

ACT Reading Practice Questions

After reading the passage, choose the best answer to each question. You may refer to the passage as often as necessary. Check out these [ACT reading strategies](#).

This passage is adapted from the novel *A Passage to India* by Aditi C. Thakur (©2003 by Aditi Thakur).

I'm shivering in the air conditioning. I've never gotten used to the swirl of chilled air in the apartment. I'd like to open the window, to welcome in the hot bright yellow sun, but the superintendent has painted all the building's windows (5) shut for some unexplained reason.

Ramesh won't be home from the university for several hours, I know. The project he's working on is keeping him at the lab until later in the evenings these days. Still shivering, I mull the choices for our evening meal, scanning the vegetables, (10) herbs, and spices I collected at the specialty food market this morning. Even after five years in the United States, I find I still seek the patterns of our life in India, including my daily morning visits to the market for the day's food shopping.

(15) As I pore over the curled turmeric roots and the bright orange and red mangoes—both of which appeared in the market's bins today for the first time—I remember the first time I went to an American-style supermarket. Intimidated by the unfamiliar streets and landmarks of our new city, Ramesh (20) and I had spent the first month of our American life eating all our meals at restaurants within walking distance of the flat. Ramesh had concocted his lunch from items purchased at the university's "convenience store"; he joked that convenience was really the only desirable thing the shop offered. Once we (25) had exhausted the menus at each of the nearby restaurants, I promised that I would brave the supermarket so we could both have a taste of the home we'd been aching for.

Naturally—or rather, unnaturally—the store was cold, and I was glad I had decided to bring along my *dupatta* to (30) shield my otherwise bare shoulders.

At first, the enormous quantity of goods and the wildly varied colors everywhere I looked were impressive. But then I noticed that the produce section—it seemed surprisingly tucked away on the end farthest from the doors, as if the store (35) were somehow ashamed of it—lacked items we considered favorites or even staples: no dried lentils or chickpeas, no cherimoyas or pomegranates. I wandered up and down the aisles, wondering at the slabs of meat sealed within cocoons of plastic, and at the seemingly infinite rows of boxes, (40) each of which somehow housed "dinner for the whole family." Unable after a time to focus on the boxes' labels, I turned to a gangly, uniformed teenager who was pretending to straighten the ginger ale bottles on the bottom shelf.

"Excuse me, please, I am wondering whether you could (45) help me find..." I began.

He glanced up at me, noting my *sari* with an eye that felt at once piercing and uncritical. "Aisle 7, on the right," he squeaked, with a wide, unexpectedly amiable grin.

My irritation at having been so easily categorized faded (50) somewhat at discovering two shelves' worth of jars of chutneys and mixes, including one imported tandoor paste that had been one of our favorites back in India. But as I unsteadily but successfully navigated the checkout lines and paid for my few, familiar products, I observed that the supermarket's (55) fluorescent ceiling bulbs effectively bleached out the shelves' contents. The bottles and boxes no longer seemed exotic or glamorous. It seemed to me that no matter how insistently the labels tried to draw attention to the wonders within their containers, the vividness of their colors would inevitably (60) appear flat and lifeless under the homogenizing light.

I still go to the supermarket sometimes, but recently a colleague of Ramesh's recommended that we go to the outskirts of the city to shop at a new Indian market, where I went this morning. The old woman who manages the places (65) moves quickly from stall to stall, urging customers to sample pieces of fruit or explaining how adding one more ingredient will perfect the planned dish. She reminds me, almost painfully, of my grandmother, who was similarly convinced that she could make others' lives better through shared food or (70) wisdom—my grandmother, to whose image I've often come back whenever I've needed consolation or company.

I trace my finger along the beige granite countertop, as if conjuring up the rough wooden surface in my grandmother's kitchen. As a child, I'd believed the dark wood had retained (75) every nick from every vegetable chopped, and every stain from every fruit that had yielded its sticky sweetness to my grandmother's swift, sure knife. I think of the fourteen distinct spices, each with its own grainy texture and subtle but memorable color, that she pounded into dust with her mortar (80) and pestle. Then I recall the grayish, unfriendly curry powder I'd seen in the American supermarket, so unlike the familiar result of my grandmother's efforts. I sigh.

I don't really need to begin to prepare our dinner yet. I've learned to combine the specialty market's fresh produce with (85) the supermarket's "quick prep" sauces and pastes, so making dinner isn't the all-day task it often was for my grandmother and even my mother. Even so, I decide to ward off the cold by shrugging on a sweatshirt embossed with the university's logo, and I set myself to work.

1. It can most reasonably be inferred from the passage that the narrator regards her grandmother as:

- (A) comforting.
- (B) frightening.
- (C) foolish.
- (D) out of touch.

[+] [See the Answer](#)

2. The narrator refers to the supermarket's "fluorescent ceiling bulbs" (line 55) in order to:

- (A) draw a contrast between the supermarket and the outdoor markets she remembers from India.
- (B) explain how her perception of the store's offerings had changed.
- (C) suggest one reason that the supermarket terrified her.
- (D) describe why she was able to see the fruits and vegetables more clearly.

[+] [See the Answer](#)

3. As it is used in line 80 the word *unfriendly* most nearly suggests that:

- (A) the narrator thinks that the clerk doesn't want her to buy the curry powder.
- (B) the narrator considers this curry powder to be different from the curry powder with which she is familiar.
- (C) the narrator doesn't like the ingredients in the curry powder.
- (D) the curry powder has been imported from another country.

[+] [See the Answer](#)