

## Practice Comprehension 1- Pieces Of Silver

- 1 When, at five minutes to ten, the bell started to ring, a pall of silence settled over the noisy playfield. Reluctantly games of cricket and pick-ups were abandoned; climbers came slithering down from the old tamarind tree on the school grounds or dropped quickly from its branches, making haste to clear their mouths of the green, acid fruit they had been enjoying. The school of four hundred odd boys assembled in ranks across the pebbled playfield, waiting for inspection before they could file into the red-walled school. Some glanced apprehensively at their dusty, naked feet, while others tried feverishly to make their nails and hands presentable. 5
- 2 The teachers came from the schoolroom in a leisurely bunch, laughing and joking in quiet voices as they sauntered towards the boys. The stout, pompous, acting Headmaster came to the window that opened off his platform on to the playfield, still making an unnecessary clangour with his bell, and looked sternly over the assembled rows of scholars. 10
- 3 The smaller boys straightened and stiffened under his cold gaze.
- 4 As the teachers passed slowly along the ranks the boys turned their hands back and forth and grinned to show their teeth. A number of boys who failed to pass the teachers' inspection of health were hauled out of the ranks and ordered in to the acting Head. There were three strokes with his cane of plaited tamarind stalks for unclean hands; four for improperly brushed teeth and six for an uncombed head. 15
- 5 After the inspection the boys filed quietly into school and to their different classes. When you could have heard a pin drop the schoolmaster rapped out the order: 'Shun!' The entire school of boys - flung their hands to their foreheads and chanted: 'Good morning to our teachers.' 20
- 6 The schoolmaster announced a hymn, and emitting an untrue, faltering note, invited the scholars to take it. The boys rendered a rich improvement of the sound, and when the schoolmaster flung his hand up and stamped his foot they tore full-throatedly into the hymn. At the conclusion of the hymn the boys sang, 'Amen,' bringing their hands up to their faces in an attitude of prayer. The schoolmaster submitted a long, impromptu supplication, rambling and ill-worded, at the end of which the boys said 'Amen' once more. Again, the schoolmaster ordered: 'Shun!' The boys came to attention, and school was ready to begin. 25
- 7 But this morning the schoolmaster did not order the school to be seated as was the normal custom after prayers. Instead, he fixed the school with his cold eyes and said: 'Those who have brought contributions to Mr Megahey's purse will give them to their teachers.' Hands delved into pockets, while, in the lower classes, a number of small, moist fists closed still more tightly over the pieces of silver which had been wrapped in paper and pressed carefully into their palms. The teachers drew chairs and stools to their respective desks and sat down. Each produced a foolscap sheet on which were recorded the names of those of his class who had contributed to the purse for the retiring Head, Mr Megahey. 30 35
- 8 No commendation seemed due to the donor of threepence. A sixpence was held up between the thumb and forefinger of the receiving teacher and displayed before the class, while the name of the boy who had presented it was repeated some half a dozen times. Still more ado was made of the bestower of a shilling. In addition to being patted on the shoulder and beamed on by his teacher, and basking in the envy of his class, he was sent up to be thanked by the acting Head who shook his hand heartily and showed the gleaming gold of his teeth, and who, with a grave gesture, bestowed upon him the fag-end of a stick of chalk with the injunction that it be not used about the school. The receipt of the contributions was over, and the last boy had returned to his seat. On the platform the acting Head cleared his throat for attention and said: 'Those who have contributed to our retiring Head's purse will now sit. Those who have not will remain standing.' 40 45
- 9 When the scuffling tumult of a school of boys taking their seats had subsided, here and there about the schoolroom a scattered few stood with downcast eyes. The acting Head was a squat jug of a man, fierce-eyed and unsmiling. He now sauntered along the edge of his platform and fixed, one after the other, each of the standing boys with a look of complete scorn. Then, mopping his brow, he ordered those who had brought no gifts to come up and mount the platform where the dozen - of them were lined up. Taking a stick of chalk, he scrawled an X upon the forehead of each boy, to the huge delight of the rest of the school. When he had imprinted this symbol of shame upon the brow of each unhappy child, he turned to the laughing school, and holding his hand up to check the gusts of merriment, said: 'Look! They bear the symbol of ingratitude!' 50
- 10 The cruel laughter went up to the rafters. The schoolmaster permitted it free swell for a few moments before raising his hand once more. 'Ingratitude,' he went on, 'ingratitude, more strong than human hand... Come, Clement. You're in the fourth. Step forward and let's hear Mark Antony on ingratitude. Surely our old Head would expire if he knew that in his school he harboured so many thankless Brutuses. 55
- 11 Come, Clement, let us hear you recite the piece, and well? Clement stepped forward, shabby and barefoot, and with eyes downcast, began to recite the passage in a choked, monotonous tone. Now and again the schoolmaster threatened him with his rod, exhorting him to speak up. The boy would then raise his voice and quicken his words under the threat of the lash, but soon his voice sank back and the recitation resumed its muttered vein. 60 65
- 12 At last, however, the passage was finished. The acting Headmaster then spent some minutes more making the hapless boys the laughingstock of their school-friends. Only when he thought the school on the verge of becoming unmanageable did he dismiss the tormented boys with the words: Now go to your places. But bear in mind, every morning, until you show some appreciation for your resigning Headmaster, you shall come up here and stand in shame before the whole school." 70



Practice Comprehension 1- Pieces Of Silver

a) In Paragraph 1, what made the boys leave all their activities in an instant? [1]

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b) Explain what the writer means when he uses the words, "some glanced apprehensively." [2]

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c) How do you think the younger boys felt when the headmasters gaze fell upon them? [1]

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d) Identify two details that show the boys listened to everything Mr. Megahey ordered. [2]

Detail 1:

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Detail 2:

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e) Why do you think the boys were physically beaten? What outcome was the school administration trying to get out of this action? [1]

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f) Give the most important reason why there were different reactions to the different donations given by the students. [1]

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g) How does Clement feel about reciting the passage? Give two details from the text to support your answer. [3]

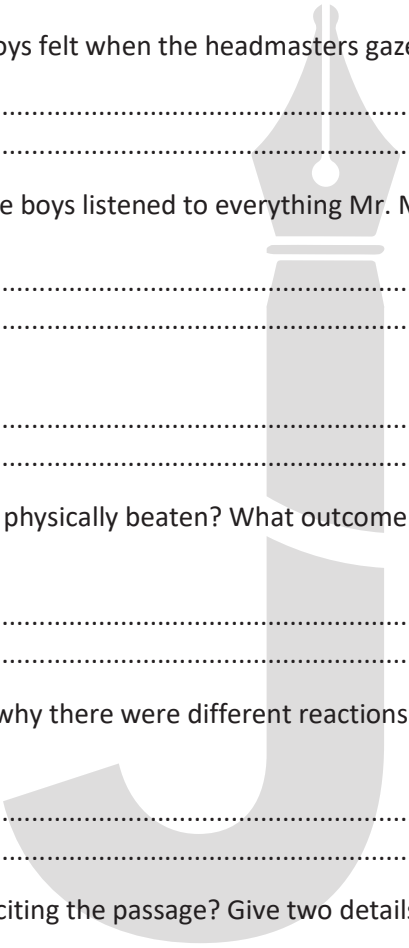
Clement's Feeling:

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Details:

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h)-i- In the story, one major problem that the Davecot family faces is implied. What is the problem? [1]



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-ii- How does this problem affect Clement’s social life? [1]

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j) Explain using your own words the different feelings of the different boys in school that day. Give three details from anywhere in the text to support your answer. [3]

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[Marks Obtained: /16]

**Question 2:**

(a) Read this sentence from the text: “In the lower classes, a number of small, moist fists closed still more tightly over the pieces of silver which had been wrapped in paper and pressed carefully into their palms.” What does the writer want to suggest to the reader about the younger children’s behavior? [1]

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(b) Explain why the writer uses the word 'acting' in the phrase, " hauled out of the ranks and ordered in to the acting head. (line 15-16)

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.....[1]

(c) Read this sentence from the text: “He now sauntered along the edge of his platform and fixed, one after the other, each of the standing boys with a look of complete scorn.”

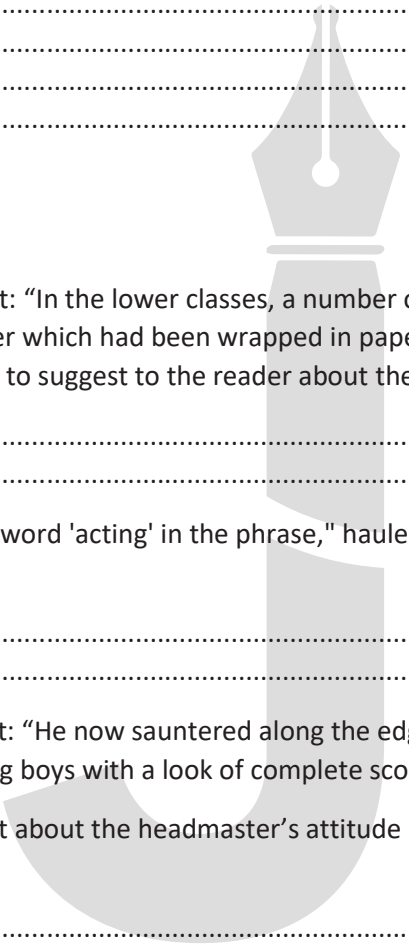
What effect does the writer suggest about the headmaster’s attitude by using the phrase ‘complete scorn.’ (line 48)

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.....[2]

(d) What two impressions does the writer want to convey to the reader in this sentence:

"With a grave gesture, bestowed upon him the fag-end of a stick of chalk with the injunction that it not be used about the school"

.....  
.....[2]



(e) Identify one example of how the writer uses language effectively to convey the result of the headmaster's actions.

Taking a stick of chalk, he scrawled an X upon the forehead of each boy, to the huge delight of the rest of the school. When he had imprinted this symbol of shame upon the brow of each unhappy child, he turned to the laughing school, and holding his hand up to check the gusts of merriment, said: 'Look! They bear the symbol of ingratitude!' The cruel laughter went up to the rafters. The schoolmaster permitted it free swell for a few moments before raising his hand once more.

Explain the impression the writer creates in the example you have identified.

Example:

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Explanation:

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[3]

[Marks Obtained: /9]

