

## “Clean Water Act”

Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

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



Josiah Hodge collapsed in a seat at the Café du Monde restaurant in New Orleans. He put his head in his hands and let out a deep sigh.

Josiah had come to New Orleans to do a public service. He had come up with the idea to develop a play for children affected by Hurricane Katrina, and he had secured a modest grant from the government to do so. But he hadn't accounted for the major **hindrance** he would face: blistering heat in August with no clean water to drink.

Buying water for his crew of 38 volunteers for weeks on end would be far too expensive to do on his *shoestring budget*, and he had no one to turn to on such short notice for help. Josiah feared he would have to close up the production and return home.

As he sipped on a glass of soda, he found it ironic that water, which flooded this city and left many residents without homes or hope, would now be his downfall as he tried to spread the joy of theater to its children.

“Hello, sir,” a man at the table next to him said. “What brings you to New Orleans?”

Josiah shook his head. Later, he would find it amusing that this man knew just by looking that Josiah was not a local. For now, he was just tired and **irritated**.

“Look, I don't mean to be rude, but I've had a bad day,” Josiah said. “I don't much feel like talking.”

“What brings you to town?” the man said, pleasantly.

Josiah **grudgingly** talked a bit about his work as a theater director in Manhattan and his dream to bring a top-flight play to the children of New Orleans.

The next day, as Josiah left a blazing hot outdoor studio, he noticed the same man from the restaurant, parked on the street. A shock of fluffy white hair framed his dark face, making him look almost saintly.

“Look, sir, what do you want?”

“To help.”

“How?”

“What do you need?”

“What I really need is clean water. That’s all I need.” Josiah turned and walked away. He had been rude, he knew, but he was so frustrated by this problem.

When he arrived back at his hotel room that evening, the front desk clerk handed Josiah an unmarked envelope. Inside was a check for \$2,000. The memo line read, “For water.”

Josiah was flabbergasted. Who was this man?

As he pondered his good fortune, the phone rang in his hotel room.

“Will that get you some water?” a voice said on the other end.

“Why, yes, yes it will,” Josiah said. “Thank you so much for your generosity.”

“My wife and I would like to take you to dinner.”

Josiah could not refuse! This man was his savior, and his curiosity had gotten the best of him. Who was this benefactor?

At dinner, Etienne Fanchon and his wife, Adelaide, formally introduced themselves. Mr. Fanchon never graduated from high school, but inherited 5 acres of land from his father upon his death. For years, Mr. Fanchon grew cucumbers on the land, barely making a living. One day, a neighbor offered Fanchon a bag of money if Mr. Fanchon would let him bury three old trucks at the back of his property.

Mr. Fanchon took the bag and agreed. Later, he could not believe how much money was in the bag. “And just for letting him bury some trucks!”

The next morning, Mr. Fanchon said, he woke up, picked all the cucumbers off his land, and converted the 5 acres into a waste management facility. He is now one of New Orleans’ few multimillionaires.

“So, I have all this money now and live to help others,” said Mr. Fanchon. “That is why I’ve helped you.”

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### Questions:

**1)** Which best describes Josiah's mood at the beginning of this passage?

- A.** tired and vindictive
- B.** angry and conniving
- C.** pensive and high-strung
- D.** frustrated and overwhelmed

**2)** Which of the following best describes Josiah's mood after he gets the check?

- A.** surprised and curious
- B.** confused and questioning
- C.** excited and nervous
- D.** suspicious and cautious

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Questions (continued):

- 3) The climax of this story happens when
- A. Josiah opens the envelope
  - B. Mr. Fanchon shows up at the studio
  - C. Mr. Fanchon describes how he got so rich
  - D. Josiah accepts Mr. Fanchon's invitation to dinner

- 4) In the middle of the story, the author writes, "A shock of fluffy white hair framed his dark face, making him look almost saintly." Which of the following literary devices is used in this quotation?

- A. euphemism, characterized by the replacement of a harsh or direct word or phrase with a vague or milder word or phrase
- B. allegory, characterized by an extended metaphor in which concrete things represent abstract ideas
- C. foreshadowing, characterized by hinting at what is to come
- D. satire, characterized by the making fun of a human flaw or weakness to make a larger point

- 5) As used in the beginning of the story, which is the best antonym for **hindrance**?

- A. assistance
- B. obstacle
- C. profit
- D. friend

- 6) In paragraph 3, the author uses the term "shoestring budget." This means to

- A. accept help when it is offered
- B. have to rely on luck
- C. operate with little money
- D. have extreme patience

- 7) As used in the beginning of the story, which is the best antonym for **irritated**?

- A. acclimated
- B. bashful
- C. melancholy
- D. pacified

- 8) What lesson does Josiah learn in this passage?

- A. It is okay to be somewhat rude on first meeting someone.
- B. Help can come from the most unlikely of places.
- C. Frustration can often cloud one's judgment.
- D. Theater programs are an excellent way to help those in need.

Questions (continued):

- 9) Why does Josiah **grudgingly** talk to Mr. Fanchon in the Cafe du Monde?
- A. He is hungry.
- B. He is irritated and does not feel like being bothered.
- C. He decided conversation might make him feel better.
- D. He wanted to spread the word about his theater program.
- 10) In this passage, how are Josiah and Mr. Fanchon alike?
- A. Both are patient.
- B. Both lack ambition.
- C. Both are quick to show emotion.
- D. Both have philanthropic interests.

What does it mean to be *altruistic*? Are you an *altruist*? Explain.

[illegible]

## Answers and Explanations

1) **D**

At the beginning of the story, we learn that Josiah wants to do a public service project but cannot complete it, because it is extremely hot out and he cannot afford to provide water to the volunteers. To be *overwhelmed* by something is to be taken over by it. Since Josiah does not know how to solve his problem, he is overwhelmed by it. The story says, "As he sipped on a glass of soda, he found it ironic that water, which flooded this city and left many residents without homes or hope, would now be his downfall as he tried to spread the joy of theater to its children." Josiah feels the lack of water will be his downfall and ruin his plans. This feeling that his plans will not work out makes him frustrated. Thus Josiah is overwhelmed and frustrated. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

*Vindictive* is seeking revenge. While Josiah may be tired from trying to figure out what to do, he is not seeking revenge. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect.

*Conniving* means to be secretly plotting something. Josiah is not planning anything in secret. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. To be *pensive* is to be deep in thought, and to be *high-strung* is to be extremely nervous and emotional. While Josiah is thinking about his problem, he is not extremely nervous and emotional. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

2) **A**

Josiah does not know what to do. He thinks that he will not be able to put on the play. After Josiah received the check, the author writes in paragraph 17 that he "was flabbergasted." He wonders, "Who was this man?" Since the money was unexpected, and it leaves Josiah "flabbergasted," we can understand that Josiah is surprised after receiving the check. Since Josiah wonders about the man who left the check, Josiah is curious. Josiah is surprised and curious. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

Josiah wonders about the man, but he understands what has happened, so he is not confused. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Josiah may be excited that he will now be able to continue work on the play, but he is not nervous.

Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Josiah is not cautious. He is happy about being able to continue his work. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

3) **A**

The *climax* of the story is the culminating moment or resolution to the conflict. This story begins with Josiah being very upset because he cannot provide his volunteers with water. He is so upset that tries to avoid a man who attempts to engage him in conversation. Then he sees the same man the next day and brushes him off again. Just when it seems that there is nothing that Josiah can do to save the play, an unmarked envelope with a \$2000 check arrives. The conflict is resolved by Josiah receiving money from the man. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

The conflict is not resolved by Mr. Fanchon showing up at the studio.

Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Mr. Fanchon describes how he became rich after

the conflict in the story is resolved. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Again, the real conflict, the lack of money for water, is resolved when Josiah receives the envelope. This means he accepts Mr. Fanchon's invitation after the story's climax. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

4) **C**

In paragraph 10, the author describes Mr. Fanchon: "A shock of fluffy white hair framed his dark face, making him look almost saintly." Later in the story, Mr. Fanchon helps Josiah and saves the theater production by donating money. Giving money to a total stranger in order to do something good might be described as saintly. Since Mr. Fanchon was described as looking saintly and then later does something saintly, we can understand that the author is using foreshadowing. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

A euphemism requires a milder word substituted for a harsher or more offensive word. The description of Mr. Fanchon as saintly does not use a milder, indirect word in place of a more offensive word. Therefore **(A)** is not the best answer. An allegory is an extended metaphor which employs concrete symbols to stand for abstract concepts. The description of Mr. Fanchon as saintly does not consist of an extended metaphor and includes no symbolism. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Describing Mr. Fanchon as saintly does not make fun of a flaw or weakness. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

5) **A**

**hindrance** (*noun*): something that impedes or prevents one from doing something; obstacle.

In paragraph 2, the author writes that Josiah "hadn't accounted for the major hindrance he would face: blistering heat in August with no clean water to drink." Then, we learn that Josiah cannot afford to buy water for his volunteers, and without the water there will be no theater production for the children. Since the lack of clean water makes it impossible to continue the production, the lack of water prevents Josiah from accomplishing his goal. We can understand from this information that a *hindrance* is something that prevents someone from accomplishing a goal or task. *Assistance* is help. Helping someone accomplish something is the opposite of preventing someone from accomplishing something, so assistance is an antonym for hindrance. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

An *obstacle* is something that blocks or prevents. This is similar to a hindrance. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. A *profit* is the amount someone gains on a business venture. While this is different than keeping someone from accomplishing something, it is not opposite, so a profit is not an antonym for a hindrance. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. A *friend* is someone who you are on good terms with or are affectionate toward. While a friend may be helpful, this is not necessarily an antonym for hindrance. **(D)** is incorrect.

6) **C**

In paragraph 3, the author writes, "Buying water for his crew of 38 volunteers for weeks on end would be far too expensive to do on his shoestring budget,

and he had no one to turn to on such short notice for help.” Since the budget left Josiah without enough money to buy water, the budget must be small. We can understand from this information that doing something on a *shoestring budget* means doing something with little money. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

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

- 7) **D**  
**irritated** (*adjective*): bothered or annoyed.

Josiah is frustrated because he does not have enough money to buy water for his volunteers. In paragraph 5, a man tries to strike up a conversation with him. The author writes, “Josiah shook his head. Later, he would find it amusing that this man knew, just by looking, that Josiah was not a local. For now, he was just tired and irritated.” After that, Josiah tries to avoid talking to the man. Since Josiah is tired, frustrated, and doesn’t want to talk, we can understand that he is feeling bothered by the situation. This helps us understand that *irritated* means bothered. *Pacified* means soothed or appeased. Bothered is the opposite of soothed, so pacified is an antonym for irritated. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

*Acclimated* means grown used to. While this is different than being bothered, it is not opposite, so acclimated is not an antonym for irritated. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Bashful* is shy. Feeling shy is different than feeling bothered, but not opposite. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Melancholy* means sad. One can feel both sad and bothered, so melancholy is not an antonym for irritated. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

- 8) **B**  
In this story, Josiah needs money to do something good for the community. He gets frustrated and doesn’t want to waste time chatting with an old man. Although Josiah was not expecting it, the man turns out to be the person who helps him. Josiah learns that help can come from unexpected places. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

Josiah is rude when he first meets Mr. Fanchon, but Josiah does not learn that it is okay to be rude. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. While Josiah is frustrated in the story, his frustration does not lead him to make poor decisions. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. Josiah is putting on a theater production because he wants to help children affected by a catastrophe. However, he does not learn this over the course of the passage. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

- 9) **B**  
In the middle of the story, Josiah is frustrated because he can’t buy water for the volunteers. In paragraph 6, the author writes, “For now, he was just tired and irritated.” Although Josiah tries to avoid Mr. Fanchon, Mr. Fanchon continues to talk to Josiah. Then, in paragraph 9, the author writes, “Josiah grudgingly talked a bit about his work as a theater director in Manhattan and his dream to bring a top flight play to the children of New

Orleans.” We can understand from this information that Josiah did not want to talk to Mr. Fanchon because he felt tired and irritated. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

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

10)**D**

Josiah is working to produce a play for children affected by a hurricane. Mr. Fanchon uses his money to help people when he sees that they need it. What both of the men have in common is that they are trying to help others. *Philanthropic* interests are interests that benefit others. Both men have philanthropic interests. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

While Mr. Fanchon may be patient, Josiah is not. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Both men are trying to accomplish good things, so they are both ambitious. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Neither man is quick to show emotion in the passage. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.