

Diagnostic Reading Assessment

Read the passages and answer the questions that follow:

While a comet's appearance is no longer thought to signal doom, as the ancients believed, various kinds of astronomical phenomena such as comets, asteroids, and meteors continue to pique our curiosity. As astronomers probe our solar system for what might, some day, fall to Earth, they carefully distinguish among these "heavenly bodies."

5 Astronomers theorize that comets, millions of them, are remains of the origins of our solar system floating through space and time in a vast cloud. Each comet has a core, a flying iceberg, embedded in its own "coma" of gases and dust particles. If dislodged from this cloud, the comet hurtles on an elliptical path toward the Sun and begins to heat up. As it does, its gaseous tail lengthens to create some splendid shapes--like a fan, a streamer, or even a sword. One unusually bright comet
10 having extensive dust and gas emissions is the Hale-Bopp Comet, named after its discoverers in 1995. Like virtually all comets, though, this one never threatened Earth; at its closest it was 122 million miles away.

Asteroids, often mistaken for comets, are also remnants of primordial solar activity. Sometimes called minor planets or planetoids, asteroids are rocky bodies, primarily stone and iron,
15 orbiting around our Sun between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Ceres, the largest asteroid, is less than 600 miles in diameter; but most, perhaps millions, are about boulder size. Interestingly, all asteroids put together would not form one small planet, and the theory that they are broken from an exploded planet is now discredited. At least 7000 regularly orbiting asteroids have been found since 1801, of which 5000 are named and numbered.

20 Fragments sent off by an asteroid or comet are seen as meteors, often called shooting or falling stars. These streaks of light in the night sky signal the breakup of solar material that enters the Earth's atmosphere and vaporizes. The falling object itself is called a meteoroid, which usually burns up in the upper atmosphere. (The few that do fall to Earth are called meteorites.) The speed and path of the meteoroid is influenced by its orbit around the Sun and the pull of Earth's gravity. A meteoroid may
25 move as fast as 45 miles per second as it enters our atmosphere, and such velocity is what causes visible light. The Arizona Meteor Crater--4000 feet wide and 600 feet deep--is the result of one such great "hit" on Earth, perhaps 50,000 years ago.

Some theorize that the meteoroids that fragment easily are the remains of comets, while the denser ones that fall to Earth originate from asteroids millions of years ago. Thus comes the hypothesis that a
30 huge meteorite fell to Earth, at what is now the Yucatan Peninsula, sending up a death cloud that blotted out the Sun and eradicated dinosaurs 65 million years ago. This theory intrigues us today and raises the minute chance of another such cosmic disaster. This possibility alone should be enough to keep astronomers looking up.

1. Which sentence best states the main idea of this passage?
 - a. Asteroids are rocky bodies that orbit around our Sun between Mars and Jupiter.
 - b. Astronomers carefully differentiate among the "heavenly bodies" of our solar system.
 - c. Our solar system is made up of various "heavenly bodies."
 - d. Asteroids, comets, and meteoroids are easily distinguished from one another.

2. Which sentence best states the main idea of paragraph four?
 - a. Meteoroids are falling fragments of asteroids which usually burn up in the upper atmosphere long before they reach Earth.
 - b. Meteoroids are fragments of asteroids or comets whose streak of light signals the breakup of solar material that enters the Earth's atmosphere and vaporizes.
 - c. The Arizona Meteor Crater is the result of a meteor entering the Earth's atmosphere at 45 miles per hour.
 - d. Astronomers theorize that the first asteroid "hit" on Earth about 50,000 years ago.

3. The author's primary purpose is to
- inspire amateur astronomers to study the "heavenly bodies" carefully.
 - establish the connection between meteoroids and the eradication of dinosaurs.
 - argue various theories concerning the origins of the "heavenly bodies."
 - discuss the differences among asteroids, comets, and meteoroids.
4. What is the relationship of ideas within the following sentence?
"The Arizona Meteor Crater--4,000 feet wide and 600 feet deep--is the result of one such great 'hit' on Earth, perhaps 50,000 years ago." (lines 26-27)
- cause and effect
 - comparison
 - time order
 - addition
5. Identify the term that expresses the clearest relationship between these two sentences from the second paragraph:
"Each comet has a core, a flying iceberg, embedded in its own 'coma' of gases and dust particles" (lines 6-7), and "One unusually bright comet having extensive dust and gas emissions is the Hale-Bopp Comet, named after its discoverers in 1995." (lines 9-10)
- comparison and contrast
 - clarification
 - cause and effect
 - statement and example
6. The author in this passage shows a biased attitude in favor of
- watching the Hale-Bopp comet.
 - tracing primordial solar activity.
 - examining meteors.
 - studying astronomy.
7. "Some theorize that the meteoroids that fragment easily are the remains of comets, while the denser ones that fall to Earth originate from asteroids millions of years ago." (lines 28-29)
The above sentence is a statement of
- fact.
 - opinion.
8. "While a comet's appearance is no longer thought to signal doom, as the ancients believed, various kinds of astronomical phenomena such as comets, asteroids, and meteors continue to pique our curiosity." (lines 1-3)
A conclusion that can be drawn from the above sentence from paragraph one is that
- astronomers never believed the superstitions the ancients held concerning comets.
 - astronomers study "heavenly bodies" to formulate as many theories as they possibly can.
 - asteroids are larger in size than comets, but not as large as meteoroids.
 - in addition to comets, asteroids and meteors, other types of astronomical phenomena do exist.

9. According to the passage, which one of the following statements best supports the author's overall idea in paragraph two?
- a. Asteroids are broken pieces of an exploded planet from our solar system.
 - b. Astronomers believe that each comet has its own "coma" of gases and dust particles.
 - c. The appearance of our heavenly bodies is no longer related to superstitions.
 - d. A clear distinction between asteroids and meteoroids will never be achieved.

Communication theory often emphasizes how speakers should present their material. On the receiving end of that sender-message-audience paradigm, however, are listeners. Some of them focus intently on the speaker, while others daydream or whisper to a neighbor. What distinguishes these two kinds of listeners? Broadly speaking, effective listeners have discovered the benefits of paying close attention and remain focused to avoid distractions. Not having experienced the rewards of paying close attention, ineffective listeners continue to wonder why they can't remember what they "heard" or why they do poorly on tests.

How do effective listeners manage to pay close attention? First of all, they avoid letting poor circumstances, like an uncomfortable seat, a personal problem, or the speaker's mannerisms, distract them. Instead, they "tune out" anything that will keep them from understanding and remembering what they hear. After leaving a lecture or meeting, effective listeners remember what was said, not the room conditions or the poor delivery of the speaker. On the other hand, ineffective listeners who think they are paying attention to the message can be easily sidetracked, either by those same distractions or by what might seem to be the slow pace of the speaker.

In order to resist potential internal and external distractions, effective listeners become actively but objectively engaged in the message itself. They do not prejudge the speaker as representing a viewpoint contrary to their own, nor do they prejudge the material as boring, too easy, or too difficult. Effective listeners accept the challenge of new ideas--even those that conflict with preconceived notions or strongly held values. To help themselves become actively involved in the speaker's message, effective listeners jot down important words and phrases as a reminder of difficult ideas and perhaps indicate the relationship of those ideas to each other.

Ineffective listeners reject abstract or controversial material; they may pretend to listen but daydream or doodle instead to avoid hearing what they don't agree with or readily understand. Moreover, rather than attending to meaning itself, ineffective but well-intentioned listeners might be so involved in taking copious notes that they miss the speaker's main idea. These listeners leave a speech or a class with a notebook full of words that are not connected by any conceptual framework and therefore mean little when referred to later for a test or other purposes.

Clearly, a certain amount of effort is involved in listening actively, objectively, and openly to new ideas. But as that effort begins to pay off for previously ineffective listeners, they too will cultivate this skill as a beneficial lifelong habit.

10. Which statement best expresses the main idea of this passage?

- a. Good speakers are concerned with how they present their material.
- b. Poor listening circumstances contribute greatly to ineffective listening.
- c. Communication is centered on a sender-message-audience paradigm.
- d. Certain basic characteristics distinguish the effective from the ineffective listener.

11. Some of the strategies used by the effective listener to resist potential distractions include all of the following EXCEPT

- a. attempting to record the speaker's exact words.
- b. becoming objectively engaged in the message.
- c. avoiding prejudging the speaker or the difficulty level of the material.
- d. accepting the challenge of new and/or controversial ideas.

12. The primary purpose of this passage is to

- a. describe the habits of the poor listener.
- b. discuss strategies employed by the effective listener.
- c. describe the results of ineffective listening.
- d. point out the differences between effective and ineffective listeners.

13. The organizational pattern of this passage is
- order of importance.
 - comparison and/or contrast.
 - example.
 - time order.
14. Identify the relationship between these two sentences from paragraph four:
“Ineffective listeners reject abstract or controversial material; they may pretend to listen but daydream or doodle instead to avoid hearing what they don’t agree with or readily understand. Moreover, rather than attending to meaning itself, ineffective but well-intentioned listeners might be so involved in taking copious notes that they miss the speaker’s main idea.” (lines 22-25)
- spatial order
 - addition
 - clarification
 - emphasis
15. As used in line 13, the word *sidetracked* means
- focused.
 - distracted.
 - informed.
 - persuaded.
16. The author’s tone in paragraph five of this passage is
- playful.
 - jaded.
 - reverent.
 - encouraging.
17. A conclusion that can be drawn from this passage is that the author believes that
- communication theory penalizes the speaker.
 - distractions should be abolished.
 - the listener has a responsibility to contribute to the process.
 - better communication skills should be taught in schools.
18. Which statement is most relevant to the author’s claim that “Clearly, a certain amount of effort is involved in listening actively, objectively, and openly to new ideas” (lines 28-29)?
- Listeners daydream to avoid hearing what they don’t readily understand.
 - Listeners leave class with a notebook full of words not linked to a conceptual framework.
 - Listeners accept the challenge of new ideas and jot down important phrases.
 - Listeners remember the room conditions and the delivery of the speaker.

As cities are necessarily built closer to forest lands and prairies, people increasingly come into contact with animals once considered wild--the opossum, the armadillo, and the raccoon. While few would be tempted to think affectionately of the pink and sneaky opossum or the lumbering, long-snouted armadillo, many people naively find the masked raccoon “cute.” However, this animal is actually the most pervasive, persistent, and pesky of urban animals--and perhaps the most dangerous.

Indeed, the North American raccoon, scientifically called *Procyon lotor*, has certainly set up housekeeping in our midst. Its nickname, “the masked bandit,” aptly describes both its appearance and its deft ability to rob garbage cans for food in the form of urban debris and waste. The raccoon has a strong, tough little body--six to twelve inches at the shoulder and an overall length of twenty to forty inches, about the size of a large house cat or small dog.

Raccoons invade the fringes of neighborhoods because these prolific animals often multiply beyond the capacity of their territory to sustain them. The female raccoon breeds at ten to twelve months, has a gestation period of 63 days, and produces a litter of two to seven offspring. Although males and females may go into a simulated hibernation during cold months in the North, in southern states they remain reproductively active, producing many litters. Luckily, the average urban raccoon lives only about six years, and its population is checked by a few predators and the automobile.

Without such thinning of this pest population, raccoons would soon overtake the urban landscape and pose an even greater threat to humans and pets. Harboring such disease-carrying parasites as ticks, fleas, and worms, raccoons are also one of the principal carriers of the deadly rabies virus. While raccoons may never succumb to this disease themselves, they can easily transmit it in their saliva. Moreover, these cagey, skillful animals make formidable opponents with their strong claws and fierce bite, able to kill all but the largest of dogs.

Although we may acknowledge the persistence and resilience of raccoons, we must remember that they spread vermin from nearby wooded areas to our own backyards. Therefore, we keep a safe distance from this deceptively “cute” masked creature, which is actually a wild animal--and a potentially dangerous one at that.

19. Which sentence best states the main idea of this passage?

- a. Because raccoons are one of the principal carriers of the deadly rabies virus, they are a serious health threat.
- b. Of all pesky urban animals, the opossum, the armadillo, and the raccoon are perhaps the most pervasive and the most dangerous.
- c. The urban “masked” raccoon that many people find “cute” is actually a pesky and very dangerous animal.
- d. Raccoons are wild animals--scientifically called *Procyon lotor*--that have tough little bodies and are about the size of a large house cat.

20. According to the passage, which of the following would result if the raccoon population were not kept in check?

- a. Raccoons would readily overtake the urban areas.
- b. Raccoons would have few predators.
- c. Raccoons would become the number one health problem of the cities.
- d. Raccoons would cease to reproduce.

21. The author’s primary purpose in the passage is to

- a. criticize.
- b. praise.
- c. inform.
- d. define.

22. “While few would be tempted to think affectionately of the pink and sneaky opossum or the lumbering long-snouted armadillo, many people naively find the masked raccoon ‘cute.’”(lines 2-4)

The relationship of parts within the sentence above is

- a. cause and effect.
- b. time order.
- c. contrast.

23. Identify the relationship between these two sentences from the fifth paragraph:

“Although we may acknowledge the persistence and resilience of raccoons, we must remember that they spread vermin from nearby wooded areas to our own backyards. Therefore, we must keep a safe distance from this deceptively ‘cute’ masked creature, which is actually a wild animal--and a potentially dangerous one at that.” (lines 23-26)

- a. comparison
- b. addition
- c. example
- d. cause and effect

24. As used in line 8, the word deft most nearly means

- a. awkward.
- b. limited.
- c. skillful.
- d. dishonest.

25. In this passage, the author expresses a biased attitude in favor of

- a. encouraging the increase of raccoon predators.
- b. keeping the raccoon population in check.
- c. protecting the raccoon population.

26. The tone of this passage can best be described as

- a. fearful.
- b. excited.
- c. cautionary.
- d. sarcastic.

27. “However, this animal is actually the most pervasive, persistent, and pesky of urban animals--and perhaps the most dangerous.” (lines 4-5)

The above sentence is a statement of

- a. fact.
- b. opinion.

Diagnostic Reading Assessment
Answer Sheet

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Item Analysis

*Circle the item numbers that you got incorrect
and note the skill that you may need to practice:*

Vocabulary in Context

15 24

Main Ideas / Implied Main Ideas

1 2 10 19

Supporting Details

11 20

Patterns of Organization / Relationships

4 5 13 14 22 23

Inferences / Drawing Conclusions

8 17

Purpose & Tone

3 12 16 21 26

Bias

6 25

Fact & Opinion

7 27

Arguments

9 18

Diagnostic Reading Assessment

Answer Key

1. B Main Ideas / Implied Main Ideas
2. B Main Ideas / Implied Main Ideas
3. D Purpose & Tone
4. A Patterns of Organization
5. D Patterns of Organization
6. D Bias
7. A Fact & Opinion
8. D Inferences
9. B Arguments
10. D Main Ideas / Implied Main Ideas
11. A Supporting Details
12. D Purpose & Tone
13. B Patterns of Organization
14. B Patterns of Organization
15. B Vocabulary in Context
16. D Purpose & Tone
17. C Inferences
18. C Arguments
19. C Main Ideas / Implied Main Ideas
20. A Supporting Details
21. C Purpose & Tone
22. C Patterns of Organization
23. D Patterns of Organization
24. C Vocabulary in Context
25. B Bias
26. C Purpose & Tone
27. B Fact & Opinion