

• Reading Comprehension 8 Level 8

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

The hammer may be the oldest tool we have record of. Stone hammers—some of the oldest human artifacts ever discovered—date back as early as 2,600,000 BCE. Not only is the hammer the oldest tool, but it is also the greatest. What makes the hammer so great is its simplicity, power, and usefulness.

The structure of the hammer is relatively simple—a fact largely responsible for its early invention and widespread distribution across cultures and geographic regions. The hammer is composed of two main parts: a handle and a head. The handle is used to swing the hammer. The head is used to hit other objects.

While the hammer is a very simple tool, it is still able to generate tremendous power. This power results from two factors: the weight of the head, and the speed at which the hammer is swung. Every hammer (though some more than others) has a large distribution of weight at the head. When a hammer is swung, this weight pivots about the hand, which acts as a fulcrum. The handle carries the weight at a distance, acting as a lever arm, so a longer handle means increased speed. The weight of the head together with the speed generated by the lever arm is what gives the hammer so much power. The heavier the head and the faster it is swung, the more power a hammer produces.

In addition to the hammer's great power, it also has an exceptionally wide range of useful applications. The purpose of the hammer-- to hit-- is a universal action that can accomplish many tasks. Let's start with the obvious: a hammer can be made to pound nails. But a hammer has many other uses as well. It can break apart hard objects such as brick or concrete. It can bend and shape metal or steel. It can gently tap objects to make small adjustments. It can be used to make sculpture or pottery. It can be used in the hot, harsh business of blacksmithing as well as in delicate operations like crafting jewelry. In times of desperation, it can even be used as a weapon.

The hammer truly is a great tool. It is simple, powerful, and useful. A **quintessential** symbol of labor, the hammer has come to represent hard work and embody the spirit of human industry.

Questions

- 1) The *thesis statement* is one sentence that clearly communicates what the author plans to discuss in the passage. Based on this information, which of the following sentences from the passage is its thesis statement?
 - A. "The hammer may be the oldest tool we have record of."
 - B. "Not only is the hammer the oldest tool, but it is also the greatest."
 - C. "A quintessential symbol of labor, the hammer has come to represent hard work and embody the spirit of human industry."
 - D. "What makes the hammer so great is its simplicity, power, and usefulness."

- 2) Which of the following best describes the organization of this passage?
 - A. introduction, supporting paragraphs, conclusion
 - B. introduction, examples, supporting paragraphs, conclusion
 - C. history, examples, conclusion
 - D. history, introduction, supporting paragraphs

- 3) Based on information in the passage, it can be inferred that which of the following hammers is capable of generating the most power?
- A. a claw hammer, because it can be swung very fast
 - B. a ball-peen hammer, because it has a medium length handle and a small head
 - C. a sledge hammer, because it has a long handle and a heavy head
 - D. a bush hammer, because it has a long handle and a light head
- 4) Based on information in the passage, all of the following people might reasonably use a hammer at work except
- A. a sculptor who works in different metals
 - B. an artist who makes earrings
 - C. the driver of a concrete mixer
 - D. a carpenter who frames wooden houses
- 5) As used in the final paragraph, which of the following describes something **quintessential**?
- A. Jean-Michel finds a prize at the bottom of a cereal box. Once he digs it out, he sees that it is a cheap plastic toy car. After playing with it for a few minutes, he throws it in the trash.
 - B. Veterans agree that there are many songs that accurately depict the struggles faced by U.S. soldiers during the Vietnam War.
 - C. While the buildings that line the streets in downtown Manhattan are very impressive, what visitors tend to remember most about New York City are the signature yellow taxi cabs that appear nearly everywhere.
 - D. During the first three months of its life, our newborn baby cried at night. It was only after we implemented a strict routine of feeding, sleeping, and activity time that we were finally able to enjoy a soundless night.

Answers and Explanations

1) **D**

The thesis statement is one sentence that clearly communicates what the author plans to discuss in the passage, and it is usually (but not always) found at the end of the introduction, so that is a good place to look. In this passage, the last sentence of the introduction is *What makes the hammer so great is its simplicity, power, and usefulness*. We can confirm that this is the thesis statement by examining the rest of the passage. In paragraph 2, the author describes the simple physical makeup of the hammer. In paragraph 3, we learn how its design allows the hammer to be so powerful. In paragraph 4, the author describes how the hammer can be used in many different ways. This means that the passage is about how a hammer is simple, powerful, and useful, all ideas that are mentioned in the thesis statement. Therefore **(D)** is correct. The only place the passage discusses the age of the hammer is in the first paragraph, but a thesis statement should tell the reader what is discussed in the entire passage. This means **(A)** is incorrect. The passage is not simply a statement that the hammer is great. It is a detailed description of the design and usefulness of the hammer. This rules out **(B)**. As explained above, the passage is about how the hammer works and how it is useful. Only one sentence at the end is about what the hammer represents. This means **(C)** is also incorrect.

2) **A**

The opening paragraph tells us that hammers are very simple, powerful, and useful. Paragraph 2 explains the simple structure of the hammer. Paragraph 3 explains how the hammer creates power. Paragraph 4 describes how useful the hammer is. Paragraph 5 concludes by repeating the idea that the hammer is “simple, powerful, and useful.” This means paragraph 1 introduces the idea that the hammer is simple, powerful, and useful; paragraphs 2- 4 support that idea; and paragraph 5 is a conclusion. Since the organization of this passage can best be described as introduction, supporting paragraphs, conclusion, **(A)** is the correct choice. There are no examples given between the introduction and the supporting paragraphs, so **(B)** is incorrect. The passage tells us that the hammer is old, but it does not provide a history of the hammer. This rules out **(C)** and **(D)**.

3) **C**

In paragraph 3, the author explains that “the heavier the head and the faster it is swung, the more power a hammer produces.” We can understand from this sentence that the hammer that will generate the most power is the hammer with the heaviest head that can be swung the fastest. Also, the author tells us that “a longer handle means increased speed.” From this we can understand that the hammer capable of generating the most power will be the one with the heaviest head and the longest handle. The long handle combined with a heavy head make the sledge hammer the most powerful hammer on the list. This means **(C)** is correct. Although a claw hammer can be swung fast, we are not provided information about the weight of its head. If it has a light weight head, it cannot generate much power. This means **(A)** is incorrect. A ball-peen hammer has a medium-length handle and a small head, so it would be less powerful than a sledge hammer. This means **(B)** is incorrect. A bush hammer has a long handle, but a light head, so it would be less powerful than a sledge hammer. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

4) **C**

In paragraph 4, the author describes the various uses for a hammer. The author writes, “A hammer can be made to pound nails. But a hammer has many other uses as well. It can break apart hard objects such as brick or concrete. It can bend and shape metal or steel. It can gently tap objects to make small adjustments. It can be used to make sculpture or pottery. It can be used in the hot, harsh business of blacksmithing as well as in delicate operations like crafting jewelry.” This question asks us to find the one person who would probably not use a hammer at work. It is best to use process of elimination to find this answer. The author claims that a hammer can “make sculpture” as well as “shape metal,” so a sculptor who works in metal could use a hammer. This eliminates **(A)**. The author also says that a hammer can be used “in delicate operations like crafting jewelry.” Since earrings are a type of jewelry, an artist who makes earrings could use a hammer. This eliminates **(B)**. The author says that a “hammer can be made to pound nails.” It is reasonable to believe that a carpenter who frames wooden houses would use a hammer at work. This eliminates **(D)**. Although the author says that a hammer can “break apart hard objects such as brick or concrete,” the driver of a concrete mixer does not necessarily have to break concrete apart. He or she probably just drives the truck, so the passage does not support the idea that the driver of a concrete mixer could use a hammer at work. This means **(C)** is the correct choice.

5) **C**

quintessential (*adjective*): representing the perfect or best example of something; the most typical.

In paragraph 1, we learn that the hammer is perhaps the oldest human tool. In paragraph 2, we learn that it is a very basic tool. At the end of the passage, the author writes, “A quintessential symbol of labor, the hammer has come to represent hard work and embody the spirit of human industry.” This sentence tells us that the hammer represents hard work and human industry. Because it is a very old, basic tool that represents hard work, we can infer that the hammer is the perfect, or most typical, symbol of labor. From this we can understand that *quintessential* means representing the perfect example of something, or the most typical. If what visitors remember most about New York City are the “signature yellow taxi cabs,” then when people think of the city, they think of yellow taxi cabs. This means that the yellow taxi cabs are the single most typical feature—the quintessential feature—of New York City. Therefore **(C)** is correct. A plastic toy car in a cereal box is not a perfect representation of something else, so **(A)** is incorrect. Something that is quintessential is the perfect or best example of something. Many songs that accurately depict soldiers’ struggles are not a single best song or a perfect example. This means that many songs cannot be an example of something quintessential. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. A strict routine to help a baby sleep through the night is an example of a solution to a problem, not an example of a perfect representation of something. This means **(D)** is incorrect.