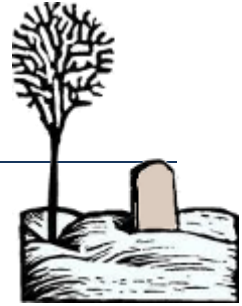


## “Remains of a Marriage”

Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

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



“Leave it.”

Kelsey could not begin to fathom what she was hearing. In fact, a part of her began to feel she was in some sort of dream, unable to emerge to wakefulness.

Even the contractor appeared **flabbergasted**. His mouth stayed in a half-open position, like a marionette waiting for its strings to be tugged.

“Yes. Leave it,” Robert said again, speaking to the notion that someone in the room had asked him to clarify his words. No one had, but Robert understood the silence.

What were the chances that an Indian burial ground would be found on the bucolic site where Robert and Kelsey had chosen to build their dream home? Why in the world would Robert not want to have the remains carted away, thought Kelsey. The last thing they needed were Indian poltergeists meandering around their home while the two of them were trying to renovate their marriage.

Kelsey, usually **deferential** to her husband, knew that now was the time to make her position heard.

She tried to **cajole** Robert away from the direction he was heading. “Sweetheart,” she cooed. “We don’t want to build on a site with human remains. It would be irreverent to the dead.”

Immediately, she saw contempt in Robert’s eyes; it was a subtle reminder of how he often viewed her as superficial and self-absorbed.

“What would be irreverent,” said Robert, his voice dripping with condescension, “would be to **desecrate** these Native graves and move them from their final resting place. Remember the culture.”

No, Kelsey did not “remember the culture.” She could not care less about the culture. However, Robert, the history professor, was obviously enthralled by the contractor’s findings. He had an innate way of understanding other cultures and other people that amazed Kelsey. He did not have that gift with her.

But something inside Kelsey said this was too much. She believed wholeheartedly in ghosts and could not imagine a life of them haunting her, rattling her cupboards, and shaking her floorboards.

Kelsey had an unnerving sensation that problems were ahead.

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Questions:

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- 1) Which of the following best explains how Kelsey feels at the beginning of the story?
- A. unable to comprehend the current situation
  - B. unable to comprehend the decision of her husband
  - C. unaware of the problem at hand
  - D. unwilling to confront a potentially life-threatening ordeal
- 2) As used at the beginning of the story, which is the best synonym for **flabbergasted**?
- A. dumbfounded
  - B. hostile
  - C. querulous
  - D. unimpressed
- 3) In paragraph 2, the author writes, "His mouth stayed in a half-open position, like a marionette waiting for its strings to be tugged." Which of the following literary techniques is used in this quotation?
- A. allusion, characterized by a casual reference to a literary or historical figure
  - B. simile, characterized by a comparison between two unlike things using "like" or "as"
  - C. denotation, characterized by the usage of the literal definition of a word
  - D. hyperbole, characterized by a gross exaggeration
- 4) The title of this passage makes use of which literary device?
- A. a pun, where one word has two meanings that are both used at the same time
  - B. irony, where the words used mean the opposite of what they say
  - C. foreshadowing, which hints at what is to come later in the story
  - D. overstatement, where something is exaggerated for effect
- 5) Kelsey wants to have the remains removed because
- I. She is afraid of ghosts.
  - II. Robert wants to leave them there.
  - III. She respects Native cultures.
- A. I only
  - B. I and II
  - C. I and III
  - D. I, II, and III
- 6) If Kelsey had chosen to be **deferential** (paragraph 6) to her husband, what would she have likely told him regarding his plans?
- A. "Good idea."
  - B. "Don't be silly."
  - C. "I'll leave you."
  - D. "I'm not sure."

Questions (continued):

7) Which adjective best describes Kelsey and Robert's marriage?

- A. busy
- B. appalling
- C. strained
- D. good-natured

8) What about Robert seems to keep him from wanting to move the gravesite?

- A. He is controlling.
- B. He fears the Indians.
- C. He cares about cultural history.
- D. He is afraid of ghosts.

9) In paragraph 7, the author writes, "She tried to **cajole** Robert away from the direction he was heading." Which of the following is the best way to rewrite the above sentence while keeping its original meaning as used in the story?

- A. She tried to compromise with Robert to go the other direction.
- B. She tried to force Robert to change directions.
- C. She tried to entice Robert away from the direction he was heading.
- D. She tried to threaten Robert about the direction he was heading.

10) As used at the end of the story, which is the best antonym for **desecrate**?

- A. honor
- B. excavate
- C. defile
- D. criticize

Whose side are you on— Robert's or Kelsey's? Explain.

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## Answers and Explanations

1) **B**

In the story, we learn that an Indian burial ground has been found on the site where Kelsey and Robert are building their home. In paragraph 1, Robert tells the contractor to leave the burial ground as it is. But Kelsey believes in ghosts, and can't imagine living on top of an intact burial ground. That is why in paragraph 2, the author says, "Kelsey could not begin to fathom what she was hearing. In fact, a part of her began to feel she was in some sort of dream, unable to emerge to wakefulness." Kelsey does not comprehend why anyone would leave human remains in the ground under his or her house. Kelsey does not understand Robert's decision to tell the contractor to leave the remains as they are. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The current situation is that an Indian burial ground has been found on the property where Kelsey and Robert are building a house. Since Kelsey knows they are there and wants to have the remains removed from the property, she clearly comprehends what is happening. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Again, Kelsey knows that there is a burial ground on the property. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Since the issue is a burial ground, no one's life is at stake. The situation is not life-threatening. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

2) **A**

There is an Indian burial ground where Robert and Kelsey want to build their house. Robert thinks the remains should be left as they are, a decision which Kelsey thinks is shocking. In paragraph 3, the author says, "Even the contractor appeared flabbergasted. His mouth stayed in a half-open position, like a marionette waiting for its strings to be tugged." Since the contractor stood there with his mouth hanging open after learning Robert's wish, we can understand that the contractor cannot believe Robert's sentiment.

*Dumbfounded* means overcome with confusion or disbelief. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

Someone is *hostile* if they are angry. Angry and disbelieving are different, so hostile is not a synonym for flabbergasted. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Querulous* means in a grumbling or peevish way. Peevish and disbelieving are also different. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. When someone is *unimpressed*, he or she does not have a favorable opinion. While someone who can't believe what they are hearing might not have a favorable opinion, flabbergasted and unimpressed are not the same. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

3) **B**

A simile is a comparison between two unlike things using "like" or "as." The sentence in question compares the contractor to a "marionette waiting for its strings to be tugged." It also uses the word "like." The sentence contains a simile. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The passage does not contain information to support answer choices **(A)**, **(C)**, or **(D)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

4) **A**

The word *remains* can mean a corpse. It can also be used to describe what is left of something after other parts have gone away. Since the story is about building a house over a burial mound and about the deterioration of Kelsey and Robert's marriage, the title uses the word *remains* for both of its meanings: the corpses under their house, and what is left of their marriage. This means the title is a pun. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

Since the words in the title do not convey a meaning different than what they say, the title is not ironic. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Generally, titles do not contain hints about what is to come later in the story. The title is not foreshadowing. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The title does not use exaggeration for effect. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

5) **A**

Robert wants to leave the remains in the ground and build over them. However, Kelsey wants the remains removed. In paragraph 11, the author says Kelsey "believed wholeheartedly in ghosts and could not imagine a life of them haunting her, rattling her cupboards, and shaking her floorboards." Using this information, we can infer that Kelsey wants to have the remains removed because she is afraid of ghosts. This supports **option (I)**. Robert wants to leave the remains where they are. Kelsey tries to convince Robert that the remains should be moved, but nothing in the passage suggests that she does this simply to spite Robert. This eliminates **option (II)**. In paragraph 10, the author says that Kelsey "could not care less about the culture." This means that the reason Kelsey wants the remains removed is not to respect the culture, because she does not care about it. This eliminates **option (III)**. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

6) **A**

**deferential** (*adjective*): showing respect; submissive.

In paragraph 6, the author says, "Kelsey, usually deferential to her husband, knew that now was the time to make her position heard." Since Kelsey is going to voice her own position, she is taking charge. Since she is doing this even though she is usually deferential, we can infer that deferential is the opposite of taking charge, so *deferential* means submissive. If Kelsey had chosen to be deferential to Robert, she would have done what he wanted to do. Someone who is willing to do what someone else wants would be likely to say, "Good idea." Therefore **(A)** is correct.

If Kelsey said, "Don't be silly," she would be telling Robert that his idea is silly. Telling someone his idea is silly is disparaging. This is not being deferential. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. If Kelsey said, "I'll leave you," she would be giving him an ultimatum. This is not being submissive to his wishes. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Being unsure about going along with someone's wishes is not the same as being deferential. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

7) **C**

In paragraph 5, the author says that Kelsey and Robert “were trying to renovate their marriage.” In paragraph 8, the author says that Robert “often viewed her as superficial and self-absorbed.” In paragraph 10, we see that while Robert is gifted at “understanding other cultures and other people,” he “did not have that gift” with Kelsey. From this information, we can infer that Robert and Kelsey have problems with their relationship and they are trying to work on it. When a relationship is difficult, it is strained. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Kelsey and Robert are building a house together, but the passage does not tell us that they do many things together. We cannot tell from the information in the passage that their marriage is busy. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Things seem tense between Kelsey and Robert, but they are not terrible to each other in an offensive way. This means their marriage is not appalling. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. While Kelsey and Robert are not obviously cruel to each other, they are not easygoing and cheerful with each other either. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect

8) **C**

In paragraph 9, Robert says that moving the graves from their final resting place would be irreverent. He tells Kelsey to “remember the culture.” In paragraph 10, we learn that Robert is a history professor. The narrator also writes, “He had an innate way of understanding other cultures and other people that amazed Kelsey.” Since Robert is a history professor, he cares about history. The fact that Robert understands and is concerned with other cultures tells us that Robert cares about culture. Since Robert cares about culture and history and thinks that moving the graves is irreverent, we can infer Robert does not want to move the graves because he cares about cultural history. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

While Kelsey usually deferred to Robert, the passage does not tell us that Robert is controlling. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Robert is interested in the Indians, not afraid of them. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Kelsey is afraid of ghosts, not Robert. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

9) **C**

**cajole** (*verb*): to try to get someone to do what you want by flattery or coaxing.

In paragraph 7, Kelsey tries to cajole Robert away from his position. She tells him that leaving the bodies “would be irreverent to the dead.” She does this because Robert is a history professor and is sensitive to ancient culture. We can infer from this information that Kelsey is trying to make moving the graves seem more appealing to Robert so that he will change his mind. She also “cooed” at him, which is using a sweet, coaxing tone of voice. This means Kelsey tries to entice Robert away from his original stance. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Either the remains stay in the ground or they are removed. There is no place for compromise. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. To force someone is to make him

do something against his will. Kelsey is trying to get Robert to willingly do what she wants. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Kelsey does not threaten Robert. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

10) **A**

**desecrate** (*verb*): to violate the sanctity of something.

In paragraph 9, Robert says that moving the bodies would be irreverent and would desecrate the graves. He tells Kelsey, "Remember the culture." Since Robert is sensitive to the culture and thinks it would be irreverent to move the graves, we can infer that to *desecrate* the graves means to violate the sacred nature of the graves. To *honor* something means to show respect for something. Since respecting something is the opposite of violating something, honor is a good antonym for desecrate. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

To *excavate* is to uncover something by digging. Since Robert thinks that digging up the graves is desecrating them, excavate is not a good antonym for desecrate. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. To *defile* something is to pollute it or to corrupt it. This is similar to desecrate. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. To *criticize* is to evaluate something or to find fault with something. This is different than violating something sacred, but not opposite, so criticize is not a good antonym for desecrate. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.