

“City Girl”

Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

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



I am a city girl at heart. I’ve never milked a cow – never wanted to.

I was shocked when I attended my first “pig pickin’” after my husband and I moved to North Carolina from Boston. I had to **avert** my eyes from the huge pig, skin and head still on, splayed open across an oil drum that had been sawed in half lengthwise and fitted with hinges so it opened and closed. This, I later learned, was called a “pig cooker.” Part of the pig’s insides were chopped up in a pan beside it and referred to as “barbecue.” Seeing all of this did not improve my appetite.

“Y’all in thuh country now, *gul*,” the host told me happily, apparently thrilled to be the one to indoctrinate me into country living.

When, at 8 months pregnant, I volunteered to chaperone my son’s strawberry-picking field trip, the other mothers looked at me strangely. I thought strawberries grew on tall bushes, not low to the ground. All that squatting sent me into early labor.

You should keep these incidents in mind in order to understand my attitude when I heard a “huge hurricane” was headed toward our town. I thought back to the snowstorms forecast during my days growing up in Philadelphia. The “20 inches” predicted by the weatherman never seemed to **materialize**.

The local newspaper ran a long checklist of things townspeople should get to prepare for the hurricane. My neighbor, Wayne, aware that I was new to town, made a point of giving me a copy of the list. I took a **cursory** glance and thought nothing more of it.

While my neighbors were running around taping their windows, buying fresh batteries, and prepping their generators, I was, quite **literally**, sitting in my glass house playing with the kids on the floor.

The rains started at 2 o’clock in the afternoon. To my amazement, this was exactly what the weatherman had predicted.

These were no ordinary rains, either. From my glass living room, I could no longer see the front lawn or the trees. The rain was as thick as a *woolen curtain*. By nightfall, my husband’s car had begun to float out of the driveway. The water started insidiously creeping up our front steps, overturning potted plants and benches in its wake.

“This is unbelievable!” I yelled. I reached for the phone to dial Wayne. He had been born and raised in these parts; surely he would know what to do.

"Wayne," I said worriedly into the receiver. "The water is coming up our front steps. It's almost to our door!"

"Ours, too," he said, quite calmly, I thought, given the circumstances.

"What should I do?"

"Put out your sandbags. It will keep the water out as long as it doesn't get too high."

"Sandbags?"

"You didn't get any?" he asked in disbelief. "They were on the list."

No, I hadn't.

Questions:

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| <p>1) What other title might fit this passage best?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. "An Urban Attitude"B. "Learning Hurricanes"C. "Picking Strawberries"D. "Snow Storms that Don't Come" | <p>2) What seems to be the author's main purpose in the first four paragraphs of this passage?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. to let the reader know that the narrator went into early laborB. to let the reader know that the narrator does not like barbecueC. to let the reader know that the narrator is unfamiliar with country lifeD. to let the reader know that the narrator wants to move back to Boston |
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3) "I had to avert my eyes from the huge pig, skin and head still on, splayed open across half of an oil drum that had been sawed in half lengthwise."

Which of the following is the best way to rewrite the above sentence (from paragraph 2) while keeping its original meaning as used in the story?

- A. I had to open my eyes to the huge pig, skin and head on, splayed open across an oil drum that had been sawed in half lengthwise."
- B. I had to direct my eyes towards the huge pig, skin and head on, splayed open across an oil drum that had been sawed in half lengthwise.
- C. I had to turn my eyes away from the huge pig, skin and head on, splayed open across an oil drum that had been sawed in half lengthwise.
- D. I had to fix my eyes upon the huge pig, skin and head on, splayed open across an oil drum that had been sawed in half lengthwise.

Questions (continued):

- 4) As used in paragraph 5, which is the best definition for **materialize**?
- A. to be false
 - B. to increase in size
 - C. to become actual or real
 - D. to be concerned with consumer goods.
- 5) Which literary term best applies to the following quote: “*Y’all in thuh country now, gul.*”
- A. yarn, meaning an improbable tale
 - B. trait, characterized as a habit or tendency in one’s personality
 - C. caprice, characterized as expressing fanciful or odd notions
 - D. vernacular, meaning the native language of people in a particular geographical area
- 6) Which best describes the narrator's attitude in this passage?
- A. disdainful of rural life
 - B. unaware of country ways
 - C. anxious to get back to Boston
 - D. wishful for her children to grow up in the city
- 7) As used in the middle of the story, which is the best antonym for **cursor**?
- A. angry and willful
 - B. fast and intelligent
 - C. slow and deliberate
 - D. slow and superficial
- 8) What does it mean to **literally** do something?
- A. to think about doing something
 - B. to do something exactly as said
 - C. to do something and regret it later
 - D. to do something with a bad attitude
- 9) What message does the author convey by having the narrator wait out the storm in a glass room?
- A. It signifies how vulnerable she is.
 - B. It signifies the narrator's nontraditional tastes.
 - C. It lets the reader know that she has not taped up her windows.
 - D. It lets the reader know she can see everything that's going on.
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Questions (continued):

10) Which best describes the use of *woolen curtain* in this passage?

- A. simile, meaning the direct comparison of two different things using “like” or “as.”
- B. comic relief, meaning it offers humor in a tense situation.
- C. personification, meaning something described as if it were human.
- D. satire, meaning it ridicules the weakness of an institution.

11) If the story were to continue, what might reasonably happen next?

- I. Water might get into the house.
 - II. The narrator might flee to Wayne’s house for safety.
 - III. The narrator might drive back to the store to get sandbags.
- A. I only
 - B. I and II
 - C. II and III
 - D. I, II, and III

12) Which lesson does the narrator most likely learn during the hurricane?

- A. The early bird catches the worm.
- B. Marry in haste and repent at leisure.
- C. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
- D. Actions speak louder than words.

13) How might the narrator have been better able to deal with her immediate problem?

- A. She could have taped her windows.
- B. She could have replaced the old batteries in her appliances.
- C. She could have prepped her generator.
- D. She could have purchased the items from the hurricane list.

Which do you like better, the country or the city? Why?

Answers and Explanations

1) **A**

In paragraph 1, the narrator states, “I’m a city girl at heart.” The reader learns that she lived in Boston before she moved to North Carolina. In paragraph 5, the narrator reveals that she grew up in Philadelphia, another large city. The incidents recounted in the passage all describe her failure to adjust to living outside of an urban environment. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

The other answers all refer to specific stories that are a part of the passage, but they do not describe the theme of the passage as a whole. Therefore **(B)**, **(C)**, and **(D)** are incorrect.

2) **C**

The first four paragraphs describe two specific incidents which reveal the narrator’s lack of familiarity with country life. In paragraph 3, the host of the pig picking the narrator attends tells her that she and her husband are in the country now. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Although the narrator does say she went into early labor, that is a detail in the story rather than her purpose in recounting the story. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. The narrator does imply that she doesn’t like barbecue, but that is another detail, not the larger purpose of the first four paragraphs. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The story does not contain information to support the idea that the narrator wants to move back to Boston. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

3) **C**

The verb, *avert*, means to turn away from. Because she finds the sight so disturbing, the narrator must turn her eyes away from the dead pig. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

All of the other answer choices depict her turning her eyes *towards* the disturbing scene, instead of turning her eyes *away from* the disturbing scene. They describe the opposite reaction that one would expect based on the narrator’s description of her shock. Therefore **(A)**, **(B)**, and **(D)** are incorrect.

4) **C**

materialize (*verb*): to assume bodily form; to appear suddenly; to come into existence.

In paragraph 5, the narrator remembers childhood snowstorms, which never seemed to bring as much snow as the forecast said they would. She explains, “The ‘20 inches’ predicted by the weatherman never seemed to **materialize**.” In this context, *materialize* means to appear or become real. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

To be false means to be untrue. The weatherman’s predictions were untrue, but it does not make sense that the snowstorms themselves did not seem to be untrue. That would imply the storms were true, or did happen, when they

did not. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *To increase in size* means to get bigger, but the snowstorms did not happen at all, much less get bigger. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *To be concerned with material goods* is the definition of *materialistic*, not *materialize*. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

5) **D**

The phrase “Y’all in thuh country now, gul” may be understood to mean: “You all are in the country now, girl.” The narrator’s host is speaking English; however, he is using a vernacular form that is unique to the region where he lives. Because of his accent, it does not sound like standard English. Therefore, **(D)** is correct.

A yarn is an improbable tale, but what the man says is true. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. A trait is a tendency in one’s personality, but the sentence does not directly indicate any of the man’s character traits. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Caprice means expressing fanciful or odd notions, but what the man expressed is not particularly odd or fanciful. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

6) **B**

Over the course of the passage, the narrator is surprised over and over again by what country life involves. She lists many things that catch her unaware of what to do or how to behave. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The narrator does not disdain rural life. She is open to trying new things, like strawberry picking, and she asks her rural neighbor for help because she admits he knows more than she does about hurricanes. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Despite the mishaps the character experiences, there is no evidence in the story that she wants to return to Boston or wishes her children to grow up in the North. Therefore **(C)** and **(D)** are incorrect.

7) **C**

cursor (*adjective*): quick; superficial; hasty.

In paragraph 6, when the narrator gives the checklist from the newspaper a *cursor* glance, she skims over it quickly without really reading it carefully or paying attention to what it says. To read something *slowly* and *deliberately* would be the opposite of giving it merely a *cursor* glance. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Angry and willful is not the opposite of quick. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Fast* is more similar to *cursor*, while *intelligent* is unrelated. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Slow* is the opposite of *cursor*, but *superficial* is a synonym. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

8) **B**

literally (*adverb*): actually; truly; without exaggeration.

In paragraph 7, the narrator says, “I was, quite **literally**, sitting in my glass house playing with the kids on the floor.” When she tells us this she is letting

us know that she is telling the truth about where she was and not exaggerating. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

She is not thinking about sitting in her glass house, she is actually doing it. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Although she may later regret not being more prepared, she does not know this at the time. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The fact that she was “playing with the kids” does not indicate she had a bad attitude. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

9) **A**

The narrator’s position inside her glassed-in room highlights how susceptible, or vulnerable, she is to the hurricane. The image also reveals how, in a larger sense, her lack of knowledge of country ways makes her vulnerable. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

While having a glass room in one’s house may be unconventional, that detail is irrelevant to the story. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The narrator has told us that “while her neighbors were running around taping up their windows,” she was playing with her kids, so we already know she has not taped up her own windows. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The narrator can see everything that is going on, but she could also do that through regular windows. She does not need a glass room to see outside. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

10) **A**

When the narrator says, “The rain was as thick as a *woolen curtain*,” she is comparing the rain to a curtain by using a *simile*. Just as a woolen curtain is too thick to see through, the rain was so thick that it obscured the narrator’s view. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

This line does not offer any humor. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Neither a woolen curtain nor the rain is described as human. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. This line does not ridicule the weakness of an institution. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

11) **B**

The story ends with the narrator calling Wayne and telling him that the water is almost up to their front door. If the story continued, water might flow under the front door and into the house. This supports **option (I)**. The narrator and her family also might seek shelter next door at Wayne’s, since he was better prepared. This supports **option (II)**. The narrator could not drive to the store to get sandbags because the flood of water that caused her husband’s car to float away would make driving impossible. This eliminates **option (III)**. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

12) **C**

If the narrator had read the checklist Wayne gave her and watched her other neighbors preparing for the hurricane, she would have been able to *prevent* a great deal of damage without a lot of effort. Unfortunately, since she ignored the checklist and the neighbors’ preparations, the narrator will spend a great

deal of time and money fixing, or *curing*, the damage done by the storm. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

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

13)**D**

Flooding from the excessive rainfall and its movement into her house are the narrator's immediate problem. At the end of the story, when the narrator calls Wayne to tell him that the water is near her front door, Wayne tells her to use her sandbags to block the flow of water. When the narrator admits she doesn't have sandbags, Wayne replies, "You didn't get any? They were on the list." If the narrator had looked carefully at the hurricane checklist Wayne gave her and purchased the items on the list, she would have had sandbags to stop the water from washing into her house. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Taping windows **(A)**, replacing the batteries in appliances **(B)**, and prepping a generator **(C)** are all good things to do before a hurricane; however, the passage does not say that flying glass and power outages are an immediate problem for the narrator in the same way that flooding is. Therefore **(A)**, **(B)**, and **(C)** are incorrect.