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Graduate Record Examination GRE Literature in English
Test

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Question: 1

How is this passage organized?

- A. Association of ideas
- B. Main idea and supporting evidence
- C. Chronological order
- D. Cause and effect
- E. Comparison and contrast

Answer: A

Explanation:

Is the best answer because the only consistent underlying pattern of organization in this passage is association, or the process by which one idea triggers another. Choice (B) may be tempting, since the passage does refer to a main idea, but the passage is not organized by stating the main idea first and presenting supporting evidence. Answer (C), chronological order, is not the strongest choice because the passage seems to recount events and impressions from multiple occasions, and the reader is not told which came first and which after. Choice (D), cause and effect, most often isolates a single cause and looks at its effects one-by-one. This passage, however, does not evidence a pattern of cause and effect. Choice (E), comparison and contrast, looks at the similarities and differences of two things, but this passage does not do so.

Questions 2 - 6 pertain to the following passage:

Katherine Mansfield, "Mrs. Brill"

The band had been having a rest. Now they started again. And what they played was warm, sunny, yet there was just a faint chill—a something, what was it?—not sadness—no, not sadness—a something that made you want to sing. The tune lifted, lifted, the light shone; and it seemed to Miss Brill that in another moment all of them, all the whole company, would begin singing. The young ones, the laughing ones who were moving together, they would begin, and the men's voices, very resolute and brave, would join them. And then she too, she too, and the others on the benches—they would come in with a kind of accompaniment—something low, that scarcely rose or fell, something so beautiful—moving.... And Miss Brill's eyes filled with tears and she looked smiling at all the other members of the company. Yes, we understand, we understand, she thought—though what they understood she didn't know.

Just at that moment a boy and girl came and sat down where the old couple had been. They were beautifully dressed; they were in love. The hero and heroine, of course, just arrived from his father's yacht. And still soundlessly singing, still with that trembling smile, Miss Brill prepared to listen.

"No, not now," said the girl. "Not here, I can't."

"But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there?" asked the boy. "Why

does she come here at all—who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?"

"It's her fu-fur which is so funny," giggled the girl. "It's exactly like a fried whiting."

"Ah, be off with you!" said the boy in an angry whisper. Then: "Tell me, ma petite chere—"

"No, not here," said the girl. "Not yet."

On her way home she usually bought a slice of honey cake at the baker's. It was her Sunday treat. Sometimes there was an almond in her slice, sometimes not. It made a great difference. If there was an almond it was like carrying home a tiny present—a surprise—something that might very well not have been there. She hurried on the almond Sundays and struck the match for the kettle in quite a dashing way.

But to-day she passed the baker's by, climbed the stairs, went into the little dark room—her room like a cupboard—and sat down on the red eiderdown. She sat there for a long time. The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the neck let quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying.

Question: 2

Who is the "old thing" the boy refers to?

- A. The girl
- B. The band members
- C. Mrs. Brill
- D. The baker
- E. A cat

Answer: C

Explanation:

The boy refers to Mrs. Brill as an "old thing." Choice (A) is incorrect because the context of the quotation makes it clear that the boy is speaking to the girl about the "old thing." so he cannot be referring to the girl. Choice (B), the band members, is also improbable. Choice (D) is incorrect because the baker is not present during the scene in the park. Choice (E) is incorrect because at no point is a cat mentioned.

Question: 3

Which of the following statements best characterizes Mrs. Brill at the beginning of the passage?

- A. She feels a connection with the other people on the benches
- B. She feels disoriented
- C. She feels frustrated
- D. She feels hurt
- E. She waits impatiently

Answer: A

Explanation:

Mrs. Brill felt connected to the other people on the benches. The narrator describes Mrs. Brill's thoughts, saying, "Yes, we understand, we understand, she thought—though what they understood she didn't know." From this description of Mrs. Brill's thoughts, the reader can sense her feeling of unity with the other people in the park. The other choices are incorrect because the narrator does not indicate any feelings of disorientation, frustration, hurt, or impatience at the beginning of the passage.

Question: 4

Which of the following statements best characterizes Mrs. Brill at the end of the passage?

- A. She was furious
- B. She was hurt
- C. She felt nervous and agitated
- D. She felt cheerful
- E. She was short-tempered

Answer: B

Explanation:

Though the narrator does not explicitly state Mrs. Brill's feelings, the most likely interpretation is choice (B). We can deduce that the bogs harsh words at the park must have hurt her. We know that she skips her usual stop at the baker's, she sits silently for a long time in her chair, and she thinks she hears the sound of something crying inside a box. Each of these details implies that she was hurt by the bogs comment. None of the other interpretations is supported by the passage: it gives no indication that she feels furious, nervous, cheerful, or short-tempered.

Question: 5

What is the setting of the first part of this passage?

- A. In a park
- B. On a boat
- C. In a snowstorm
- D. At a movie theater
- E. In a rural area

Answer: A

Explanation:

The narrator describes a band and benches, from which we can deduce that Mrs. Brill sits in a park. No evidence from the passage supports the remaining choices.

Question: 6

In what point of view is this passage written in?

- A. Third person limited omniscience
- B. First person
- C. Omniscient narrator
- D. Objective narrator
- E. Second person

Answer: A

Explanation:

The passage refers to Mrs. Brill in the third person, yet the narrator has access to her thoughts. The narrator does not have access to the thoughts of any other characters, which makes third person limited omniscience the best choice for point of view. Choice (B), first person, is incorrect because Mrs. Brill does not narrate the passage from her own perspective, referring to herself as "I." Choice (C) is incorrect because "omniscient narrator" implies that the narrator can read the thoughts of all characters, yet this narrator can read only Mrs. Brill's thoughts. Choice (D) is incorrect because an objective narrator cannot penetrate the thoughts of any of the characters, but the narrator of this story has access to Mrs. Brill's thoughts. Choice (E), second person, is incorrect; if the passage were written in second person, it would refer to the characters as "you."

Questions 7 - 12 pertain to the following passage:

John Donne, "Death be not proud"

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

Question: 7

What form does this poem use?

- A. Villanelle

- B. Sonnet
- C. Epic
- D. Sestina
- E. Haiku

Answer: B

Explanation:

Is the best answer because "Death be not proud" is a fourteen-line poem with a strong sense of meter and rhyme, which are characteristics of a sonnet form. Choice (B), villanelle, is incorrect because a villanelle has stanzas with repeating lines at the end of each stanza. Choice (C), epic, is incorrect because an epic is a long work, commonly composed in rhymed heroic couplets. Choice (D), sestina, is incorrect because a sestina has six-line stanzas, and each one repeats the same six words, one at the end of each line. Choice (E), haiku, is not the best choice because it is a short poetic form with three lines and a fixed number of syllables.

Question: 8

To whom is this poem addressed?

- A. To death
- B. To the speaker's lover
- C. To God
- D. To eternity
- E. To the muses

Answer: A

Explanation:

Is the best answer because the poem speaks directly to death; see, for example, the final line: "death, thou shalt die." "Thou" is a pronoun of direct address, and it clearly refers to "death." None of the other answers can be supported with examples from the text.

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