

Reading Comprehension Practice Set

Answers can be found in Part V.

Questions 1 through 4 are based on the following reading passage.

Called by some the “island that time forgot,” Madagascar is home to a vast array of unique, exotic creatures. One such animal is the aye-aye. First described by western science in 1782, it was initially categorized as a member of the order Rodentia. Further research then revealed that it was more closely related to the lemur, a member of the primate order. Since the aye-aye is so different from its fellow primates, however, it was given its own family: *Daubentoniidae*. The aye-aye has been listed as an endangered species and, as a result, the government of Madagascar has designated an island off the northeastern coast of Madagascar as a protected reserve for aye-ayes and other wildlife.

Long before Western science became enthralled with this nocturnal denizen of Madagascar’s jungles, the aye-aye had its own reputation with the local people. The aye-aye is perhaps best known for its large, round eyes and long, extremely thin middle finger. These adaptations are quite sensible, allowing the aye-aye to see well at night and retrieve grubs, which are one of its primary food sources, from deep within hollow branches. However, the aye-aye’s striking appearance may end up causing its extinction. The people of Madagascar believe that the aye-aye is a type of spirit animal, and that its appearance is an omen of death. Whenever one is sighted, it is immediately killed. When combined with the loss of large swaths of jungle habitat, this practice may result in the loss of a superb example of life’s variety.

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Based on the information given in the passage, the intended audience would most likely be

- visitors to a natural science museum
- professors of evolutionary science
- a third-grade science class
- students of comparative religions
- attendees at a world culture symposium

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The author’s attitude toward the aye-aye, as represented in the highlighted text, could best be described as

- admiring
- mystified
- reverent
- appalled
- lachrymose

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Select the sentence in the first paragraph that suggests the author’s claim that “this practice may result in the loss of a superb example of life’s variety” is unlikely to happen.

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For the following question, consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.

Which of the following statements can be logically inferred from the passage about the aye-aye?

- The aye-aye currently lives only on a protected reserve off the northeastern coast of Madagascar.
- The aye-aye is a nocturnal animal.
- The aye-aye is a prominent part of the religion practiced by the people of Madagascar.

Questions 5 through 6 are based on the following reading passage.

A novel that is a bestseller is often, because of its popularity, not taken seriously as literature. Critics seem to presuppose that great literature must be somehow burdensome to the reader; it must be difficult for the uninitiated to understand. It is precisely this inverted snobbery that has hindered Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* from gaining the critical attention it deserves.

Published in 1982, the novel draws deeply on the author's own family history. Allende is the first cousin once removed of former Chilean president Salvador Allende, who was murdered during a right-wing military coup in 1973. Yet rather than the to-be-expected socialist harangue, Allende subtly works her political message within the fabric of the compelling narrative she weaves. While Allende borrows a bit too freely from Gabriel García Márquez's work, she nevertheless has a powerful and original voice within the construct of magical realism.

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The author of the passage would probably consider which of the following situations to be most analogous to the critics' viewpoint as it is described in the highlighted sentence?

- Avant-garde movies with complicated storylines are deemed cinematically superior works to Hollywood blockbusters with straightforward narratives.
- Scientific journals are thought of as providing coverage of natural events that is inferior to that provided by nature documentaries.
- Poetry is considered superior literature to prose because it is shorter, and therefore the message it conveys is more easily understood.
- Political diatribes are viewed as falling outside the accepted literary canon because they are too controversial.
- A movie version of a popular novel is considered artistically superior to the original.

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It can be inferred from the passage that

- Allende's novel is a retelling of her family's political struggles
- Allende's novel would have received more favorable reviews if critics had believed it to be great literature
- Allende learned about magical realism from Gabriel García Márquez
- Allende's novel could have been more compelling if she had included a stronger political message
- readers might have expected Allende's work to be more political than it actually was

Questions 7 through 8 are based on the following reading passage.

Bronson Alcott is perhaps best known not for who he was, but for whom he knew. Indeed, Alcott's connections were impressive by any standards: He was a close confidante of such luminaries as Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. Yet, to remember the man solely by his associations is to miss his importance to nineteenth-century American philosophy as a whole and to the Transcendental Movement in particular. Admittedly, Alcott's gift was not as a writer. His philosophical treatises have rightly been criticized by many as being ponderous, esoteric, and lacking focus.

However, Alcott was an erudite orator, and it is in the text of his orations that one begins to appreciate him as a visionary. Most notably, Alcott advocated what were at the time polemical ideas on education. He believed that good teaching should be Socratic in nature and that a student's intellectual growth was concomitant with his or her spiritual growth.

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It can be inferred from the passage that the author would agree with all of the following statements EXCEPT

- Alcott should be remembered for his contributions to Transcendentalism
- Alcott's ideas were ahead of those of many of his contemporaries
- Alcott believed that learning should not neglect a student's spiritual education
- Alcott's ideas about education were not always accepted by his compatriots
- Alcott should not be regarded as a particularly gifted orator

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It can be inferred that the author would agree with which of the following statements?

- Transcendentalism was an esoteric field of inquiry promulgated by a select group of visionaries.
- Alcott's prose style is not always easily understood.
- A Socratic pedagogical style is difficult to align with spiritual teaching.
- Alcott should be chiefly appreciated for the strengths of his association.
- The text of Alcott's orations were widely accepted by his peers.

Questions 9 through 10 are based on the following reading passage.

Echinosorex gymnura, known colloquially as the moonrat or gymnure, is one of the many fascinating creatures that inhabit the jungles of Southeast Asia. A close relative of the hedgehog, the moonrat likewise belongs to the order *Insectivora* and the family *Erinaceidae*. However, the family then splits into the sub-family *Hylomyinae*, which contains three separate genera and eight distinct species. The appearance and habitat of the moonrat are actually far more similar to those of various members of the order *Rodentia*, though its eating habits are more in line with its fellow insectivores. Ultimately, the taxonomic classification of this animal is useful only when considered along with other information regarding the animal's ecological niche.

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Consider each of the choices separately and select all that apply.

Which of the following scenarios demonstrates the idea put forth by the author of this passage regarding animal classification?

- While studying a population of bears, scientists rely solely on the traditional taxonomic designations to identify likely hunting grounds.
- A team of medical researchers closely monitors the actions of the animals involved in a study and compares its findings with prevailing beliefs about those animals.
- A zookeeper designs a habitat for a new acquisition, disregards taxonomic classifications and instead focuses on observational data.

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The author's tone could best be described as

- exasperated
- didactic
- ambivalent
- morose
- laudatory