

“Accused”

Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

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



Elizabeth was brooding in her room. She had sought asylum there since **spurious** gossip about her began circulating at Seagrove Academy last week.

Not that Elizabeth had ever been considered a social butterfly. She preferred to live vicariously through the stories of her more **brazen** friends: late night partying, fraternizing with boys, childish pranks. Still, she had taken to being more by herself than usual since the allegations surfaced.

She was up for consideration for the highly coveted Blauvelt Award, a scholarship recognizing “academic integrity and promise.” A student had given headmaster Billings an anonymous “tip” that Elizabeth had cheated on several tests this year.

The accusations were laughable. Elizabeth had long been a stellar student at Seagrove. She lacked a natural intelligence – this was true. However, she compensated for this deficit through **diligence** and **perseverance**; she was very thorough in her studies and exhibited an almost relentless determination.

Still, the accusations had given the recommendation committee pause. On Friday Elizabeth had been called to Mr. Billings’ grand office, where she was asked copious questions about her recent exams. The experience was quite traumatic.

Seagrove was an elite school. Most of its students came from privileged backgrounds. This was not the case for Elizabeth. Her family had little money. She attended Seagrove on a full scholarship. The Blauvelt Award would help her family pay for college.

So, it was with the same diligence which she applied to her studies that Elizabeth planned to unmask her accuser. She opened the school directory on her bed and began combing through the names.

Seagrove was such a small and insular community. Twenty-one kids would be in her graduating class. Elizabeth knew it was **inevitable** that the person spreading rumors about her would come to light. It was just a matter of time.

Questions:

1) As used at the beginning of the story, which is the best synonym for **spurious**?

- A. ashamed
- B. ghastly
- C. general
- D. untrue

2) What is the meaning of “*diligence and perseverance*” as used in paragraph 4?

- A. efficiency and willpower
- B. natural ability
- C. hard work and discipline
- D. painstaking attention

3) Which of the following is best described as **brazen**?

- A. A dog chases a cat up a tree.
- B. A man walks his dog during the rain.
- C. A woman steps in front of a bus to make it to stop.
- D. A little girl wins the National Spelling Bee with hard work.

4) Why would Elizabeth have likely been disqualified from receiving the Blauvelt Award if caught cheating?

- A. Mr. Billings said this was the case.
- B. Awards are never given to cheaters.
- C. The award is based on academic integrity.
- D. Cheating would have made the award illegitimate for college use.

5) How is Elizabeth different than many of her peers?

- A. She is diligent.
- B. She is honest.
- C. She is not wealthy.
- D. She likes to be alone.

6) Seagrove Academy was

- A. a school for gifted students
 - B. a school with many wealthy students
 - C. a school where many kids lied and cheated
 - D. a large school where it was hard to get to know people
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Questions (continued):

7) What does the reader learn about the student who accused Elizabeth of cheating?

- I. The student is a former friend of Elizabeth.
- II. The student does not want anyone to know who he or she is.
- III. The student is either lying or mistaken.

- A. I only
- B. I and II
- C. II and III
- D. I, II, and III

8) As used at the end of the story, which is the best antonym for **inevitable**?

- A. impossible
- B. unmistakable
- C. probable
- D. certain

9) Why is Elizabeth so sure that she will learn who has accused her of cheating?

- A. Her friends will help her.
- B. The community is so small.
- C. She thinks the person will come forward.
- D. She thinks the person will be the recipient of the Blauvelt Award.

10) How did Elizabeth respond to being accused?

- A. She became frustrated.
- B. She became reclusive.
- C. She became encouraged.
- D. She became enraged.

11) Who is the antagonist in this story?

- A. Elizabeth, because she is the leading character
- B. Mr. Billings, because he is the hero
- C. the anonymous student, because he or she struggles against Elizabeth
- D. the recommendation committee, because it holds sway over Elizabeth's future

12) The Blauvelt Award is important to Elizabeth because it will

- A. prove she is intelligent
- B. help her pay for college
- C. make her parents proud
- D. prove she did not cheat

Answers and Explanations

1) **D**

spurious (*adjective*): lacking authenticity or validity; not genuine; false.

In paragraph 1, the reader learns that Elizabeth has been brooding because she is the object of *spurious* gossip. In paragraph 3, the reader learns that someone told the school headmaster that Elizabeth had been cheating. In paragraph 4, the accusation is described as “laughable,” because Elizabeth is “thorough in her studies” and relentlessly determined. The reader can infer from this that Elizabeth did not cheat, since she is hardworking and so upset by the allegations. Therefore, “spurious” gossip is untrue gossip and **(D)** is correct.

Ashamed means disgraced or embarrassed. Elizabeth may be hiding in her room in part because she feels embarrassed, even though the rumors are untrue. However, the gossip itself is not ashamed. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Something *ghastly* is extremely unpleasant, to the point of horror. A rumor can be *ghastly*, and Elizabeth certainly found the rumors horrible, but the reason why she found them so horrible was because they were untrue and unfair. Thus **(D)** is a stronger answer, and therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Something *general* lacks specificity. We learn in paragraph 3 that Elizabeth is accused of “cheating on several tests this year.” This is a specific rumor. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

2) **C**

In paragraph 4, we learn that although Elizabeth “lacked a natural intelligence,” Elizabeth “compensated for this deficit through diligence and perseverance; she was very thorough in her studies and exhibited an almost relentless determination.” The reader can infer from these statements that although Elizabeth did not find schoolwork easy, she worked very hard and had the discipline to keep working even when it was difficult. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Efficiency is being effective in relation to the amount of effort made. Thoroughness and determination do not make actions *efficient*. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. We know that Elizabeth worked hard because she did not have a *natural ability*. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Painstaking attention* is great attention to detail, which is related to diligence. However, this phrase does not capture the full meaning of working hard even through great difficulty. Therefore, **(D)** is incorrect.

3) **C**

brazen (*adjective*): shameless and bold.

In paragraph 2, we learn that Elizabeth is not very social, but enjoys the “stories of her more brazen friends: late night partying, fraternizing with boys, childish pranks.” The reader can infer that *brazen* here means bold,

dangerous or unafraid. Stepping in front of a bus to make it stop is a good example of bold, unafraid behavior. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

A dog chasing a cat up a tree is not bold. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Walking a dog in the rain is not bold or dangerous. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Working hard is not dangerous or bold either. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

4) **C**

In paragraph 3, the passage states that the Blauvelt Award recognizes “academic integrity and promise.” Integrity is adherence to a strict moral or ethical code. Cheating is a mark of dishonesty, which would be unacceptable for an award for academic integrity. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

While it’s probably true that known cheaters win few awards, the story gives more explicit information that the award was for *academic integrity*, making **(C)** a stronger answer. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The story does not contain information to support answer choices **(A)** and **(D)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

5) **C**

In paragraph 6, we learn “Seagrove was an elite school. Most of its students came from privileged backgrounds. This was not the case for Elizabeth. Her family had little money.” Therefore, Elizabeth is not wealthy like many of her peers. **(C)** is correct.

The story does not indicate whether Elizabeth’s peers at Seagrove are diligent. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. It also does not indicate whether her peers are honest. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. While paragraph 2 tells us that Elizabeth has friends who like parties and “fraternizing with boys,” the passage does not indicate that many or most of the Seagrove students dislike being alone. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

6) **B**

In paragraph 6, the story says, “Seagrove was an elite school. Most of its students came from privileged backgrounds.” The reader can infer from these statements that Seagrove was an expensive school with mostly wealthy students. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The story indicates that the students are *privileged*, but this does not mean that the students are *gifted*. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Although the story is about false rumors spread by a student, there is nothing that indicates that *many* of the students lie. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. We know that Elizabeth’s graduating class will only have 21 students in it, so it is not large. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

7) **C**

The story does not contain any information about the student being Elizabeth’s former friend. This eliminates **option (I)**. The student who accused Elizabeth of cheating did so anonymously. This indicates that the

student does not want to be known. This supports **option (II)**. We know that Elizabeth did not cheat, so the student who accused Elizabeth of cheating is either mistaken or lying. This supports **option (III)**. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

- 8) **A**
inevitable (*adjective*): certain; sure to happen.

At the end of the passage, the reader learns that Seagrove is very small and insular. The passage says, “Elizabeth knew it was **inevitable** that the person spreading rumors about her would come to light. It was just a matter of time.” The reader can infer that because of the small number of students and close community, Elizabeth believed that she could surely find out who made the accusations. *Impossible* means incapable of being done, so impossible is the opposite of inevitable. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

Something that is unmistakable is impossible to confuse. That is not the opposite of something that is certain to happen. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Something that is *probable* is likely to happen, but not certain to happen. Therefore, *probable* is more similar to the word *inevitable* than it is different. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Inevitable* means *certain* to happen, so certain is a synonym for *inevitable*, not the opposite. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

- 9) **B**
At the end of the story it says, ‘Seagrove was such a small and insular community. Twenty-one kids would be in her graduating class. Elizabeth knew it was inevitable that the person spreading rumors about her would come to light.’ The reader can infer from this that Elizabeth was certain that she would find out who made the accusations because there were so few students in the small community. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The story does not contain information to support answer choices **(A)**, **(C)** and **(D)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

- 10) **B**
In paragraph 1, it says, “Elizabeth was brooding in her room.” In paragraph 2, the reader learns that Elizabeth “has taken to being more by herself than usual since the allegations surfaced.” The reader can infer from these statements that the allegations have caused Elizabeth to keep to herself, or to become reclusive. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

Although it would be natural for someone to feel frustrated by being falsely accused of cheating after working so hard, the story does not indicate that Elizabeth felt those emotions. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. It would be unnatural for someone to feel encouraged by false accusations of cheating, and the passage does not indicate that Elizabeth felt that way. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. It would be natural for someone to be enraged by being falsely accused, but the story does not indicate that Elizabeth felt enraged. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

11) **C**

The antagonist is the student who accused Elizabeth of cheating, because that person is clearly working in opposition to Elizabeth, or struggling against her. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The leading character is the protagonist, not antagonist. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Mr. Billings is acting in response to information he has received. He is not acting in opposition to Elizabeth. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The job of the recommendation committee is to determine who deserves the scholarship. While their determination is crucial for Elizabeth, the committee is not acting against Elizabeth, so **(D)** is incorrect.

12) **B**

The story tells the reader that Elizabeth is a hardworking student. In paragraph 6, the reader learns that Elizabeth's "family had little money." Also, "the Blauvelt Award would help her family pay for college." Since Elizabeth works so hard at her studies, going to college is probably important to her. Since Elizabeth doesn't have much money, Elizabeth probably needs the money in order to attend college. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The story tells the reader in paragraph 4 that Elizabeth does not have a natural intelligence, so it does not make sense that Elizabeth would use an award to prove something untrue. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. While winning the award might make Elizabeth's parents proud, the passage does not indicate that this is important to Elizabeth. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Elizabeth's problem is that she will not get the award if the committee believes that she has cheated. Therefore, she is not trying to use the award to prove her innocence. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.