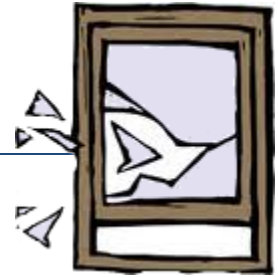


“BB”

Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

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



When I was about 12 years old, my older brother, James, smuggled a BB gun into the house.

I'm not quite sure where he got it. This was in 1938, during the Great Depression. He must have bartered for it with one of his friends.

Our parents had told us many times that we were not to bring home guns or knives, even if they were just toys. Having any form of weaponry in our home was strictly **taboo**.

James brought me to his room. He opened his closet door and took out a shoebox that was buried beneath a heap of clothes. The BB gun was inside. I was immediately **enamored** by the shiny (albeit plastic) wooden stock and the steely-blue hue of the barrel. He let me touch it and walk with it around the room. I fingered the trigger.

“Can I shoot it, Jamesie?” I asked, hopefully.

“No way,” James said, taking it from me and putting it back in its **covert** location.

I forgot about it for a while, but one day, when no one was home, I went into James' closet and took it out.

For some inexplicable reason – I have no idea what I was thinking – I went to the front window of the second floor in our row house. I cracked the window open. I pointed the gun outside and shot. I quickly shut the window and peeked outside.

In a matter of seconds, old Mr. Schlosberg came out of his grocery store. He looked back at his store window. He looked up the street. He looked down the street. Then he looked straight across to our house. He could tell from the **trajectory** just where that shot had come from – he knew someone in our house was the **culprit**.

I ran back to James' room to return the gun and then sat downstairs, waiting nervously for someone to get home. Thankfully, Jamesie made it home before Mother or Father.

As he stepped through the door, I could hear old Mr. Schlosberg call his name.

“James, James,” he called. “Come here, son.”

I crept to look out the door and saw Mr. Schlosberg pointing feverishly at our

house (up to the second floor window!) and then at his shop window. James ran back across the street and into the living room. I had retreated into the kitchen.

“Alma!” he screamed. “Get out here! You cracked Mr. Schlosberg’s window with my BB gun!”

“Oh, please, Jamesie,” I begged. “Don’t let him tell Mother. She will whip my bottom real good!”

Jamesie sighed. He wiped my tears and went back across the street to Mr. Schlosberg’s.

I don’t know what James said to that man, but there was never a mention of the incident again. I didn’t know how I got out of it, but I got out of it, and that was all that mattered to me then. I was too self-absorbed to realize what a great brother I had.

Years later, I found out Jamesie had used the money he got from his newspaper route to pay for Mr. Schlosberg’s cracked window. He only got one cent for every paper he delivered. He managed to pay back the debt just before he went off to fight in World War II.

Since that day, I have never touched a gun: a BB gun, a water gun, a real gun, or any other type.

Questions:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1) Which is the best reason why the author tells the reader the story takes place during the Great Depression?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. to let the reader know how old the narrator is nowB. to let the reader know why guns were taboo in the houseC. to let the reader know that World War II had not occurred yetD. to let the reader know how economically strained things were | <p>2) As used at the beginning of the story, which is the best <u>antonym</u> for enamored?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. annoyedB. amusedC. repulsedD. scared |
| <p>3) If something is taboo it is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. illegalB. forbiddenC. incomprehensibleD. dangerous | <p>4) As used in the beginning of the story, which is the best definition for covert?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. darkB. secretC. wornD. unknown |

Questions (continued):

5) How did the incident seem to affect Alma at the time?

- I. It made her cautious with guns.
- II. It made her appreciate her brother.
- III. It made her certain her brother would be a good soldier.

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

6) A **culprit** is

- A. guilty
- B. nervous
- C. obedient
- D. dangerous

7) What is a **trajectory**?

- A. a hole
- B. a crack
- C. a path
- D. a sound

8) What did Alma seem most worried about?

- A. getting caught by her brother
- B. getting spanked by her mother
- C. having to pay for the broken glass
- D. hiding the gun before her parents got home

9) What kind of person does James appear to be?

- A. wealthy
- B. secretive
- C. responsible
- D. foolhardy

10) What kind of 12-year-old girl does Alma appear to be?

- A. impulsive and self-involved
- B. feisty and indignant
- C. humble and loving
- D. reverent and respectful

Have you ever done something you regretted? Explain.

Answers and Explanations

1) **D**

In paragraph 2, Alma says, “I’m not quite sure where he got [the gun]. This was in 1938, during the Great Depression. He must have bartered for it with one of his friends.” We can understand from this information that Alma did not know how James got the gun because money was scarce due to the Great Depression. Since there was very little money, James would not have had extra money to buy the gun and must have traded something to one of his friends to get it. Since the author tells us it was the Great Depression, we know that things were economically strained and therefore understand Alma’s conclusion that he bartered for it. This means **(D)** is the correct answer.

Alma’s current age is not relevant to the story. Authors do not include details that are not relevant to their stories. This rules out **(A)**. The fact that this story takes place during the Great Depression does not explain why weapons were taboo in the house, so **(B)** is incorrect. The reader can infer that World War II had not happened at the time the story takes place, because we learn near the end of the story that James paid off the broken window debt before he left to fight in the war. This means **(C)** is incorrect.

2) **C**

enamor (*verb*): to captivate; to inspire love.

Near the beginning of the story, Alma describes the first time she saw the gun, saying, “I was immediately enamored by the shiny (albeit plastic) wooden stock and the steely-blue hue of the barrel. I wanted it to be mine. He let me touch it and walk with it around the room. I fingered the trigger.” Since Alma was excited to touch the gun and wanted it for herself, we can understand that Alma was captivated by the gun. To be *enamored* is to be captivated. To be *repulsed* is to be repelled by something. Since repelled is the opposite of captivated, repulsed is a good antonym for enamored. This makes **(C)** the best answer.

To be *annoyed* is to be irritated. Being irritated is different than being captivated, but not opposite (the opposite of irritated would be satisfied). This means that annoyed is not an antonym for enamored. This makes **(A)** a poor choice. To be *amused* is to be entertained. Something can be both captivating and entertaining, so amused is not an antonym for enamored. This rules out **(B)**. To be *scared* is to be frightened. To be frightened is different from being captivated, but not opposite (the opposite of frightened would be calm). Since scared is not a good antonym for enamored, **(D)** is incorrect.

3) **B**

taboo (*adjective*): banned or forbidden, usually by social convention.

Near the beginning of the story, Alma says, “Our parents had told us many times that we were not to bring home guns or knives, even if they were just

toys. Having any form of weaponry in our home was strictly taboo.” Since Alma’s parents forbid the children to bring home weapons, we can understand that something *taboo* is something forbidden. This means **(B)** is correct.

Something *illegal* is forbidden by law. In the story, weapons are considered taboo because Alma and James’ parents won’t allow the children to bring them home. Though their parents won’t allow it, it is not necessarily against the law. This means taboo is not the same as illegal, so **(A)** is not the best choice. Something *incomprehensible* is not understandable. Since Alma understands that her she is not allowed to bring weapons home, we can understand that taboo does not mean incomprehensible. This rules out **(C)**. Something *dangerous* is likely to do harm. Weapons were taboo because Alma’s parents told her she could not bring them home, not because they were likely to do harm. This means **(D)** is not the best answer, because taboo does not mean dangerous.

4) **B**

Near the beginning of the story, James shows Alma the gun. James “opened his closet door and took out a shoebox that was buried beneath a heap of clothes. The BB gun was inside.” Since James put the gun in a shoebox under a pile of clothes in a closet, we know that James is keeping the gun hidden. A little later in the story, “James takes the gun from Alma, “putting it back in its covert location.” Since the gun is hidden, we can understand that its location is secret. Since covert means secret, **(B)** the best answer.

While the inside of a closet is probably dark, the fact that the gun is in a box, underneath a pile in a closet, indicates that the spot was chosen for its secrecy, not its darkness. This means **(A)** is not the best answer. Something *worn* shows signs of use. A place in a box, under a pile in a closet does not indicate signs of use, so **(C)** is incorrect. *Unknown* means not known. James and Alma know the location of the gun, so we can understand that covert does not mean unknown. This makes **(D)** incorrect.

5) **A**

At the end of the story, Alma says, “Since that day, I have never touched a gun: a BB gun, a water gun, a real gun, or any other type.” We can understand from this information that the incident made Alma wary of guns. This supports **option (I)**. Near the end of the story, Alma says, “I didn’t know how I got out of it, but I got out of it, and that was all that mattered to me then. I was too self-absorbed to realize what a great brother I had.” We can understand from this information that at the time of the incident, all Alma cared about was not getting in trouble. She did not appreciate what James did for her until later in life. This eliminates **option (II)**. Alma does not say anywhere in the passage that she thought her brother would be a great soldier. This eliminates **option (III)**. Therefore **(A)** is the correct answer.

6) **A**

culprit (*noun*): someone who is guilty of a crime.

In the middle of the story, Alma shoots the gun from a window in the house. Then, “Mr. Schlosberg came out of his grocery store.” He looked up and down the street and then looked right at Alma’s house. “He could tell from the trajectory just where that shot had come from – he knew someone in our house was the culprit.” We can understand from this information that Mr. Schlosberg knows that the shot has come from Alma’s house. The culprit is the person who has shot the gun. The *culprit*, therefore, is the guilty person. This makes **(A)** the best answer choice.

Someone who is *nervous* is anxious or has a feeling of apprehension. While Alma was probably nervous after she realized what she had done, Mr. Schlosberg is looking for the person guilty of shooting the gun, not the nervous person. This means **(B)** is incorrect. An *obedient* person follows orders or instructions. Here, the culprit is whoever shot the gun (Alma), not whoever followed instructions. This rules out **(C)**. Shooting guns out of windows is definitely *dangerous*, but, again, the culprit here is simply the person guilty of shooting the gun. This means **(D)** is also incorrect.

7) **C**

In the middle of the story, Alma shoots the gun out of a window in her house. Then, Mr. Schlosberg, the owner of the grocery store came out of the store. Alma says, “He looked back at his store window. He looked up the street. He looked down the street. Then he looked straight across to our house. He could tell from the trajectory just where that shot had come from.” Since Mr. Schlosberg looked in all directions and could tell where the shot had come from, the *trajectory* must be the path the shot took. This means **(C)** is the best answer.

If the trajectory were a hole, Mr. Schlosberg would not have to look up and down the street to understand the trajectory, because a hole is in one place. This rules out **(A)**. A crack is also in one place. Mr. Schlosberg would not have to look all around if a trajectory were a crack. Therefore **(B)** is also incorrect. Since Mr. Schlosberg figured out the trajectory by looking around, the trajectory must be visible. A sound is not visible, so **(D)** is not a good choice.

8) **B**

In the middle of the story, after James tells Alma that she has hit Mr. Schlosberg’s window, Alma begs James to help her. “Oh please, Jamesie,” Alma pleads, “Don’t let him tell Mother. She will whip my bottom real good!” We can understand from this information that the reason that Alma does not want to get caught is that she does not want to get spanked. This makes **(B)** the best choice.

(A) is not the best answer choice because James has already caught Alma. Alma doesn’t say anything about paying for the window. In fact, we learn near the end of the passage that Alma doesn’t learn about James paying for the window until years after the incident. This means **(C)** is not a good answer

choice. Alma says nothing about hiding the gun from her parents. Also, the problem in the story is not that hiding the gun is difficult, but that Alma has hit the grocery store window. This means **(D)** is incorrect.

9) **C**

James brings the BB gun into the house and shows Alma where the gun is. When Alma breaks a window shooting the gun, James protects Alma from punishment and pays for the broken window, even though he had to give up the money he earned for a long time. These actions show that James is trustworthy and willing to account for his own behavior. **(C)** is the correct answer here because James is *responsible*.

We know that James is not *wealthy*. The story takes place during the Great Depression, when money was scarce, and Alma thinks James must have traded something to one of his friends to get the gun instead of buying it. Also, we learn near the end of the story that James only earned 1 cent for each paper he delivered. A wealthy person would not work hard delivering newspapers for 1 cent each. This makes **(A)** incorrect. Since James tells Alma where the BB gun is, he is not *secretive*. This rules out **(B)**. Some may argue that James is reckless for showing Alma the gun in the first place. However, James' more significant action in the story is paying for the broken window. This means **(D)** is a poor choice because paying for the window is being responsible, not *foolhardy*.

10) **A**

Alma was so interested in the gun that she shot it out the window even though that is a foolish thing to do. Alma herself admits she has no idea what she was thinking. Since Alma shot the gun for no apparent reason, her behavior was impulsive. Then, Alma lets James take full responsibility for the broken window, even though it was really her fault, because she cannot see past her own fear of punishment. This is very self-involved of Alma. Since Alma's behavior during the incident was *impulsive and self-involved*, **(A)** is correct.

Someone *feisty and indignant* is spunky, energetic, and angry about an injustice. While a little girl shooting her brother's BB gun might be feisty, Alma certainly has not been treated unjustly, so **(B)** is not the best answer. Someone *humble and loving* is respectful and shows love. In the story, Alma takes her brother's gun even though she knows she is not supposed to, then lets her brother take responsibility for her actions. This behavior is neither humble nor loving, so **(C)** is incorrect. Someone *reverent and respectful* feels a profound regard for someone or something. At the time of the events of the story, Alma does not listen to her brother or appreciate what he does for her. This means Alma, as a 12-year-old, is not reverent and respectful. Therefore **(D)** is not the best choice.