

## “Wild”

### Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

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



I was 16 when my father **unequivocally** decided he would send me to wilderness camp for several months. He had threatened to do it many times before, but my mother had always managed to prevent him from actually packing me up and shipping me off. This time he was dead set on it.

My latest transgression was viewed as the last straw. In a fit of **unbridled** rage, I had shoved my math teacher down a flight of steps at school. He broke his arm in two places and severely dislocated his shoulder. The man hadn't done a thing to me. I am hard-pressed to remember why I was so irritated at him.

Anyway, Mr. Ford, my math teacher, had agreed not to press charges as favor to my dad. He was a friend of my dad's from way back. Mr. Ford knew what was at stake. We all did.

Dad was in the middle of a tight race for sheriff in our town. This latest “Danny Thing,” as my reckless behavior was now called, had all my dad's closest advisors talking.

“John, he's your son and he's a kid, but he is dragging you down,” I heard Jake Hutch tell my dad through his closed office door the night after I pushed Mr. Ford. “If it appears you can't set the course for enforcement in your own home, how can you set the course for this town?”

So, off to Pisgah National Forest I went. I knew in my heart that “Wilderness Camp” was surely just a **euphemism** for “Torture Center.” I imagined hours of untold abuse at the hands of some lumberjack-sized drill sergeant. I resolved not to be broken and to emerge from the program unchanged. I was who I was.

Nearly every day for six months, a small group of other troubled teens and I lugged our 30-pound backpacks on a trek that covered about 10 miles. We hiked in a rugged wilderness that seemed untouched by civilization. The **grandeur** of the sky, rock, and wilderness made me **reverent**.

Our counselors were firm but kind, not the **ogres** I had imagined. We learned how to make a fire without matches and create a shelter with twigs, branches, and grass. We learned which plants were safe to eat out in the wild. Late into the night, we talked about our fears and hopes.

We were devoid of radios, televisions, and cell phones. I felt myself change. I was calm and often reflective. My old, impulsive self was gone.

One morning, six months later, my dad came to pick me up. I ran to hug him and

saw relief and love in his eyes.

“So what’s it like being sheriff?” I asked on the ride home.

“I lost the race, Danny,” he said.

“I’m sorry, Dad.” I knew my behavior probably had a lot to do with his defeat.

Dad squeezed my shoulder and brought me close. “As long as I don’t ever lose you, I’m okay.”

---

### Questions:

---

1) Which best describes the double meaning of the title?

- A. Danny goes to wilderness camp; it is in a national forest.
- B. Danny is out of control; he is sent into the wilderness.
- C. Danny changes at wilderness camp; his father loses a tight race for sheriff.
- D. Danny hikes in the rugged wilderness; he becomes respectful of nature and others.

2) "I was 16 when my father **unequivocally** decided he would send me to wilderness camp for several months."

Which of the following is the best way to rewrite the above sentence (from paragraph 1) while keeping its original meaning as used in the story?

- A. I was 16 when my father angrily decided he would send me to wilderness camp for several months.
- B. I was 16 when, over the course of several months, my father decided he would send me to wilderness camp.
- C. I was 16 when my father tentatively decided he would send me to wilderness camp for several months.
- D. I was 16 when my father decided without question he would send me to wilderness camp for several months.

3) What does the idiomatic expression, "*the last straw*," (in paragraph 2) suggest?

- A. the biggest problem of all
- B. the worst thing someone could have done
- C. the last in a line of unacceptable occurrences
- D. the deed someone wishes he or she could take back

4) As used in paragraph 2, which is the best antonym for **unbridled**?

- A. amusing
  - B. peaceful
  - C. restrained
  - D. understandable
  - E. scarce
-

---

Questions (continued):

---

- 5) What lesson did Danny seem to learn in this passage?
- A. Fight fire with fire.
  - B. Faith will move mountains.
  - C. Nature exceeds nurture.
  - D. A reed before the wind lives on, while mighty oaks do fall.

- 6) What is a **euphemism** (paragraph 6)?
- A. a code word
  - B. a nickname
  - C. a different name
  - D. a less offensive term
  - E. a meaningless title

- 7) What kind of character is Jake Hutch in this passage?
- A. round, meaning he/she is fully developed
  - B. protagonist, meaning he/she is the main character
  - C. antihero, meaning he/she lacks heroic traits
  - D. flat, characterized by having only enough traits to fulfill his/her function in the passage
  - E. antagonist, meaning he/she is the person who is opposed to or struggles against another character

- 8) "*The **grandeur** of the sky, rock, and wilderness made me **reverent**.*"

Which of the following is the best way to rewrite the above sentence (from paragraph 7) while keeping its original meaning as used in the story?

- A. I was awed by the majesty of the sky, rock, and wilderness.
- B. I felt small in comparison to the sheer size of the sky, rock, and wilderness.
- C. The power of the sky, rock, and wilderness made me regret my past behavior.
- D. The inherent danger of the sky, rock, and wilderness made me nervous.

- 9) What is evident by the end of the passage?
- I. how much Danny has changed
  - II. how much John loves his son
  - III. that John has given up running for office
- A. I only
  - B. I and II
  - C. II and III
  - D. I, II, and III

- 10) If the counselors at the wilderness camp had been **ogres** (paragraph 8), how might have they behaved?
- A. by giving teenagers water only when they were thirsty
  - B. by making the teenagers figure out how to build a fort in the rain
  - C. by refusing to treat the teenagers' wounds when they got injured
  - D. by encouraging the teens to socialize with one another even if they didn't want to
-

## Answers and Explanations

1) **B**

The word *wild* can describe a piece of land that has been left in its natural state. *Wild* can also refer to a person whose behavior is out of control. Since the passage describes a person who is out of control and then sent to a place in its natural state (the wilderness), the title of the passage holds both meanings. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The other answers all describe what happens to Danny over the course of the passage; however, they do not capture the double meaning of the title. Therefore **(A)**, **(C)**, and **(D)** are incorrect.

2) **D**

**unequivocally** (*adverb*): without exception; without question; unambiguous; admitting no disagreement.

In paragraph 1 we learn that Danny's "father unequivocally decided he would send" him "to wilderness camp for several months. He had threatened to do it many times before... This time he was dead set on it." From this the reader can infer that Danny's father is finally doing something, without question, that he had threatened to do before. Thus unequivocally means without question. Therefore **(D)** is the correct answer.

Though Danny's father may have been angry, there is no evidence in the story that he was. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. The decision was not made over several months; rather, Danny was sent to wilderness camp for several months. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Tentatively* means hesitantly, which is the opposite of unequivocally. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

3) **C**

In paragraph 2, Danny states, "My latest transgression was viewed as the last straw." Danny's use of the word *latest* suggests that this most recent transgression, or offense, was merely one in a series that he had committed. The phrase "last straw" indicates that with this latest transgression, a limit has been reached for Danny's father. His father is pushed over the edge and decides to send Danny away. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The story does not contain information to suggest that this latest transgression was the biggest problem Danny had. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Though it is bad to push a teacher down the stairs, the story does not imply that it is the worst thing someone could have done. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Danny may wish he could take back the deed, but there is no information in the story to suggest this is true. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

4) **C**

**unbridled** (*adjective*): unrestrained; out-of-control; runaway.

In paragraph 2, Danny, in a "fit of unbridled rage," pushes his math teacher down the steps. The word *unbridled* literally means without a bridle, as in a horse that is not controlled by a bridle. *Unbridled* also describes a person who

lacks discipline or restraint. We can understand that Danny lacked restraint because he described the episode as a fit of rage, and said later he did not know why he had done it. *Restrained* is the opposite of lacking discipline or restraint. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

*Amusing* means providing laughter or entertainment. Providing laughter is not the opposite of lacking discipline. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Peaceful* means devoid of violence or force. Although a person who lacks discipline may use violence or force, this is not always the case. Peaceful is not the opposite of unbridled. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Understandable* means to be comprehended or expected. This is not the opposite of lacking discipline. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. *Scarce* means insufficient or uncommon. This is not the opposite of lacking discipline. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

5) **C**

Danny's parents, although they love him, cannot succeed in getting him to behave properly; their *nurturing* ultimately fails to reach him. Yet his time in the wilderness, or *nature*, teaches him how to calm down and respect himself and others. This demonstrates the power of nature over nurture. The proverb "Nature exceeds nurture" best embraces this idea. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

*Fight fire with fire* means to respond to an attack with a similar method. In this story, Danny does not respond to an attack. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Faith will move mountains* means faith is immensely powerful. This story is not concerned with anyone's faith. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *A reed before the wind lives on, while mighty oaks do fall* means it is better to be flexible than rigid in turbulent times. Danny does not learn a lesson about being flexible in this story. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

6) **D**

Euphemism is derived from the Greek word *euphēmos*, which describes something that sounds good. Euphemisms are used to make negative ideas sound better. For example, rather than announcing that they are going to fire a significant number of people, a company might use the euphemism *downsize personnel*, which means the same thing but sounds less offensive. In paragraph 6, Danny states, "I knew in my heart that 'Wilderness Camp' was surely just a euphemism for 'Torture Center.'" He describes the "untold abuse" he imagines goes on there. His remark indicates that he believes "Wilderness Camp" is merely a more appealing, less offensive term for what is really a "Torture Center." Therefore **(D)** is correct.

A code word is a word predesigned to carry a secret meaning. "Wilderness Camp" is not a code word for something else. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. A nickname is a more familiar form of a proper name. "Wilderness Camp" is not a nickname for "Torture Center." Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. A different name is too general to convey the meaning of euphemism. "Wilderness Camp" is different, but it is also less offensive than "Torture Center." Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. "Wilderness Camp" is not a meaningless title, because it does convey the meaning of the place. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

7) **D**

In paragraph 5, Jake Hutch tells Danny's father that his son is "dragging him down." Jake's only function in the passage is to warn Danny's father. The reader does not get any sense of his motivations or personality. He simply exists to fulfill one particular narrative role: telling Danny's father that his son is a problem. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

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

8) **A**

**grandeur** (*noun*): the state of being impressive, awesome, or grand; majesty.  
**reverent** (*adjective*): characterized by awe; deeply respectful.

In paragraph 7 Danny speaks about the land with respect, describing it as "rugged wilderness that seemed untouched by civilization." When he says, "The grandeur of the sky, rock and wilderness made me reverent," he is expressing his sense of wonder and respect, or *awe*, at the magnificence, or *majesty*, of the natural world. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

Danny may have felt small compared to the sky, rock, and wilderness, but reverent does not mean small. There is no information in the story that Danny felt small or that he was struck by the proportions of nature. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Though Danny may have felt regret for his past actions, the story does not contain any information to suggest that is the case. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. While nature may be dangerous at times, the story does not contain information to support the idea that Danny felt nervous or in danger. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

9) **B**

In paragraph 10 Danny runs to give his father a hug. When Danny then hears his father has lost the race for sheriff, he realizes that his own behavior was a factor in his father's defeat, and apologizes to him. Danny now realizes and accepts the impact his actions can have on his father's career. These changes in Danny's behavior support **option (I)**. The last part of the story also illustrates how much Danny's father cares about him. When Danny first sees his dad, he sees "love and relief" in his father's eyes. After Danny says he is sorry his dad lost the race, his father replies, "As long as I don't ever lose you, I'm okay." This supports **option (II)**. In this last part of the story, John, Danny's father, says that he lost the election, but not that he gave up running for office. This eliminates **option (III)**. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

10) **C**

In mythology and fairy tales an *ogre* is a horrible giant that eats humans. The word has evolved to mean an especially cruel person. If the counselors at the wilderness camp were really the ogres Danny imagined them to be, they would behave in cruel and harmful ways, such as refusing the teenagers necessary medical treatment. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The other answers describe things which may be unpleasant, but are not harmful or cruel. Therefore **(A)**, **(B)**, and **(D)** are incorrect.