

Multiple-Choice Sample Questions: Passage 1

When we were all still alive, the five of us in that kerosene-lit house, on Friday and Saturday nights, at an hour when in the spring and summer there was still abundant light in the air, I would set out in my father's car for town, where my friends lived. I had, by moving ten miles away, at last acquired friends: an illustration of that strange law whereby, like Orpheus leading Eurydice, we achieved our desire by turning our back on it. I had even gained a girl, so that the vibrations were as sexual as social that made me jangle with anticipation as I clowning in front of the mirror in our kitchen, shaving from a basin of stove-heated water, combing my hair with a dripping comb, adjusting my reflection in the mirror until I had achieved just that electric angle from which my face seemed beautiful and everlastingly, by the very volumes of air and sky and grass that lay mutely banked about our home, beloved.

My grandmother would hover near me, watching fearfully, as she had when I was a child, afraid that I would fall from a tree. Delirious, humming, I would swoop and lift her, lift her like a child, crooking one arm under her knees and cupping the other behind her back. Exultant in my height, my strength, I would lift that frail brittle body weighing perhaps a hundred pounds and twirl with it in my arms while the rest of the family watched with startled smiles of alarm. Had I stumbled, or dropped her, I might have broken her back, but my joy always proved a secure cradle. And whatever irony was in the impulse, whatever implicit contrast between this ancient husk, scarcely female, and the pliant, warm girl I would embrace before the evening was done, direct delight flooded away: I was carrying her who had carried me, I was giving my past a dance, I had lifted the anxious care-taker of my childhood from the floor, I was bringing her with my boldness to the edge of danger, from which she had always sought to guard me.

1. The speaker might best be described as someone who is
 - (A) unwilling to forsake his family in order to gain his freedom
 - (B) long overdue in obtaining maturity and acceptance in the adult world
 - (C) struggling to find his own identity and sense of purpose
 - (D) disturbed by the overbearing attentiveness and attitudes of his family
 - (E) defining his passage from the role of protected to that of protector
2. The mythological reference in lines 6-7 reinforces the "strange law" (line 6) that
 - (A) wishes are often best fulfilled when they are least pursued
 - (B) conflict between youth and old age is inevitable
 - (C) anticipation is a keener emotion than realization
 - (D) in our search for heaven, we may also find hell
 - (E) to those who examine life logically, few things are exactly as they seem to be
3. The effect of the words "vibrations" (line 9) and "jangle" (line 10) is most strongly reinforced by which of the following?
 - (A) "adjusting my reflection" (lines 12-13)
 - (B) "electric angle" (lines 13-14)
 - (C) "frail brittle body" (line 22)
 - (D) "irony was in the impulse" (lines 26-27)
 - (E) "implicit contrast" (line 27)

4. Which of the following best restates the idea conveyed in lines 12-16?
- (A) There are moments in youth when we have an extravagant sense of our own attractiveness.
 - (B) We can more easily change people's opinions of ourselves by adjusting our behavior than by changing our appearances.
 - (C) Vanity is a necessary though difficult part of the maturing process.
 - (D) How others see us determines, to a large degree, how we see ourselves and our environment.
 - (E) Adolescence is a time of uncertainty, insecurity, and self-contradiction.
5. In line 13, "everlastingly" modifies which of the following words?
- (A) "I" (line 13)
 - (B) "my face" (line 14)
 - (C) "beautiful" (line 14)
 - (D) "lay" (line 146)
 - (E) "beloved" (line 16)
6. The image of the "very volumes of air and sky and grass that lay mutely banked about our home" (lines 14-15) is used to show the speaker's
- (A) desire to understand his place in the universe
 - (B) profound love of nature
 - (C) feelings of oppression by his environment
 - (D) expansive belief in himself
 - (E) inability to comprehend the meaning of life
7. The attitude of the speaker at the time of the action is best described as
- (A) understanding
 - (B) exuberant
 - (C) nostalgic
 - (D) superior
 - (E) fearful
8. The passage supports all of the following statements about the speaker's dancing EXCEPT:
- (A) He danced partly to express his joy in seeing his girl friend later that night.
 - (B) His recklessness with his grandmother revealed his inability to live up to his family's expectations for him.
 - (C) In picking up his grandmother, he dramatized that she is no longer his caretaker.
 - (D) He had danced that way with his grandmother before.
 - (E) His dancing demonstrated the strength and power of youth.
9. The description of the grandmother in lines 20 and 25 emphasizes which of the following?
- (A) Her emotional insecurity
 - (B) The uniqueness of her character
 - (C) Her influence on the family
 - (D) Her resignation to old age
 - (E) Her poignant fragility
10. Which of the following statements best describes the speaker's point of view toward his grandmother in the second paragraph?
- (A) Moving to the country has given him a new perspective, one that enables him to realize the importance of his grandmother.
 - (B) Even as a young man, he realizes the uniqueness of his grandmother and her affection for him.
 - (C) He becomes aware of the irony of his changing relationship with his grandmother only in retrospect.
 - (D) It is mainly through his grandmother's interpretation of his behavior that he becomes aware of her influence on him.
 - (E) Comparing the enduring love of his grandmother to his superficial feelings for the young girl heightens his appreciation of his grandmother.
11. Which of the following patterns of syntax best characterizes the style of the passage?
- (A) Sparse sentences containing a minimum of descriptive language
 - (B) Long sentences interspersed with short, contrasting sentences
 - (C) Sentences that grow progressively more complex as the passage progresses
 - (D) Sentences with many modifying phrases and subordinate clauses
 - (E) Sentences that tend toward the narrative at the beginning, but toward the explanatory at the end of the passage
12. In this passage, the speaker is chiefly concerned with
- (A) presenting grandparents as symbols worthy of reverence
 - (B) demonstrating the futility of adolescent romanticism
 - (C) satirizing his own youthful egocentricity
 - (D) considering himself as an adolescent on the brink of adulthood
 - (E) revealing his progression from idealism to pragmatism

Multiple-Choice Sample Questions: Passage 2

Advice to a Prophet

When you come, as you soon must, to the streets of our city,
Mad-eyed from stating the obvious,
Not proclaiming our fall but begging us
In God's name to have self-pity,

- 5 Spare us all word of the weapons, their force and range,
The long numbers that rocket the mind;
Our slow, unreckoning hearts will be left behind,
Unable to fear what is too strange.

- 10 Nor shall you scare us with talk of the death of the race.
How should we dream of this place without us?
The sun mere fire, the leaves untroubled about us,
A stone look on the stone's face?

- 15 Speak of the world's own change. Though we cannot conceive
Of an undreamt thing, we know to our cost
How the dreamt cloud crumbles, the vines are blackened by frost,
How the view alters. We could believe,

- 20 If you told us so, that the white-tailed deer will slip
Into perfect shade, grown perfectly shy,
The lark avoid the reaches of our eye,
The jack-pine lose its knuckled grip

On the cold ledge, and every torrent burn
As Xanthus* once, its gliding trout
Stunned in a twinkling. What should we be without
The dolphin's arc, the dove's return,

- 25 These things in which we have seen ourselves and spoken
Ask us, prophet, how we shall call
Our natures forth when that live tongue is all
Dispelled, that glass obscured or broken

- 30 In which we have said the rose of our love and the clean
Horse of our courage, in which beheld
The singing locust of the soul unshelled,
And all we mean or wish to mean.

- 35 Ask us, ask us whether with the worldless rose
Our hearts shall fail us; come demanding
Whether there shall be lofty or long standing
When the bronze annals of the oak-tree close.

*Xanthus: in Greek myth, a river scalded by Hephaestus, god of fire.

13. The speaker assumes that the prophet referred to in lines 1-12 will come proclaiming
 - (A) a new religious dispensation
 - (B) joyous self-awareness
 - (C) a new political order
 - (D) the horror of self-destruction
 - (E) an appreciation of nature
14. According to the speaker, the prophet's "word of the weapons" (line 5) will probably not be heeded because
 - (A) human beings are really fascinated by weapons
 - (B) nature is more fascinating than warfare
 - (C) men and women are more concerned with love than with weapons
 - (D) people have heard such talk too often before
 - (E) people cannot comprehend abstract descriptions of power
15. In the phrase, "A stone look on the stone's face," (line 12) the speaker is suggesting that
 - (A) a stone is the most difficult natural object to comprehend
 - (B) such a stone is a metaphor for a human lack of understanding
 - (C) it is human beings who see a face on stones
 - (D) nature is a hostile environment for the human race
 - (E) the pain of life is bearable only to a stoic
16. In line 13 the speaker is doing which of the following?
 - (A) Anticipating the prophet's own advice
 - (B) Despairing of ever influencing the prophet
 - (C) Exchanging his own point of view with that of the prophet
 - (D) Heeding the prophet's advice
 - (E) Prescribing what the prophet should say
17. In lines 14-16, the speaker is asserting that we
 - (A) learn more or less about decay in nature according to our point of view
 - (B) can never understand change in nature
 - (C) are always instructed by an altering of our perspective
 - (D) have all experienced loss and disappointment
 - (E) realize that the end of the world may be near
18. The speaker implies that without "the dolphin's arc, the dove's return" (line 24) we would
 - (A) be less worried about war and destruction
 - (B) crave coarser pleasures than the enjoyment of nature
 - (C) have less understanding of ourselves and our lives
 - (D) be unable to love
 - (E) find ourselves unwilling to heed the advice of prophets
19. The phrase "knuckled grip" (line 20) implies that the jack-pine
 - (A) will never really fall from the ledge
 - (B) has roots that grasp like a hand
 - (C) is very precariously attached to the ledge
 - (D) is a rough and inhuman part of nature
 - (E) is very awkwardly placed
20. "The dolphin's arc" (line 24) refers to the
 - (A) biblical story of Noah
 - (B) leap of a dolphin
 - (C) hunting of dolphins with bows and arrows
 - (D) rainbow
 - (E) migration pattern of the dolphin
21. The phrase "that live tongue" (line 27) is best understood as
 - (A) a metaphor for nature
 - (B) an image of the poet's mind
 - (C) a symbol of the history of the world
 - (D) a reference to the poem itself
 - (E) a metaphor for the advice of the prophet
22. According to the speaker, we use the images of the rose (line 29), the horse (line 30), and the locust (line 31)
 - (A) literally to denote specific natural objects
 - (B) as metaphors to aid in comprehending abstractions
 - (C) as similes illustrating the speaker's attitude toward nature
 - (D) to reinforce images previously used by the prophet
 - (E) to explain the need for scientific study of nature
23. Which of the following best describes an effect of the repetition of the phrase "ask us" in line 33?
 - (A) It suggests that the prophet himself is the cause of much of the world's misery.
 - (B) It represents a sarcastic challenge to the prophet to ask the right questions.
 - (C) It suggests that the speaker is certain of the answer he will receive.
 - (D) It makes the line scan as a perfect example of iambic pentameter.
 - (E) It provides a tone of imploring earnestness.
24. Which of the following best paraphrases the meaning of line 36?
 - (A) When the end of the year has come
 - (B) When the chronicles no longer tell of trees
 - (C) When art no longer imitates nature
 - (D) When nature has ceased to exist
 - (E) When the forests are finally restored
25. Which of the following best describes the poem as a whole?
 - (A) An amusing satire on the excesses of modern prophets
 - (B) A poetic expression of the need for love to give meaning to life
 - (C) A lyrical celebration of the importance of nature for man
 - (D) A personal meditation on human courage in the face of destruction
 - (E) A philosophical and didactic poem about man and nature

Multiple-Choice Sample Questions: Passage 3

If the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, “tradition” should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a writer beyond his twenty-fifth year; and this historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity

To proceed to a more intelligible exposition of the relation of the writer to the past: he can neither take the past as a lump, an indiscriminate bolus, nor can he form himself wholly on one or two private admirations, nor can he form himself wholly upon one preferred period. The first course is inadmissible, the second is an important experience of youth, and the third is a pleasant and highly desirable supplement. The writer must be very conscious of the main current, which does not at all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations. He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe--the mind of his own country--a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind--is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing *en route*, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen. That this development, refinement perhaps, complication certainly, is not, from the point of view of the artist, any improvement. Perhaps not even an improvement from the point of view of the psychologist or not to the extent which imagine; perhaps only in the end based we upon a complication in economics and machinery. But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past’s awareness of itself cannot show.

Someone said: “The dead writers are remote from us because we *know* so much more than they did.” Precisely, and they are that which we know

26. The primary distinction made in the first paragraph is one between
- (A) a narrow definition of tradition and a more inclusive one
 - (B) the concerns of a contemporary writer and those of one from the past
 - (C) an understanding of the past and a rejection of the present
 - (D) the literature of Renaissance Europe and that of ancient Greece
 - (E) a literary tradition and a historical period
27. Which of the following best describes the function of the first sentence of the passage?
- (A) It states the main thesis of the passage as a whole.
 - (B) It provides concrete evidence to support the central idea of the first paragraph.
 - (C) It clears the way for serious discussion by dismissing a common misconception.
 - (D) It poses a rhetorical question that is debated throughout the passage.
 - (E) It establishes the reliability of the author as an impartial arbiter.
28. The phrase “lost in the sand” (line 6) is best read as a metaphor relating to
- (A) forgotten masterpieces
 - (B) prehistoric times
 - (C) ephemeral trends
 - (D) the sense of the timeless
 - (E) literary enigmas
29. In context, the clause “anyone who would continue to be a writer beyond his twenty-fifth year” (lines 11-12) suggests which of the following?
- I. Mature writers need to have a historical sense.
 - II. Few writers can improve their perceptions after their twenty-fifth year.
 - III. Young writers cannot be expected to have a developed historical sense.
- (A) I only
 - (B) II only
 - (C) III only
 - (D) I and II only
 - (E) I and III only
30. According to the passage, writers who are most aware of their own contemporaneity would be those who
- (A) have rejected the sterile conventions of earlier literature in order to achieve self-expression
 - (B) have refused to follow the ways of the immediately preceding generation in favor of novelty and originality
 - (C) have an intimate acquaintance with past and present literary works
 - (D) understand that contemporary works are likely to lose their popularity in time
 - (E) prefer the great literature of the past to the works of modern writers

31. In the first paragraph, the author is most concerned with
- (A) explaining how writers may be aware of their own contemporaneity
 - (B) defining the historical sense as it relates to writing
 - (C) berating those who dismiss the notion of tradition
 - (D) developing a theory of what is durable in literature
 - (E) summarizing historical trends in literary criticism
32. In lines 21-22, the repeated linkage of the words “timeless” and “temporal” can be interpreted as an emphasis on the
- (A) author’s assumption that the two words are used carelessly by contemporary writers
 - (B) necessity of allying two concepts usually thought of as opposites
 - (C) ironic conclusion that all that is temporal is meaningless
 - (D) author’s disgust that contemporary writers have focused only on the timeless
 - (E) unresolved debate as to which of the two concepts is more important
33. According to lines 27-34, which of the following would be natural and tolerable attitude for a young writer to hold?
- (A) The opinion that older literature is probably irrelevant to contemporary men and women.
 - (B) The idea that writing is more a matter of natural talent than of hard work.
 - (C) The idea that Shakespeare and Dickens are the only writers that he or she need use as models.
 - (D) The notion that older literature is inherently superior to the works of contemporary writers.
 - (E) The belief that genius is more likely to spring from one region or historical period than from another.
34. The author implies that the “first course is inadmissible” (lines 31-32) because following it leads to
- (A) failure to discriminate among the various literary works of past centuries
 - (B) abandonment of the commitment to read older literature
 - (C) relaxation of the standards that make a work of art likely to endure
 - (D) neglect of the study of present-day writers who will become part of the tradition
 - (E) forgetting that writer’s first duty is to preserve his or her integrity.
35. The “main current” (line 35) is best understood as that which
- (A) changes and improves constantly
 - (B) is and has been durable in literature
 - (C) has had wide popular appeal
 - (D) is suitable for stylistic imitation
 - (E) epitomizes the characteristics of one period
36. In lines 42-43, the “mind which changes” refers to which of the following?
- I. “the mind of Europe” (line 40)
 - II. “the mind of his own country” (line 40)
 - III. “his own private mind” (line 42)
- (A) I only
 - (B) III only
 - (C) I and II only
 - (D) I and III only
 - (E) I, II, and III
37. In line 46, the author refers to the “rock drawing of Magdalenian draughtsmen” as
- (A) an example of an artistic style that has been imitated by contemporary artists
 - (B) a part of a continuing artistic tradition that is still changing
 - (C) evidence of the kind of re-evaluation that takes place when new critical theories are proposed
 - (D) an example of art that had no self-consciousness about being part of an artistic tradition
 - (E) evidence of the need to use the same standards in evaluating literature and painting
38. Which of the following is implicit before “That this development . . . improvement” (lines 47-49) ?
- (A) The difference between the past and the present is
 - (B) We all unconsciously believe
 - (C) The significance of art is
 - (D) The writer must be aware
 - (E) A historian would deny
39. The function of the quotation in lines 57-58 is primarily to
- (A) support ironically an idea different from the one apparently intended by “Someone”
 - (B) refute the idea that art does not improve
 - (C) ridicule the idea that writers of the past were ignorant
 - (D) show that although “Someone’s” ideas are obviously to be respected, literary critics do often have disagreements
 - (E) add a new definition to the concept of ‘remoteness,’ while subtly indicating approval of the ideas expressed
40. The development of the argument can best be described as progressing from the
- (A) assertion of an idea to an elaboration of its meaning
 - (B) summary of an argument to an analysis of the logic of the conflicting sides
 - (C) statement of a hypothesis to a summary of possible objections to it
 - (D) criticism of a process to a defense of its value
 - (E) description of an abstract idea to a compilation of concrete examples of it
41. Taken as a whole, the passage is best described as
- (A) a narrative with a historical perspective
 - (B) a technical discussion of a point of literary criticism
 - (C) an argument developed through the use of anecdotes
 - (D) an expository passage largely concerned with definition
 - (E) a descriptive passage that makes use of concrete examples