English Comprehension: Hard Practice Paper 6

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

Uncle Podger Hangs a Picture

by Jerome K. Jerome

From Three Men in a Boat (1889). The narrator, J., is planning a boating holiday with his two friends, George and Harris. Harris has just announced that he will take charge of the packing – and then handed out all the actual work to the other two. That reminds J. of his Uncle Podger. A few words have changed since 1889: sixpen'orth is sixpence-worth; the girl and the charwoman are servants who worked in the house; a rule is a measuring stick and a spirit-level a tool for checking that something is straight; and to be dead beat is to be worn out. Jerome calls Uncle Podger's wife Aunt Podger at first and Aunt Maria later on – they are the same person.

He always reminds me of my poor Uncle Podger. You never saw such a commotion up and down a house, in all your life, as when my Uncle Podger undertook to do a job. A picture would have come home from the frame-maker's, and be standing in the dining-room, waiting to be put up; and Aunt Podger would ask what was to be done with it, and Uncle Podger would say:

"Oh, you leave that to *me*. Don't you, any of you, worry yourselves about that. *I'll* do all that."

And then he would take off his coat, and begin. He would send the girl out for sixpen'orth of nails, and then one of the boys after her to tell her what size to get; and, from that, he would gradually work down, and start the whole house.

"Now you go and get me my hammer, Will," he would shout; "and you bring me the rule, Tom; and I shall want the step-ladder, and I had better have a kitchen-chair, too; and, Jim! you run round to Mr. Goggles, and tell him, 'Pa's kind regards, and hopes his leg's better; and will he lend him his spirit-level?' And don't you go, Maria, because I shall want somebody to hold me the light; and when the girl comes back, she must go out again for a bit of picture-cord; and Tom!—where's Tom?—Tom, you come here; I shall want you to hand me up the picture."

And then he would lift up the picture, and drop it, and it would come out of the frame, and he would try to save the glass, and cut himself; and then he would spring round the room, looking for his

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handkerchief. He could not find his handkerchief, because it was in the pocket of the coat he had taken off, and he did not know where he had put the coat, and all the house had to leave off looking for his tools, and start looking for his coat; while he would dance round and hinder them.

"Doesn't anybody in the whole house know where my coat is? I never came across such a set in all my life—upon my word I didn't. Six of you!—and you can't find a coat that I put down not five minutes ago! Well, of all the—"

Then he'd get up, and find that he had been sitting on it, and would call out:

"Oh, you can give it up! I've found it myself now. Might just as well ask the cat to find anything as expect you people to find it."

And, when half an hour had been spent in tying up his finger, and a new glass had been got, and the tools, and the ladder, and the chair, and the candle had been brought, he would have another go, the whole family, including the girl and the charwoman, standing round in a semi-circle, ready to help. Two people would have to hold the chair, and a third would help him up on it, and hold him there, and a fourth would hand him a nail, and a fifth would pass him up the hammer, and he would take hold of the nail, and drop it.

"There!" he would say, in an injured tone, "now the nail's gone."

And we would all have to go down on our knees and grovel for it, while he would stand on the chair, and grunt, and want to know if he was to be kept there all the evening.

The nail would be found at last, but by that time he would have lost the hammer.

"Where's the hammer? What did I do with the hammer? Great heavens! Seven of you, gaping round there, and you don't know what I did with the hammer!"

We would find the hammer for him, and then he would have lost sight of the mark he had made on the wall, where the nail was to go in, and each of us had to get up on the chair, beside him, and see if we could find it; and we would each discover it in a different place, and he would call us all fools, one after another, and tell us to get down. And he would take the rule, and re-measure, and find that he wanted half thirty-one and three-eighths inches from the corner, and would try to do it in his head, and go mad.

And we would all try to do it in our heads, and all arrive at different results, and sneer at one another. And in the general row, the original number would be forgotten, and Uncle Podger would have to measure it again.

He would use a bit of string this time, and at the critical moment, when the old fool was leaning over the chair at an angle of forty-five, and trying to reach a point three inches beyond what was possible for him to reach, the string would slip, and down he would slide on to the piano, a really fine musical effect being produced by the suddenness with which his head and body struck all the notes at the same time.

And Aunt Maria would say that she would not allow the children to stand round and hear such language.

At last, Uncle Podger would get the spot fixed again, and put the point of the nail on it with his left hand, and take the hammer in his right hand. And, with the first blow, he would smash his thumb, and drop the hammer, with a yell, on somebody's toes.

Aunt Maria would mildly observe that, next time Uncle Podger was going to hammer a nail into the wall, she hoped he'd let her know in time, so that she could make arrangements to go and spend a week with her mother while it was being done.

"Oh! you women, you make such a fuss over everything," Uncle Podger would reply, picking himself up. "Why, I *like* doing a little job of this sort."

And then he would have another try, and, at the second blow, the nail would go clean through the plaster, and half the hammer after it, and Uncle Podger be precipitated against the wall with force nearly sufficient to flatten his nose.

Then we had to find the rule and the string again, and a new hole was made; and, about midnight, the picture would be up—very crooked and insecure, the wall for yards round looking as if it had been smoothed down with a rake, and everybody dead beat and wretched—except Uncle Podger.

"There you are," he would say, stepping heavily off the chair on to the charwoman's corns, and surveying the mess he had made with evident pride. "Why, some people would have had a man in to do a little thing like that!"

Harris will be just that sort of man when he grows up, I know, and I told him so.

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. "commotion" (line 2)

What is the best meaning of this word here?

A. a carefully made plan

B. a long and gloomy silence

C. a cheerful celebration

D. a serious family quarrel

E. noisy confusion and fuss

Q2. "Oh, you leave that to *me*. Don't you, any of you, worry yourselves about that." (lines 7–8)

What does this tell us about Uncle Podger?

A. He knew that Aunt Podger would make a better job of it.

B. He was certain he could manage the whole job on his own.

C. He was afraid the picture would get broken by the children.

D. He did not really want to put the picture up at all.

E. He was politely asking the family to lend him a hand.

Q3. "*I'll* do all that." (line 8)

Why has the author printed the word "I'll" in italics?

A. To show that somebody else was speaking at the same moment.

B. To show that the word comes from another language.

C. To show that he only thought the word instead of saying it.

D. To show that Uncle Podger said the word loudly, with emphasis.

E. To show that he was whispering so the children would not hear.

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Q4. Again and again the author writes “he would shout”, “he would say” and “we would all have to”. Why has he told the story in this way?

A. Because this is what happened every time Uncle Podger did a job, not just once.

B. Because the narrator is not certain that any of it really happened.

C. Because these things are going to happen at some point in the future.

D. Because Uncle Podger was giving orders rather than asking politely.

E. Because the narrator was too young at the time to remember it clearly.

Q5. “Now you go and get me my hammer, Will,” (line 13)

What type of sentence is this?

A. an exclamation

B. a polite request

C. a command

D. a question

E. a statement of fact

Q6. What was Jim sent to do? (lines 15–17)

A. To hand the picture up to Uncle Podger.

B. To ask Mr. Goggles whether he would lend his spirit-level.

C. To fetch the hammer down from upstairs.

D. To buy sixpen’orth of nails at the shop.

E. To hold the light steady for Uncle Podger.

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Q7. Why could Uncle Podger not find his handkerchief? (lines 24–27)

A. He had used it to wrap up the broken glass from the frame.

B. One of the boys had taken it out to the shop with him.

C. It had slipped down behind the piano in the dining-room.

D. Aunt Podger had put it away in a drawer upstairs.

E. It was in the pocket of the coat he had taken off and then mislaid.

Q8. "Then he'd get up, and find that he had been sitting on it" (line 34)

Why is this funny, coming where it does?

A. It is the first time in the whole passage that anybody sits down.

B. He has just been given a brand new coat by Aunt Podger.

C. He has just blamed six other people for losing what he was sitting on himself.

D. He has just told everybody that he never loses anything at all.

E. He has just found the hammer he had been searching for.

Q9. "Might just as well ask the cat to find anything as expect you people to find it." (lines 36–37)

What does this remark show about Uncle Podger?

A. He trusts the family cat more than he trusts the children.

B. He has decided to give up the job and go to bed.

C. He is trying to make the children laugh and cheer them up.

D. He blames everybody else even when the fault is entirely his own.

E. He is grateful for all the help the family have given him.

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Q10. When Uncle Podger had another go, how many people are described as helping him onto the chair and handing him his tools? (lines 42–45)

A. three

B. four

C. five

D. six

E. seven

Q11. "in an injured tone" (line 46)

What does "injured" mean here?

A. angry enough to start shouting

B. weak and short of breath

C. puzzled and unsure what to do next

D. offended, as though he had been treated unfairly

E. badly hurt in an accident

Q12. Which of these things happened last in the story of the picture?

A. Uncle Podger lost sight of the mark he had made on the wall.

B. Uncle Podger smashed his thumb with the hammer.

C. Uncle Podger slid down onto the piano.

D. Uncle Podger found that he had been sitting on his coat.

E. Uncle Podger cut himself on the glass of the picture.

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Q13. "a really fine musical effect being produced by the suddenness with which his head and body struck all the notes at the same time" (lines 71–73)

What is the author really describing?

A. Uncle Podger playing a tune to cheer everybody up.

B. Aunt Maria starting to play the piano in the next room.

C. The children banging on the piano while he worked.

D. The noise of the hammer striking the plaster wall.

E. Uncle Podger crashing down onto the keys of the piano.

Q14. Aunt Maria hoped Uncle Podger would tell her in good time before he next hammered a nail, "so that she could make arrangements to go and spend a week with her mother while it was being done." (lines 82–83)

What is she really saying?

A. That being anywhere near Uncle Podger doing a job is not to be borne.

B. That she genuinely wants to visit her mother again next week.

C. That Uncle Podger ought to be given more time to do the job properly.

D. That she is worried her mother is unwell and needs looking after.

E. That she would like Uncle Podger to come with her to her mother's house.

Q15. "precipitated against the wall" (line 89)

What does "precipitated" mean here?

A. slowly pushed

B. firmly tied

C. flung suddenly

D. gently leaned

E. carefully lowered

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Q16. "the wall for yards round looking as if it had been smoothed down with a rake" (lines 93–94)

What does this tell us about the wall?

A. It had a neat row of nail holes running across it.

B. It had been scratched and torn all over by his attempts.

C. It had been swept perfectly clean and flat at last.

D. It had been given a fresh coat of paint that afternoon.

E. It was covered in garden soil carried in on his boots.

Q17. "everybody dead beat and wretched—except Uncle Podger" (lines 94–95)

Why does the author end the sentence in this way?

A. To show that Uncle Podger had not noticed how late it had grown.

B. To show that Uncle Podger was the only one who had enjoyed the evening.

C. To show that Uncle Podger had slipped off to bed before the others.

D. To show that Uncle Podger was too badly hurt to feel tired.

E. To show that Uncle Podger was the only one still working at midnight.

Q18. "surveying the mess he had made with evident pride" (lines 97–98)

What is surprising about this?

A. He is proud of work that somebody else has done for him.

B. He is ashamed of the mess but is pretending to be pleased.

C. He is proud because the picture is perfectly straight at last.

D. He is looking at a different wall from the one he worked on.

E. He is proud of a result that everybody else can see is a disaster.

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Q19. Why does the narrator tell this long story about Uncle Podger?

A. To warn the reader what his friend Harris is going to be like.

B. To explain the proper way to hang a picture on a wall.

C. To show how much he admired his uncle when he was a boy.

D. To prove that his family were the noisiest in the whole street.

E. To describe in detail the house he grew up in.

Q20. Which of these sayings best fits Uncle Podger?

A. Empty vessels make the most noise.

B. Many hands make light work.

C. A stitch in time saves nine.

D. Practice makes perfect.

E. Look before you leap.

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