

Literary Analysis*

Sample Passage

The narrator of this passage from a short story describes the cabin where her father worked.

I wasn't sure what this work involved, but it must have been exciting because the Lab itself was exciting. Anywhere we didn't go often was exciting.

We would get there in a heavy wooden rowboat, built in the five-house village half a mile away—our mother would row, she was quite good at it—or by following a twisty, winding footpath, over fallen trees and stumps and around boulders and across wet patches where a few slippery planks were laid across the sphagnum moss, breathing in the mildew smell of damp wood and slowly decaying leaves. It was too far for us to walk, our legs were too short, so mostly we went in the rowboat.

The Lab was made of logs; it seemed enormous, though in the two photographs of it that survive it looks like a shack. It did however have a screened porch, with log railings. Inside it there were things we weren't allowed to touch—bottles containing a dangerous liquid in which white grubs floated, their six tiny front legs clasped together like praying fingers, and corks that smelled like poison and were poison, and trays with dried insects pinned to them with long, thin pins, each with a tiny, alluring black knob for a head. All of this was so forbidden it made us dizzy.

At the Lab we could hide in the ice house, a dim and mysterious place that was always bigger on the inside than it was on the outside, and where there was a hush, and a lot of sawdust to keep the blocks of ice cool. Sometimes there would be a tin of evaporated milk with holes punched in the top and wax paper stuck over them; sometimes there would be a carefully hoarded stub of butter or an end of bacon; sometimes there would be a fish or two, pickerel or lake trout, already filleted, laid out on a chipped enamel pie plate.

What did we do in there? There was nothing to actually do. We'd pretend we had vanished—that nobody knew where we were. This in itself was strangely energizing. Then we'd come out, away from the silence, back into the pine-needle scent and the sound of waves pocking against the shore, and our mother's voice calling us, because it was time to get back into the rowboat and row home.*

Sample Question 1

In line 1, “this work” clearly refers to

- A. writing
- B. food science
- C. photography
- D. insect research

Sample Question 2

Details in the passage suggest that the narrator is

- A. an adult remembering a recent incident
- B. an elderly person remembering middle age
- C. an adult recalling a location from childhood
- D. a child describing a frightening place

Sample Question 3

The descriptions of the Lab and of the ice house are similar in that both descriptions

- A. emphasize cheerful and light-filled surroundings
- B. contain images of hiding and concealment
- C. highlight the narrator's misconception of size
- D. contrast with descriptions of the narrator's home

Sample Question 4

When the narrator repeatedly uses the pronouns "we" and "us," she is most likely speaking of herself and

- A. a sibling
- B. her mother
- C. her father

D. the reader

*Sample passages and questions taken from The College Board (2013). *Texas Success Initiative: Sample Questions*