

## • Reading Comprehension 8 Level 9

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

Once upon a time a famous art museum searched the world over for the best paintings it could find. After a long search, the museum found a beautiful Old Master painting depicting youths and maidens frolicking in a wood. The directors were only too glad to pay millions for this painting because they were captivated by its beauty and elegance. How delightfully the maidens' hair and mouths were drawn, how perfectly the hands and arms of the youths, how lifelike the bare feet on the forest floor. But the curator of the museum was the happiest one of all, for he had now become guardian and protector of a famous work by a famous painter. "Every time I look at that painting," he would say, "I see new beauties and excellences. Just look at these leaves here, the sweep of the branches from this tree, capturing just the hint of a breeze and seeming to vibrate with the music from the dance of the youths and maidens in the clearing. My very soul resonates with the greatness of it all."

Needless to say, this wonderful painting was the most popular exhibit at the museum, providing instruction and delight for thousands of visitors. Everyone, from the young child who could barely walk to the old man who could barely walk, enjoyed its beauty frankly and openly or profited from studying its color and arrangement. Children loved to see the happy figures kicking up their feet with joy; the young people marveled at the freshness and beauty of the figures; those of mature years stood astonished at the excellent technique that could present such a convincing vision; the old remarked upon the feeling of cozy intimacy produced by the scene of innocent pleasure.

"This painting is almost too good to be true," remarked one visitor prophetically as he purchased a print of it.

One day a horrible discovery was made: the painting was not a genuine Old Master after all. It was a forgery. It had not been painted by the famous artist whose name was on it, and in fact it had been painted within the last ten years. The museum directors and the curator were horrified and consumed with shame. Immediately the painting was jerked from the walls of the museum and **ignominiously** relegated to a basement storeroom. "We regret such an unfortunate imposition," the curator told the museum's patrons. "This painting is not art; it is a tawdry fake. This painting is a lie."

At first the public was saddened to lose sight of such a popular painting, and a few mild protests were raised, but eventually concern for the painting was pushed aside by other more pressing concerns, and it was forgotten (as are all things no longer directly in front of us in this busy world) and life continued.

Only the museum curator and an occasional junior staff member ever saw the painting now, hanging in the dim light of the basement well away from public view. All that was heard of it was the curator's occasional **disparaging** comment. "Every day I see new defects and ugliness in this fraudulent outrage," he would say. "Just look how false the sun on the leaves looks, how phony is the wisp of that girl's hair, how ugly the clouds there, and how awkward that boy's position in the dance. How we were ever taken in by this obvious cheat is beyond me." And finally, shaking his head to show his regret, he concluded, "What we did was foolish and shameful."

## Questions

- 1) According to the passage, before the painting is discovered to be a forgery, it is
- I. viewed as a fraudulent outrage
  - II. considered to be highly valuable
  - III. perceived as a delight by the public
- A. I only
  - B. I and II only
  - C. II and III only
  - D. I, II, and III
- 2) Based on its use in paragraph 4, it can be inferred that **ignominiously** belongs to which of the following word groups?
- A. delightfully, merrily, blissfully
  - B. penitently, remorsefully, sorrowfully
  - C. ardently, fervently, enthusiastically
  - D. disgracefully, shamefully, humiliatingly
- 3) Which of the following statements best expresses the overall theme of the passage?
- A. Knowledge can alter one's perceptions.
  - B. Art is impossible to understand.
  - C. Experts should be the ultimate judges of value.
  - D. Public popularity is a poor measure of value.
- 4) It can be inferred that the author would most likely agree that
- A. people should never pay millions of dollars for a painting
  - B. most people, including experts, do not know much about art
  - C. the person who sold the forgery to the museum should be imprisoned
  - D. the value of art is determined by people, not by the art itself
- 5) The museum curator can be described as all of the following except
- A. passionate
  - B. ashamed
  - C. unwavering
  - D. inconsistent
- 6) As used in the final paragraph, which is the best antonym for **disparaging**?
- A. unreliable
  - B. fortunate
  - C. neutral
  - D. complimentary

## Answers and Explanations

1) **C**

Before the painting is discovered to be a forgery, people do not view it as a fraudulent outrage. Instead, people think it is "a beautiful Old Master painting." It is only after the forgery is discovered that the curator is quoted as saying, in the last paragraph, that the painting is a "fraudulent outrage." This eliminates **option (I)**. In paragraph 1, the author informs us that the museum directors "were only too glad to pay millions for this painting." This tells us that before it is discovered to be a forgery, it is considered highly valuable. This supports **option (II)**. In paragraph 2, the author claims, "This wonderful painting was the most popular exhibit at the museum, providing instruction and delight for thousands of visitors." Since the visitors could be considered members of the public, we know that the painting is perceived as a delight by the public before people discover that it is a forgery. This supports **option (III)**. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

2) **D**

To answer this question correctly, it helps to use context. In paragraph 4 the author writes, "One day a horrible discovery was made: the painting was not a genuine Old Master after all. It was a forgery. It had not been painted by the famous artist whose name was on it, and in fact it had been painted within the last ten years. The museum directors and the curator were horrified and consumed with shame. Immediately the painting was jerked from the walls of the museum and ignominiously relegated to a basement storeroom." It makes sense that the discovery that the painting is a fake causes much disgrace or shame. Given that the museum and curator were publically deceived, this is a humiliating event. Therefore, it makes sense to think that the painting was ignominiously, or disgracefully relegated to the basement. Using this information, we can understand that ignominiously belongs to the word group in **(D)**, making it the correct choice. The discovery that the painting is a fake is a negative event. Since *delightfully*, *merrily*, *blissfully* are all positive words, this rules out **(A)**. Although the museum and curator were probably sad to have been fooled by the fake painting, the words *penitently*, *remorsefully*, *sorrowfully* do not as accurately capture the shame that they felt. Choice **(B)** is incorrect. **(C)** is incorrect because the museum and curator did not defend the painting or suggest that it should still be displayed regardless of its true identity as a fake. This means *ardently*, *fervently*, *enthusiastically* are inaccurate.

3) **A**

The theme is the subject of discussion, or unifying or dominant idea. The painting in the passage never changes, although people's feelings towards it vary wildly according to the things they know about it. When people believe that it is a "beautiful Old Master painting" worth "millions," they are delighted by it. When people find out it is a forgery, they view the painting as a "tawdry fake" and a "fraudulent outrage." In telling this story, the author illustrates the idea that knowledge can alter one's perceptions. Therefore **(A)** is correct. The passage is not concerned with understanding art, but with the reasons why art is or is not considered valuable. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. In the passage, the experts (the curator and directors) are not shown to be good judges of value. The curator cannot initially tell that the painting is a forgery, and when this fact is discovered, he changes his opinion about the quality of the painting. This means **(C)** is incorrect. There is not enough information for us to infer what the author judges to be a good measure of value, so the passage does not suggest that public popularity is necessarily a poor measure of value. This makes **(D)** incorrect.

4) **D**

The author presents a story that illustrates how people judge the value of art. When people believe the painting to be a work by an Old Master, it provides "instruction and delight for thousands of visitors," as the author claims in paragraph 2. However, when the painting is discovered to be a forgery, the author tells us that the directors and curator are "horrified and consumed with shame." The painting is put in the basement and forgotten by the public who had so delighted in it. The painting itself does not change, but people's views of it do, and along with the views the value of the painting. This story illustrates that the value of art is determined by people, not by the art itself. Therefore **(D)** is correct. Although in the passage a museum pays millions for a painting that turns out to be a forgery, this story does not necessarily suggest that the author believes that all people should never pay millions of dollars for a painting. The author might think this amount of money is justified if a painting could be verified as a true masterpiece. This means **(A)** is incorrect. In the passage, the experts and the public are tricked by the forgery. However, this does not suggest that the author believes most people do not know much about art. For example, the author could define knowledge about art as knowledge about the principles of color, design, and beauty rather than the ability to tell a real masterpiece from a forgery. This makes **(B)** incorrect. While many might think that the person who sold the forgery to the museum should be imprisoned, the passage does not contain information to suggest that the author agrees. Because it is unsupported by the passage, **(C)** is incorrect.

5) **C**

In the beginning of the passage we learn about a new painting acquired by the museum curator. The painting is touted to be a work by an Old Master, which provides "instruction and delight for thousands of visitors," as the author claims in paragraph 2. However, when the painting is discovered to be a forgery, the author tells us that the directors and curator are "horrified and consumed with shame." The curator's opinion of the quality of the painting drastically changes upon his becoming aware that it is a fake. This knowledge does not change the painting, however; the painting looks the same as it did before. Because the author's opinion of the painting's appearance changes so drastically upon hearing that it is a fake, he cannot be accurately described as *unwavering*, or resolute. Therefore **(C)** is correct. In the middle of paragraph 1, the curator's passion for the painting is revealed: "But the curator of the museum was the happiest one of all, for he had now become guardian and protector of a famous work by a famous painter. 'Every time I look at that painting,' he would say, 'I see new beauties and excellences. Just look at these leaves here, the sweep of the branches from this tree, capturing just the hint of a breeze and seeming to vibrate with the music from the dance of the youths and maidens in the clearing. My very soul resonates with the greatness of it all.'" Upon learning that the painting is a fake, this passion is not diminished, but reversed: "All that was heard of it was the curator's occasional disparaging comment. 'Every day I see new defects and ugliness in this fraudulent outrage' he would say. 'Just look how false the sun on the leaves looks, how phony is the wisp of that girl's hair, how ugly the clouds there, and how awkward that boy's position in the dance. How we were ever taken in by this obvious cheat is beyond me.'" The curator indeed is *passionate* throughout the passage. This means **(A)** is incorrect. Upon

learning that the painting is a fake in paragraph 3, the author writes, "The museum directors and the curator were horrified and consumed with shame." Choice **(B)** is correct. Since *inconsistent* is an antonym for unwavering, we can understand that **(D)** is incorrect.

6) **D**

**disparaging** (*adjective*): tending to belittle or bring reproach upon; derogatory; unfavorable; uncomplimentary.

In the final paragraph, the author relays a "disparaging comment" made by the curator after the discovery that the painting is a forgery: "'Every day I see new defects and ugliness in this fraudulent outrage,' he would say. 'Just look how false the sun on the leaves looks, how phony is the wisp of that girl's hair, how ugly the clouds there, and how awkward that boy's position in the dance. How we were ever taken in by this obvious cheat is beyond me.' And finally, shaking his head to show his regret, he concluded, 'What we did was foolish and shameful.'" This comment insults and criticizes the painting. From the critical nature of the curator's comment we can understand that *disparaging* means belittling or derogatory. The best antonym for derogatory is *complimentary*, which makes **(D)** correct. The passage does not contain information to suggest that the curator's comment is reliable. If anything, the curator is an unreliable source because his criticism of the painting in the last paragraph directly contradicts his praise of the painting in paragraph 1. This means that *unreliable* cannot be an antonym for disparaging. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Although the curator's disparaging comment is unfavorable, it is not unfortunate, or unlucky. This means that *fortunate* cannot be an antonym for disparaging, which makes **(B)** incorrect. Disparaging is a very negative word because it means belittling or derogatory. The best antonym for a very negative word is not *neutral*, but a very positive word like complimentary. This means that **(C)** is not the best choice.