

“The Mini Problem”

Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

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



Lily’s anger could not have been more **palpable**.

She awakened Christmas morning and, along with her brother, ran down to see the gifts under the tree.

In the living room sat a magnificent mini bike. It was red with a pearly white gas tank and side panels. For a brief moment, Lily was filled with what seemed like **insurmountable** excitement. She couldn’t imagine anything better than getting that bike. Then, her eyes caught sight of a baby doll sitting on the couch with a huge bow.

She knew. She knew that the mini bike belonged to her brother and that she had been **relegated** to that doll. It was *par for the course*.

Tommy always got cool things: skateboards, gliders, science kits. The mini bike was just the latest cool thing.

Lily always got the boring gifts: a doll with a gown, a doll with a tutu, a doll with a puppy. This doll seemed unusually blah. The doll wore a petticoat. The doll had short, straight black hair.

Tommy had seen that mini-bike in the front window of Moore’s Bike Shop, but hadn’t Lily too? Both had begged for the bike. Both had said it was the only thing they wanted for Christmas. Hadn’t Lily asked for it with as much **fervor** as her twin brother?

Tommy’s eyes grew wide at the sight of the bike he knew was his—no doll for him. He ran into his parents’ room and jumped excitedly on the bed.

“Thank you, Mama! Thank you, Papa!” he yelled.

Meanwhile Lily simmered in the other room. She was furious. She was enraged. She was **incensed**. It took a while for anyone to even realize she was missing.

“What’s wrong, Lil?” Papa asked. “Did you see your pretty doll?”

“I saw it,” she said sulkily.

“What’s wrong?” asked Mama.

Silence. Lily’s jaw was fixed. Her hands clenched. Her whole body trembled.

“Oh, Mama, you know Lily is never excited by presents!” her brother laughed. “Come out and watch me ride!”

And so they did.

Questions:

- 1) In the beginning of the story, Lily's anger was described as **palpable** because it was
- A. unusual
 - B. irrational
 - C. difficult to understand
 - D. easy to feel
- 2) As used in the beginning of the story, which is the best antonym for **insurmountable**?
- A. sane
 - B. phony
 - C. unjustified
 - D. surpassable
- 3) As used in the beginning of the story, which best describes the act of being **relegated**?
- A. A star athlete is given a coveted award.
 - B. A disobedient dog is put in the garage to sleep.
 - C. After being tested, swimmers are put into groups according to their ability levels.
 - D. The birthday boy is taken to his favorite restaurant.
- 4) As used in the beginning of the story, the expression *par for the course* implies that something
- A. is to be expected
 - B. cannot be undone
 - C. is sure to cause anger
 - D. was meant to be hurtful
- 5) What is ironic about the title of this passage?
- A. Lily has a big problem.
 - B. Tommy is perfectly happy.
 - C. Lily does not get a mini bike.
 - D. Lily's parents do not realize there is actually a problem.
- 6) What could the author have written if she wanted to show Lily taking steps to improve her situation?
- A. a scene with Lily storming out of the house
 - B. a description of Lily getting to ride the mini bike first
 - C. a paragraph describing Lily pretending to appreciate the doll
 - D. a dialogue with Lily explaining to her family why she was so angry

Questions (continued):

7) As used in the middle of the story, which is the best antonym for **fervor**?

- A. gluttony
- B. indifference
- C. politeness
- D. passion

8) Using the information in the story as a guide, it can be inferred that Lily's parents could reasonably be accused of being

- I. unloving
- II. insensitive
- III. gender biased

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

9) In paragraph 6, the author most likely repeats the word "doll" to

- A. highlight how extravagant the dolls were
- B. juxtapose the number of dolls with just one mini bike
- C. emphasize how common this gift had become for Lily
- D. make it clear that the doll she got this Christmas was the worst of all

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

- A. pleased
- B. annoyed
- C. patient
- D. indignant

What would you do if you were in Lily's position? Explain.

Answers and Explanations

- 1) **D**
palpable (*adjective*): easy to feel.

At the beginning of the story, we are told that Lily's anger was palpable. The story goes on to describe how although Lily and her brother both wanted a bike for Christmas, only Lily's brother got one. This makes Lily angry. Lily stays in the other room while the rest of the family gathers in the living room. Near the end of the story, Lily's mother realizes that she is in the other room and asks her what is wrong. The author writes, "Silence. Lily's jaw was fixed. Her hands clenched. Her whole body trembled." Since Lily won't respond and is visibly angry, her anger is easy to perceive, or feel. We can understand from this information that *palpable* means easy to feel. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Near the end of the story, Tommy says, "Oh, Mama, you know Lily is never excited by presents!" This tells us that Lily's anger is not unusual, because she feels it every time the two children receive gifts. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Lily never gets the gifts she asks for, while her brother always does. It makes sense that this would make her angry, so her anger is not irrational. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Again, Lily never gets what she asks for. It is easy to understand why someone in Lily's place would get angry. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

- 2) **D**
insurmountable (*adjective*): impossible to exceed.

Near the beginning of the story, the author writes, "In the living room sat a magnificent mini bike. It was red with a pearly white gas tank and side panels. For a brief moment, Lily was filled with what seemed like insurmountable excitement. She couldn't imagine anything better than getting that bike." Since getting the bike is the best thing Lily can imagine, we can understand that her excitement is the highest it could be. *Insurmountable* means impossible to exceed. *Surpassable* means capable of being exceeded. Since this is the opposite of being impossible to exceed, surpassable is an antonym for insurmountable. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Sane means rational. Rational is not the opposite of impossible to exceed, so sane is not an antonym for insurmountable. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Phony* means fake. Fake is not the opposite of impossible to exceed, so phony is not an antonym for insurmountable. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Unjustified* means without reasonable grounds. Being without reasonable grounds is not the opposite of being impossible to exceed. Unjustified is not an antonym for insurmountable. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

- 3) **B**
relegated (*verb*): to assign to something undesirable; to banish or exile.

Lily is interested in the kinds of toys her brother always gets, but Lily always gets dolls, although she dislikes them. On Christmas morning, Lily was excited to see a bike, but then she saw a doll. In paragraph 4, the author writes, "She knew. She knew that the mini bike belonged to her brother and that she had been relegated to that doll." Since Lily doesn't like dolls but always gets them, we can infer that the word *relegated* means to be assigned to something undesirable. A disobedient dog that has been placed in the garage to sleep has also been assigned to something undesirable. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

A coveted award is desirable. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Being placed in groups according to ability is not being assigned to something undesirable. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. A favorite restaurant is desirable. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

4) **A**

The expression *par for the course* is taken from the sport of golf. Par is the number of strokes expected for a given hole. Saying that something is par for the course is saying that something is as it is expected to be. But we don't have to have a working knowledge of golf to get this one right. We can infer the meaning of this expression from the passage. In paragraph 4, when Lily gets the doll, it is described as "par for the course." We know that this means getting the doll is what is expected, because in paragraph 6 we are told that Lily gets dolls very often. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

The passage does not provide information to support choices **(B)**, **(C)** or **(D)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

5) **A**

In this passage we learn that Lily never gets the presents that she wants. Her parents seem to not notice or understand, and her brother seems not to care. This seems like a big problem. Irony is using words to express something opposite of its literal meaning. Here, the title *The Mini Problem* is ironic because Lily actually has a big problem. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

The fact that Tommy is happy is not related to the title. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The fact that Lily does not get the mini bike is the conflict in the story, but this fact does not make the title ironic. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The fact that Lily's parents are unaware of the problem is not reflected in the title in any way. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

6) **D**

In the passage, we learn that Lily and her brother both want a mini bike. Lily's brother gets the bike, but Lily does not. The story goes on to explain that in the past Lily never got the presents that she wanted, but instead always got dolls. We can understand from this that Lily's problem is that she always gets dolls instead of presents she wants. However, when Lily's parents ask her what is wrong, she does not tell them. Since Lily's parents have not figured out for themselves that Lily does not like dolls, the only way for them to know

would be for someone to tell them. A dialogue with Lily explaining to her family why she was so angry would help improve her situation. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Lily's parents already know that Lily is angry, so storming out of the house would not change anything. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Lily's problem is that she gets dolls instead of the presents she wants. Just getting to ride the mini bike first does not help solve that problem. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. If Lily pretended to like the doll, her parents would continue to give her dolls. Since Lily does not want dolls, this would not solve her problem. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

- 7) **B**
fervor (*noun*): intense emotion.

In paragraph 7, the author writes, "Tommy had seen that mini-bike in the front window of Moore's Bike Shop, but hadn't Lily too? Both had begged for the bike. Both had said it was the only thing they wanted for Christmas. Hadn't Lily asked for it with as much fervor as her twin brother?" Since both of the children were extremely excited about the bike, we can understand that *fervor* means intense emotion. *Indifference* is a lack of emotion. This is the opposite of intense emotion, so indifference is a good antonym for fervor. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

Gluttony is doing something way too much. This is different from intense emotion, but not opposite, so gluttony is not an antonym for fervor. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Politeness* is using good manners and showing respect for others. This is different than intense emotion, but not opposite, so politeness is not an antonym for fervor. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Passion* is intense emotion. This is the same as fervor, so passion is a synonym for fervor, not an antonym. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

- 8) **C**
Lily's parents give her and her brother gifts, and when Lily seems unhappy, they ask her what is wrong. This shows that her parents seem loving, not unloving. This eliminates **option (I)**. At the end of the story, Lily's parents see that Lily is upset. Tommy says, "Oh, Mama, you know Lily is never excited by presents!" Then they all go out to watch Tommy ride the bike, even though Lily is upset. Since they know Lily gets upset by presents but they never try to find out why, they are being insensitive. This supports **option (II)**. Lily's parents get Tommy a variety of presents, but they always seem to get Lily a doll. Since dolls are generally considered to be a toy for girls, they seem to be giving the children presents based on their gender, or showing gender bias. This supports **option (III)**. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

- 9) **C**
In paragraph 6, the author writes, "Lily always got the boring gifts: a doll with a gown, a doll with a tutu, a doll with a puppy. This doll seemed unusually blah. The doll wore a petticoat. The doll had short, straight black hair." This information tells us that Lily has received a lot of different dolls. Since Lily has

received so many dolls, we can understand that a doll is a very common gift for Lily. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The descriptions of the dolls do not seem extravagant. In fact, the last doll is described as blah. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. To *juxtapose* something is to place it next to something to create a contrast. Paragraph 5 does mention the mini bike, but it also mentions several other toys that Tommy got. That means the repetition of the word doll is not intended to contrast the number of dolls with just the one bike. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The description does tell us that the doll this year was especially blah, but the repetition of the word doll does not emphasize this fact. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

10) **A**

Instead of the mini bike she wanted, Lily gets a doll once again. Her brother Tommy gets the mini bike. While Tommy rejoices in the living room, Lily sulks. In paragraph 10, the author writes, "Meanwhile Lily simmered in the other room. She was furious. She was enraged. She was incensed. It took a while for anyone to even realize she was missing." Since Lily is "simmering" in the other room and is described as "furious," and "enraged," right before she is described as "incensed," we can understand that *incensed* means extremely angry. To be *pleased* is to be happy or satisfied. This is the opposite of being extremely angry, so pleased is a good antonym for incensed. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

To be *annoyed* is to be irritated. While this is different than feeling extremely angry, it is not opposite, so annoyed is not an antonym for incensed. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. To be *patient* is to wait without getting annoyed. This is different than being very angry, but not opposite, so patient is not a good antonym for incensed. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. To feel *indignant* is to feel angry about something unfair. This is similar to feeling extremely angry, so indignant is a synonym for incensed, not an antonym. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.