

“The Storm”

Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

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



“Crack-crack...kowowww! Thunder, and then a shock of lightening etched its reflection upon the corrugated metal siding,” Rowan read aloud.

She worked to read clearly, with depth and emotion. Her eyes scanned the next paragraph. She took a breath to continue, but was interrupted by her younger brother Nolan, stretched out on the living room couch, flicking a pencil against his forehead.

“I was never a big fan of **onomatopoeia**,” Nolan said, in his usual, **supercilious** manner. “It is impossible to write words that truly sound like a thunderstorm, a jar opening, or a falling tree, yes? But please, do continue.”

Rowan sucked her teeth. “That’s why I can’t stand doing this in front of you, Nollie. You are no help at all. Haven’t you something better to do?”

“Ha! Better than to annoy you before your moment of reckoning? I don’t think so.” Nolan’s enjoyment of getting under his big sister’s skin was fully conspicuous.

“Nollie, please keep quiet!” Mother Ann broke in. “This is important. Rowan presents in less than an hour. She needs to focus. Row, sweetheart, please continue.”

Mother Ann’s comments seemed to **assuage** Rowan’s irritation. She cleared her throat and continued where she had left off. “Farmer John knew this was a storm of epic proportion. Even the cows retreated to their hutches. Not one person in the...”

“The cows *retreated*? The cows *retreated*?” Nolan chortled upon hearing the repetition of this line in his own voice. “That’s great. Even the stupid cows retreated! Oh, man. That must have been one heck of a storm-a-brewin’. Mama, I’m scared!” Nolan howled at the ceiling and curled up into a tight little ball of laughter.

“Nollie!” Mother Ann shouted suddenly, her thunderous voice **tantamount** to the rumbling storm Rowan was attempting to capture in her reading. Nolan gave a little start. “You have no idea how difficult it is to speak in front of a crowd. Your sister has been preparing for this presentation for weeks and I swear if you don’t...”

Mother Ann continued to **castigate** Nolan most thoroughly, scolding him for his rudeness and lack of respect. Then, feeling as though she had achieved the intended effect, she sighed rather contentedly and reclined in her chair. Sometimes she reminded even herself the fury by which, if completely

necessary, she could quell any quarrel.

Nolan had fallen silent and was now sitting upright, his hands folded before him. He actually appeared a bit remorseful.

“Oh, Mother,” Rowan sighed, crumpling to the floor, **despondent**. “It’s no use. ‘The Storm’ shall be the end of me.”

“Ahh, but Rowan, my dear,” Mother rejoined. “This is but a mere shower!”

Questions:

1) As used in paragraph 3, which is the best definition for **onomatopoeia**?

- A. a story that is told orally
- B. a word that imitates the sound it represents
- C. the repetition of the initial letter sound
- D. the repetition of similar vowel sounds
- E. the use of very detailed description

2) Why does Rowan get upset with Nolan?

- I. because he is annoying her
 - II. because he interrupts her reading
 - III. because he is making fun of her delivery of the reading
- A. I only
 - B. II only
 - C. I and II
 - D. II and III
 - E. I, II, and III

3) As used in paragraph 3, which is the best definition for **supercilious**?

- A. arrogant and haughty
- B. comical and carefree
- C. gifted with words
- D. youthful and smart
- E. playful and obnoxious

4) Which of the following words best describes Nolan's personality?

- A. juvenile
- B. malicious
- C. intelligent
- D. playful
- E. easygoing

Questions (continued):

- 5) What is Nolan most likely referring to when he jokes about Rowan's "moment of reckoning"?
- A. the end of her life
 - B. an upcoming presentation
 - C. a time when Mother will yell at Rowan
 - D. a time when Nolan will annoy Rowan even more
 - E. the moment when Rowan's father returns home

- 6) In the middle of the story, the author writes, "Mother Ann's comments seemed to **assuage** Rowan's irritation." Which is the best way to rewrite this sentence, while keeping its original meaning?

- A. Mother Ann's comments made Rowan feel worse.
- B. Mother Ann's comments were intended to defend Rowan.
- C. Mother Ann's comments did nothing to help Rowan.
- D. Mother Ann's comments helped to ease Rowan's irritation.
- E. Mother Ann's comments proved that Rowan is rightfully irritated.

- 7) As used at the end of the story, which is the best antonym for **despondent**?

- A. hopeless
- B. irritated
- C. optimistic
- D. critical
- E. humiliated

- 8) What does Mother Ann most likely mean when she tells Rowan, "This is but a mere shower"?

- A. It has started to rain outside.
 - B. Rowan's presentation will be a disaster.
 - C. The piece Rowan is to read is poorly written.
 - D. Mother's anger with Nolan was just for show.
 - E. Rowan's present situation isn't that bad.
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Answers and Explanations

1) **B**

In paragraph 3, Nolan claims not to be a fan of **onomatopoeia**. He says, “It is impossible to write words that truly sound like a thunderstorm, a jar opening, or a falling tree.” Here he is referring to the lines Rowan just read, “Crack-crack...Kowowww!” These lines were meant to imitate the sound of thunder and lightning in the storm. From this information, the reader can infer that onomatopoeia is a word that imitates the sound it represents. Therefore **B** is correct.

Though Rowan is reading a story, she is reading from a page, not telling it orally. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. While the lines that Rowan just read do contain the repetition of initial letter sounds, Nolan defines onomatopoeia as “words that truly sound like a thunderstorm, a jar opening, or a falling tree.” Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The lines Rowan read also contain the repetition of internal vowel sounds, yet those sounds do not imitate the sound of a thunderstorm, jar opening, or falling tree. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. There is also detailed description in the lines Rowan read, but the description does not imitate the sound of the storm. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

2) **C**

In paragraph 4, Rowan showed signs of being annoyed at her brother, such as when she “sucked her teeth.” In the next paragraph, after she asked Nolan if he didn’t have anything better to do, he retorted, “Better than to annoy you before your moment of reckoning?” From these lines the reader can infer that Rowan was upset because her brother was annoying her. This supports **option (I)**. In paragraph 2, just as Rowan was about to continue reading, she “was interrupted by her younger brother Nolan, stretched out on the living room couch, flicking a pencil against his forehead.” Later in the story, we learn from Mother Ann that Rowan has to present in less than an hour. Since Rowan is pressed for time and needs to practice, the reader can infer that she is upset that Nolan is interrupting her. This supports **option (II)**. Although Nolan is making fun of the reading, he is making fun of the author’s choice of words, not Rowan’s delivery of those words. He criticizes the use of onomatopoeia and the phrase “the cows retreated,” but he does not specifically make fun of how Rowan speaks. This eliminates **option (III)**. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

3) **A**

supercilious (*adjective*): displaying arrogant pride, scorn or disdain.

In paragraph 3, Nolan interrupts in his “usual, **supercilious** manner” to criticize the author’s use of onomatopoeia. Since he is claiming that the author is attempting to do something “impossible,” and therefore implying that the author fails in his attempt, the reader can understand that Nolan feels scorn or disdain for the author. To disdain something is to feel arrogant or haughty, as if one is superior. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

While Nolan finds the situation *comical* and he acts *carefree*, the tone of his voice and his criticism of the author are arrogant, not comical and carefree. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. It is clear that Nolan is *gifted with words*, but his tone is not gifted with words. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Nolan may be *youthful and smart*, though we do not know his age, but his tone is not youthful and smart. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. While Nolan's tone could be construed as *obnoxious*, it is not particularly *playful*. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

4) **A**

Throughout the passage, Nolan takes delight in annoying his sister and making her flustered. In paragraph 5, we learn, "Nolan's enjoyment of getting under his big sister's skin was fully conspicuous." Later, Mother Ann scolds Nolan for his "rudeness and lack of respect." After his scolding, we learn that Nolan gets quiet and sits upright, almost as if he feels "remorseful." From these details, the reader can infer that Nolan has an immature personality: he enjoys annoying his sister, he can be rude and disrespectful, but when scolded he does feel badly. *Juvenile* is another word for immature. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

Malicious means characterized by malice or spite, intending to do harm. While Nolan enjoys annoying his sister, the story does not contain information that he would like to do her harm. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. While Nolan's vocabulary and comments imply that he is *intelligent*, intelligence is not a personality trait so much as a mental capacity. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Teasing could be described as *playful*, but Rowan clearly does not enjoy Nolan's form of teasing. Mother Ann indicates that it is rude and disrespectful, which means he is more annoying than playful to his sister. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. Finally, if Nolan were *easygoing*, he would have a more relaxed temperament. From his tendency to interrupt and criticize, the reader can infer he is not particularly easygoing. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

5) **B**

In paragraph 5, Nolan responds to his sister's question about finding something better to do by saying, "Better than to annoy you before your moment of reckoning?" In the next paragraph, Mother Ann says, "Rowan presents in less than an hour." Later in the story, Mother Ann again refers to the fact that Rowan has to speak "in front of a crowd" and that she has been preparing for this presentation for weeks. From this information the reader can infer that Rowan has a presentation coming up. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

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

6) **D**

assuage (*verb*): to make something unpleasant less intense.

In the middle of the story, Mother Ann scolded Nolan for the first time and we learn that "Mother Ann's comments seemed to **assuage** Rowan's irritation." After Mother Ann assuaged Rowan's irritation, Rowan "cleared her throat and continued where she had left off." Before Rowan had been too upset with

Nolan to continue, but after Mother Ann's comments, Rowan calmed down enough to return to her reading. Since Mother Ann's comments made Rowan's irritation less intense, and allowed her to return her focus to the reading, the reader can understand that *Mother Ann's comments helped to ease Rowan's irritation*. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

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

- 7) **C**
despondent (*adjective*): in low spirits from loss of hope or courage.

At the end of the story, Rowan worried that she would not do well for her presentation: "Oh, Mother," Rowan sighed, crumpling to the floor, **despondent**. "It's no use. 'The Storm' shall be the end of me." Rowan seemed about to give up. From her body language (falling to the floor), the fact that she sighed, and her words, the reader can infer that Rowan felt hopeless. The opposite of hopeless is hopeful, or *optimistic*. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Hopeless is a synonym for despondent. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. A person who is *irritated* might be in low spirits, but irritated is not the opposite of hopeless. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Critical* means inclined to find fault. This is not the opposite of hopeless. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. *Humiliated* means embarrassed, which is not the opposite of hopeless. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

- 8) **E**
At the end of the story, Rowan expressed frustration with practicing for her upcoming presentation. "Oh, Mother," Rowan sighed, crumpling to the floor, **despondent**. "It's no use. 'The Storm' shall be the end of me." Her mother tried to comfort her by saying, "Ahh, but Rowan, my dear,... This is but a mere shower!" The *this* in Mother's sentence refers to the fact that Rowan has to present 'The Storm,' and perhaps to the frustration Rowan is experiencing. In life, Mother seems to be saying, there will be real storms for you to weather, but comparatively, your present situation is "a mere shower," in other words, not so bad. Therefore **(E)** is correct.

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

- 9) **C**
tantamount (*adjective*): equivalent in seriousness to, equal.

When Mother Ann shouted at Nolan, the story says "her thunderous voice" was "**tantamount** to the rumbling storm Rowan was attempting to capture in her reading." Because her voice is described as "thunderous," it is equated with the "rumbling storm." **Tantamount** means equal or equivalent. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The story does not contain information that Mother Ann's shouting lasted longer than the storm. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. If Mother Ann's shouting was less intense than the storm, then her voice would not have been described as "thunderous." Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The shouting and the storm clearly have a connection, as the author is drawing a comparison between the two. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

10) **D**

castigate (*verb*): to reprimand severely, punish, or discipline.

Near the end of the story, after Mother Ann began shouting at Nolan, she "continued to **castigate** Nolan most thoroughly, scolding him for his rudeness and lack of respect." Here the reader can infer that to **castigate** is to scold someone. Scolding is a form of punishment or reprimand. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Although Mother Ann does shout at Nolan, and *yell* is a synonym for *shout*, **castigate** must mean something more negative than *yell*. The story makes it clear that Mother Ann is punishing Nolan. Sometimes people yell or shout when they are excited or scared, but the reader can infer that Mother Ann is angry. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Abusing* someone means treating them harmfully. Mother Ann is trying to teach Nolan to be more respectful, not trying to harm him. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Threatening* someone means offering a negative consequence for his actions. Mother Ann does not say what she will do if Nolan doesn't start treating his sister more nicely. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Antagonizing* someone means to make that person hostile or unfriendly. Though **castigating** someone *could* make him feel antagonized, after Mother Ann castigates Nolan, he behaves better. The story does not contain information to make the reader think Nolan is hostile. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.