

English Skill Builder Set A

Focus: Inference and comprehension from a 600–700 word literary passage

Estimated Time: 12 minutes

Format: 1 passage + 6 multiple choice questions

Passage Title: *The Forgotten Violin*

Theme: Memory, resilience, and intergenerational connection

Excerpt Length: ~630 words

The attic was a place no one really went anymore. Dust blanketed everything—old boxes, yellowed photo albums, and forgotten toys stacked like remnants of another life. When I followed Grandpa up there that afternoon, I wasn’t expecting anything more than the usual: mothballs, dim light, and stories about “the good old days.”

But then he stopped, frozen in front of a small leather case.

“I haven’t seen this in years,” he whispered.

He opened it slowly, revealing a violin with a broken bow and tarnished strings. It looked fragile, like it might collapse under the weight of air itself.

“You played?” I asked, surprised.

He didn’t answer at first. Instead, he took the instrument out and held it to his chin. Though he didn’t try to play, his fingers curled naturally around the neck, like they remembered what the rest of him had forgotten.

“Every day,” he said finally. “Before everything changed.”

I sat on the wooden floor, waiting for more.

“I was sixteen when the war broke out,” he continued, his voice distant. “Music was... a lifeline. But we left in such a hurry, I had to choose what to carry. I chose this violin. For a long time, it was the only thing that reminded me who I was.”

He ran his fingers gently along the edge of the instrument.

“After we arrived here, things got... busy. We worked, we learned English, we tried to fit in. Music felt like a luxury we couldn’t afford anymore. So I put it away.”

“But why didn’t you ever tell me?” I asked.

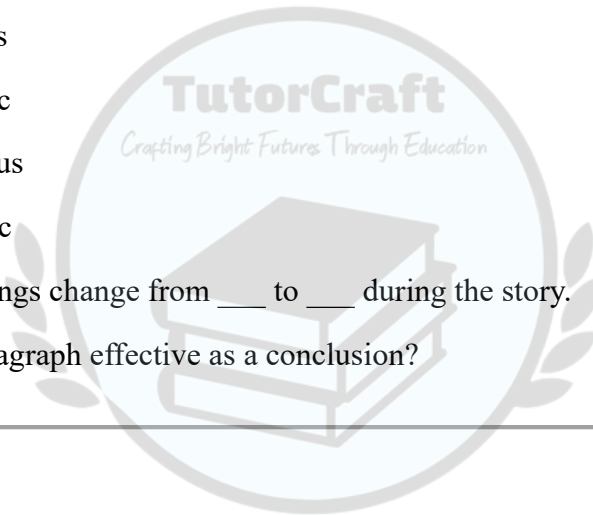
He looked at me then, eyes tired but soft. “I suppose I didn’t want to remember what I had lost. Until now.”

There was a long silence, the kind that didn’t need to be filled. And then he handed me the violin.

“Maybe it’s time someone else remembers.”

Questions:

1. What can be inferred about Grandpa's character based on his behavior in the attic?
 2. The violin is most likely a symbol of:
 - A. Forgotten family history
 - B. Lost musical talent
 - C. Emotional closure
 - D. A future opportunity
 3. Which line best supports the idea that music was important to Grandpa?
 4. What tone does the author use to describe the attic?
 - A. Ominous
 - B. Nostalgic
 - C. Humorous
 - D. Energetic
 5. The narrator's feelings change from ____ to ____ during the story.
 6. Why is the last paragraph effective as a conclusion?
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Solution:

Q#	Answer	Explanation
1	Grandpa is reflective and sentimental	His quiet behavior, soft speech, and delicate handling of the violin show emotional depth and nostalgia.
2	C. Emotional closure	The violin represents a part of his identity and emotional past he's finally ready to confront and pass on.
3	"I chose this violin. For a long time, it was the only thing that reminded me who I was."	This line proves music was essential to Grandpa's self-concept.
4	B. Nostalgic	The attic and the memories tied to the violin evoke warmth, longing, and quiet reflection—hallmarks of nostalgia.
5	Confused → Respectful	At first, the narrator doesn't understand why the attic or violin matter; by the end, they see its emotional weight.
6	It circles back to family legacy and healing	Grandpa symbolically hands over his memories by giving the violin to the narrator, completing the emotional arc.

English Skill Builder Set B

Focus: Inference and authorial technique in a narrative passage

Estimated Time: 12 minutes

Format: 1 passage + 6 multiple choice questions

Passage Title: *On the Edge of Ice*

Theme: Perseverance, environmental danger, self-trust

Excerpt Length: ~680 words

Reading Level: Upper Grade 7 to 8

The lake had frozen overnight, but the ice was still thin in places—so thin that it made the kind of sounds you feel in your stomach before you hear them in your ears. Still, I stepped forward.

Dad had always warned me: “Wait three days of cold before crossing the lake.” But he wasn’t here now. And the dog was.

Max had chased something across the surface and fallen through. I could hear his frantic barks from the shore, muted by wind and panic. I knew I had minutes—if that.

I took another step. The wind howled like a starving wolf, clawing at my coat. The ice groaned under my weight, a long, low sound like a warning. I didn’t breathe. I just listened.

Crack.

I dropped to all fours, spreading my weight. I could see Max’s dark shape struggling in the water ahead. Closer now. The lake stretched wide behind him, silent and watching.

Crack. Crack.

I froze. The ice beneath my left hand shimmered with a thin thread of silver—splintering, delicate. I shifted my weight, inching to the right. My gloves were soaked; I could barely feel my fingers.

When I reached Max, his eyes locked onto mine—wild and pleading. I hooked my scarf around his collar, tugging gently. He flailed, panicked, but I whispered calmly, the way Dad used to do.

“Easy, buddy. I’ve got you.”

Together, inch by inch, we backed away from the hole. Every movement felt like a gamble.

When we reached solid ground, I collapsed beside him, chest heaving. The wind still howled. The ice still cracked in the distance.

But we were home.

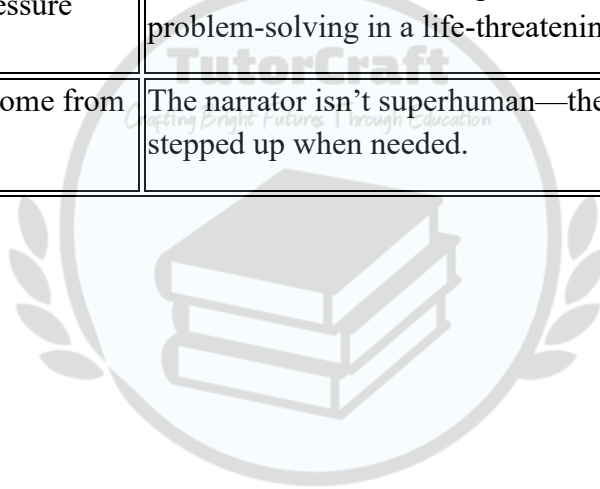
Questions:

1. What is the main source of tension in the passage?
 2. The phrase "cracks of silence" (line 12) suggests:
 - A. Stillness of nature
 - B. Internal fear
 - C. Thin ice cracking
 - D. Sudden interruptions
 3. Which literary device is used in line 8: "The wind howled like a starving wolf"?
 4. Why does the narrator hesitate before crossing?
 5. What do we learn about the narrator's personality from the final paragraph?
 6. Which statement best captures the theme?
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Solution:

Q#	Answer	Explanation
1	The narrator's fear of falling through while saving Max	The tension lies in risking their life to save the dog before the ice breaks completely.
2	C. Thin ice cracking	"Cracks of silence" is a metaphor for danger building silently but ominously—referring to breaking ice.
3	Simile	The phrase "like a starving wolf" is a simile comparing the wind's howl to something fierce and hungry.
4	They fear the ice may not hold their weight	The hesitation is grounded in realistic danger and survival instincts.
5	Brave, calm under pressure	The narrator shows courage, control, and clear-headed problem-solving in a life-threatening situation.
6	Acts of courage can come from ordinary people	The narrator isn't superhuman—they're just someone who stepped up when needed.



English Skill Builder Set C

Focus: Vocabulary-in-context and author's meaning

Estimated Time: 10 minutes

Format: 6 context-based multiple choice questions from short authentic-style excerpts (~2–3 sentences each)

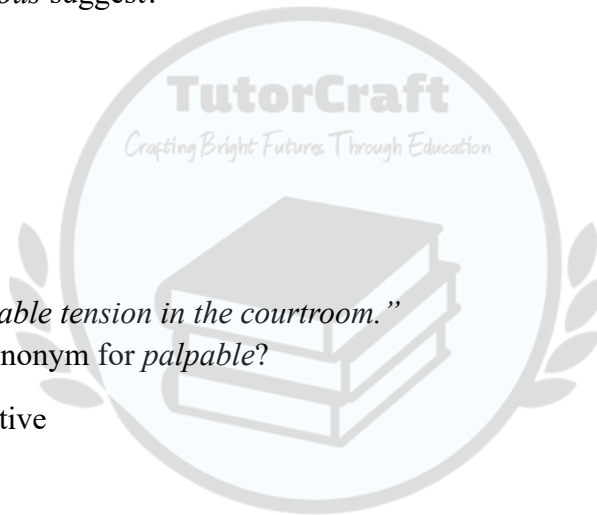
Excerpts:

1. **“The mayor’s proposal was met with derision, as critics mocked its naivety and lack of planning.”**
→ *Derision* = contemptuous ridicule or mockery
2. **“She watched the leaves pirouette to the ground, spinning in elegant, airy spirals like tiny dancers.”**
→ *Pirouette* = spin gracefully (from ballet)
3. **“Despite the teacher’s entreaty for quiet, the class remained unruly and loud.”**
→ *Entreaty* = an earnest or urgent request
4. **“The scientist approached the problem with meticulous care, noting every variable with precision.”**
→ *Meticulous* = extremely careful and precise
5. **“There was a palpable tension in the air, thick enough to choke on.”**
→ *Palpable* = so intense it can almost be touched or felt
6. **“His bravado masked a deeper uncertainty, like armor built from cardboard.”**
→ *Bravado* = boldness intended to impress, often false or exaggerated

Questions:

1. *“The mayor’s proposal was met with derision, as critics mocked its naivety.”*
What does *derision* mean in this sentence?
 - A. Confusion
 - B. Respect
 - C. Mockery
 - D. Support
2. *“She watched the leaves pirouette to the ground in slow, elegant spirals.”*
What does *pirouette* most likely mean?
 - A. Crackle

- B. Spin
 - C. Fall
 - D. Drift
3. “*Despite the teacher’s entreaty, the students remained restless.*”
What is the meaning of *entreaty*?
- A. Command
 - B. Apology
 - C. Request
 - D. Warning
4. “*The scientist approached the problem with meticulous care.*”
What does *meticulous* suggest?
- A. Fast
 - B. Lazy
 - C. Precise
 - D. Clumsy
5. “*There was a palpable tension in the courtroom.*”
What is the best synonym for *palpable*?
- A. Imaginative
 - B. Visible
 - C. Tangible
 - D. Soft
6. “*His bravado masked a deeper sense of uncertainty.*”
What does *bravado* mean here?
- A. Arrogance
 - B. Courage
 - C. Bold front
 - D. Self-pity



Solution

Q#	Answer	Explanation
1	C. Mockery	“Critics mocked” confirms that <i>derision</i> means ridicule or scorn.
2	B. Spin	“Spirals” and “tiny dancers” support <i>pirouette</i> meaning to spin.
3	C. Request	<i>Entreaty</i> is a formal or earnest plea—fits with the teacher asking for quiet.
4	C. Precise	“Noting every variable with precision” restates the meaning of <i>meticulous</i> .
5	C. Tangible	<i>Palpable</i> tension means you can feel the tension almost physically.
6	C. Bold front	<i>Bravado</i> is fake or exaggerated confidence, hiding real insecurity.

