

How to identify references that demonstrate understanding of a short story

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Cranes Fly South” by Edward McCourt**

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **30 minutes**

Reminder

In working through the four exercises in Module 4, you should gain confidence in selecting appropriate references to support your understanding of a text. In this part of the analysis you should demonstrate your comprehension of the text through the choice of references and analogies you use to support your interpretation of the reading. This selection of appropriate references should show your understanding of the reading as a whole.

Instructions

In the exercise below, select the references that best indicate your understanding of the text by placing a check mark beside each correct answer and an X beside any incorrect response. There may be more than one appropriate choice in the list. Consult the **Answer key** for the correct response.

Exercise 1

1. **RESPONSE.** Lee is determined that Grandpa see the whooping crane again because he knows what this experience will mean to Grandpa. Lee overcomes his own initial hesitation and reluctance about taking Grandpa out on the cold, bleak day, because he realizes that Grandpa's desire and enthusiasm about seeing the whooping crane again are much more important at the moment than following the rules and guidelines about Grandpa's care that his mother would have wanted him to follow.
 - A. _____ "We're near there, Grandpa," he said. "You can see the slough now."
 - B. _____ "Thanks, boy, for takin' me out. Maybe we'd better go home now. I'm tired – awful tired."
 - C. _____ "What are you doing' to me, boy?" he complained almost tearfully. "You know what Ellen said. I ain't supposed to go out without she's along."

2. **RESPONSE.** The potential extinction of the whooping crane mentioned in the beginning of the story relates to the idea of the importance and appreciation of life. Grandfather knows life is short and that he must see the overwhelming beauty of the crane, just once more, before he dies. In a sense, Grandpa is reliving an important part of his earlier days, 40 years before, when he was a much younger man, because he also knows that his own life is beginning to fade.
 - A. _____ "You can set in the sun all winter and see things beside flatness. Man gets mighty tired of flatness – after eighty years." His voice trailed off.
 - B. _____ "A convulsive shudder twisted the shrunken body in the chair. The old man stood up without laying a hand on the arm rest of the chair, and his voice was loud and strong. 'Boy I've got to! ' "
 - C. _____ Grandpa's determination can be compared to people who are diagnosed with cancer and at that moment decide to live life to the fullest.

3. **RESPONSE.** When Bessie, the old mare, breaks into a startled trot, the reader realizes that she, like Grandpa, has a feeling of revival—a purpose and meaning in life. When Bessie’s gait transforms into a reluctant walk, Lee knows she will succeed in bringing them safely to the slough. This can be compared to the difficulty Grandpa experiences maintaining the energy needed to accomplish his goal. Bessie’s determination mirrors Grandpa’s.
- A. _____ Lee remembered what his mother had said. “Grandpa is a very old man, Lee; he mustn’t ever get excited.”
- B. _____ “A convulsive shudder twisted the shrunken body in the chair. The old man stood up without laying a hand on the arm rest of the chair, and his voice was loud and strong.”
- C. _____ “The old man caught up his stick from beside the chair. Fury chased the cunning from his puckered face.”
4. **RESPONSE.** The mood and tone set by the final events of the story—Grandpa’s delirious raving, the mother’s reaction, the father’s reaction and Lee’s final thoughts—demonstrate to the reader that children have insight into life and death that adults may not necessarily appreciate.
- A. _____ “They stood together, man and boy, held by an enchantment that was not part of the drab, flat world about them.”
- B. _____ I remember when my grandmother died I felt very sad. I didn’t even want to go to her funeral I was so upset.
- C. _____ “But he wasn’t crazy; he knew all right what he was saying. Only no one except Lee understood what he meant. He did not regret what he had done.”
5. **RESPONSE.** Escaping the mundane and bringing joy and excitement into life is important in living life to the fullest.
- A. _____ Whenever I am bored, I go to the video store and rent a movie to pass the time.
- B. _____ “Me, I’m going south too,” Grandpa said. “You can set in the sun all winter and see things besides flatness.”
- C. _____ “They come in the night and you hear a sound like thunder and the sky gits dark—and there’s the Mississippi below and the smell of the sea blown in from a hundred miles away...”

Answer key

1. Quote “C” is the most appropriate quote for this selection. The reference to “Ellen” and the fact that Grandpa shouldn’t be out without her indicates to the reader that Lee is willing to break a few rules to guarantee that Grandpa sees the whooping crane. Quotes “A” and “B” partially support the passage, but do not provide enough supporting detail to back up the statement.
2. Both direct quotes and the personal reference clearly develop the point of discussion. They all connect to Grandpa’s will to accomplish the task. “A,” “B” and “C” are all correct.
3. “A” does not provide enough information to be used as an appropriate supporting quote – it only tells the reader that Grandpa is tired, but does not reveal the surge of energy he experiences. Both “B” and “C” support the passage by describing Grandpa’s new-found energy.
4. “A” and “C” directly and clearly support the quote, but the personal reference is irrelevant. It may be about a grandparent’s death, but it is not pertinent to the text.
5. Both direct quotes, “B” and “C,” support the notion of life being brought to the mundane, but the personal example, “A” does not connect to the theme being illustrated.

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Reminder

In this objective, remember that you want to find pertinent references to demonstrate your understanding of the reading. References that demonstrate an understanding of the reading do not always have to be **direct quotations** from the text, even though the practice exercise below works with direct quotations. References to such aspects of a reading as character and plot, for example, can be quite specific without directly quoting from the story. Your references must always show, however, that you have a clear comprehension of the text.

Instructions

For each critical/analytical paragraph below, locate two valid quotes from the short story that directly support the main point the analytical paragraph conveys.

Exercise 2

Paragraph 1

In the introduction of the story, the reader is introduced to the importance of the whooping crane. First, Grandpa describes the power of their flight, equating the sound and power of their movement with that of thunder or a freight train. The significance of the cranes in the story is further reinforced when Lee convinces his grandfather that he has recently seen one of these mighty birds with the black-tipped wings, even though the species is almost extinct. This exchange between Lee and Grandpa sets the tone of suspense in the story as the reader wonders what role Lee's discovery will play.

Quote 1

Quote 2

Paragraph 2

Grandpa, old and feeble like the mare, Bessie, experiences a feeling of excitement and re-birth as he realizes that a three-mile trip to see a whooping crane once again is within his reach. Grandpa's age and weariness is compared to the horse and buggy, also aged, yet significantly enough, their ages do not hinder their ability to embark on their adventure together.

Quote 1

Quote 2

Paragraph 3

A complication in the plot arises when the grandfather feels he is too cold and tired to continue to the slough where Lee had spotted the crane. Even though Grandpa is ready to give up and succumbs to his weakness and frailty, Lee finds a way to encourage Grandpa to persevere.

Quote 1

Quote 2

Paragraph 4

When the crane flies up into the pale sky, Grandpa is overwhelmed and overjoyed to see this majestic sight once again. The experience is almost spiritual as Grandpa appears to come to youthful life again as he experiences the same joy as he had forty years earlier when he witnessed the same powerful image.

Quote 1

Quote 2

Paragraph 5

Irony is demonstrated in the story when it appears that only Lee understands what his grandfather is muttering while lying on his death bed. The adults misinterpret Grandpa's ranting as delirium – but Lee knows differently. With Grandpa, he experienced joy in the final stage of the cycle of life, and only Lee deeply understands the meaning in Grandpa's final words.

Quote 1

Quote 2

Answer key

The quotes you have selected will not necessarily be the exact quotes listed below, but they should be similar in content.

Paragraph 1

“First you hear a sound far off and you figger it’s thunder—and it gits louder and nearer, and soon it’s like a freight train passin’ right over your head, and if there’s a moon they fly across it and the night gits dark...”

Lee spoke very slowly now, trying hard to be patient. “At Becker’s slough. Honest. I saw the black tips of his wings just as clear!”

Paragraph 2

Grandpa wrinkled up his face. “We got a horse and buggy, ain’t we?”

But Bessie slowed almost at once to a shambling, reluctant walk, and Lee felt a little easier. Maybe the buggy wouldn’t fall to pieces after all.

Paragraph 3

“Thanks, boy, for takin’ me out. Maybe we’d better go home now. I’m tired—awful tired.”

He eased the old man down from the buggy, and slipped a hand under his arm. “Come on, Grandpa,” he urged. “We’ll make it all right.”

Paragraph 4

“Great God in heaven!” The words were a strange, harsh cry of ecstasy and pain. “A whooper, boy – a whooper!”

Again the harsh cry burst from his lips – “Great God in heaven!” the cry that was at once a shout of exultation and a prayer. Then the light in his eyes faded and went out.

Paragraph 5

But he wasn't crazy; he knew all right what he was saying. Only no one except Lee understood what he meant.

He did not regret what he had done. No matter what happened he was glad that Grandpa had seen the whooper.