that Tom was now genuinely rich.
- B. To prove that the other boys had cheated Tom in the trades.
- C. To make the reader smile at what a boy counts as treasure.
- D. To explain why Tom had run out of whitewash so soon.
- E. To show that the village was a very poor place to live.

Q18. "He had had a nice, good, idle time all the while" (line 104)

How many adjectives are there in this phrase?

- A. one
- B. two
- C. three
- D. four
- E. five

Q19. "If he hadn't run out of whitewash he would have bankrupted every boy in the village." (lines 105-107)

What is the author doing in this sentence?

- A. Stating a plain fact about how poor the village had become.
- B. Exaggerating wildly to make the reader laugh.
- C. Warning the reader about the trouble that comes next.
- D. Repeating something Aunt Polly had said earlier.
- E. Explaining why Tom had to stop work in the afternoon.

Q20. Which of these best sums up what Tom discovered that morning?

- A. Hard work is always rewarded in the end.
- B. People want most whatever seems difficult to get.
- C. It is wrong to play tricks on your friends.
- D. A job shared between friends is a job halved.
- E. Money can never buy real happiness.

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