
SSAT Reading Comprehension Practice Test 1

Reading Comprehension 1

Directions: Read each passage and answer the questions that follow it.

If you are asked the color of the sky on a fair day in summer, your answer will most probably be “blue.” This answer is only partially correct. Blue sky near the horizon is not the same kind of blue as it is straight overhead. Look at the sky some fine day and you will find that the blue sky near the horizon is slightly greenish. As your eye moves upward toward the *zenith*, you will find that the blue changes into pure blue, and finally shades into a violet-blue overhead.

Have you heard the story of a farmer who objected to the color of the distant hills in the artist’s picture? He said to the artist, “Why do you make those hills blue? They are green, I’ve been over there and I know!”

The artist asked him to do a little experiment. “Bend over and look at the hills between your legs.” As the farmer did this, the artist asked, “Now what color are the hills?”

The farmer looked again, then he stood up and looked. “By gosh, they turned blue!” he said.

It is quite possible that you have looked at many colors that you did not really recognize. Sky is not just blue; it is many kinds of blue. Grass is not plain green; it may be one of several varieties of green. A red-brick wall frequently is not pure red. It may vary from yellow-orange to violet-red in color, but to the unseeing eye it is just red brick.

Q1. Which title best expresses the ideas of this passage?

- (A) “The Summer Sky”
- (B) “Artists vs. Farmers”
- (C) “Recognizing Colors”
- (D) “Blue Hills”

Answer: ___

Q2. At the zenith, the sky is usually

- (A) violet-blue.
- (B) violet-red.
- (C) greenish-blue.
- (D) yellow-orange.

Answer: ___

Q3. The author suggests that

- (A) farmers are color-blind.
- (B) perceived color varies.

- (C) brick walls should be painted pure red.
- (D) some artists use poor color combinations.

Answer: ___

Q4. The word *zenith* in the first paragraph probably refers to

- (A) a color.
- (B) a point directly overhead.
- (C) a point on the horizon.
- (D) the hills.

Answer: ___

Reading Comprehension 2

While the Europeans were still creeping cautiously along their coasts, Polynesians were making trips between Hawaii and New Zealand, a distance of 3,800 miles, in frail canoes. These fearless sailors of the Pacific explored every island in their vast domain without even the simplest of navigational tools.

In the daytime, the Polynesians guided their craft by the position of the sun, the trend of the waves and wind, and the flight of seabirds.

Stars were used during long trips between island groups. Youths studying navigation were taught to view the heavens as a cylinder on which the highways of navigation were marked. An invisible line bisected the sky from the North Star to the Southern Cross.

In addition to single canoes, the Polynesians often used twin canoes for transpacific voyages. The two boats were fastened together by canopied platforms that shielded passengers from sun and rain. Such crafts were remarkably seaworthy and could accommodate 60 to 80 people, in addition to water, food, and domestic animals. Some of these vessels had as many as three masts.

These Pacific *mariners* used paddles to propel and steer their canoes. The steering paddle was so important that it was always given a personal name. Polynesian legends not only recite the names of the canoe and the hero who discovered a new island but also the name of the steering paddle he used.

Q5. Which title is best for this selection?

- (A) "European Sailors"
- (B) "The History of the Pacific Ocean"
- (C) "The Study of Navigation"
- (D) "Early Polynesian Navigation"

Answer: ___

Q6. The Polynesians made trips to

- (A) New Zealand.
- (B) the Atlantic.
- (C) the Southern Cross.

- (D) Europe.

Answer: ___

Q7. The word *mariner* means

- (A) propeller.
- (B) seaman.
- (C) paddle.
- (D) navigation.

Answer: ___

Q8. This passage suggests that the Polynesians

- (A) trained seabirds to guide their canoes.
- (B) had seen a line in the sky that was invisible to others.
- (C) used a primitive telescope to view the heavens.
- (D) were astronomers as well as explorers.

Answer: ___

Reading Comprehension 3

The seasonal comings and goings of birds have excited the attention and wonder of all sorts of people in all ages and places. The oracles of Greece and the augurs of Rome wove them into ancient mythology. They are spoken of in the Books of Job and Jeremiah.

Nevertheless, it has been difficult for many to believe that small birds, especially, are capable of migratory journeys. Aristotle was convinced that the birds that wintered in Greece were not new arrivals, but merely Greece's summer birds in winter dress. According to a belief persisting in some parts of the world to this day, swallows and swifts do not migrate, but spend the winter in hibernation. (Swifts and swallows do migrate, just as most other Northern Hemisphere birds do.) Another old and charming, but untrue, legend enlists the aid of the stork in getting small birds to and from winter quarters: Small birds are said to hitch rides on the European stork's back.

It is clear why Northern Hemisphere birds fly south in the fall; they go to assure themselves of food and a more favorable climate for the winter months. It is also clear where most of the migrants come from and where they go. Years of birdbanding have disclosed the routes of the main migratory species.

But there are other aspects of migration that remain, for all our powers of scientific investigation, as puzzling and mysterious to modern man as to the ancients. Why do migrant birds come north each spring? Why don't they simply stay in the warm tropics the whole twelve months of the year? What determines the moment of departure for north or south? Above all, how do birds—especially species like the remarkable golden plover, which flies huge distances directly across trackless ocean wastes—find their way?

Q9. Which of the following is the best title for this selection?

- (A) "The Solution of an Ancient Problem"

- (B) “Mysterious Migrations”
- (C) “The Secret of the Plover”
- (D) “Aristotle’s Theory”

Answer: ___

Q10. Bird-banding has revealed

- (A) the kind of food birds eat.
- (B) why the birds prefer the tropics in the summer.
- (C) why birds leave at a certain time.
- (D) the routes taken by different types of birds.

Answer: ___

Q11. Swallows and swifts

- (A) remain in Greece all year.
- (B) change their plumage in winter.
- (C) hibernate during the winter.
- (D) fly south for the winter.

Answer: ___

Q12. The article proves that

- (A) nature still has secrets that man has not fathomed.
- (B) the solutions of Aristotle are accepted by modern science.
- (C) we live in an age that has lost all interest in bird lore.
- (D) man has no means of solving the problems of bird migration.

Answer: ___

Using new tools and techniques, scientists, almost unnoticed, are remaking the world of plants. They have already remodeled sixty-five sorts of flowers, fruits, vegetables, and trees, giving us among other things tobacco that resists disease, cantaloupes that are immune to the blight, and lettuce with crisper leaves. The chief new tool they are using is colchicine, a poisonous drug, which has astounding effects upon growth and upon heredity. It creates new varieties with astonishing frequency, whereas such mutations occur but rarely in nature. Colchicine has thrown new light on the fascinating jobs of the plant hunters. The Department of Agriculture sends agents all over the world to find plants native to other lands that can be grown here and are superior to those already here. Scientists have crossed these foreign plants with those at home, thereby adding to our farm crops many desirable characteristics. The colchicine technique has enormously facilitated their work, because hybrids so often can be made fertile and because it takes so few generations of plants now to build a new variety with the qualities desired.

Q13. Which title best expresses the ideas of the paragraph?

- (A) “Plant Growth and Heredity”
- (B) “New Plants for Old”
- (C) “Remodeling Plant Life”
- (D) “A More Abundant World ”

Answer: ___

Q14. Mutation in plant life results in

- (A) diseased plants.
- (B) hybrids.
- (C) new varieties.
- (D) fertility.

Answer: ___

Q15. Colchicine speeds the improvement of plant species because it

- (A) makes possible the use of foreign plants.
- (B) makes use of natural mutations.
- (C) creates new varieties very quickly.
- (D) can be used with sixty-five different vegetables, fruits, and flowers.

Answer: ___

Q16. According to the passage, colchicine is a

- (A) poisonous drug.
- (B) blight.
- (C) kind of plant hunter.
- (D) hybrid plant.

Answer: ___

About the year 1812, two steam ferryboats were built under the direction of Robert Fulton for crossing the Hudson River, and one of the same description was built for service on the East River. These boats were what are known as twin boats, each of them having two complete hulls united by a deck or bridge. Because these boats were pointed at both ends and moved equally well with either end foremost, they crossed and re-crossed the river without losing any time in turning about. Fulton also contrived, with great ingenuity, floating docks for the reception of the ferryboats and a means by which they were brought to the docks without a shock. These boats were the first of a fleet that has since carried hundreds of millions of passengers to and from New York.

Q17. Which title best expresses the main idea of this selection?

- (A) "Crossing the Hudson River by Boat"
- (B) "Transportation of Passengers"
- (C) "The Invention of Floating Docks"
- (D) "The Beginning of Steam Ferryboat Service"

Answer: ___

Q18. The steam ferryboats were known as twin boats because

- (A) they had two complete hulls united by a bridge.

- (B) they could move as easily forward as backward.
- (C) each ferryboat had two captains.
- (D) two boats were put into service at the same time.

Answer: ___

Q19. Which statement is true according to the selection?

- (A) Boats built under Fulton's direction are still in use.
- (B) Fulton planned a reception to celebrate the first ferryboat.
- (C) Fulton piloted the first steam ferryboats across the Hudson.
- (D) Fulton developed a satisfactory way of docking the ferryboats.

Answer: ___

Q20. Robert Fulton worked in the

- (A) seventeenth century.
- (B) eighteenth century.
- (C) nineteenth century.
- (D) twentieth century.

Answer: ___

Q21. In line 8, the word shock is used to mean an

- (A) unpleasant surprise.
- (B) impact.
- (C) illness following an accident.
- (D) electrical impulse.

Answer: ___

Q22. The first steam ferryboats were built to

- (A) cross the Erie Canal.
- (B) cross the Hudson River.
- (C) carry passengers to Massachusetts.
- (D) travel down the Delaware River.

Answer: ___

Answer Keys Link

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