Literary Analysis*

Sample Question 1

In line 1, “this work” clearly refers to

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

Explanation:

Choice (D) is correct. In the first part of the passage, the narrator refers to “this work,” saying that “it must have been exciting because the Lab itself was exciting.” While she isn’t “sure what this work involved,” she describes the Lab very fully: the mysterious journey to get to it, its exterior, then its contents (“bottles containing a dangerous liquid in which white grubs floated . . . trays with dried insects”) and other aspects of her father’s work. The narrator never directly states what “this work” is, but these and other elements of the passage imply that it involves scientific research with such insects as the grubs. Choices (A), (B), and (C) are incorrect because there is no indication in the passage that the narrator’s father is involved in writing, food science, or photography.

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

Explanation:

Choice (C) is correct. The narrator uses the past tense throughout the passage, signaling to the reader that the events described occurred in the past. And the passage contains numerous hints that the narrator is describing her childhood self: “our mother would row” and “our legs were too short,” for example. It is reasonable to assume that the narrator is an adult recalling a location (and
events) from childhood. Choices (A) and (B) are incorrect because the incidents described are clearly not recent, nor do the events recalled happen to a middle-aged person. And although the place has elements of scariness about it, the person describing it is clearly not a child; therefore, choice (D) is incorrect.

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

Explanation:

Choice (C) is correct. When describing the Lab, the narrator states that “it seemed enormous, though in the two photographs of it that survive it looks like a shack.” When describing the ice house, she states that it “was always bigger on the inside than it was on the outside.” Both these descriptions emphasize misconceptions about the size of a place. The first misconception occurs because of a child’s natural perception that a place is larger than it is in reality, and is corrected by an adult viewing of photographs; the second plays on a child’s mistaken perception of the size of a place based on its exterior. Choices (A) and (D) are incorrect because there are no cheerful and light-filled surroundings in the passage, nor is there a description of the narrator’s home. And although the narrator does speak of hiding and concealing herself in the ice house, she does not speak of doing so in the Lab itself; therefore, choice (B) is incorrect.

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

Explanation:

Choice (A) is correct. In lines 3-4, when referring to the journey to the Lab, the narrator states, “our mother would row.” At the end of the passage—after she has described repeated adventures at the Lab while accompanied by at least one other person—she recalls hearing “our mother's voice calling us, because it was time to get back into the rowboat and row home.” It is clear that the narrator's companion shared a mother and a home with the narrator—in other words, the other person is the narrator's sibling. Choices (B) and (D) are incorrect because the narrator's mother is clearly differentiated from the companion in the passage and the reader does not participate in the events described in the passage. Although the narrator is describing the place where her father worked, there is no indication that her father was the other person accompanying her; indeed, it is unlikely that the narrator's father's legs would be “too short” for the walk, and he might not hide with a small child inside an ice house. Therefore, choice (C) is incorrect.

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