

“Blizzard in Birmingham”

Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

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



The Turner kids were not **accustomed** to snow. The most they ever got in their southern city of Birmingham was an inch or so per year. Even that was quite **infrequent**—it never snowed more than once or twice each winter. And on the few occasions that it did snow, it was always too warm for the snow to accumulate. The temperature almost never got below freezing.

What was funny was that even the slightest bit of snow was enough to cancel school and close businesses. No one knew how to drive in the stuff. It was never enough for young Lily Mae Turner, though, because the snow that came was always too sparse to build a snowman or to go sledding.

But one night, in March of 1993, something magical happened.

An unexpected blast of cold air from Canada and moist air from the Caribbean converged on the eastern part of the United States to create the “Storm of the Century.”

All that the Turner kids knew was that when they woke up Saturday morning, there was 17 inches of unbelievable snow on their front lawn and as far as the eye could see.

The Turner parents were in shock. Most folks in town were ill-prepared for such a storm. They had no shovels to dig their way out and no salt to keep from slipping. They had no idea what to do.

While the adults seemed paralyzed with disbelief, the Turner kids set about having the time of their lives. Lily Mae discovered that a rope tied to a metal trash can lid made a perfect sled. John Henry figured out that if he put his feet in plastic grocery bags before putting on his rain boots, his feet stayed warm for a longer time. Rachel made snow angels in every part of the yard. Together, all the kids made a huge snowman and dressed it in their dad’s hat and jacket. (Mr. Turner didn’t own a scarf!)

For three straight days, the Turner kids had a **splendid** time. On Tuesday, the temperature hit 70 degrees, and life for these Southerners went back to normal.

Questions:

- 1) As used at the beginning of the story, what does **accustomed** mean?
- A. used to
 - B. aware of
 - C. scared of
 - D. interested in
- 2) As used at the beginning of the story, which is the best antonym for **infrequent**?
- A. common
 - B. long
 - C. rare
 - D. surprising
- 3) Which other title would best fit this passage?
- A. "1993"
 - B. "A Cold March"
 - C. "Magical Snow"
 - D. "Ill-Prepared Parents"
- 4) The author may have described the storm as magical because
- A. Lily Mae believed the snow was magic
 - B. it was such an unusual thing to happen that it felt like magic
 - C. there was no other explanation for why the storm occurred
 - D. the author wanted to cast doubt on whether the storm actually took place
- 5) How are the children different than the adults in this passage?
- A. The kids stayed warm, while the adults were very cold.
 - B. The kids knew the storm was coming, while the adults did not.
 - C. The kids went out and had fun, while the adults did not know what to do.
 - D. The adults still had to go to work, while the kids stayed home.
- 6) What conclusions can be drawn about what the weather is typically like in Birmingham during the month of March?
- I. It is warm.
 - II. It does not snow.
 - III. It is windy.
- A. I only
 - B. I and II
 - C. II and III
 - D. I, II, and III

Questions (continued):

- 7) What can be said about the Turner kids' ideas for playing in the snow without the usual snow gear?
- I. They were creative.
 - II. They were effective.
 - III. They were complicated.
- A. I only
 - B. I and II
 - C. II and III
 - D. I, II, and III

- 8) *"What was funny was that even the slightest bit of snow was enough to cancel school and close businesses."*

"No one knew how to drive in the stuff."

Which of the following punctuation marks could best be used to combine the above sentences?

- A. a comma (,)
 - B. a semicolon (;)
 - C. an ellipsis (...)
 - D. a hyphen (-)
- 9) What was going on outside of Birmingham during the snowstorm?
- A. The rest of the country was also dealing with snow.
 - B. Nothing—Birmingham was the only area affected by the storm.
 - C. The Eastern United States was also hit by the storm.
 - D. The passage does not provide enough information to say.
- 10) As used at the end of the story, which is the best antonym for **splendid**?
- A. great
 - B. perfect
 - C. happy
 - D. terrible
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Answers and Explanations

1) **A**

accustomed (*adjective*): familiar with; used to; adapted to.

In paragraph 1, the story says, “The Turner kids were not accustomed to snow. The most they ever got in their southern city of Birmingham was an inch or so per year. Even that was quite infrequent—it never snowed more than once or twice each winter.” These statements tell us that it snows very rarely in Birmingham. Since it rarely snows, the kids do not spend much time in snow. This means the kids are not used to snow. We can understand from this information that *accustomed* means used to. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

Even though the snow was infrequent in Birmingham, it did occasionally snow, so the children were aware of what snow is. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The first paragraph tells us that the kids were not accustomed to snow because snow was rare in Birmingham. It doesn’t make sense to say the children were not scared of the snow because it was rare. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The fact that it rarely snowed does not tell us whether the children were interested in snow or not. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

2) **A**

infrequent (*adjective*): not occurring often; not occurring on a regular basis.

In paragraph 1, the author writes, “The most they ever got in their southern city of Birmingham was an inch or so per year. Even that was quite infrequent—it never snowed more than once or twice each winter.” This tells us that it does not snow very often in Birmingham. We can infer from this information that something *infrequent* doesn’t happen very often. To say that something is *common* means that it occurs often or regularly. Something that happens often is the opposite of something that rarely happens. This means *common* is a good antonym for *infrequent*. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

Something that is *long* is great in length or duration. This is different than something that happens infrequently, but not opposite. This means long is not an antonym for infrequent. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Something that is *rare* is hard to find or doesn’t happen very often. This meaning is similar to that of infrequent, so rare is not an antonym for infrequent. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Something *surprising* is unexpected and causes shock or amazement. Something that is infrequent may also be surprising, so surprising is not an antonym for infrequent. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

3) **C**

In the story, a rare snowfall gives the children an experience unlike anything they have had before. The amount of snow that fell was so unbelievable that it seemed magical. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The story takes place in 1993, but the year is not important to the story. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. The big snowstorm is what was special about that

March, not that it was cold. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The parents were ill-prepared, but that is just one detail. This means **(D)** is also incorrect.

4) **B**

At the beginning of the story, we learn that snow was a rare occurrence in Birmingham. Then, we hear the story of a huge snowfall that gave the children a wonderful experience. The snow was both rare and wonderful. The snowfall was so unusual that it seemed like magic. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The story does not say Lily Mae believed the snow was magic. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. In paragraph 4, we learn that “an unexpected blast of cold air from Canada and moist air from the Caribbean converged on the eastern part of the United States to create the ‘Storm of the Century.’” This explains the storm. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The central event is the storm. There is no doubt as to whether it happened. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

5) **C**

In paragraph 6, the author writes, “The Turner parents were in shock. Most folks in town were ill-prepared for such a storm. They had no shovels to dig their way out and no salt to keep from slipping. They had no idea what to do.” From this we know that the adults did not know what to do about the snow. In contrast, the author writes in paragraph 7, “While the adults seemed paralyzed with disbelief, the Turner kids set about having the time of their lives.” The paragraph describes how each child chose to enjoy the snow. From this we know that the children had fun in the snow. The kids went out and had fun while the adults did not know what to do. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The story does not tell us whether anyone got cold or warm. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. No one expected the storm. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The story does not say whether the adults went to work or the kids went to school. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

6) **B**

In paragraph 1, the author writes, “And on the few occasions that it did snow, it was always too warm for the snow to accumulate. The temperature almost never got below freezing.” Since it is almost never cold in Birmingham, we can understand that it is usually warm there. This supports **option (I)**. The author also writes, “The Turner kids were not accustomed to snow. The most they ever got in their southern city of Birmingham was an inch or so per year. Even that was quite infrequent—it never snowed more than once or twice each winter.” We can understand from this that it generally does not snow in Birmingham in March. This supports **option (II)**. The passage does not mention the wind. This eliminates **option (III)**. Therefore **B** is correct.

7) **B**

In paragraph 7, the author writes, “Lily Mae discovered that a rope tied to a metal trash can lid made a perfect sled. John Henry figured out that if he put his feet in plastic grocery bags before putting on his rain boots, his feet stayed warm for a longer time. Rachel made snow angels in every part of the yard. Together, all the kids made a huge snowman and dressed it in their dad’s hat and jacket.” We can understand from this information that all of the children

used their imaginations to come up with ways to deal with the snow and have fun in the snow, even though they did not have equipment and clothes designed for snow. The children were creative. This supports **option (I)**. All of the makeshift devices created by the children did what they were supposed to do, so they were effective. This supports **option (II)**. The solutions the children came up with did not take a lot of time, effort or equipment, so they were not complicated. This eliminates **option (III)**. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

8) **B**

A semicolon may be used to link two independent clauses that are closely related. The sentences above are closely related, since they express the idea that everything closed down because no one could drive in the snow. The connection between the two sentences is strengthened by the use of a semicolon instead of a period. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

A comma is only used to join two independent clauses if a connecting word is used, such as and, but, for, or, nor, so or yet. Since we have no connecting word to join the two clauses, a comma may not be used. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. An ellipsis is used to indicate that some words have been left out of quoted material, or else to indicate a pause in dialogue. These situations do not apply to the sentences above. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. A hyphen (not to be confused with a dash) is used between the parts of a compound word or between syllables of a word divided at the end of a line of text. These situations do not apply to these sentences. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

9) **C**

In paragraph 4, it says, "An unexpected blast of cold air from Canada and moist air from the Caribbean converged on the eastern part of the United States to create the 'Storm of the Century.'" We can understand from this that the storm affected the eastern part of the United States, not just Birmingham. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

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

10) **D**

splendid (*adjective*): brilliant; glorious; wonderful.

In paragraph 7, the author describes the different ways that the children were having fun in the snow. Then, in paragraph 8, the author writes, "For three straight days, the Turner kids had a splendid time." Since the author says the children had a splendid time right after explaining all the great things the kids were doing in the snow, we can understand that *splendid* means wonderful. *Terrible* means very bad. This is the opposite of wonderful, so terrible is an antonym for splendid. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Great means excellent or really good. This means *great* is a synonym for *splendid*. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Perfect* means without fault or excellent in every way. This is not the same meaning as *splendid*, but the meanings are similar. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Happy* means full of cheer. Again, this is not the same meaning as *splendid*, but similar. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.