

“Dreams”

Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

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



The relationship between my mother, sister and me had been cold and **inimical** for as long as I could remember.

To me, my mother was irrational, hurling hurtful **invectives** for the slightest infraction. “Don’t matter,” my mother grumbled when I asked her where she moved my watercolor paints. “It ain’t like you got talent.” The time our mailbox got knocked off she somehow got it in her head that I was the culprit. “Never respected nothin’,” I heard her say. And my sister took my mother’s side against me every time. Five years my senior, Tammy seemed not to have a brain in her head. She dithered about everything, incapable of making any firm decision. No matter how often my mother deprecated her— “dumb, ugly, fat”—Tammy made futile attempts to fawn her way back into mother’s good graces.

My father would pontificate, “You three are more alike than you know.”

In April of 2000, my mother kicked us both out of the house. (Dad had been exiled many years before.) After that, my sister and I went our separate ways. It was then that I began having recurring dreams.

In one, I am running to catch up with a woman. Each time I get near, I trip and fall. Another woman, smiling and shouting my name, comes with great alacrity and offers her hand, but when I reach to grab it, she disappears.

In another, a female professor hands me a test. Although I have spent hours studying for it, I know none of the answers. The professor **derides** me for my poor performance. I watch while she relays my ignorance to the class with comic hilarity.

These dreams were not hard to understand. In fact, it was just the opposite; they were **pellucid**, and absent any knowledge of dream interpretation, I was still able to devise their significance. I knew that they both reflected the pugnacious relationship I shared with my mother and sister.

However, there was one dream I could never quite construe. I bite into an apple. All my teeth fall out. I had this dream far more than any of the others.

Years later, in an effort to heal our fractious relationship, Mom, Tammy and I elected to go to counseling together. After several sessions, I told my dream about teeth tumbling out of my head.

“My God, Crystal,” said my mother. “I’ve had the exact same dream many times.”

“Me, too,” said Tammy solemnly.

Breakthrough? No idea. But I was reminded of the words of my now-dead father. Maybe the three of us are more alike than we know.

Questions:

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| <p>1) Which is most likely to make a relationship inimical (paragraph 1)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. great pathosB. frequent maledictionsC. magnanimous gesturesD. ingenious discussionsE. heated debates | <p>2) As used in paragraph 2, which is the best <u>synonym</u> for invectives?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. insultsB. namesC. profanityD. wordsE. misfortunes |
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- 3) If the story were true, which would best describe its genre?
- A. literary essay, based on a piece of literature
 - B. memoir essay, centered on a significant memory from the past
 - C. persuasive essay, characterized by choosing a side and refuting other arguments
 - D. expository essay, meant to inform the reader of a body of knowledge
 - E. satire, in which human folly and vice are held up to scorn, derision, or ridicule

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| <p>4) The father's comment in paragraph 3 is best described as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. hyperbole, an obvious exaggeration for effectB. a paradox, an idea that contains two conflicting conceptsC. symbolism, using one thing to represent something elseD. foreshadowing, a hint at what is to comeE. a simile, comparing two or more things using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> | <p>5) What is the tone of this story?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. matter-of-factB. sentimentalC. pompousD. uncertainE. comical |
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- 6) How does the relationship between the narrator, her mother, and her sister seem to change from the beginning of passage to end?
- A. from brusque to florid
 - B. from egregious to impassive
 - C. from enervating to rejuvenating
 - D. from destructive to collaborative
 - E. from convivial to estranged

Questions (continued):

7) As used in paragraph 7, which is the best antonym for **pellucid**?

- A. dirty
- B. frightening
- C. enlightening
- D. strange
- E. unclear

8) "*The professor **derides** me for my poor performance.*"

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

- A. The professor is in disbelief due to my poor performance.
- B. The professor laughs mockingly at my poor performance.
- C. The professor announces my poor performance.
- D. The professor gives me a failing grade for my poor performance.
- E. The professor gives me a tutorial because of my poor performance.

9) "*I bite into an apple. All my teeth fall out.*"

Which of the following is the best way to rewrite the above sentences (from paragraph 9) while keeping their original meaning the same?

- A. I bite into an apple, so all my teeth fall out.
- B. I bite into an apple, yet all my teeth fall out.
- C. I bite into an apple, and all my teeth fall out.
- D. I bite into an apple, because all my teeth fall out.
- E. I bite into an apple, but all my teeth fall out.

10) Which of the following words from the story has/have a negative connotation?

- I. **deprecated** (*paragraph 2*)
- II. **alacrity** (*paragraph 5*)
- III. **pugnacious** (*paragraph 7*)

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

- 1) **B**
inimical (*adjective*): hostile; unfriendly.

In paragraph 1, the narrator says, “The relationship between my mother, sister and me had been cold and **inimical** for as long as I could remember.” The narrator explains that her mother would say hurtful things and blame her for things she didn’t do. The narrator also says, “My sister took my mother’s side against me every time.” Since the narrator’s mother and sister were hurtful to the narrator, their relationship with the narrator is hostile. Therefore, the reader can infer that *inimical* means hostile. *Maledictions* are calling curses on someone or telling lies about someone. Frequently cursing someone or telling lies about them is certain to make a relationship hostile, or inimical. Therefore **(B)** is the best answer.

Pathos is a feeling of sympathy or sorrow for others, or a quality that arouses such sympathy. Great sympathy for others will not make a relationship hostile, so great pathos is not likely to make a relationship inimical. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. A *magnanimous gesture* is something noble and generous done as an indication of intention. Generosity will not make a relationship hostile, so magnanimous gestures will not make a relationship inimical. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Ingenious discussions* are brilliant, imaginative conversations. Brilliant conversations seem likely to lead to a happy relationship, not a hostile one. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. *Heated debates* are highly emotional discussions of opposing points. While an emotional discussion may occasionally lead to hostility, heated debates will not invariably do so. Therefore **(E)** is not the best answer.

- 2) **A**
invectives (*noun*) abusive or rude expressions.

In paragraph 2, the narrator says, “To me, my mother was irrational, hurling hurtful invectives for the slightest infraction. ‘Don’t matter,’ my mother grumbled when I asked her where she moved my watercolor paints. ‘It ain’t like you got talent.’” Since the mother is saying something mean to the narrator, we can infer that *invectives* are abusive or rude expressions. *Insults* are offensive remarks. Since abusive or rude expressions are offensive remarks, insults is a good synonym for invectives. Therefore **(A)** is the correct answer.

Names are the words we call people and things. The mother insulted the narrator, but did not call her names. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Profanity* is vulgar language. While the mother’s language is rude, there is no evidence in the story that it is vulgar, so profanity is not a synonym for invectives. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Words* are not inherently hurtful; they *can* be hurtful, but they can also praise. *Words* is too general to be a synonym for *invectives*. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. *Misfortunes* mean incidents of bad luck or disastrous events. The narrator may experience her relationship with her

mother as a misfortune, but her mother does not hurl misfortunes at her daughter. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

3) **B**

The story begins with the narrator's description of the difficult relationship between her, her mother, and her sister. Then, the narrator tells the reader about her recurring dreams. Finally, the narrator recounts a counseling session during which the narrator, her mother and sister discovered that they were all having the same dream. All the events in the passage are taken from the narrator's life, so this story is a memoir, centered on the narrator's memories of her past. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

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

4) **D**

At the beginning of the story, the narrator describes the strained relationship between her, her mother and her sister. Then, in paragraph 3, the narrator's father says, "You three are more alike than you know." Later in the story, the narrator tells the reader about a counseling session in which she, her mother and her sister discover they all have the same recurring dreams. Since the father's comment that the three women were alike is shown to be true later in the story, the comment hints at what is to come in the story. The comment foreshadows what is to come. Therefore **(D)** is the best answer.

The statement does not contain an exaggeration. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. While there is conflict between the narrator and her mother and sister, the father's comment does not contain two conflicting ideas. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The meaning of the father's statement is apparent on the surface. It does not use something to represent something else. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The father's comment includes more than two people, but it does not compare them. This means the comment is not a simile. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

5) **A**

The author recounts facts from her life with little emotion, focusing on what happened and not how she feels about it. This means the tone is *matter-of-fact*. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

A *sentimental* tone is one colored by emotion instead of the facts. Since the narrator is factual without being emotional, the tone is not sentimental. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Pompous* means irritatingly or affectedly self-important. The narrator does not give undue importance to her story, or alienate the reader with her tone. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The narrator does not seem *uncertain* about the story she tells. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. The story is not funny in any aspect, so the tone is not *comical*. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

6) **D**

In the first half of the story, the narrator describes how terrible the relationship is between her, her mother, and her sister. Since the three treated each other so badly, the relationship can be described as destructive. However, at the end of the story we learn that the women are trying to heal their relationship through counseling. Since the women are working together to improve their relationship, their relationship is collaborative. The relationship changes *from destructive to collaborative*. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Something that is brusque is rudely blunt. Something florid is flowery and ornate. These words usually describe someone's mannerisms or way of speaking. They do not generally describe relationships between people. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Something egregious is absolutely terrible or shocking. Something impassive is devoid of emotion. Although the relationship was certainly terrible at the beginning, the story does not indicate that the relationship changed to become emotionless. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Something enervating takes the strength out of something else, or weakens it. Something rejuvenating gives energy and renews something. While the relationship between the women was terrible and may have sapped them of their vitality, the story does not tell us the relationship becomes a positive one that strengthens them. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. A convivial relationship is one that is sociable and happy, while an estranged relationship is one that has become hostile or indifferent. Here, the relationship started out hostile and seems to be changing for the better. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

- 7) **E**
pellucid (*adjective*): clear in meaning.

In paragraphs 5 and 6, the narrator describes her recurring dreams. In paragraph 7, she says, "These dreams were not hard to understand. In fact, it was just the opposite; they were **pellucid**, and absent any knowledge of dream interpretation, I was still able to devise their significance." We can infer from this information that the narrator found the dreams easy to understand. Even knowing nothing about how to interpret dreams, the narrator knew what the dreams meant. Since the dreams were easily understood, *pellucid* means clear. The opposite of clear is unclear, so *unclear* is a good antonym for pellucid. Therefore **(E)** is the best answer.

Pellucid means clear. It can be clear so as to let light through or clear in meaning. In the context of the passage, pellucid means clear in meaning. This means *dirty* is the opposite of clear in some contexts, but not here. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Something *frightening* is scary. Scary is not the opposite of clear, so frightening is not an antonym for pellucid. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Something *enlightening* gives information or insight. This is different from something that is clear, but not opposite, so enlightening is not an antonym for pellucid. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Something *strange* is odd or weird. This is different from clear, but not opposite, so strange is not an antonym for pellucid. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

- 8) **B**
deride (*verb*) to mock or jeer.

In paragraph 6, the narrator describes a dream where she has studied for a test yet knows none of the answers. The narrator says, “The professor **derides** me for my poor performance. I watch while she relays my ignorance to the class with comic hilarity.” Since the professor makes fun of the narrator’s ignorance, we can infer that *derides* means mocks or ridicules. The sentence *The professor laughs mockingly at my poor performance* best retains the meaning of the original sentence. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

While the professor does *announce* the narrator’s poor performance to the class, *announce* is a neutral word which does not convey the idea of mocking. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The passage does not provide information to support answer choices **(A)**, **(D)**, or **(E)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

9) **C**

The sentence, *I bite into an apple and all my teeth fall out*, combines the 2 sentences while retaining the original meaning, which is that her teeth fall out after she bites into an apple. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The narrator’s teeth do not necessarily fall out because she bites into the apple. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. The narrator’s teeth do not fall out despite biting into an apple. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Biting into an apple is not something anyone would do *because* his or her teeth had fallen out.

Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. Biting into an apple would not protect teeth from falling out, so it does not make sense to combine the sentences with but. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

10) **C**

deprecate (*verb*): to belittle.

alacrity (*noun*): quickness and willingness.

pugnacious (*adjective*): belligerent.

In paragraph 2, the narrator says of her sister, “my mother **deprecated** her— ‘dumb, ugly, fat.’” Since the mother has called the sister terrible things, we can infer that *deprecated* means to belittle. This has a negative connotation, so it supports **option (I)**. In paragraph 5, the author is describing a recurring dream. She says, “I trip and fall. Another woman, smiling and saying my name, comes with great **alacrity** and offers her hand, but when I reach to grab it, she disappears.” Since the woman is smiling and shouting the narrator’s name, she is encouraging the narrator to take her hand. We can infer from this that *alacrity* is willingness. Willingness to help has a positive connotation, so this eliminates **option (II)**. The narrator describes the terrible relationship she has with her mother and sister. Then she tells the reader about her recurring dreams, which she believes reflect this relationship. In paragraph 7, the narrator says, “I knew that they both reflected the **pugnacious** relationship I shared with my mother and sister.” Since we know the relationship between the women was belligerent, we can infer that *pugnacious* means belligerent. This has a negative connotation, so it supports **option (III)**. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

11) **B**

The mother is described as mean-spirited, calling one daughter names and telling the other that she has no talent. Later, the professor in the narrator's dream also behaves in a mean-spirited way, making fun of the narrator in front of the class. The professor most likely represents the mother. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

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

12) **B**

Near the end of the story, the narrator tells her mother and sister about her dreams during a counseling session, and they tell her they have the same dreams. The narrator says, "Breakthrough? No idea." We can infer from this information that the narrator does not know whether learning that they share the same dreams is a breakthrough in their relationship. This same meaning is clear in the statements, *Was this a breakthrough? I have no idea*. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The sentence, *Breakthrough, no idea* is nonsensical. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. The sentence, *If this was a breakthrough; I have no idea* is grammatically incorrect. A semicolon cannot combine a dependent clause with an independent clause. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The sentences, *I had no idea. This was a breakthrough*, do not retain the meaning of the original sentences. Written this way, the narrator is saying that she had no idea that her mother and sister had the same dreams and learning this information was a breakthrough, which changes the original meaning. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. The sentence, *Breakthrough or not, I have no idea*, tells us that whether or not there was a breakthrough doesn't matter, because the narrator does not have an idea. This also changes the original meaning. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.