

# Reading Comprehension Based on Literature

## Literature: Literary terms

1. **Allegory:** a poem, play, picture, etc, in which the apparent meaning of the characters and events is used to symbolize a deeper moral or spiritual meaning
2. **Alliteration:** the use of the same consonant (consonantal alliteration) or of a vowel, not necessarily the same vowel (vocalic alliteration), at the beginning of each word or each stressed syllable in a line of verse, as in around the rugged rock the ragged rascal ran
3. **Allusion:** a passing reference; oblique or obscure mention
4. **Amphigory or amphigouri:** a piece of nonsensical writing in verse or, less commonly, prose
5. **Angry Young Men:** a group of young writers in Great Britain after WWII, bitterly critical of upper-class and middle-class values, practices, etc.
6. **Anti-hero:** a central character in a novel, play, etc, who lacks the traditional heroic virtues
7. **Aphorism:** a short pithy saying expressing a general truth; maxim
8. **Archaism:** the adoption or imitation of something archaic, such as a word or an artistic or literary style
9. **Bibliography:** a list of sources used in the preparation of a book, thesis, etc
10. **Bildungsroman:** a novel concerned with a person's formative years and development
11. **Black comedy:** a comedy dealing with an unpleasant situation in a pessimistic or macabre manner
12. **Bloomsbury group:** a group of writers, artists, and intellectuals living and working in and around Bloomsbury in London from about 1907 to 1930. Influenced by the philosophy of G. E. Moore, they included Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Clive and Vanessa Bell, Roger Fry, E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, Duncan Grant, and John Maynard Keynes
13. **Bombast:** pompous and grandiloquent language
14. **Carnavalesque:** characteristic of, suitable for, or like a carnival
15. **Causerie:** an informal talk or conversational piece of writing
16. **Cento:** a piece of writing, esp a poem, composed of quotations from other authors
17. **Coda:** a concluding part of a literary work, esp a summary at the end of a novel of further developments in the lives of the characters
18. **Colloquialism:** a word or phrase appropriate to conversation and other informal situations
19. **Decadence:** deterioration, esp of morality or culture; decay; degeneration
20. **Deconstruction:** a technique of literary analysis that regards meaning as resulting from the differences between words rather than their reference to the things they stand for. Different meanings are discovered by taking apart the structure of the language used and exposing the assumption that words have a fixed reference point beyond themselves
21. **Denouement:** the final clarification or resolution of a plot in a play or other work
22. **Double entendre:** a word, phrase, etc, that can be interpreted in two ways, esp one having one meaning that is indelicate
23. **Epilogue:** a speech, usually in verse, addressed to the audience by an actor at the end of a play
24. **Epistolary novel:** a novel written in the form of a series of letters
25. **Epitaph:** a speech or written passage composed in commemoration of a dead person
26. **Exegesis:** explanation or critical interpretation of a text, esp of the Bible
27. **Fable:** a short moral story, esp one with animals as characters
28. **Fabulist:** a person who invents or recounts fables
29. **Futurism:** an artistic movement that arose in Italy in 1909 to replace traditional aesthetic values with the characteristics of the machine age
30. **Gothic:** of or relating to a literary style characterized by gloom, the grotesque, and the supernatural, popular esp in the late 18th century
31. **Hagiography:** the writing of the lives of the saints
32. **Hellenism:** conformity to, imitation of, or devotion to the culture of ancient Greece
33. **Hermeneutics:** the science of interpretation, esp of Scripture
34. **Invective:** vehement accusation or denunciation, esp of a bitterly abusive or sarcastic kind
35. **Journalese:** a superficial cliché-ridden style of writing regarded as typical of newspapers
36. **Kafkaesque:** of, characteristic of, or like the writings of Kafka; specif., surreal, nightmarish, confusingly complex, etc.
37. **Lampoon:** a satire in prose or verse ridiculing a person, literary work, etc
38. **Literary criticism:** the evaluation, study and discussion of literature
39. **Litterateur:** one who is devoted to the study or writing of literature
40. **Locus classicus:** an authoritative and often quoted passage from a standard work
41. **Magic realism or magical realism:** a style of painting or writing that depicts images or scenes of surreal fantasy in a representational or realistic way
42. **Maxim:** a brief expression of a general truth, principle, or rule of conduct
43. **Melodrama:** (formerly) a romantic drama characterized by sensational incident, music, and song
44. **Metafictional:** fiction that acknowledges that it is fictional or artificial
45. **Metalinguage:** a language or system of symbols used to discuss another language or system
46. **Metaphor:** a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action that it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance, for example he is a lion in battle
47. **Modernism:** a 20th-century divergence in the arts from previous traditions, esp in architecture
48. **Motif:** a distinctive idea, esp a theme elaborated on in a piece of music, literature, etc
49. **Mythopoeia:** the composition or making of myths

50. **Naturalism:** a movement, esp in art and literature, advocating detailed realistic and factual description, esp that in 19th-century France in the writings of Zola, Flaubert, etc
51. **Nom de plume:** an author's pseudonym
52. **Novellette:** an extended prose narrative story or short novel
53. **Onomatopoeia:** the formation of words whose sound is imitative of the sound of the noise or action designated, such as hiss, buzz, and bang
54. **Oxymoron:** an epigrammatic effect, by which contradictory terms are used in conjunction
55. **Palindrome:** a word or phrase the letters of which, when taken in reverse order, give the same word or phrase, such as able was I ere I saw Elba
56. **Paraphrase:** an expression of a statement or text in other words, esp in order to clarify
57. **Parody:** a musical, literary, or other composition that mimics the style of another composer, author, etc, in a humorous or satirical way
58. **Pastiche:** a work of art that mixes styles, materials, etc; a work of art that imitates the style of another artist or period
59. **Pastoral:** dealing with an idealized form of rural existence in a conventional way
60. **Pathos:** the quality or power, esp in literature or speech, of arousing feelings of pity, sorrow, etc
61. **Picaresque:** of or relating to a type of fiction in which the hero, a rogue, goes through a series of episodic adventures. It originated in Spain in the 16th century
62. **Plagiarism:** the act of plagiarizing, copying text or theme.
63. **Polemic:** an argument or controversy, esp over a doctrine, belief, etc
64. **Postmodernism:** any of a number of trends or movements in the arts and literature developing in the 1970s in reaction to or rejection of the dogma, principles, or practices of established modernism, esp. A movement in architecture and the decorative arts running counter to the practice and influence of the International Style and encouraging the use of elements from historical vernacular styles and often playful illusion, decoration, and complexity
65. **Pot-boiler:** a literary or artistic work of little merit produced quickly in order to make money
66. **Roman à clef:** a novel in which real people are depicted under fictitious names
67. **Samizdat:** a system of clandestine printing and distribution of banned or dissident literature
68. **Simile:** a figure of speech that expresses the resemblance of one thing to another of a different category, usually introduced by as or like
69. **Splatterpunk:** a literary genre characterized by graphically described scenes of an extremely gory nature
70. **Spoonerism:** the transposition of the initial consonants or consonant clusters of a pair of words, often resulting in an amusing ambiguity of meaning, such as hush my brat for brush my hat
71. **Sturm und Drang:** a German literary movement of the latter half of the 18th century, characterized by a reaction against rationalism
72. **Surrealism:** a movement in art and literature in the 1920s, which developed esp from dada, characterized by the evocative juxtaposition of incongruous images in order to include unconscious and dream elements
73. **Tragicomedy:** a drama in which aspects of both tragedy and comedy are found
74. **Trope:** a word or expression used in a figurative sense; a recurring theme or idea
75. **Vignette:** a short graceful literary essay or sketch

## **Reading Comprehension - 1**

During the Victorian period, women writers were measured against a social rather than a literary ideal. Hence, it was widely thought that novels by women should be modest, religious, sensitive, guileless, and chaste, like their authors. Many Victorian women writers took exception to this belief, however, resisting the imposition of nonliterary restrictions on their work. Publishers soon discovered that the gentlest and most idyllic female novelists were tough-minded and relentless when their professional integrity was at stake. Keenly aware of their artistic responsibilities, these women writers would not make concessions to secure commercial success.

The Brontës, George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and their lesser-known contemporaries repudiated, in their professional lives, the courtesy that Victorian ladies might exact from Victorian gentlemen. Desiring rigorous and impartial criticism, most women writers did not wish reviewers to be kind to them if kindness meant overlooking their literary weaknesses or flattering them on their accomplishments simply because of their sex. They had expected derisive reviews; instead, they found themselves confronted with generous criticism, which they considered condescending. Elizabeth Barrett Browning labeled it "the comparative respect which means... absolute scorn."

For their part, Victorian critics were virtually obsessed with finding the place of the woman writer so as to judge her appropriately. Many bluntly admitted that they thought *Jane Eyre* a masterpiece if written by a man, shocking or disgusting if written by a woman. Moreover, reactionary reviewers were quick to associate an independent heroine with carefully concealed revolutionary doctrine; several considered *Jane Eyre* a radical feminist document, as indeed it was. To Charlotte Brontë, who had demanded dignity and independence without any revolutionary intent and who considered herself politically conservative, their criticism was an affront. Such criticism bunched all women writers together rather than treating them as individual artists.

Charlotte Brontë's experience served as a warning to other women writers about the prejudices that immediately associated them with feminists and others thought to be political radicals. Irritated, and anxious to detach themselves from a group stereotype, many expressed relatively conservative views on the emancipation of women and stressed their own domestic accomplishments. However, in identifying themselves with women who had chosen the traditional career path of marriage and motherhood, these writers encountered still another threat to their creativity. Victorian prudery rendered virtually all experience that was uniquely feminine unprintable. No nineteenth-century woman dared to describe childbirth, much less her sexual passion. Men could not write about their sexual experiences either, but they could write about sport, business, crime, and war—all activities from which women were barred. Small wonder no woman produced a novel like *War and Peace*. What is amazing is the sheer volume of first-rate prose and poetry that Victorian women did write.

- 1) **The primary purpose of the passage is to**
  - A. refute the contention that no Victorian woman writer produced a novel like War and Peace
  - B. trace the historical relationship between radical feminist politics and the Victorian novels written by women
  - C. show how three Victorian women writers responded to criticism of their novels
  - D. resolve the apparent contradiction between Victorian women writers' literary innovativeness and their rather conservative social views
  - E. describe the discrepancy between Victorian society's expectations of women writers and the expectations of the women writers themselves
- 2) **According to the passage, Victorian women writers "would not make concessions" to publishers primarily because they felt that such concessions would**
  - A. require them to limit descriptions of uniquely feminine experiences
  - B. compromise their artistic integrity
  - C. make them vulnerable to stereotyping by critics
  - D. provide no guarantee that their works would enjoy commercial success
  - E. go against the traditions of English letters
- 3) **The passage suggests that Victorian criticism of works by women writers was**
  - A. indulgent
  - B. perfunctory
  - C. resourceful
  - D. timely
  - E. apolitical
- 4) **The author of the passage quotes Elizabeth Barrett Browning in order to demonstrate that Victorian women writers**
  - A. possessed both talent and literary creativity
  - B. felt that their works were misunderstood
  - C. refused to make artistic concessions
  - D. feared derisive criticism
  - E. resented condescending criticism
- 5) **It can be inferred from the passage that Charlotte Bronte considered the criticisms leveled at Jane Eyre by reactionary reviewers "an affront" primarily because such criticism**
  - A. exposed her carefully concealed revolutionary doctrine to public scrutiny
  - B. assessed the literary merit of the novel on the basis of its author's sex
  - C. assumed that her portrayal of an independent woman represented revolutionary ideas
  - D. labeled the novel shocking and disgusting without just cause
  - E. denied that the novel was a literary masterpiece
- 6) **Which of the following statements best describes the "threat" mentioned in line 57 of the passage?**
  - A. Critics demanded to know the sex of the author before passing judgment on the literary quality of a novel.
  - B. Women writers were prevented from describing in print experiences about which they had special knowledge.
  - C. The reading public tended to prefer historical novels to novels describing contemporary London society.
  - D. Publishers were urging Victorian women writers to publish under their own names rather than under pseudonyms.
  - E. Women writers' domestic responsibilities tended to take time away from their writing.
- 7) **The passage suggests that the attitude of Victorian women writers toward being grouped together by critics was most probably one of**
  - A. relief
  - B. indifference
  - C. amusement
  - D. annoyance
  - E. ambivalence
- 8) **It can be inferred from the passage that a Victorian woman writer who did not consider herself a feminist would most probably have approved of women's**
  - A. entering the noncombat military
  - B. entering the publishing business
  - C. entering a university
  - D. joining the stock exchange
  - E. joining a tennis club
- 9) **The passage suggests that the literary creativity of Victorian women writers could have been enhanced if**
  - A. women had been allowed to write about a broader range of subjects
  - B. novels of the period had been characterized by greater stylistic and structural ingenuity
  - C. a reserved and decorous style had been a more highly valued literary ideal
  - D. publishers had sponsored more new women novelists
  - E. critics had been kinder in reviewing the works of women novelists

## Reading Comprehension - 2

It is an unfortunate fact that most North Americans know little about American Indian culture and history. Scholars have studied such matters, but they have not succeeded in broadcasting their conclusions widely. Thus, it is still not widely known that American Indians have epics, that they performed plays long before Europeans arrived, and that they practiced politics and carried on trade.

One way to gain a fuller appreciation of this rich culture is to examine American Indian poetry, for poetry is in all cultures the most central and articulate of the arts. It is especially important that we study American Indian poetry as this poetry can create a context that gives cohesive expression to the crafts, the artifacts, and the isolated facts that many Americans have managed to notice willy-nilly. Even a survey of American Indian poetry reveals a range of poetic thought and technique that defies easy generalization. Jarold Ramsey hazards a summary, however, which serves at least to give the uninitiated reader some sense of what American Indian poetry is like. Overall, he writes, it represents "an oral, formulaic, traditional, and anonymous art form," whose approach is to emphasize the "mythic and sacred" components of reality. It "flourished through public performances... by skilled recitallists whose audiences already knew the individual stories" and valued the performers for their "ability to exploit their material dramatically and to combine them ?their stories? in longer cycles" rather than for their "plot invention." Because this poetry belongs to highly ethnocentric tribal peoples, whose cultures "we still do not know much about," it "is likely to seem all the more terse, even cryptic."

American Indian poetry has another feature that Ramsey ignores: it is always functional. Whether sung, chanted, or recited; whether performed ceremonially, as entertainment, or as part of a task such as curing a patient or grinding corn; or whether recited individually or by a group, it is always fully woven into the fabric of ordinary life.

For complicated reasons, American Indian poetry has basically been ignored by non-Indian cultures. Kenneth Lincoln writes that failure to hear American Indian voices results "partly...from the tragedies of tribal dislocation, partly from mistranslation, partly from misconceptions about literature, partly from cultural indifference." Brian Swann suggests an additional explanation: tribal poetry is oral, whereas Europeans arrived in the New World with a deeply ingrained belief in the primacy of the written word. As a result, European settlers found it hard to imagine that poetry could exist without written texts and thus that the American Indians had achieved something parallel to what Europeans called literature long before Europeans arrived. As a consequence, Europeans did not fully respond to the rich vitality of American Indian poetry.

- 1) According to the passage, American Indian cultures have produced all of the following forms of artistic expression EXCEPT
  - A. crafts
  - B. dramas
  - C. songs
  - D. written poems
  - E. oral epics
- 2) According to Jarold Ramsey, American Indian poetry is an art form characterized by its
  - A. unusual depictions of landscapes
  - B. integration with everyday affairs
  - C. universal accessibility
  - D. highly original plots
  - E. adaptability to public performance
- 3) According to Kenneth Lincoln, one of the reasons that non-Indians have had little knowledge of American Indian poetry is that American Indian poems
  - A. have been poorly translated
  - B. have not yet attracted the scholarly attention they deserve
  - C. can be appreciated only when presented orally
  - D. are difficult to understand without a background in comparative mythology
  - E. are too stylistically complex
- 4) According to the passage, it would be unusual for American Indian poetry to be
  - A. attributed to specific authors
  - B. sung by a group of performers
  - C. chanted while working
  - D. sung during a sacred ceremony
  - E. performed in a dramatic manner
- 5) It can be inferred from the passage that Brian Swann believes which of the following about the European settlers of America?
  - A. They probably were more literate, on the average, than the general European population they left behind.
  - B. They probably thought it necessary to understand American Indian politics before studying American Indian literature.
  - C. They probably did not recognize evidence of an oral poetic tradition in the American Indian cultures they encountered.
  - D. They probably could not appreciate American Indian poetry because it was composed in long narrative cycles.
  - E. They probably did not study American Indian poetry because its subject matter was too practically oriented.



- 6) The tone of lines 12-16 suggests that the author believes that most Americans' knowledge of American Indian culture can best be characterized as
- spotty and contradictory
  - stereotyped and limited
  - confused and inaccurate
  - unsystematic and superficial
  - vague and biased
- 7) Which of the following best describes the organization of the last paragraph of the passage?
- An observation is made and qualifications of it are provided.
  - A phenomenon is noted and explanations for it are presented.
  - A hypothesis is presented and arguments against it are cited.
  - A prognosis is made and evidence supporting it is discussed.
  - A criticism is presented and information expanding it is provided.

### Reading Comprehension - 3

Shaw's defense of a theater of ideas brought him up against both his great bugbears—commercialized art on the one hand and Art for Art's Sake on the other. His teaching is that beauty is a by-product of other activity; that the artist writes out of moral passion, not out of love of art; that the pursuit of art for its own sake is a form of self-indulgence as bad as any other sort of sensuality. In the end, the errors of "pure" art and of commercialized art are identical: they both appeal primarily to the senses. True art, on the other hand, is not merely a matter of pleasure. It may be unpleasant. A favorite Shavian metaphor for the function of the arts is that of tooth-pulling. Even if the patient is under laughing gas, the tooth is still pulled.

The history of aesthetics affords more examples of a didactic than of a hedonist view. But Shaw's didacticism takes an unusual turn in its application to the history of arts. If, as Shaw holds, ideas are a most important part of a work of art, and if, as he also holds, ideas go out of date, it follows that even the best works of art go out of date in some important respects and that the generally held view that great works are in all respects eternal is not shared by Shaw. In the preface to *Three Plays for Puritans*, he maintains that renewal in the arts means renewal in philosophy, that the first great artist who comes along after a renewal gives to the new philosophy full and final form, that subsequent artists, though even more gifted, can do nothing but refine upon the master without matching him. Shaw, whose essential modesty is as disarming as his pose of vanity is disconcerting, assigns to himself the role, not of the master, but of the pioneer, the role of a Marlowe rather than of a Shakespeare. "The whirligig of time will soon bring my audiences to my own point of view," he writes, "and then the next Shakespeare that comes along will turn these petty tentatives of mine into masterpieces final for their epoch."

"Final for their epoch"—even Shakespearean masterpieces are not final beyond that. No one, says Shaw, will ever write a better tragedy than *Lear* or a better opera than *Don Giovanni* or a better music drama than *Der Ring des Nibelungen*; but just as essential to a play as this aesthetic merit is moral relevance which, if we take a naturalistic and historical view of morals, it loses, or partly loses, in time. Shaw, who has the courage of his historicism, consistently withstands the view that moral problems do not change, and argues therefore that for us modern literature and music form a Bible surpassing in significance the Hebrew Bible. That is Shaw's anticipatory challenge to the neo-orthodoxy of today.

- 1) The primary purpose of the passage is to discuss
- the unorthodoxy of Shaw's views on the Bible
  - the aesthetic merit of Shaw's plays
  - Shaw's theory of art
  - Shavian examples of the theater of ideas
  - Shaw's naturalistic and historical view of morals
- 2) The author sets off the word "pure" with quotation marks in order to
- contrast it with the word "true," which appears later
  - suggest that, in this context, it is synonymous with "commercialized"
  - underscore its importance
  - strip away its negative connotations
  - emphasize its positive connotations
- 3) According to the author, Shaw compares art to tooth-pulling in order to show that
- the moral relevance of a work of art must be extracted from the epoch in which it was created
  - true art is painful to the senses
  - even the best works of art go out of date
  - pleasure is not the sole purpose of art
  - all art has a lasting effect on its audience
- 4) According to the author, Shaw's didacticism was unusual in that it was characterized by
- idealism
  - historicism
  - hedonism
  - moralism
  - religious zeal

- 5) It can be inferred from the passage that Shaw would probably agree with all of the following statements about Shakespeare EXCEPT:
- He wrote out of a moral passion.
  - All of his plays are out of date in some important respect.
  - He was the most profound and original thinker of his epoch.
  - He was a greater artist than Marlowe.
  - His Lear gives full and final form to the philosophy of his age.
- 6) Which of the following does the author cite as a contradiction in Shaw?
- Whereas he pretended to be vain, he was actually modest.
  - He questioned the significance of the Hebrew Bible, and yet he believed that a great artist could be motivated by religious zeal.
  - Although he insisted that true art springs from moral passion, he rejected the notion that morals do not change.
  - He considered himself to be the pioneer of a new philosophy, but he hoped his audiences would eventually adopt his point of view.
  - On the one hand, he held that ideas are a most important part of a work of art; on the other hand, he believed that ideas go out of date.
- 7) The ideas attributed to Shaw in the passage suggest that he would most likely agree with which of the following statements?
- Every great poet digs down to a level where human nature is always and everywhere alike.
  - A play cannot be comprehended fully without some knowledge and imaginative understanding of its context.
  - A great music drama like Der Ring des Nibelungen springs from a love of beauty, not from a love of art.
  - Morality is immutable; it is not something to be discussed and worked out.
  - Don Giovanni is a masterpiece because it is as relevant today as it was when it was created.
- 8) As it is revealed in the passage, the author's attitude toward Shaw can best be described as
- condescending
  - completely neutral
  - approving
  - envious
  - adulatory

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### Answer Key:-

RC - 1	1. E	2. B	3. A	4. E	5. C	6. B	7. D	8. C	9. A
RC - 2	1. D	2. E	3. A	4. A	5. C	6. D	7. B		
RC - 3	1. C	2. A	3. D	4. B	5. C	6. A	7. B	8. C	