

• Reading Comprehension 7 Level 9

Directions: Read the passage. Then answer the questions below.

Among the old Norsemen, it was customary for certain warriors to dress in the skins of the beasts they had slain, and thus to give themselves an air of **ferocity**, which was calculated to strike terror into the hearts of their foes. Of course, one may also assume that a wolf or bear skin would make a warm, comfortable outer coat for a man whose manner of living required him to defy all weathers.

Many legends speak of these warriors, also known as berserkers, and imply that they were physically transformed into the beasts whose skins they wore. The werewolf is one such being. There is also mention of a type of man who was bewitched into bear shape. Legends suggest that the skins carried the power of the beasts and, when worn, turned the wearer into that animal at the height of its capabilities.

The berserker was an object of terror, as his life's goal was to challenge quiet country farmers to combat. As the law of the land stood in Norway, a man who declined to accept a challenge from a berserker forfeited all his possessions, even his wife, over to the hands of his challenger. Therefore, the berserker had any man he challenged at his mercy. If the berserker slew him, the farmer's possessions became his, and if the poor fellow declined to fight, he lost all legal right to his inheritance. A berserker would invite himself to any feast and contribute to the hilarity of the entertainment by snapping the backbone or cleaving the skull of some merrymaker who displeased him. He might even single one out to murder for no other reason than to practice his combat skills.

It is not difficult to imagine that popular superstition went along with the popular dread of these wolf- and bear-skinned rovers, and that they were believed to be filled with the force, as they certainly were with the ferocity, of the beasts whose skins they wore.

The stories of the Norsemen indicate that the berserker rage was believed to be a kind of demonic possession. The berserkers were said to work themselves into a frenzy, in which an evil power came over them and compelled them to carry out acts that they never would commit in their normal states. They acquired superhuman force, and were wholly insensitive to pain. No sword would wound them, no fire would burn them, and only a club could destroy them, by breaking their bones or crushing their skulls. Their eyes glared as though a flame burned in the sockets; they ground their teeth and frothed at the mouth; they gnawed at their shield rims, and are said to have sometimes bitten through them; and as they rushed into conflict they yelped as dogs or howled as wolves.

Questions

- 1) passage would most likely be found in a(n)
 - A. scholarly history journal
 - B. nature magazine
 - C. fiction novel about werewolves
 - D. encyclopedia article about berserkers

- 2) As used in paragraph 1, which is the best synonym for **ferocity**?
 - A. viciousness
 - B. confidence
 - C. insanity
 - D. strength

- 3) In paragraph 1, the author writes, "Of course, one may also assume that a wolf or bear skin would make a warm, comfortable outer coat to a man whose manner of living required him to defy all weathers." Using this information, the reader can infer that Norse warriors
- A. had great respect for the animals that they killed and skinned
 - B. lived in harsh climate conditions
 - C. made comfort their highest priority in life
 - D. only made clothing out of ferocious animals, like wolves or bears
- 4) According to the passage, legends suggest that the berserkers got their powers from
- I. their own strength
 - II. evil spirits
 - III. their animal skins
- A. I only
 - B. I and II only
 - C. II and III only
 - D. I, II, and III
- 5) In paragraph 4, the author writes: "A berserker would invite himself to any feast and contribute to the hilarity of the entertainment by snapping the backbone or cleaving the skull of some merrymaker who displeased him." Which of the following literary devices is used in this sentence?
- A. *Irony*, characterized by the use of words to convey a meaning that is the opposite of its literal meaning. In irony, the deeper, real layer of significance is revealed by the situation and the context in which they are placed and not by the words themselves.
 - B. *Hyperbole*, characterized by the use of specific words and phrases that exaggerate and overemphasize the core of the statement in order to produce a grander, more noticeable effect. This usually works to convey an action or sentiment that is generally not realistically possible or plausible but helps to emphasize an emotion.
 - C. *Foreshadowing*, characterized by the use of words or phrases that hint at something—typically something bad—that is going to happen later in the story. This is done without revealing the story or spoiling the suspense.
 - D. *Personification*, characterized by the attribution of human traits or characteristics to non-human animals, inanimate objects, or abstract ideas.
- 6) Which sentence from the passage best supports the idea that the berserkers did, in a sense, transform into the animals whose skins they wore?
- A. "The berserker was an object of terror, as his life's goal was to challenge quiet country farmers to combat."
 - B. "Their eyes glared as though a flame burned in the sockets; they ground their teeth and frothed at the mouth; they gnawed at their shield rims, and are said to have sometimes bitten them through; and as they rushed into conflict they yelped as dogs or howled as wolves."
 - C. "The berserkers were said to work themselves into a frenzy, in which an evil power came over them, compelling them to carry out acts that they never would commit in their normal states."
 - D. "Many legends speak of these warriors, also known as berserkers, and imply that they were physically transformed into the beasts whose skins they wore."

Answers and Explanations

1) **D**

An encyclopedia article is objective, informative, and based on facts. This passage is full of facts about the Norse warriors known as berserkers, and it is written objectively, meaning that the author does not insert his or her opinion. This means the passage would most likely be found in an encyclopedia article about berserkers. Therefore **(D)** is the correct choice. The passage is written for a general audience, because the information is not specialized enough for a scholarly journal. This eliminates **(A)**. Despite the mention of animal skins, the topic is not very closely related to nature. It would not likely appear in a nature magazine, so **(B)** is incorrect. A fiction novel about werewolves would probably not contain this much information about berserkers. The passage only mentions werewolves once, whereas it mentions berserkers in nearly every paragraph. This means **(C)** is not the best choice.

2) **A**

ferocity (*noun*): the characteristic of being ferocious; being very fierce, vicious, or savage in nature.

The author writes in paragraph 1 that the Norse warriors wore skins to “give themselves an air of ferocity, which was calculated to strike terror into the hearts of their foes.” Because the skins were designed to make the warriors’ enemies very afraid, readers can understand that *ferocity* is a characteristic that suggests a vicious or savage nature, such as that of a wild beast. This means a good synonym for ferocity is *viciousness*. Therefore **(A)** is correct. Although the skins may have given the warriors *confidence*, it is unlikely that confidence alone would make enemies very afraid. This means **(B)** is incorrect. Later in the passage, there is information to make us think that the berserkers undergo a kind of *insanity*, or “demonic possession.” However, there is no evidence in paragraph 1 that the warriors attempted to look insane. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Strength* alone would be unlikely to make enemies very afraid, so **(D)** is incorrect.

3) **B**

The author tells us that the skins would make a warm coat for a man “whose manner of living required him to defy all weathers.” This information suggests that the Norse warriors needed clothing to protect them from all different kinds of weather. From this we can infer that the Norsemen lived in harsh climate conditions. Therefore **(B)** is correct. The need for a warm, comfortable coat does not indicate that the warriors had great respect for the animals killed, so **(A)** is incorrect. Although this sentence suggests that comfort may have been one priority for Norse warriors, we cannot conclude that it was their highest priority. This means **(C)** is incorrect. This sentence tells us that warriors made clothes out of wolves and bears, but it does not imply that warriors made clothing out of these animals exclusively. This makes **(D)** incorrect.

4) **C**

It may be true that the berserkers got their powers from their own strength, but that is not what legends suggest. All we know from the passage is that legends imply “the skin carried the power of the beasts” (paragraph 2) and that “the berserker rage was believed to be a kind of demonic possession” (paragraph 5). Since the question specifically asks about what the legends suggest, we can eliminate **option (I)**. In the last paragraph, the author claims that “the stories of the Norsemen indicate that the berserker rage was believed to be a kind of demonic possession,” described as a time when “an evil power came over” the warriors. Since stories are another word for legends, we can understand that the legends suggest that the warriors got their powers from some kind of evil spirits. This supports **option (II)**. In paragraph 2, the author states, “Legends suggest that the skin carried the power of the beasts and, when worn, turned the wearer into that animal at the height of its capabilities.” From this we can understand that legends suggest berserkers got their powers from the animal skins. This supports **option (III)**. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

5) **A**

The author does not literally mean that snapping a backbone or cleaving a skull is “hilarious.” He or she is being sarcastic, because it would not be funny at all to the man whose backbone was snapped. This is a form of irony: saying one thing, but meaning another. Therefore **(A)** is correct. The author indicates that a berserker would actually hurt someone who displeased him, so the author is not exaggerating. Since this sentence is not an example of hyperbole, **(B)** is incorrect. This is an informative passage, not a story with a plot, so the author is not foreshadowing something that will happen later. This means **(C)** is incorrect. A berserker is not an inanimate object or an animal, but actually human, so **(D)** is incorrect.

6) **B**

The phrase “in a sense” in the question alerts the reader to the fact that the correct answer will not likely be literal in nature. The question does not imply that the berserkers actually turned into these animals, but that in a more abstract sense, they somehow became these beasts. We are looking for the sentence that supports (meaning provides the best evidence) this idea. Frothing at the mouth, chewing a shield, and yelping are behaviors associated with dogs, wolves, or other wild animals. “In a sense,” therefore, the berserker has been transformed into an animal, because he is acting like an animal. These behaviors are evidence of how berserkers seemed to transform into wild beasts. This makes **(B)** correct. The berserker was an object of terror, but this sentence does not provide evidence that the berserker somehow transformed into an animal. This means **(A)** is incorrect. A berserker being controlled by an evil power is also not evidence that he is somehow transformed into an animal. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Legends imply that berserkers were physically transformed into beasts, but this sentence only restates the main idea. It does not support, or provide evidence, for the idea. This makes **(D)** incorrect.