

Literature

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## SAT® Subject Test in Literature

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In this document, you will find detailed answer explanations to all of the Literature practice questions from *Getting Ready for the SAT Subject Tests*. By reviewing these answer explanations, you can familiarize yourself with the types of questions on the test and learn your strengths and weaknesses.

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**1. Difficulty: Easy**

Choice (A) is correct. Lines 1–7 of the passage set the scene for the conversation that follows: Granny sees the cameraman “cut[ting] across our neighbor’s yard” and comes outside to confront him (“the screen door bammin soft and scratchy against her palms”). As the cameraman begins to speak, “Granny cut him off. And smiled that smile.” Granny’s curt greeting (“Good mornin”) and no-nonsense manner make the cameraman realize that he is intruding, as his reaction makes clear: “‘Good mornin,’ he said, head all down the way Bingo does when you yell at him.” The cameraman seems to feel uncomfortable and hesitant, although he still tries to complete his task of filming Granny’s house.

**2. Difficulty: Easy**

Choice (B) is correct. In this context, “patronizing” means condescending, or assuming undue familiarity with a person perceived to be inferior. Referring to a person to whom one is not related as “aunty” is patronizing and disrespectful. The cameraman’s lack of respect for Granny is emphasized by the fact that he is “pointin [the camera] straight at her,” despite having been asked to turn it off. Presumably, it is only because the cameraman feels superior to Granny that he calls her “aunty” rather than using a more respectful term like “ma’am.”

**3. Difficulty: Easy**

Choice (E) is correct. When Granny tells the cameraman, “Your mama and I are not related,” she is doing more than clarifying that she is not his “aunty”; she is also rebuking him, or criticizing him sharply and angrily. Granny’s anger toward the cameraman has been building throughout the passage: First, she “cut him off” and “smiled that smile” (lines 7–8); then, she said “with no smile” that she did mind the filming (line 29); last, speaking “real low through her teeth” as she “took a step down off the porch and then another,” she warned the cameraman to “shut that machine off” (lines 34–36). In the last line of the passage, Granny forcefully expresses her anger toward the cameraman by rejecting his insulting use of the term “aunty.”

**4. Difficulty: Easy**

Choice (A) is correct. Granny displays “propriety,” or polite and appropriate behavior, while the cameraman displays “impertinence,” or rude and inappropriate behavior. The cameraman is not hostile or vulgar in his dealings with Granny, but his rude treatment is evident in his use of the patronizing term “aunty” and his failure to ask permission to film or apologize for his intrusion onto Granny’s property; in short, the cameraman does not treat Granny with proper respect. Granny, on the other hand, politely greets the cameraman with the phrase “Good mornin” and a curt smile, and asserts through her speech and actions (“‘I do indeed,’ said Granny with no smile”) that she considers his behavior to be an improper intrusion. Granny is angry, but she does not shout or curse; she simply states, with appropriate directness, that she does not appreciate the cameraman’s actions.

**5. Difficulty: Medium**

Choice (E) is correct. The excerpt is a narrative episode with philosophical implications, or a story that deals with issues of nature, reality and perception. The narrative elements of the poem are evident throughout: The speaker tells the story of events that began when he or she “found/A little boat” and decided to take it out on the water. Feeling exhilarated, the speaker suddenly sees “a huge peak, black and huge,” and guiltily turns “Back to the covert of the willow tree,” after which “for many days . . . There hung a darkness, call it solitude/Or blank desertion.” The philosophical elements of the poem are most evident in the discussion of the speaker’s feelings after the event; the speaker grapples with “a dim and undetermined sense/Of unknown modes of being.” Is the speaker awed by the peak because he or she is already feeling guilty about having stolen the boat? Or is there some external force in nature that governs our internal feelings and actions? The questions the poem raises have philosophical implications.

**6. Difficulty: Medium**

Choice (A) is correct. “Personification” is the attribution of human qualities to an object or abstraction. Nature, the boat and the mountain echoes are all personified to some degree in lines 1–7. The speaker first refers to nature as “her” (“led by her”), then calls the cave the boat’s “home” and refers to the boat as “her” (“unloosed her chain”), and finally refers to “the voice/Of mountain echoes.” The speaker’s words subtly convey the impression that nature, the boat and the mountain echoes are like human characters in the episode and are not merely things.

**7. Difficulty: Medium**

Choice (C) is correct. “Furtive” means stealthy or surreptitious; a person who is breaking a rule or law or otherwise behaving unethically, in secret, could be said to be behaving in a furtive manner. In lines 5–7, the speaker acknowledges the furtiveness of borrowing a boat that did not belong to him or her: “It was an act of stealth/And troubled pleasure, nor without the voice/Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on.” The reference to the “voice” of the “mountain-echoes” indicates that the speaker, no doubt wary of making too much noise, was acutely conscious of the sounds all around him; the reference thus reinforces the speaker’s sense of furtiveness.

**8. Difficulty: Medium**

Choice (B) is correct. The poem tells the story of events that began when the speaker “found/A little boat” and decided to take it out on the water. Feeling exhilarated, the speaker suddenly saw “a huge peak, black and huge,” a “grim shape” that seemingly “Strode after” him or her. The speaker then guiltily turned “Back to the covert of the willow tree,” after which “for many days . . . o’er my thoughts/There hung a darkness.” The speaker is awed by the fact that nature seemed to see the theft of the boat and, in the form of the “huge peak,” threaten the speaker in some profound but unclear way (“my brain/Worked with a dim and undetermined sense/Of unknown modes of being”). The speaker knows that the experience with the peak was significant, and scary, but he or she is unable to trace all the implications of what happened. The speaker seems to feel that the peak is a figure of undefined and unsettling significance.

**9. Difficulty: Medium**

Choice (D) is correct. The outlook of the speaker at the beginning of the excerpt would best be described as “daring,” or bold and adventurous. Having boldly taken a small boat out on the lake for an evening adventure, the speaker describes himself or herself as “like one who rows,/ Proud of his skill”; the speaker even uses the adverb “lustily” to convey the confidence with which he or she piloted the boat. But the speaker’s outlook shifts dramatically when he or she speaks of seeing the “huge peak, black and huge”: “The speaker turned back to the shore “With trembling oars . . . And through the meadows homeward went, in grave/And serious mood.” The speaker reveals that in the days that followed, he or she was profoundly shaken and confused by the experience: “for many days, my brain/Worked with a dim and undetermined sense/Of unknown modes of being; o’er my thoughts/There hung a darkness.” During the course of the excerpt, the speaker clearly passes from a daring outlook to one of “uncertainty,” or one lacking conviction and confidence.

**10. Difficulty: Hard**

Choice (E) is correct. Beginning in line 1, the speaker directly addresses his or her soul: “Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth” (“earth” means “body,” as the following lines make clear). Throughout the rest of the poem, the speaker discusses the relationship between his or her soul and physical body. When the speaker refers to “thy outward walls,” “thy fading mansion,” “thy charge,” and so on, he or she is referring to the body, which will ultimately die and be eaten by worms (“Shall worms, inheritors of this excess/ Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body’s end?”). The message of the poem is that the (inner) soul should stop worrying about the (outer) body and should essentially let the body wither and die, knowing that the soul is all that matters in the afterlife (“Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant’s loss”). The dramatic situation of the poem is that of an individual — the speaker — addressing his or her own soul.

**11. Difficulty: Hard**

Choice (C) is correct. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker addresses his or her soul (“Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth”), and asks why the soul is “Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?” The “outward walls” of the soul refer to the speaker’s physical body, which is being adorned in an expensive and showy manner (“so costly gay”). Lines 3–4 of the poem ask why the soul is attending to physical appearances while neglecting the nourishment the soul needs (“pine within and suffer dearth”) — presumably from spiritual or religious sources.

**12. Difficulty:** *Hard*

Choice (E) is correct. The first eight lines of the poem feature four consecutive questions. The speaker is essentially asking the soul why so much attention is being paid to the body (“thy outward walls,” “thy fading mansion”), which is only going to die and be consumed by worms (“Is this thy body’s end?”). In other words, the speaker is asking why the immortal soul is sacrificing its needs in favor of those of the “sinful” and dying body. The speaker’s questions are rhetorical; he or she is using the questions to subtly make the point that spiritual concerns should be emphasized over material things. This point is made more explicit at line 9, when the speaker turns to commands: “Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant’s loss,/And let that pine to aggravate thy store ...” The speaker is commanding the soul to let the body wither and die, knowing that the soul is all that matters in the afterlife (“there’s no more dying then”).

**13. Difficulty:** *Hard*

Choice (B) is correct. Throughout the poem, the speaker directly addresses the soul. The speaker first questions his or her soul and then commands it to put its own needs over those of the body: “live thou upon thy servant’s loss,/And let that pine to aggravate thy store ...” In other words, the speaker advocates ignoring physical or material concerns and focusing on increasing one’s spiritual well-being. The last two lines of the poem carry this idea to its logical conclusion: The soul should “feed on Death, that feeds on men,/And Death once dead, there’s no more dying then.” To paraphrase: The body will wither and die, but the immortal soul will be enriched and, having benefited from the death of the body, the soul will transition into some kind of eternal paradise. The image is a fascinating one: While Death is feeding on the body, weakening and ultimately killing it, the soul is feeding on Death, using the suffering of the body to improve its spiritual fitness or closeness to God, in preparation for the eternal afterlife. The theme of these lines is best described as an affirmation of the immortality of the soul.