English Comprehension: Hard Practice Paper 4

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

The Inchcape Rock

by Robert Southey

This poem was published in 1802. The Inchcape Rock is a real reef in the North Sea, about eleven miles off the east coast of Scotland; at high tide the sea covers it completely, so that a ship can strike it without ever having seen it. Aberbrothok is the old name for the town of Arbroath on the coast nearby, and an abbot is the head of an abbey. A buoy is a float anchored in one place in the sea. The poem is printed here in full, with the poet's own old-fashioned spellings kept as he wrote them.

No stir in the air, no stir in the sea,
The ship was still as she could be;
Her sails from heaven received no motion;
Her keel was steady in the ocean.

Without either sign or sound of their shock,
The waves flowed over the Inchcape Rock;
So little they rose, so little they fell,
They did not move the Inchcape Bell.

The Abbot of Aberbrothok
Had placed that Bell on the Inchcape Rock;
On a buoy in the storm it floated and swung,
And over the waves its warning rung.

When the Rock was hid by the surge's swell,
The mariners heard the warning Bell;
And then they knew the perilous Rock,
And blest the Abbot of Aberbrothok.

The sun in heaven was shining gay;
All things were joyful on that day;
The sea-birds screamed as they wheeled round,
And there was joyance in their sound.

The buoy of the Inchcape Bell was seen,
A dark spot on the ocean green;
Sir Ralph the Rover walked his deck,
And he fixed his eye on the darker speck.

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He felt the cheering power of spring;
It made him whistle, it made him sing:
His heart was mirthful to excess,
But the Rover's mirth was wickedness.

His eye was on the Inchcape float.
Quoth he, "My men, put out the boat
And row me to the Inchcape Rock,
And I'll plague the Abbot of Aberbrothok."

The boat is lowered, the boatmen row,
And to the Inchcape Rock they go;
Sir Ralph bent over from the boat,
And he cut the Bell from the Inchcape float.

Down sank the Bell with a gurgling sound;
The bubbles rose and burst around.
Quoth Sir Ralph, "The next who comes to the Rock
Won't bless the Abbot of Aberbrothok."

Sir Ralph the Rover sailed away;
He scoured the sea for many a day;
And now grown rich with plundered store,
He steers his course for Scotland's shore.

So thick a haze o'erspread the sky,
They cannot see the sun on high:
The wind hath blown a gale all day,
At evening it hath died away.

On the deck the Rover takes his stand;
So dark it is they see no land.
Quoth Sir Ralph, "It will be brighter soon,
For there is the dawn of the rising moon."

"Canst hear," said one, "the broken roar?
For methinks we should be near the shore."
"Now where we are I cannot tell,
But I wish I could hear the Inchcape Bell."

They hear no sound; the swell is strong;
Though the wind hath fallen, they drift along
Till the vessel strikes with a shivering shock:
"O Christ! it is the Inchcape Rock!"

Sir Ralph the Rover tore his hair,
He curst himself in his despair:

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The waves rush in on every side;
The ship is sinking beneath the tide.

But, even in his dying fear,
One dreadful sound could the Rover hear,—
A sound as if with the Inchcape Bell
The Devil below was ringing his knell.

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

Q1. How are the rhymes arranged in each verse of this poem? (lines 1–8)

A. The first line rhymes with the third, and the second with the fourth.

B. All four lines of a verse rhyme with one another.

C. The first two lines rhyme with each other, and so do the last two.

D. The last line of every verse rhymes with the last line of the verse before it.

E. The poem does not rhyme at all.

Q2. "No stir in the air, no stir in the sea," (line 1)
What does this opening line tell us about that day?

A. The sea was so calm that nothing moved at all.

B. A gale was blowing hard across the water.

C. A thick fog had come down over the ship.

D. The tide was running strongly against the ship.

E. Rain had been falling since early that morning.

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Q3. Why had the Abbot of Aberbrothok placed a Bell on the Inchcape Rock? (lines 9–16)

A. To call the fishermen of Aberbrothok to prayer each morning.

B. To mark the spot where his own ship had once been wrecked.

C. To guide ships safely into the harbour at Aberbrothok.

D. To warn sailors of the Rock when the sea had hidden it.

E. To let the town know whenever a storm was coming.

Q4. "the perilous Rock" (line 15)

What does "perilous" mean here?

A. hidden

B. dangerous

C. distant

D. enormous

E. slippery

Q5. "And blest the Abbot of Aberbrothok." (line 16)

What did the mariners do?

A. They prayed alongside the Abbot in his abbey.

B. They paid the Abbot a sum of money for the use of the Bell.

C. They asked the Abbot to move the Bell to a safer place.

D. They blamed the Abbot for the danger they had been in.

E. They thanked and praised the Abbot for what he had done.

Q6. "But the Rover's mirth was wickedness." (line 28)

What is the poet doing in this line?

A. Warning the reader that Sir Ralph's high spirits will lead to harm.

B. Explaining that Sir Ralph was cheerful because spring had arrived.

C. Telling the reader that Sir Ralph sang very badly indeed.

D. Showing that Sir Ralph was pleased to see the Abbot's Bell.

E. Suggesting that Sir Ralph was only pretending to be happy.

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Q7. “Quoth he” (line 30) and “Quoth Sir Ralph” (line 39)

What does the old word “quoth” mean?

A. asked

B. thought

C. said

D. wrote

E. shouted

Q8. Why did Sir Ralph the Rover cut the Bell from the buoy? (lines 29–40)

A. He meant to sell the Bell for the value of its metal.

B. He believed the Bell was driving the fish away from the Rock.

C. He was afraid the Bell would give his own ship away.

D. He thought the Bell rang too loudly for his men to sleep.

E. He wanted to spite the Abbot and spoil his good name.

Q9. “Down sank the Bell with a gurgling sound;” (line 37)

Why has the poet chosen the word “gurgling”?

A. Because it rhymes with the line that comes after it.

B. Because the word imitates the noise it describes.

C. Because it is a word only sailors would have used.

D. Because it gives the Bell feelings of its own.

E. Because it repeats the first sound of the words beside it.

Q10. Which of these things happened last? (lines 33–44)

A. The boatmen rowed Sir Ralph out to the Inchcape Rock.

B. Sir Ralph cut the Bell away from the Inchcape float.

C. The bubbles rose and burst where the Bell had sunk.

D. Sir Ralph steered his course for Scotland’s shore.

E. Sir Ralph scoured the sea and grew rich with plunder.

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Q11. "And now grown rich with plundered store," (line 43)

How had Sir Ralph become rich?

A. By robbing other ships at sea.

B. By selling the Inchcape Bell in Scotland.

C. By trading goods up and down the Scottish coast.

D. By fishing in waters that no one else dared to use.

E. By being paid to guide ships safely past the Rock.

Q12. "So thick a haze o'erspread the sky," (line 45)

Why is this haze so important to the story?

A. It shows that a great storm is about to break over the ship.

B. It means the ship has been carried much further north than intended.

C. It leaves the sailors too cold to work the sails properly.

D. It is the reason the Abbot cannot see the ship from the shore.

E. It hides the Rock, so the crew now need the Bell that is no longer there.

Q13. Who speaks the words "But I wish I could hear the Inchcape Bell" (line 56)?

A. One of Sir Ralph's crew

B. The Abbot of Aberbrothok

C. Sir Ralph the Rover

D. A sailor aboard another ship

E. The poet himself

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Q14. "But I wish I could hear the Inchcape Bell." (line 56)

Why is this line so striking?

A. The speaker has forgotten that a Bell was ever there at all.

B. The Bell can still be heard, but only very faintly.

C. The speaker is asking the Abbot of Aberbrothok for help at last.

D. The speaker now longs for the very Bell that he destroyed himself.

E. The crew do not believe that any Bell was ever put there.

Q15. "Till the vessel strikes with a shivering shock" (line 59)

What does the repeated "sh" sound add to this line?

A. It makes the line rhyme with the line that comes before it.

B. It carries the hiss and the crash of the ship striking the Rock.

C. It slows the poem to a gentle, sleepy pace.

D. It shows that the sailors are whispering to one another.

E. It tells the reader that the ship is only a small one.

Q16. "The waves rush in on every side; The ship is sinking beneath the tide." (lines 63–64)

Why has the poet written about these events as though they were happening now?

A. To show that the wreck happened long after the Bell was cut away.

B. Because he is describing a painting of a shipwreck that he has seen.

C. To suggest that the same thing happens to every ship that passes there.

D. Because he has lost track of how his own story began.

E. To make the wreck feel as if it is taking place before the reader's eyes.

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Q17. "A sound as if with the Inchcape Bell The Devil below was ringing his knell." (lines 67–68)

What is a "knell"?

A. a bell rung to mark a death

B. a bell rung to call people to a meal

C. a warning shouted from one ship to another

D. a prayer said at the end of a voyage

E. the rope by which a bell is rung

Q18. What is really making the sound that the Rover hears as his ship goes down? (lines 65–68)

A. The Inchcape Bell, which has worked itself loose from the sea bed.

B. The wreck around him, turned into a bell by his own guilty terror.

C. The bells of the Abbot's abbey, ringing far away on the shore.

D. Another ship signalling to him through the haze.

E. The Devil, who has risen out of the sea to meet him.

Q19. Which of these sayings best fits the story the poem tells?

A. Still waters run deep.

B. Many hands make light work.

C. Look before you leap.

D. He who digs a pit for others falls into it himself.

E. A friend in need is a friend indeed.

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Q20. How does the poet set the Abbot and Sir Ralph against one another?

A. The Abbot is wealthy; Sir Ralph is poor and must steal in order to live.

B. The Abbot is a sailor himself; Sir Ralph has never been to sea before.

C. The Abbot works to save strangers at sea; Sir Ralph destroys the means of saving them.

D. The Abbot is young and eager; Sir Ralph is old and tired of the sea.

E. The Abbot talks a great deal; Sir Ralph says nothing at all.

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