

“Seeing Through”

Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

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

Jeffrey brushed quickly past an elderly woman waiting on the platform ahead of him to get onto the subway. He wanted to be sure to get a seat to read his *New Economics Journal*. As the train screeched out of the station, he lifted his head from the business news and stared at the man directly across from him.

A fierce wave – a tsunami – of **antipathy** came over him. Jeffrey knew this man, knew him all too well. They had become bitter enemies.

Their eyes locked.



As the train reached full speed, the cacophony of speeding wheels against the winding rails and of the wildly vibrating subway car filled Jeffrey’s ears. To this frenetic beat, Jeffrey listed in his head all the reasons that this man, whose eyes he gravely stared into, whose image seemed to appear nearly everywhere he went, had become **anathema** to him.

*He had climbed the upper echelons of the Wall Street firm using an **imperious** manner with his subordinates: issuing directives; ordaining idiosyncratic decrees; generally making certain everyone knew he was the boss.*

*Despite his impoverished upbringing, he had become **ostentatious**. Flush with cash from the lucrative deals he made on Wall Street, he had purchased a yacht and a home in Versailles. He used neither. But, oh, how he liked to say he had them. Meanwhile—Jeffrey knew—this man’s father was on the verge of being evicted from his decrepit tenement apartment in the South Bronx.*

What bothered Jeffrey most about this man was that he never even attempted to make amends for his evil ways.

Could this man change? Jeffrey did not know. But maybe, just maybe, he could try.

The train screeched to Jeffrey’s stop at Battery Park. He gave the man one last hard look. “See you around,” he mumbled to himself. And he knew he would—the wrinkled brow, that part of graying hair, those cold metallic eyes in a subway window reflection—were his own.

It would take years of hard work and self-contemplation, but Jeffrey would once again encounter this man on the train, and marvel at what a kinder person he had become.

Questions:

1) Which best describes Jeffrey's attitude in this passage?

- A. anxious
- B. studied
- C. unfortunate
- D. self-aware
- E. self-pitying

2) A fierce wave – a tsunami – of antipathy *came* over him. Given the imagery in this sentence, which word would be the best substitute for *came*?

- A. angled
- B. drizzled
- C. rained
- D. washed
- E. trampled

3) As used in paragraph 2, which word is the best antonym for **antipathy**?

- A. ambivalence
- B. desperation
- C. admiration
- D. infatuation
- E. happiness

4) Using the story as a guide, it can be inferred that

- A. Jeffrey has few friends
- B. Jeffrey likes to be the boss
- C. Jeffrey has had a difficult life
- D. Jeffrey is capable of change
- E. Jeffrey rides the subway frequently

5) "*As the train reached full speed, the cacophony of speeding wheels against the winding rails and of the wildly vibrating train filled Jeffrey's ears.*"

Which literary technique is used in the above sentence (from paragraph 4)?

- A. metaphor, a direct comparison between two things which does not use *like* or *as*
- B. analogy, an extended comparison showing the similarities between two things
- C. imagery, characterized by appealing to a sense or combination of senses
- D. irony, characterized by a contrast or incongruity between what is stated and what is meant
- E. personification, characterized by something being described as if it had human qualities

Questions (continued):

6) Which of the following best describes the main conflict in this passage?

- A. man versus man
- B. man versus himself
- C. man versus society
- D. man versus machine
- E. man versus nature

7) As used in paragraph 4, **anathema** is best defined as a(n):

- A. curse
- B. vision
- C. embarrassment
- D. antagonist
- E. problem

8) As used in paragraph 5, to have an **imperious** manner means to be:

- A. ignorant
- B. stoic
- C. simpering
- D. unaffected
- E. domineering

9) As used in paragraph 6, which is the best synonym for **ostentatious**?

- A. assiduous
- B. extravagant
- C. modest
- D. miserly
- E. refined

10) What is made clear by the end of story?

- I. The man that Jeffery dislikes is himself.
- II. Jeffery was eventually able to become a better person.
- III. Jeffery's father lives in the South Bronx.

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

Have you ever had feelings similar to Jeffery's? Were you able to change?

Answers and Explanations

1) **D**

Self-aware means aware of one's own emotions and behaviors. In the passage, Jeffrey realizes that he has become someone he does not like. He thinks about how this has happened. Near the end of the story, he thinks about changing. Then we learn that in time Jeffrey becomes "a kinder person." Since Jeffrey is thinking about what kind of person he is and how he became that way, his attitude in the passage is self-aware. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Anxious means apprehensive or worried about a future matter. Jeffrey is not concerned with a future matter, so his attitude is not anxious. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Studied* means well thought out or practiced. Jeffrey is thinking about his life, but his thoughts do not appear to be practiced, so his attitude is not studied. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Unfortunate* means unsuccessful or unlucky. Jeffrey may not like himself, but he has been very successful. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Self-pitying* is feeling sorry for oneself. In this story, Jeffrey seems to truly dislike himself, but he does not feel sorry for himself, so his attitude cannot be described as self-pitying. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

2) **D**

A tsunami is an enormous wave. If something has *washed* over someone, it has flowed over them. Since the action of a wave can be described as flowing, *washed* is a good substitute for *came* in this sentence. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Angled means bent at an angle or slanted. A giant wave does not approach at an angle. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Drizzled* means slowly poured down in small amounts. Since a tsunami is huge and moves over, not down, it is not slowly poured out. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Something that *rained* down came down more quickly and forcefully than something that drizzled, but it still came down, unlike a wave. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Trampled* means to have beaten something down by stepping on it. Waves do not have feet to beat things down. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

3) **C**

antipathy (*noun*): an intense feeling of dislike or disgust.

In paragraph 2, Jeffrey suddenly feels antipathy for a man who is his bitter enemy. Since the man Jeffrey feels antipathy for his enemy, someone he absolutely hates, the reader can infer that *antipathy* is a strong feeling of dislike. *Admiration* is a feeling of esteem, wonder and respect. Since this is the opposite of intense dislike, admiration is a good antonym for antipathy. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Ambivalence is the coexistence of conflicting feelings. Conflicting feelings are not the opposite of feelings of dislike, so ambivalence is not an antonym for antipathy. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Desperation* is a feeling of near

hopelessness. Feeling hopeless is not the opposite of dislike, so desperation is not an antonym for antipathy. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Infatuation* is a feeling of exaggerated but short-lived passion. While feeling passionate about someone is certainly different than disliking them, infatuation is always temporary. Dislike can be permanent. This means that infatuation is not an antonym for antipathy. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. *Happiness* is a feeling of joy. Dislike and joy are different, but not opposite, so happiness is not an antonym for antipathy. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

4) **D**

Much of the story is about what a terrible person Jeffrey has become. However, we learn at the end that he eventually changes into “a kinder person.” Since Jeffrey was once a selfish person, and then became a kinder person, he has changed. One must be capable of change in order to change, so we have evidence that Jeffrey is capable of change. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

While the story does indicate that Jeffrey has become someone who doesn’t like himself, it does not give the reader any information about whether he has many friends. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. In the middle of the passage, we learn that Jeffrey “had climbed the upper echelons of the Wall Street firm using an imperious manner with his subordinates: issuing directives; ordaining idiosyncratic decrees; generally making certain everyone knew he was the boss.” This tells us that Jeffrey got to his current position by acting like the boss, but tells us nothing about whether he *liked* being the boss. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. In the middle of the story, we learn that Jeffrey had an “impoverished upbringing,” but that does not necessarily tell us that his life was difficult. Since the only other information we have about Jeffrey’s life is that he is wealthy and powerful, the story does not indicate that he has had a difficult life. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. In the beginning of the story, Jeffrey boards the subway. At the end of the story, we learn that Jeffrey sees himself on the train once more years later. This information does not allow the reader to determine how often he rides the subway. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

5) **C**

Cacophony is the unpleasantness of a certain sound or sounds. The sentence appeals to the reader’s sense of hearing by describing in detail the components of the train that work together to create a loud, unpleasant but distinctive noise. The sentence uses imagery to create a sensory experience for the reader based on hearing. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

There is no comparison between two things. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. The sentence does *describe* several things, but it does so to give the reader a sense of the sounds they make, not to compare them to each other. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. There is no incongruity between what is stated and what is meant. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. The sentence does not describe any of the objects as if they were human. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

6) **B**

In the story, Jeffrey sees himself and thinks about the person he has become. He detests that person, and so detests himself. Near the end of the passage, he wonders, “Could this man change? Jeffrey did not know. But maybe, just maybe, he could try.” The reader can infer from this that Jeffrey is not sure if he can become the kind of person he wants to be. As stated at the end of the passage, his change “would take years of hard work and self-contemplation.” What Jeffrey has to overcome here is his own selfishness. In order to change, Jeffrey has to overcome himself, so the conflict in this passage is man versus himself. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The story does not provide information to support answer choices **(A)**, **(C)**, **(D)**, and **(E)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

7) **A**

anathema (*noun*): a curse; a person or thing detested.

In paragraph 4, Jeffrey lists the reasons the man he saw across from him “had become anathema to him.” The story goes on to describe the man’s poor treatment of subordinates during his ascent in a Wall Street firm and tells how the man spent money on things just to impress other people. In paragraph 7, the passage states, “What bothered Jeffrey most about this man was that he never even attempted to make amends for his evil ways.” The reader can infer from this information that *anathema* is something terrible or detested—a curse. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

A *vision* is an image produced by the imagination. In paragraph 4, the story does say that the man’s “image seemed to appear nearly everywhere [Jeffrey] went.” However, the reasons the man was anathema to Jeffrey are listed in the next 3 paragraphs. The man is not anathema to Jeffrey *because* he is a vision from Jeffrey’s imagination. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Jeffrey detests the man he sees, but the man does not appear to be a source of embarrassment to him. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. An *antagonist* is someone who directly opposes another person. Jeffrey hates the man, but it is because of the life the man leads, not because the man directly opposes him, so the man is not an antagonist. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. Again, though Jeffrey hates the man, the man does not do anything that makes the man a problem for Jeffrey. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

8) **E**

imperious (*adjective*): overbearing, arrogant and domineering.

In paragraph 5, the story states, “He had climbed the upper echelons of the Wall Street firm using an **imperious** manner with his subordinates: issuing directives; ordaining idiosyncratic decrees; generally making certain everyone knew he was the boss.” This means that the man gave orders, created peculiar rules and did whatever he could to let people know that he was in charge. The reader can infer from this information that someone with an *imperious* manner tends to order others around. Someone who orders others around is *domineering*. Therefore **(E)** is correct.

Someone who is *ignorant* is unaware. The man was imperious because he ordered others around, not because he was unaware. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Someone who is *stoic* does not display emotion. The man ordered everyone around, but we do not know if the man acted without emotion. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Someone who is *simpering* smiles in a silly, self-conscious way. It is unlikely an arrogant man giving orders with such authority would smile in a silly way. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Someone who is *unaffected* is genuine. The man's manner was overbearing, not genuine. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

9) **B**

ostentatious (*adjective*): a showy display intended to impress others.

In paragraph 6, it says, "Despite his impoverished upbringing, he had become **ostentatious**." We then learn that the man had bought a yacht and home in Versailles that he liked to tell people about. The reader can infer from this that the man grew up without any money, then used his later wealth to buy extravagantly expensive things just for show, which means that ostentatious is a display to impress others. *Extravagant* means unnecessarily showy or wasteful, so it is a good synonym for ostentatious. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

Assiduous means persistent and diligent. Since persistent and showy are not similar, assiduous is not a synonym for ostentatious. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Modest* means not showy and unpretentious, which is the opposite of ostentatious, so modest is not a synonym for ostentatious. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Miserly* means lacking generosity, which is different than a showy display, so miserly is not a synonym for ostentatious. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. *Refined* means elegant and free from vulgarity. Since being showy is vulgar, refined is not a synonym for ostentatious. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

10) **E**

At the beginning of the story, Jeffrey sees a man on the train. Then, in paragraph 9, it says, "He gave the man one last hard look. 'See you around,' he mumbled to himself. And he knew he would—the wrinkled brow, that part of graying hair, those cold metallic eyes in a subway window reflection—were his own." The reader can understand from this information that Jeffrey is looking at his reflection in the subway window and the man he dislikes is Jeffrey himself. This supports **option (I)**. For much of the story, Jeffrey is described as a terrible person. In paragraph 8, he wonders if he could change. In paragraph 10, it says, "It would take years of hard work and self-contemplation, but Jeffrey would once again encounter this man on the train, and marvel at what a kinder person he had become." We know that the man on the train is Jeffrey himself. We also know that Jeffrey was an unlikable man. Since the man has become kinder after years of hard work, we know that Jeffrey did change to become a better person. This supports **option (II)**. In paragraph 6, it says that the "man's father was on the verge of being evicted from his decrepit tenement apartment in the South Bronx. The reader can infer that the man's father lived in the South Bronx. The man is Jeffrey himself, so the man's father is Jeffrey's father, which means Jeffrey's father lives in the South Bronx. This supports **option (III)**. Therefore **(E)** is correct.