English Comprehension: Medium Practice Paper 6

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

The Pied Piper of Hamelin

by Robert Browning

The opening of a story-poem written in 1842 for a friend's young son. Hamelin is a real town in Germany; Brunswick and Hanover are the region and the city near it. Some of the words are old or foreign: the Corporation is the group of councillors who governed the town, ermine is a costly white fur, vermin means pests, a guilder is an old coin, sate means sat, quoth means said, and the Cham of Tartary and the Nizam in Asia were foreign rulers. These are the first seven verses of the poem.

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its wall on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

Rats!
They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats.
And licked the soup from the cook's own ladles,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats,
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
"'Tis clear," cried they, "our Mayor's a noddy;
And as for our Corporation—shocking
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
For dolts that can't or won't determine
What's best to rid us of our vermin!
You hope, because you're old and obese,

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To find in the furry civic robe ease?
Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking
To find the remedy we're lacking,
Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.

An hour they sate in council,
At length the Mayor broke silence:
"For a guilder I'd my ermine gown sell;
I wish I were a mile hence!
It's easy to bid one rack one's brain—
I'm sure my poor head aches again,
I've scratched it so, and all in vain
Oh for a trap, a trap, a trap!"
Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber door but a gentle tap?
"Bless us," cried the Mayor, "what's that?"
(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous
For a plate of turtle green and glutinous)
"Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?
Anything like the sound of a rat
Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!"

"Come in!"—the Mayor cried, looking bigger:
And in did come the strangest figure!
His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red,
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smile went out and in;
There was no guessing his kith and kin:
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire.
Quoth one: "It's as my great-grandsire,
Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,
Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!"

He advanced to the council-table:
And, "Please your honours," said he, "I'm able,

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By means of a secret charm, to draw
All creatures living beneath the sun,
That creep or swim or fly or run,
After me so as you never saw!
And I chiefly use my charm
On creatures that do people harm,
The mole and toad and newt and viper;
And people call me the Pied Piper."
(And here they noticed round his neck
A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
To match with his coat of the self-same cheque;
And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
And his fingers they noticed were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon his pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.)
"Yet," said he, "poor Piper as I am,
In Tartary I freed the Cham,
Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats,
I eased in Asia the Nizam
Of a monstrous brood of vampyre-bats:
And as for what your brain bewilders,
If I can rid your town of rats
Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
"One? fifty thousand!"—was the exclamation
Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

Into the street the Piper stept,
Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept
In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept,
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,
Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens,

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Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—
Followed the Piper for their lives.
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing,
Until they came to the river Weser
Wherein all plunged and perished!

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. Which river washes the wall of Hamelin Town? (lines 3–4)

A. The Hanover

B. The Weser

C. The Brunswick

D. The Rhine

E. The Hamelin

Q2. "ditty" (line 6)

What is the best meaning of this word?

A. a short simple song or poem

B. an argument between neighbours

C. a long and difficult journey

D. an old and half-forgotten town

E. a bargain struck between two men

Q3. "Rats!" (line 10)

Why has the poet given this one word a line of its own?

A. To show that somebody in the town was shouting a warning.

B. Because it is the name the townsfolk gave to the Piper.

C. To announce the trouble bluntly and make the reader stop short.

D. Because the line would otherwise have been far too long.

E. To show that the rats arrived one at a time, slowly.

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Q4. Which of these is NOT something the rats did? (lines 11–20)

A. Killed the cats and fought the dogs.

B. Made nests inside men's Sunday hats.

C. Licked the soup from the cook's own ladles.

D. Split open the kegs of salted sprats.

E. Gnawed through the ropes of the church bells.

Q5. "By drowning their speaking With shrieking and squeaking" (lines 18–19)

What does this mean?

A. The rats fell into the river while the women were talking.

B. The women were so frightened that they could not speak at all.

C. The rats made such a din that the women could not be heard.

D. The women screamed louder than the rats did.

E. The women's voices frightened the rats into squealing.

Q6. "noddy" (line 23)

What are the townspeople calling their Mayor?

A. a thief

B. a coward

C. a fool

D. a stranger

E. a tyrant

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Q7. “we buy gowns lined with ermine For dolts that can’t or won’t determine” (lines 25–26)

What are the townspeople complaining about?

A. That the council spends the town’s money on rats instead of on food.

B. That they pay for the council’s finery and get nothing useful in return.

C. That the ermine gowns have been ruined by the rats.

D. That the council will not let ordinary people wear fine clothes.

E. That the Mayor has stolen the money meant for the gowns.

Q8. “Or, sure as fate, we’ll send you packing!” (line 32)

What are the townspeople threatening to do?

A. Drive the Mayor and the councillors out of their posts.

B. Send the councillors away to fetch help from Hanover.

C. Make the councillors carry the dead rats out of town.

D. Refuse to pay for any more ermine gowns.

E. Leave Hamelin themselves and never come back.

Q9. “For a guilder I’d my ermine gown sell; I wish I were a mile hence!” (lines 37–38)

What do these words show about the Mayor?

A. He needs money badly and hopes to sell his gown at a good price.

B. He is planning to travel a mile out of town to look for the Piper.

C. He would give up the office he is so proud of just to escape the trouble.

D. He believes the ermine gown is what attracted the rats.

E. He wants a plainer gown that will not mark his rank so clearly.

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Q10. "Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister Than a too-long-opened oyster" (lines 48–49)

What is the effect of this comparison?

A. It makes the Mayor seem dull, stale and past his best.

B. It suggests that the Mayor had been weeping over the rats.

C. It shows that the Mayor was a keen and watchful man.

D. It reminds the reader that the town lived by fishing.

E. It hints that the Mayor was seriously ill.

Q11. "pit-a-pat" (line 54)

This is an example of…

A. a simile

B. onomatopoeia

C. personification

D. a metaphor

E. alliteration

Q12. "There was no guessing his kith and kin" (line 64)

What does this line mean about the stranger?

A. Nobody could tell where he came from or who his people were.

B. Nobody could work out how old he was.

C. Nobody dared to ask him a single question.

D. Nobody could understand the language he spoke.

E. Nobody had any idea how he had entered the room.

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Q13. "It's as my great-grandsire, Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone, Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!" (lines 67–69)

What is the townsman saying about the stranger?

A. That the stranger is a member of his own family.

B. That the stranger has come to punish the town for its sins.

C. That he looks like a figure risen from the grave.

D. That the stranger is a great deal older than he first appears.

E. That he has seen the stranger somewhere before, long ago.

Q14. What does the Piper say his secret charm can do? (lines 72–77)

A. Turn any creature into a harmless one.

B. Draw any living creature to follow him.

C. Make any creature fall asleep where it stands.

D. Send every creature back to the place it was born.

E. Kill any creature that has ever harmed a person.

Q15. The stranger tells the council that people call him the Pied Piper (line 79). What does the word "pied" tell us about him? (lines 57–58 and 80–82)

A. That he travels from town to town and never settles.

B. That he is dressed in more than one colour.

C. That he plays a pipe better than any other man alive.

D. That he was born in a foreign country.

E. That he keeps his bargains, whatever it costs him.

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Q16. “One? fifty thousand!” (line 96)

What does this cry show about the Mayor and Corporation?

A. That they thought the Piper was asking far too little to be believed.

B. That they meant to bargain the price down later.

C. That they were so desperate they would promise almost anything.

D. That the town had grown very rich from its trade.

E. That they had misheard the number the Piper asked for.

Q17. “You heard as if an army muttered; And the muttering grew to a grumbling; And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;” (lines 107–109)

What is the poet doing in these lines?

A. Showing that the townspeople were beginning to complain again.

B. Suggesting that a real army was marching towards Hamelin.

C. Repeating himself because he could not think of a new rhyme.

D. Warning the reader that a thunderstorm was about to break.

E. Making the sound swell step by step as the rats come nearer.

Q18. “Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,” (line 111)

How many adjectives are there in this line?

A. two

B. three

C. four

D. five

E. eight

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Q19. Why does the poet list "Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins" and "Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives"? (lines 113–117)

A. To show that whole families of rats came, leaving nothing behind.

B. To remind the reader that the townspeople were watching from their homes.

C. To suggest that the rats were really people under a spell.

D. To show that the rats were quarrelling among themselves as they ran.

E. To explain why the Piper felt sorry for the rats.

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

A. The Mayor's Ermine Gown

B. A Town in Brunswick

C. The River Weser

D. The Stranger Who Cleared the Rats

E. The Council That Would Not Pay

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