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• Passage 3 Level 6

Passage

When you imagine the desert, you probably think of a very hot place covered with sand. Although this is a good description for many deserts, Earth's largest desert is actually a very cold place covered with ice: Antarctica.

In order for an area to be considered a desert, it must receive very little rainfall. More specifically, it must receive an average of less than ten inches of precipitation—which can be rain, sleet, hail, or snow—on the ground every year. Antarctica, the coldest place on earth, has an average temperature that usually falls below the freezing point. And because cold air holds less moisture than warm air, the air in Antarctica does not hold much moisture at all. This is evident in the low precipitation statistics recorded for Antarctica. For example, the central part of Antarctica receives an average of less than 2 inches of snow every year. The coastline of Antarctica receives a little bit more—between seven and eight inches a year. Because Antarctica gets so little precipitation every year, it is considered a desert.

When precipitation falls in hot deserts, it quickly evaporates back into the atmosphere. The air over Antarctica is too cold to hold water vapor, so there is very little evaporation. Due to this low rate of evaporation, most of the snow that falls to the ground remains there permanently, eventually building up into thick ice sheets. Any snow that does not freeze into ice sheets becomes caught up in the strong winds that constantly blow over Antarctica. These snow-filled winds can make it look as if it is snowing. Even though snowfall is very rare there, blizzards are actually very common on Antarctica.

Questions

1) The main purpose of paragraph 1 is to

   A. accept a conclusion
   B. introduce an argument
   C. provide a brief history
   D. deny a common belief

2) The best title for this passage would be

   A. Earth's Many Deserts
   B. Antarctica: The Coldest Place on Earth
   C. A Desert of Ice
   D. Unusual Blizzards

3) Africa's Sahara Desert is the second-largest desert on earth. Based on the information in the passage, what characteristic must the Sahara share with Antarctica?

   A. low temperatures
   B. high temperatures
   C. frequent blizzards
   D. low precipitation

4) As used in paragraph 2, which is the best definition for **precipitation**?

   A. moisture in the air that falls to the ground
   B. any type of weather event
   C. weather events that only happen in very cold areas
   D. a blizzard that occurs in areas with limited snowfall

5) In paragraph 2 the author writes, "And because cold air holds less moisture than warm air, the air in Antarctica does not hold much moisture at all." Using this information, it can be understood that

   A. air in Africa holds more moisture than the air in Antarctica
   B. air surrounding a tropical island holds less moisture than the air in Antarctica
   C. air in the second floor of a house is typically warmer than air on the first floor
   D. air at the mountains is typically colder than the air at the beach

6) According to the final paragraph, any snow that falls over Antarctica

   I. becomes part of the Antarctic ice sheet
   II. is blown around by strong winds
   III. evaporates back into the atmosphere

   A. I only
   B. I and II only
   C. II and III only
   D. I, II, and III

7) Based on the information in the final paragraph, it can be understood that blizzards in Antarctica are mainly the result of

   A. freezing cold temperatures
   B. large amounts of snowfall
   C. low amounts of precipitation
   D. strong winds

Answers and Explanations

1) **D**
In paragraph 1 the author writes, "When you imagine the desert, you probably think of a very hot place covered with sand." This lets us know that the author thinks that deserts are commonly believed to be very hot places covered with sand. However, as the author continues to explain, this is not actually the case, stating "Many other deserts, like Antarctica, are just the opposite." Using this information, we can understand that the main purpose of paragraph 1 is to deny a common belief. This means **(D)** is correct. The author does not mention any conclusion. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. The author does not argue the idea that Antarctica is a desert. This is factual information that is documented to be true. Choice **(B)** is incorrect. The author does not provide any history. This means **(C)** incorrect.

2) **C**
A good title summarizes the main idea of a passage and lets the reader know what to expect should he or she read further. This passage is mostly devoted to explaining why Antarctica is a desert of ice, which most people may find surprising, because deserts are stereotypically hot and sandy. This idea is introduced in the first paragraph. The subsequent paragraphs are devoted to explaining this idea. Therefore **(C)** is correct. In this passage, the author presents information about Antarctica only. It does not discuss any other of earth's deserts. The title in **(A)** is too general for a passage that is just about Antarctica, making this choice incorrect. Although the passage does mention the fact that Antarctica is the coldest place on earth, and discusses Antarctica's blizzards, these are details. The main idea of the passage involves the fact that Antarctica is a desert. Therefore **(B)** and **(D)** are incorrect.

3) **D**
In paragraph 2, the author writes: "In order for an area to be considered a desert, it must receive very little precipitation. More specifically, it must receive an average of less than ten inches of precipitation—which can be rain, sleet, hail, or snow—on the ground every year." Like Antarctica, the Sahara is a desert. Therefore, it must also have low precipitation. This means **(D)** is correct. The passage does not provide information to support choices **(A)**, **(B)**, and **(C)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

4) **A**
precipitation (*noun*): moisture in the air that falls to the ground.
In paragraph 2, the author states that precipitation "can be rain, sleet, hail, or snow." All of these are forms of air moisture that falls to the ground. Using this information, we can understand that **(A)** is the correct choice. Although rain, sleet, hail, and snow are all types of weather events, the phrase "any type of weather" is too general, as it may include other types of weather such as high wind, clouds, heat, humidity, etc. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Even though it is very cold in Antarctica, rain can fall in any climate. This means precipitation isn't specific to very cold areas. This eliminates **(C)**. **(D)** is incorrect because a blizzard that occurs in areas with limited snowfall is only something that happens in extremely cold, windy places like Antarctica, and is not representative of precipitation in general.

5) **A**
In paragraph 2 the author writes, "And because cold air holds less moisture than warm air, the air in Antarctica does not hold much moisture at all." Because Africa is widely known to have a warm, if not hot, climate, we can understand that the air in Africa holds more moisture than the freezing cold air in Antarctica. Therefore **(A)** is correct. **(B)** is incorrect because a tropical island

has hot climate. This means it should hold more moisture than the air in Antarctica. Although choices **(C)** and **(D)** may provide accurate information, they are incorrect because the quote from paragraph 2 does not discuss how air temperature is related to geographical location.

6) **B**
In the final paragraph, the authors tells us that any snow that falls over Antarctica either "remains there permanently, eventually building up into thick ice sheets." or "becomes caught up in the strong winds." This supports **options (I)** and **(II)**. In the beginning of this paragraph, the author says "the air over Antarctica is too cold to hold water vapor, so there is very little evaporation." This eliminates **option (III)**. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

7) **D**
In the final paragraph, the author informs us that the blizzards in Antarctica are caused when strong winds blow snow around. Although there is a very low amount of precipitation that falls over Antarctica, some of the snow that does fall "becomes caught up in the strong winds that constantly blow over Antarctica." Because of these high winds, "even though snowfall is very rare there, blizzards are actually very common on Antarctica." Using this information, we can understand that **(D)** is correct The passage does not provide information to support choices **(A)**, **(B)**, and **(C)**. Therefore they are incorrect.