

Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program

TCAP

English Language Arts Grade 6 Item Release



Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

Excerpt from “The Town Underground”

by Claudia Cangilla McAdam

The New Colorado Prospecting Syndicate had been searching for gold in the desert of South Australia for about a month.

- 1 . . . a curtain of darkness descended on the camp, and still Willie had not returned. . .but the men had.
- 2 “Where is he?” his father asked. . . . He was torn between being angry at his son and being worried about him. . . .
- 3 The men barely heard it at first. A soft clatter of pebbles, perhaps. Or. . . footsteps? It was Willie, returning to camp with a big smile on his face.
- 4 “Where have you — ” Mr. Hutchison stopped in midsentence.
- 5 Grinning, Willie tossed his father a half-full sugar bag. “Have a look at that, Dad,” he said. “I think you’ll find some good stuff there. . . .” His grin spread farther across his face. “There’s enough for us. . . for at least a fortnight.”
- 6 Loosening the drawstring of the sugar bag, Mr. Hutchison let the contents tumble out. But it wasn’t sugar that fell onto the ground. Opals! They were opals! The iridescent gemstones shimmered in the camp’s faint light. Willie had spent the day digging up the gems. He had made the first discovery in an area that would become the largest supplier of opals in the world.
- 7 Word spread fast, and within months, experienced opal miners were on the field. But because the area was so remote, only a handful of men worked it during the next few years. In 1919. . .the opal rush was on. Hundreds of people flocked to the area to find their fortunes.
- 8 Lack of housing was a big problem, though. There were no trees to provide lumber for building materials. Water was too scarce to use to make mud bricks, and most of the water had to be carted in from long distances. The climate was brutal, with summer temperatures soaring to 120°F or hotter! But the men. . .knew what to do. They began to live underground in dugouts. . . .
- 9 The Australian Aborigines called the field “*kupa piti*,” commonly assumed to mean “white man in a hole.” The English-speaking miners mispronounced the words, giving the area its name: “Coober Pedy.”
- 10 Today, Coober Pedy is home to about 3,500 people. This virtually waterless desert town is one of the most multicultural communities in Australia: its

residents represent over 45 nationalities. The landscape resembles the surface of the moon. Generation after generation of miners dug holes in the ground, looking for opals and kicking up piles of dirt.

- 11 Because of this, the sun-scorched desert area around Coober Pedy is filled with both craters and pyramid-shaped hills, giving the whole place a rather weird — almost otherworldly — appearance. . . .
- 12 When the miners were finished digging, they simply abandoned those craters, which still dot the land. Today there are about 250,000 mine shafts in the area. People have to be careful when walking around so that they don't tumble down one. But some of the holes burrowed into the sides of hills have a different purpose. Over half the people in Coober Pedy live underground in dugouts. The homes are made by tunneling into ridges. They're caves, really, but not at all like what you might imagine.
- 13 The dugouts can be spacious and well furnished. (Some even have indoor swimming pools!) Each dugout has separate rooms with electricity and piped-in water. This water comes from an underground source about 15 miles north of town. The water has to be treated to make it clean, which makes it more expensive than water in big cities. But money is saved on heating and air conditioning because there isn't any! Living under the earth keeps the temperature around a comfortable 75°F year round.
- 14 People who want to build underground homes have to follow a variety of safety guidelines. The walls must be at least five feet thick, and each room has to have its own vent shaft for fresh air and be supplied with artificial light. The dugout dwellings must provide at least two exits, 30 feet apart. Owners need to have their underground homes inspected regularly, and sealant must be applied to the walls and ceilings to prevent the surface from wearing away.
- 15 The cost for digging an underground home is about 25 percent less expensive than building aboveground houses. . . . And construction of these dugouts is much faster, too: boring machines can dig a four-bedroom residence in just a day!
- 16 Because it has one of the most important opal fields in the world, tourists come to Coober Pedy. Many of them enjoy staying at a cave hotel or visiting one of several underground churches. . . . Golfers can play at the local golf course, which doesn't have a blade of grass on it. The greens are oiled sand, and players carry a piece of Astroturf with them that they use to tee off. . . .
- 17 Although the place and some of the people are different from what you might be used to, in many ways, life in this Australian desert town is very much like where you live. Kids go to school, play sports, and watch movies. The town has stores, a hospital, tennis courts, restaurants, and other businesses. But the most

important industry in Coober Pedy is still opal mining — underground, like almost everything else, of course!

- 18 Oh yes, and the main street in Coober Pedy? It's called Hutchison Street, named after the boy who first discovered opals there, inadvertently bringing people from all over the world to build the town underground.

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- 00.** What are **two** ways the phrase “a curtain of darkness” in paragraph 1 impacts meaning in the passage?
- A.** The words highlight the depth of affection Willie’s father has for his son.
 - B.** The words highlight that the campers were unable to rest comfortably at night.
 - C.** The words help explain why the men heard Willie’s approach before they saw him.
 - D.** The words suggest the campers were fearful so far from the city.
 - E.** The words help explain why Willie’s father is so worried.

- 00.** Which **two** details from the passage **best** support the idea that mining in South Australia in the early 1900s was challenging?
- A.** “A soft clatter of pebbles” (paragraph 3)
 - B.** “only a handful of men worked” (paragraph 7)
 - C.** “Lack of housing was a big problem” (paragraph 8)
 - D.** “The climate was brutal” (paragraph 8)
 - E.** “abandoned those craters” (paragraph 12)

- 00.** The following item has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.

Part A

What is the meaning of the word spacious in paragraph 13?

- A.** cool
- B.** fancy
- C.** temporary
- D.** large

Part B

Which **two** sentences from paragraph 13 **best** help the reader determine the meaning of spacious?

- A.** “(Some even have indoor swimming pools!)”
- B.** “Each dugout has separate rooms with electricity and piped-in water.”
- C.** “This water comes from an underground source about 15 miles north of town.”
- D.** “But money is saved on heating and air conditioning because there isn’t any!”
- E.** “Living under the earth keeps the temperature around a comfortable 75°F year round.”

- 00.** How do paragraphs 1–7 **mainly** contribute to the overall structure of the passage?
- A.** They introduce the idea that Coober Pedy was already famous for another valuable resource before becoming famous for opals.
 - B.** They introduce the remoteness of the prospecting camps in Coober Pedy.
 - C.** They introduce the methods used to mine in the sandy desert around Coober Pedy.
 - D.** They introduce the event that led to Coober Pedy becoming famous for opals.

- 00.** What is the meaning of boring as it is used in paragraph 15?
- A.** expanding
 - B.** transporting
 - C.** drilling
 - D.** sealing

00. Which inference is **best** supported by paragraphs 10–12?
- A. Opal prospectors cared little for the land once they were finished with their work.
 - B. Many of the terms used by the townspeople are based on the language of those who moved to the area to search for opals.
 - C. Many of the people who live in Coober Pedy come from generations of opal miners.
 - D. Australian Aborigines are disappointed by the way settlers from all over the world have treated the native landscape.

- 00.** How does paragraph 18 contribute to the overall structure of the passage?
- A.** It mentions the existence of a main street to show that the town has grown over time.
 - B.** It shows that the boy mentioned in the first few paragraphs is important to the history of the town.
 - C.** It develops the idea that opals were discovered accidentally, as hinted at in the first paragraph.
 - D.** It emphasizes the idea that the town initially became famous for opals, but now underground living is what makes it special.

- 00.** Which **two** factors caused the people who moved to Coober Pedy to build underground?
- A.** There was a need to escape from the heat.
 - B.** They needed protection from local tribes.
 - C.** The landscape was unattractive to look at.
 - D.** There was limited space where they were mining.
 - E.** There was a lack of wood in the area.

00. The following item has two parts. Answer Part A and then answer Part B.

Part A

What is the author's **main** purpose in writing the passage?

- A. to establish an interesting town in Australia as an enjoyable place to visit
- B. to teach creative ways to adapt to and overcome challenges in the environment
- C. to inspire the reader with a story of a boy who made an interesting discovery
- D. to describe a unique town in Australia and provide information about its history

Part B

Which quotation from the passage **best** illustrates this purpose?

- A. "'Have a look at that, Dad,' he said. 'I think you'll find some good stuff there. . . .'" (paragraph 5)
- B. "Generation after generation of miners dug holes in the ground, looking for opals and kicking up piles of dirt." (paragraph 10)
- C. ". . . enjoy staying at a cave hotel or visiting one of several underground churches. . . ." (paragraph 16)
- D. ". . . named after the boy who first discovered opals there, inadvertently bringing people from all over the world to build the town underground." (paragraph 18)

00. Which statement is the **best** summary of the passage?

- A. A boy unexpectedly discovered opals in an Australian desert, and soon people rushed to the area to get rich and build underground houses.
- B. A town in Australia has been built mostly underground, and it provides shelter to the miners who created thousands of holes as they dug for opals.
- C. A town in Australia is considered unique because it has an interesting beginning, and its landscape looks like the surface of the moon.
- D. The discovery of opals led to the creation of a town in Australia, and it had to be underground because of the conditions of the environment.

Metadata- English

Passage

Passage UIN	Grade	Passage Title	Lexile Level	Word Count
TN0059102	6	from "The Town Underground"	890L	880

Metadata Definitions:

Passage UIN	Unique letter/number code used to identify the passage(s) that go with this item.
Grade	Grade level or Course.
Passage Title	Title of the passage(s) associated with this item.
Lexile Level	Readability level for passage.
Word Count	Count of words in the passage.

Items

Page Number	UIN	Grade	Item Type	Key	DOK	TN Standards
4	TN0071972	6	MS	C,E	2	6.RI.CS.4
5	TN0071993	6	MS	C,D	2	6.RI.KID.1
6	TN0072015	6	Composite	D; A,B	2	6.L.VAU.4a
7	TN0071977	6	MC	D	2	6.RI.CS.5
8	TN0071976	6	MC	C	2	6.L.VAU.4a
9	TN0071979	6	MC	A	2	6.RI.KID.1
10	TN0071988	6	MC	B	2	6.RI.CS.5
11	TN0071996	6	MS	A,E	2	6.RI.KID.1
12	TN0072000	6	Composite	D; D	3	6.RI.CS.6
13	TN0071995	6	MC	D	2	6.RI.KID.2

Metadata Definitions:

UIN	Unique letter/number code used to identify the item.
Grade	Grade level or Course.
Item Type	Indicates the type of item. MC= Multiple Choice; MS= Multiple Select
Key	Correct answer. This may be blank for constructed response items where students write or type their responses.