

*Rothsay*

**Academy English Department**

**A**

**Close Look**

**At**

**Close Reading**

**Standard Grade  
General / Foundation Level**



## Questions on the content of the passage

There will be a number of questions in a close reading paper designed to test your understanding of what the passage is about.

### What? Why? How?

This type of question asks you to find particular information in the passage to show that you understand what it is about.

Read the short extracts and answer the question which follows each.

*On the twenty-fourth of June, in the year 1914, a young man went into a house, and never came out again. His name was William Walter Gordon Maitland, aged twenty-two, of 14, Elliesland Street, Millhall, in the county of Lanarkshire, and one summer afternoon he vanished from the face of the earth. It was as simple, and as complicated, as that.*

**Qu 1:** What happened to William Maitland on 24 June 1914?

*So Emily told him, trying hard to keep to the facts which she vaguely supposed a policeman would want to hear, but unable to help confusing these with other memories, the sun beating down on her back as they drove along, the slow whirring of insects in the steep, flower-stippled banks on either side of the road, the small grey spurts of dust under the horse's hoofs, William's strong brown hands twined lightly in the reins. In the beginning, it had been such a lovely day.*

**Qu 2:** Emily tried hard to keep to the facts. Why did she find this difficult?

*Quarter of a mile up the path, they came to the village of Wallney. Not much of a village: four big farmhouses, a couple of rows of flint-and-brick cottages, pub, sub-post office and an old-fashioned red phone-box. But enough to half-restore Rose's sanity. The owner of the cottage wouldn't want to let it just for a week, or even a fortnight. This was no holiday cottage. The thought brought relief.*

**Qu 3:** How can you tell from this paragraph that Rose did not want to rent the cottage?

Give or write down reasons/evidence/information

This type of question asks you to pick out particular information from the passage. Look at the different ways this type of question can be worded and note that you are being asked to do a similar thing each time.

Read the short extracts and answer the question which follows each.

*It still has its regulars. Two old women turn up with raincoats over their swimming costumes, so they can get into the pool as quickly as possible. Two old men do synchronised swimming. Others bring the staff sweets or baking. But numbers have been falling for years. Costs are high and the season is short. East Lothian District Council is subsidising the swimmers to the tune of almost £10 a time.*

**Qu 4:** Give two reasons why East Lothian District Council decided to close the open-air pool.

*Timothy, who was practical like his Dad, had discovered a drum of paraffin in a lean-to, filled the oil-lamps and got them going. He used more paraffin, in a careful calculating way that brought her out in a cold sweat, to get the fire in the kitchen range going. He had also got the water-pump over the sink to work. At first it had only made disgusting wheezing sounds, but Tim had poured water down it from a butt in the garden, calling it "priming the pump", very professionally.*

**Qu 5:** Give three pieces of evidence which show that Timothy was "practical like his dad".

*But there stood Beach House, one of the four farmhouses. Well kept, but not a working farm. Weeds grew in front of the barn doors. Rose walked up the tidy front garden, and knocked on the door of the little glass porch. Too late, she realised that the front door was never used. The porch was full of potted plants, several big ones right in front of the door itself.*

**Qu 6:** Write down two pieces of information which show that Beach House was "well kept, but not a working farm".

Note: In this answer, one piece of information should relate to "well kept" and one piece of information should relate to "not working".

Describe.../Explain...

You may be asked to describe or explain a character's actions or feelings.

Read the short extracts and answer the question which follows each.

*When he came back upstairs, Mr Hairston was saying goodbye to a customer Henry recognised as Mrs Pierce, who lived on the first floor of his tenement. Smiling and nodding, Mr Hairston led her to the door and closed it softly after her.*

*"Disgusting, the wart on her chin, hairs growing out of it," he said, returning to the register, a sneer replacing the smile. Actually, his smile was merely a rearrangement of his lips, his usual sneer turned inside out. Henry was amazed at how Mr Hairston treated his customers.*

*"The customer's always right," he proclaimed one day, as if he could read Henry's mind. "But only in the store. When buying. Otherwise, they're only people. Stupid, most of them. Don't even know a bargain when they see one. So, why give them a bargain?"*

**Qu 7:** a) Describe Mr Hairston's behaviour and attitude towards Mrs Pierce while she was in his shop.

b) Explain fully how these changed once she had left.

*"I think it's great," said Timothy, turning on his most charming smile like a searchlight. He had a swift eye for adult indecision. But Rose thought for once that Timothy had overreached himself. Miss Yaxley gave him a grim look, as if to say children should be seen but not heard.*

**Qu 8:** Describe two ways in which Timothy tried to persuade Miss Yaxley to let them rent the cottage.

*Rose walked up the tidy front garden, and knocked on the door of the little glass porch. Too late, she realised that the front door was never used. The porch was full of potted plants, several big ones right in front of the door itself.*

**Qu 9:** Explain fully how Rose could tell that "the front door was never used".

☑ In your own words...

Questions which ask you to give information or to describe or explain something from the passage can also ask you to do this in your own words. It is vital that you put the answer into your own words as completely as you can because if you lift words from the passage you will not receive the marks for the answer.

Read the short extracts and answer the question which follows each.

*Five weeks later when Henry reported to the store without his crutches, ready for work, Mr Hairston merely grunted.*

**Qu 10:** In your own words describe how Mr Hairston first greeted Henry on his return to work.

*The young man slung his rifle over his shoulder and motioned me to enter the hut. A dark passage led to a smoky room. Inside, in a group, stood an old man and woman, another youth with a gun, and a gaunt little girl about eleven years old. They were huddled together like a family photograph fixing me with glassy teeth-set smiles.*

**Qu 11:** Explain, in your own words, two ways in which the people seemed as if they were arranged for a "family photograph".

*They are social animals, living in colonies because they gain protection from predators. Poets have praised pigeons' lifelong devotion to their mates. Tennyson linked their iridescent feathers with romance and rebirth in his famous couplet:*

*In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish'd dove;  
In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.*

**Qu 12:** Explain in your own words why poets have praised pigeons.

## Questions about the way the passage is written

A number of the questions in a close reading paper will require you to look carefully at the way the writer has written the passage. These questions may ask you about the writer's use of particular words and expressions, how the writer develops an idea, unusual sentence structure, use of comparisons and how the writer shows his own or a character's feelings and attitudes.

### Writer's word choice

This type of question asks you to consider how the writer's careful word choice adds to the meaning of the passage.

Read the short extracts and answer the question which follows each.

*The pool was one of the town's most important tourist attractions. They had galas here, swimming and diving displays that pulled in big crowds.*

**Qu 13:** How can you tell there are no longer galas at the pool?

*"Disgusting, the wart on her chin, hairs growing out of it," he said, returning to the register, a sneer replacing the smile. Actually, his smile was merely a rearrangement of his lips, his usual sneer turned inside out. Henry was amazed at how Mr Hairston treated his customers.*

**Qu 14:** Write down the one word the writer uses which most clearly shows that Mr Hairston's smile was not genuine.

*Timothy, who was practical like his Dad, had discovered a drum of paraffin in a lean-to, filled the oil-lamps and got them going. He used more paraffin, in a careful calculating way that brought her out in a cold sweat, to get the fire in the kitchen range going. He had also got the water-pump over the sink to work. At first it had only made disgusting wheezing sounds, but Tim had poured water down it from a butt in the garden, calling it "priming the pump", very professionally.*

**Qu 15:** Write down one expression which shows that Timothy knew what he was doing.

How does the writer develop an idea?

This type of question tests your knowledge of vocabulary by asking you to identify words and expressions with similar meanings which the writer has used to continue or develop an idea in a section of the passage.

Read the short extracts and answer the question which follows each.

*Mr Hairston's voice was like thunder in the quiet store and Henry leapt with surprise as he turned to confront the store owner, whose face was dark with anger.*

**Qu 16:** Mr Hairston's face was "dark with anger".  
What other expression is used in this paragraph to show his anger?

*"It was quite deserted. The gate was open. Yes. Its hinges were broken, I think. There was honeysuckle in the hedge. The garden was terribly overgrown - William said, wasn't it a good thing we both like gardening, because it was going to take ages to put it in order. There was moss on the steps, too, and grass and stonecrop growing in the cracks in the stone. Not that we'd have minded that sort of thing."*

**Qu 17:** The place was "quite deserted".  
How does the writer develop this idea in the rest of this paragraph?

*The kitchen they were led into was uncannily like the one they had just seen in the old cottage, except that it was shining and alive. There was a glowing coal fire, which cheered Rose up, even in the middle of July. A grandfather clock ticked soothingly. There was a bundle of knitting in a chair, and a tray laid for tea, with a glass sugar-basin. Various chairs were occupied by various teddy-bears, one wearing full-size spectacles.*

**Qu 18:** The kitchen was "alive". How does the writer develop this idea in the rest of the paragraph?

## ☑ Writer's sentence construction

This type of question requires you to comment on how the writer's unusual sentence structure adds to the meaning. The question may ask you to consider unusual word order, sentence length or interesting use of punctuation.

Read the short extracts and answer the question which follows each.

*And Jane had sweated up the path many times with the luggage and then gone with a huge list of groceries to the sub-post office, and staggered back again, still without complaint, and even thought to buy all available hot-water bottles. And boiled huge black kettles, and shoved all the hotties into the beds, which did seem quite clean, thank God, only awfully dusty and sneeze-making. Now she used the black kettle again to make tea, and settled down to drink hers.*

**Qu 19:** Why do you think the writer has used the word "and" so often in the first two sentences of this paragraph?

*And then it came to me. Here was a chance to answer the perennial mystery that puzzled generations of city dwellers: why doesn't anyone ever see a baby pigeon? Let others plumb Loch Ness for its monster or climb the Himalayas in search of the Yeti. I would be the first human to see a baby pigeon in the wild.*

**Qu 20:** Why does the writer begin the paragraph with such a short sentence?

*At first it had pumped evil rusty red stuff, but now it ran clear, though Rose had visions of outbreaks of cholera and typhoid, and hurried dashes to the hospital in Norwich, and how would you ever get an ambulance up that path, but it you boiled all the water . . . Now he was winding up all the clocks and really getting them ticking.*

**Qu 21:** Look at the sentence beginning "At first it had pumped evil rusty red stuff..."

Show how the writer creates an impression of uneasy thoughts rushing through Rose's mind by sentence structure.

## ☑ Writer's use of imagery

This type of question asks you about the comparisons made by the writer to make his descriptions more vivid.

Read the short extracts and answer the question which follows each.

*Doris was a whisper of a girl, slender, with long black curls that reached her shoulders, a bow in her hair. It always looked like the same bow but the colours were different, red and yellow and blue, bright and vivid colours in contrast with her pale, white face, the dark eyes deep in their sockets, like the windows of a haunted house.*

**Qu 22:** In this paragraph, what comparison does the writer use to describe Doris's eyes?

*"Potatoes to bag up," he called over the shoulder of a customer, and Henry made his way down to the cellar, where a bin of potatoes awaited him. He always tried to hurry the job because the cellar was dark and damp and he often heard rats scurrying across the floor. One day, a grey rat squirted out of a bag of potatoes and Henry had leapt with fright, his heart exploding in his chest.*

**Qu 23:** "a grey rat squirted out of a bag of potatoes..."  
a) What is unusual about the writer's use of the word "squirted" in this sentence?  
b) Why is it a particularly suitable word to use here?

*Two days later an egg appeared, followed shortly by a second. Don Guano and Medea settled into a domestic routine. From late morning until late afternoon he sat on the eggs while she set off. The rest of the time, she roosted while he brought twigs for home-improvement projects.*

**Qu 24:** "he brought twigs for home-improvement projects"  
a) Explain exactly what Don Guano was doing.  
b) To what is Don Guano being compared, and what is the effect of this comparison?

☑ **The attitude or feelings of the writer or a character**

This type of question asks you to think about how the attitude or feelings of the writer or a character are conveyed.

Read the short extracts and answer the question which follows each.

*When I first moved to a flat in New York and discovered that my new neighbours included a colony of pigeons, my first reaction was: exterminate the brutes! I cringed at their morning mating calls, and agreed with my wife, Dana, when she cursed them as winged rodents that soil the city. I attacked them with broom and water-pistol. It was hard for me to believe that the traditional symbol of peace, a dove with an olive branch, is actually a white pigeon.*

- Qu 25:**
- a) Write down an expression from this paragraph that clearly indicates the writer's attitude to pigeons.
  - b) Given his attitude, what fact about pigeons did the writer find difficult to understand?

*The farmer's wife, though kindly, could not share Emily's alarm. She took her in, and dried her, and pacified her, but not until the rain had stopped would she allow her son, and one of the farm servants, to go out across the fields to Birkenshaw.*

- Qu 26:** How can you tell that the farmer's wife did not "share Emily's alarm"?

*The director accepts there is some regret in the town at the decision to close the open-air pool, but adds that there have been no formal protests. "People are just being rather nostalgic. The pool has had its day. It's part of a former era."*

- Qu 27:** "...there is some regret...at the decision to close down the open-air pool"
- a) Write down another expression from this paragraph which indicates people's feelings about the closure.
  - b) Explain in your own words what this expression tells you about people's feelings.

