English Comprehension: Hard Practice Paper 5

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

The Old Sea-dog at the Admiral Benbow

by Robert Louis Stevenson

From Treasure Island (1883). The story is told by Jim Hawkins, the son of the innkeeper at the Admiral Benbow, a lonely inn standing above a cove on the English coast. Here he remembers the day a strange old seaman arrived and took a room, and what came of it. The captain speaks in the rough sailor's talk of the time. A hand-barrow is a flat frame with handles for wheeling a heavy load; a grog-shop is a place selling drink; the Spanish Main and the Dry Tortugas are waters in the Caribbean where pirates sailed; and the assizes were the courts that tried the most serious crimes. This extract has been shortened in places.

I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the inn door, his sea-chest following behind him in a hand-barrow—a tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man, his tarry pigtail falling over the shoulder of his soiled blue coat, his hands ragged and scarred, with black, broken nails, and the sabre cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white. I remember him looking round the cove and whistling to himself as he did so, and then breaking out in that old sea-song that he sang so often afterwards:

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

in the high, old tottering voice that seemed to have been tuned and broken at the capstan bars. Then he rapped on the door with a bit of stick like a handspike that he carried, and when my father appeared, called roughly for a glass of rum. This, when it was brought to him, he drank slowly, like a connoisseur, lingering on the taste and still looking about him at the cliffs and up at our signboard.

"This is a handy cove," says he at length; "and a pleasant sittyated grog-shop. Much company, mate?"

My father told him no, very little company, the more was the pity.

"Well, then," said he, "this is the berth for me. Here you, matey," he cried to the man who trundled the barrow; "bring up alongside and help up my chest. I'll stay here a bit," he continued. "I'm a plain man; rum and bacon and eggs is what I want, and that head up there

for to watch ships off. What you mought call me? You mought call me captain. Oh, I see what you're at—there"; and he threw down three or four gold pieces on the threshold. "You can tell me when I've worked through that," says he, looking as fierce as a commander.

And indeed bad as his clothes were and coarsely as he spoke, he had none of the appearance of a man who sailed before the mast, but seemed like a mate or skipper accustomed to be obeyed or to strike. The man who came with the barrow told us the mail had set him down the morning before at the Royal George, that he had inquired what inns there were along the coast, and hearing ours well spoken of, I suppose, and described as lonely, had chosen it from the others for his place of residence. And that was all we could learn of our guest.

He was a very silent man by custom. All day he hung round the cove or upon the cliffs with a brass telescope; all evening he sat in a corner of the parlour next the fire and drank rum and water very strong. Mostly he would not speak when spoken to, only look up sudden and fierce and blow through his nose like a fog-horn; and we and the people who came about our house soon learned to let him be. Every day when he came back from his stroll he would ask if any seafaring men had gone by along the road. At first we thought it was the want of company of his own kind that made him ask this question, but at last we began to see he was desirous to avoid them. He had taken me aside one day and promised me a silver fourpenny on the first of every month if I would only keep my "weather-eye open for a seafaring man with one leg" and let him know the moment he appeared.

How that personage haunted my dreams, I need scarcely tell you. On stormy nights, when the wind shook the four corners of the house and the surf roared along the cove and up the cliffs, I would see him in a thousand forms, and with a thousand diabolical expressions. Now the leg would be cut off at the knee, now at the hip; now he was a monstrous kind of a creature who had never had but the one leg, and that in the middle of his body. To see him leap and run and pursue me over hedge and ditch was the worst of nightmares. And altogether I paid pretty dear for my monthly fourpenny piece, in the shape of these abominable fancies.

His stories were what frightened people worst of all. Dreadful stories they were—about hanging, and walking the plank, and storms at sea, and the Dry Tortugas, and wild deeds and places on the Spanish Main. My father was always saying the inn would be ruined, for people would soon cease coming there to be tyrannized over and put down, and sent shivering to their beds; but I really believe his

presence did us good. People were frightened at the time, but on looking back they rather liked it; it was a fine excitement in a quiet country life.

He was only once crossed, and that was towards the end, when my poor father was far gone in a decline that took him off. Dr. Livesey came late one afternoon to see the patient, took a bit of dinner from my mother, and went into the parlour to smoke a pipe until his horse should come down from the hamlet, for we had no stabling at the old Benbow. I followed him in, and I remember observing the contrast the neat, bright doctor, with his powder as white as snow and his bright, black eyes and pleasant manners, made with the coltish country folk, and above all, with that filthy, heavy, bleared scarecrow of a pirate of ours, sitting, far gone in rum, with his arms on the table. Suddenly he—the captain, that is—began to pipe up his eternal song.

By this time we had all long ceased to pay any particular notice to the song; it was new, that night, to nobody but Dr. Livesey, and on him I observed it did not produce an agreeable effect, for he looked up for a moment quite angrily before he went on with his talk to old Taylor, the gardener, on a new cure for the rheumatics. In the meantime, the captain gradually brightened up at his own music, and at last flapped his hand upon the table before him in a way we all knew to mean silence. The voices stopped at once, all but Dr. Livesey's; he went on as before speaking clear and kind and drawing briskly at his pipe between every word or two. The captain glared at him for a while, flapped his hand again, glared still harder, and at last broke out with a villainous, low oath, "Silence, there, between decks!"

"Were you addressing me, sir?" says the doctor; and when the ruffian had told him, with another oath, that this was so, "I have only one thing to say to you, sir," replies the doctor, "that if you keep on drinking rum, the world will soon be quit of a very dirty scoundrel!"

The old fellow's fury was awful. He sprang to his feet, drew and opened a sailor's clasp-knife, and balancing it open on the palm of his hand, threatened to pin the doctor to the wall.

The doctor never so much as moved. He spoke to him as before, over his shoulder and in the same tone of voice, rather high, so that all the room might hear, but perfectly calm and steady: "If you do not put that knife this instant in your pocket, I promise, upon my honour, you shall hang at the next assizes."

Then followed a battle of looks between them, but the captain soon knuckled under, put up his weapon, and resumed his seat, grumbling like a beaten dog.

"And now, sir," continued the doctor, "since I now know there's such a fellow in my district, you may count I'll have an eye upon you day and night. I'm not a doctor only; I'm a magistrate; and if I catch a breath of complaint against you, if it's only for a piece of incivility like tonight's, I'll take effectual means to have you hunted down and routed out of this. Let that suffice."

Soon after, Dr. Livesey's horse came to the door and he rode away, but the captain held his peace that evening, and for many evenings to come.

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. "plodding" (line 1)

What does this word suggest about the way the seaman came to the inn door?

A. He crept up quietly so that nobody would hear him arrive.

B. He marched smartly, the way a soldier does on parade.

C. He staggered from side to side because he had been drinking.

D. He came slowly and heavily, as though the walk had tired him.

E. He came at a run, eager to get in out of the weather.

Q2. Which single word in the description of the seaman tells us that his coat was dirty? (lines 2–4)

A. soiled

B. tarry

C. nut-brown

D. ragged

E. livid

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Q3. From whose point of view is the story told?

A. The captain himself, explaining why he came to the coast.

B. Dr. Livesey, writing up the case some time later.

C. The man who wheeled the sea-chest up in the hand-barrow.

D. An outside voice that watches everyone but knows nobody's thoughts.

E. A boy who lived at the inn, looking back on it years afterwards.

Q4. "in the high, old tottering voice that seemed to have been tuned and broken at the capstan bars" (lines 11–12)

What does this tell us about the captain's voice?

A. He had lost his voice in a storm and never fully recovered it.

B. He was putting the voice on to sound older than he really was.

C. It had been worn rough by years of heavy work and singing at sea.

D. It was surprisingly soft and musical for so large a man.

E. He had been taught to sing properly as a boy in a choir.

Q5. "he drank slowly, like a connoisseur" (line 15)

Why is this comparison a surprising one to use?

A. The captain in fact swallowed the rum far too fast to taste it.

B. A connoisseur is an expert judge of fine things, and the captain is anything but refined.

C. A connoisseur is a rank of sailor, so the comparison tells us nothing new.

D. The captain had never tasted rum before that afternoon.

E. The narrator's father had bought the rum from a connoisseur.

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Q6. “a pleasant sittyated grog-shop” (lines 17–18)

Why has the author spelled the word “sittyated” in this way?

A. To show that the captain could neither read nor write.

B. Because that was the correct spelling at the time the story is set.

C. Because the narrator has misheard what the captain said.

D. To suggest that the captain was already drunk when he spoke.

E. To let the reader hear how the captain actually pronounced it.

Q7. Why did the captain throw three or four gold pieces down on the threshold? (lines 25–26)

A. To pay well in advance and put a stop to any questions about him.

B. Because he had picked them up on the road outside the inn.

C. To show the narrator’s father what a generous man he was.

D. Because he had no further use for money now that he had retired.

E. To buy the inn from the narrator’s father outright.

Q8. “he had none of the appearance of a man who sailed before the mast, but seemed like a mate or skipper accustomed to be obeyed or to strike” (lines 28–30)

What has led the narrator to this conclusion?

A. The polite way the captain spoke to the man with the barrow.

B. The fact that the captain had arrived by the mail coach.

C. The letters the captain received from other officers.

D. The captain’s way of giving orders, rather than his clothes or his speech.

E. The fine quality of the captain’s blue coat.

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Q9. "All day he hung round the cove or upon the cliffs with a brass telescope" (lines 37–38)

How many prepositions are there in this sentence?

A. one

B. two

C. three

D. four

E. five

Q10. At first, why did the family think the captain kept asking whether any seafaring men had gone by? (lines 43–46)

A. They thought he wanted to sell his sea-chest to another sailor.

B. They thought he was making sure the coast road was safe to walk.

C. They thought he was lonely and wanted company of his own kind.

D. They thought he was expecting a friend to bring him money.

E. They thought he was watching for a storm coming in off the sea.

Q11. What was the captain paying the narrator a silver fourpenny each month to do? (lines 46–49)

A. To keep watch on the cliffs with the brass telescope.

B. To watch out for a seafaring man with one leg and tell him at once.

C. To keep the great sea-chest locked and say nothing about it.

D. To carry his letters down the coast road to the Royal George.

E. To fetch him rum and bacon and eggs from the village.

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Q12. "And altogether I paid pretty dear for my monthly fourpenny piece" (lines 57–58)

What does the narrator mean?

A. The silver coin turned out to be a forgery when he spent it.

B. He wasted all the money on things he did not really need.

C. He had to buy the coin back from the captain each month.

D. The nightmares he suffered were too high a price for the money.

E. He had to hand the captain fourpence out of his own pocket.

Q13. Which of these sentences from the passage gives an opinion rather than a fact?

A. "I really believe his presence did us good."

B. "All day he hung round the cove or upon the cliffs with a brass telescope."

C. "He threw down three or four gold pieces on the threshold."

D. "Dr. Livesey came late one afternoon to see the patient."

E. "Soon after, Dr. Livesey's horse came to the door and he rode away."

Q14. "People were frightened at the time, but on looking back they rather liked it" (lines 66–67)

Why did the neighbours rather like being frightened?

A. They enjoyed the free rum the captain bought for them.

B. They hoped the captain would throw them gold pieces too.

C. They were sure the stories were untrue and laughed at them afterwards.

D. They wanted the little inn to become famous along the coast.

E. It was a fine excitement in an otherwise quiet country life.

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Q15. “Suddenly he—the captain, that is—began to pipe up his eternal song.” (lines 79–80)

Why has the author used a pair of dashes here?

A. To stand in place of words too rude to be printed.

B. To slip in an explanation of who “he” means without starting a new sentence.

C. To show that the captain was interrupted in the middle of his song.

D. To mark a long pause before the captain begins to sing.

E. To show that the words between them were spoken aloud by the doctor.

Q16. “that filthy, heavy, bleared scarecrow of a pirate of ours” (lines 77–78)

What is the effect of this description coming straight after the description of Dr. Livesey?

A. It shows that the narrator was frightened of the doctor as well.

B. It explains why the doctor had been sent for that afternoon.

C. It shows that the captain had dressed carefully for the doctor’s visit.

D. It sharpens the contrast between the neat, bright doctor and the filthy captain.

E. It suggests that the doctor and the captain had once been shipmates.

Q17. “the world will soon be quit of a very dirty scoundrel!” (lines 97–98)

What is Dr. Livesey telling the captain?

A. That he must be out of the inn before the end of the week.

B. That the rum served at the inn is not fit to drink.

C. That if he keeps on drinking he will soon drink himself to death.

D. That he will be put aboard a ship and sent out of the country.

E. That the world has already forgotten who he used to be.

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Q18. "grumbling like a beaten dog" (lines 108–109)

What does this comparison show about the captain?

A. He had been thoroughly mastered, and knew it, though he would not admit it.

B. He was in real physical pain after the struggle with the doctor.

C. He had decided to make friends with the doctor after all.

D. He was only pretending to give in so that he could attack again later.

E. He had not understood a word the doctor had said to him.

Q19. According to the passage, which of these statements is NOT true?

A. The captain's sea-chest was brought up to the inn in a hand-barrow.

B. The captain spent his days about the cove and the cliffs with a telescope.

C. Dr. Livesey was a magistrate as well as a doctor.

D. The captain sang the same sea-song over and over again.

E. The captain chose the Admiral Benbow because it was busy with company.

Q20. Which of these does the passage as a whole most strongly suggest about the captain?

A. He was a naval officer waiting quietly for his next ship to sail.

B. He had come to the inn in order to look after the narrator's sick father.

C. He was hiding from somebody, and was afraid of being found.

D. He was a wealthy gentleman who had come to the coast to rest.

E. He cared for nothing in the world beyond rum and his own comfort.

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