

Sample ACT Reading Test Passage with Questions and Answer Explanations

This sample ACT Reading Test passage is followed by several questions. Read the passage and then choose the best answer to each question that follows the passage. Refer to the passage as often as necessary to answer the questions.

Prose fiction: This passage (published in 1865) is adapted from Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain.

I had shut the door to. Then I turned around, and there he was. I used to be scared of him all the time, he tanned me so much. I reckoned I was scared now, too; but in a minute I see I was mistaken—that is, after the first jolt, as you may say, when my breath sort of hitched, he being so unexpected; but right away after, I see I warn't scared of him worth bothering about.

He was most fifty, and he looked it. His hair was long and tangled and greasy, and hung down, and you could see his eyes shining through like he was behind vines. It was all black, no gray; so was his long, mixed-up whiskers. There warn't no color in his face, where his face showed; it was white; not like another man's white, but a white to make a body sick, a white to make a body's flesh crawl—a tree-toad white, a fish-belly white. As for his clothes—just rags, that was all. He had one ankle resting on t'other knee; the boot on that foot was busted, and two of his toes stuck through, and he worked them now and then. His hat was laying on the floor—an old black slouch with the top caved in, like a lid.

(30) I stood a-looking at him; he set there a-looking at me, with his chair tilted back a little. I set the candle down. I noticed the window was up; so he had clumb in by the shed. He kept a-looking me all over. By and by he says:

“Starchy clothes—very. You think you're a good deal of a big-bug, *don't* you?”

“Maybe I am, maybe I ain't,” I says.

(40) “Don't you give me none o' your lip,” says he. “You've put on considerable many frills since I been away. I'll take you down a peg before I get done with you. You're educated, too, they say—can read and write. You think you're better'n your father, now, don't you, because he can't? *I'll* take it out of you. Who told you you might meddle with such hifalut'n foolishness, hey?—who told you you could?”

(50) “The widow. She told me.”

“The widow, hey?—and who told the widow she could put in her shovel about a thing that ain't none of her business?”

“Nobody never told her.”

(55) “Well, I'll learn her how to meddle. And looky here—you drop that school, you hear? I'll learn people to bring up a boy to put on airs over his own father and let

on to be better'n what *he* is. You lemme
(60) catch you fooling around that school
again, you hear? Your mother couldn't
read, and she couldn't write, nuther,
before she died. None of the family
couldn't before *they* died. *I* can't; and
(65) here you're a-swellin' yourself up like
this. I ain't the man to stand it—you
hear? Say, lemme hear you read."

I took up a book and begun something
about General Washington and the wars.
(70) When I'd read about a half a minute, he
fetched the book a whack with his hand
and knocked it across the house. He
says:

"It's so. You can do it. I had my doubts
(75) when you told me. Now looky here; you
stop that putting on frills. I won't have
it. I'll lay for you, my smarty; and if I
catch you about that school I'll tan you
good. First you know you'll get religion,
(80) too. I never see such a son."

1. The two characters who appear in the scene are:

- A. an uncle and his nephew
- B. a father and his daughter
- C. a father and his son
- D. two former friends meeting again after a separation

2. From details in the passage, it can be inferred that this scene takes place:

- F. out of doors in warm weather
- G. indoors in winter
- H. indoors at night
- J. indoors during the day

3. The state of mind of the speaker in the first paragraph (lines 1–10) is best described as:

- A. terrified
- B. startled, but not frightened
- C. frightened at first, then pleased
- D. unaffected

4. The description in the second paragraph (lines 11–35) differs from the rest of the passage because several times it uses:

- F. indirect discourse
- G. simile and metaphor
- H. denotative language
- J. incorrect grammar

5. The effect of the description in the second paragraph (lines 11–35) is to make the man described appear:

- A. pitiable
- B. interesting
- C. repulsive
- D. mysterious

6. When the visitor says "Starchy clothes—very. You think you're a good deal of a big-bug, *don't* you?" (lines 36–37), he is expressing his:

- F. surprise at how much the other has grown
- G. admiration of the clothes the other is wearing
- H. contempt at the other's supposed complacence
- J. amusement at the way the other is dressed

7. In narrating the passage, the author uses which of the following?
- A. A first-person narrator, dialogue, and action that took place in the past
 - B. A third-person narrator, action taking place in the present, and monologue
 - C. A second-person narrator, dialogue, and action taking place in the present
 - D. A first-person narrator, action taking place in the present, and monologue
8. From details in the passage, it can be inferred that the narrator's mother:
- F. is a widow
 - G. was uneducated and is no longer alive
 - H. came from a social position above that of the father
 - J. deserted his father before her death
9. It can reasonably be inferred from the passage that the second speaker asks to hear the first speaker read because he:
- A. is interested in war
 - B. wishes to find out if the other can read
 - C. hates reading and readers
 - D. cannot read himself
10. In the course of the passage, the visitor expresses his contempt for all of the following EXCEPT:
- F. school
 - G. decent clothes
 - H. ignorance
 - J. religion

Answer Explanations

- C.** The two are father and son. The son narrates the passage after not having seen his father for some time. The relationship is made clear in lines 44–46, 57–59, and 80.
- H.** There are references to a door and a window through which the father has entered his son’s room (lines 1 and 32–34), making it clear that the scene is indoors, ruling out choice **F**. The reference to a candle in line 32 sets the scene at night, eliminating choice **J**. Choice **G** might seem reasonable, but nothing in the passage indicates the season.
- B.** The speaker corrects his first expression (“I reckoned I was scared . . . but . . . I was mistaken,” lines 4–6). Although terrified of his father in the past (choice **A**), here he is only startled. There is no suggestion anywhere in the passage that he is pleased (choice **C**), and lines 1–10, as well as his description of his father in lines 11–29, rule out choice **D**.
- G.** The second paragraph, unlike the rest of the passage, uses similes (“like he was behind vines,” lines 14–15; “with the top caved in, like a lid,” lines 28–29) and metaphors (“a tree-toad white, a fish-belly white,” lines 21–22). On the other hand, denotative language (choice **H**), which refers to the use of words for their primary dictionary definitions, is seen throughout the passage, as is incorrect grammar (choice **J**). Dialogue, not indirect discourse (choice **F**), makes up most of the scene.
- C.** The paragraph is at pains to make the visitor repulsive (for example, “a white to make a body sick,” “a white to make a body’s flesh crawl”). Although he is described as dressed in rags, he isn’t shown as pitiable (choice **A**). Choice **B** is vague and doesn’t take into account the negative details in the description, and although the visitor may seem menacing, he isn’t shown as mysterious (choice **D**).
- H.** Throughout the passage the father is obsessed with the notion that his son now looks down on him as a social inferior. In fact, the son dislikes him for reasons having nothing to do with class. Choice **G** is clearly incorrect; none of the father’s words indicate admiration. Choice **J**, amusement, is too gentle a word to describe the way in which the father reacts to his son’s appearance; he makes fun of the boy, but in a cruel, menacing way. He expresses no interest in or surprise about his son’s growth (choice **F**).
- A.** The passage is a first-person (“I”) narration that quotes dialogue (more than one speaker) from a scene that took place in the past. Choice **D**, the only other answer that specifies first-person narration, is incorrect because of the second two elements. (In a monologue, there is only one speaker.)
- G.** Lines 61–63 reveals that the mother is dead and, like the father, was illiterate. There is no indication that she came from a higher social class (choice **H**), that she deserted him (choice **J**) or that she was a widow when she married him (choice **F**).
- B.** Although choices **C** and **D** are accurate, his motive is to find out if the report is true. This is made clear in lines 74–75. Given the nature of the father’s words and behavior in the passage, choice **A** can be immediately eliminated.
- H.** Notice the word “EXCEPT” in this question. The father is hostile toward all choices except ignorance. His approval of ignorance is made clear in lines 55–67. His hostility toward school (choice **F**) is shown in lines 55–61, toward decent clothes (choice **G**) in lines 36–37 and 75–77, and toward religion in line 79.