

Practice Comprehension #8- Poisonous Snake

The sun blazed as if determined to burn every living thing in the broad fields to a crisp. Now and again the tall, straight, isolated sabang and shorea trees let go of some of their dirty yellow leaves. He sat exhausted against a tree trunk, his dark blue shirt wet with sweat. The expanse round him expressed total dryness.

He stared at the tufts of dull grass and bits of straw spinning in a column to the sky. The whirlwind sucked brown earth up into the air casting a dark pall over everything. He recalled the old people had told him this was the portent of drought, want, disaster, and death, and he was afraid. He was now anxious to get home; he could already see the tips of the bamboo thickets surrounding the house far ahead like blades of grass. But he hesitated. A moment before reaching the shade of the tree he felt his ears buzz and his eyes blur and knew it meant giddiness and sunstroke. He looked at the soles of his feet blistered from the burning sandy ground and became indescribably angry - angry at the weather capable of such endless torture. In the morning the cold had pierced his bones, but now it was so hot he felt his head would break into pieces. As he recalled the biting cold of the morning, he thought again of his little son.

That very morning he and two of his small children went out into the dry paddy fields near the house to look for frogs for the morning meal. The air was chilly. The two children on either side of him shivered as they stopped to look for frogs hiding in the cracks of the parched earth. Each time they saw two bright eyes in a deep crack they would shout, 'Pa, here's another one. Pa, this crack has two. Gold-legged ones! Hurry, Pa.'

He had hopped from place to place as the voices called him, prying up the dry clods with his hoe. He caught some of the frogs immediately, but a few jumped away as soon as he began digging, It was the children's job to give chase and pounce on them. Some they got. Some jumped into other fissures, obliging him to pry up a new cake of earth. Besides the frog, if his luck was good, he would unearth a land snail or razor clam waiting for the rains. He would take these as well.

The air had started to warm and already he had enough frogs to eat with the morning rice. The sound of the drumming, the village chief's call for a meeting, had sounded faintly from the village. Vague anger again spilled over as his thoughts returned to that moment. If only he had gone home then, the poor child would be all right now. It was really the last crack. As soon as he had poked it, the ground broke apart. A fully grown gold-legged frog as big as a thumb leaped past the older child. The younger raced after it for about twelve yards when it dodged into a deep hoofprint of a water buffalo. The child groped for it. And then he was shocked almost senseless by the trembling cry of his boy. 'Pa, a snake, a snake bit my hand.'

A cobra spread its hood, hissing. When finally able to act, the father with all his strength had slammed the handle of his hoe three times down onto the back of the serpent, leaving its tail twitching. He carried his child and the basket of frogs home without forgetting to tell the other to drag the snake along as well.

Question 1:

- a) Explain using your own words what the writer means by, "determined to burn everything". (2)
 - b) Why was the writer "anxious to get home"? (2)
 - c) Identify one condition the writer is suffering from as he feels his "ears buzz and his eyes blur". (1)
 - d) Explain using your own words, what kind of weather the area was experiencing. (2)
 - e) Identify two items that the family was planning to eat for breakfast? (1)
 - f) How does the writer feel about not leaving when they had caught "enough frogs to eat with the morning rice"? (1) Why does he feel this way? (2)
 - g) What had the father done to the snake? (1) Suggest what you think were the father's plans for the snake's future? (1)
 - h) Give three feelings of the writer (the father) about this day, give details from the text to support your answer. (3)
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Question 2:

- a) What impression of the sun is given in the first sentence? [1]
- b) Pick out a word from the second sentence beginning. 'Now and again...' that shows that the trees grow far apart from one another. [1]
- c) Read this extract from the text: The expanse round him expressed total dryness. He stared at the tufts of dull grass and bits of straw spinning in a column to the sky. The whirlwind sucked brown earth up into the air casting a dark pall over everything. What two impressions does the writer want to convey about the setting? [2]
- d) Read this extract from the text: "A moment before reaching the shade of the tree he felt his ears buzz and his eyes blur and knew it meant giddiness and sunstroke. He looked at the soles of his feet blistered from the burning sandy ground and became indescribably angry - angry at the weather capable of such endless torture. In the morning the cold had pierced his bones, but now it was so hot he felt his head would break into pieces." How does the writer use emotive language to evoke sympathy for the father in these lines? Make at least two separate points. [2]
- e) -i- Identify one example of how the writer uses language effectively in the final two paragraphs to convey the father's feelings? [1] -ii- Explain fully the impression of the father that the writer creates in the example you have identified. [2]