



GRADE EIGHT

WEEK OF MARCH 14-18 READING

Below are passage sets with questions that you can use for the Problem of the Day initiative.

Day One

Read the excerpt from *King Arthur's Knights* by Henry Gilbert. Answer the questions that follow.

Passage 1: from *King Arthur's Knights* by Henry Gilbert

In this excerpt from *King Arthur's Knights*, the mythical King Arthur of Britain and his Knights of the Round Table receive a mysterious visitor at court. The visitor brings news about the quest for the Holy Grail, a powerful and mysterious artifact.

- 1 Then the door opened and an old and reverend man entered, white of beard and head, and clothed also in white; . . .
- 2 "Peace be with you, fair lords," said the old man. Then turning to the king he said:
- 3 "Sir, I bring here a young knight, the which is of king's lineage, whereby the marvels of this court shall be accomplished, and the trial of this thy kingdom shall be brought to a happy end, if that may be. And the name of him is Galahad."
- 4 "Sir," said the king, "ye be right welcome and the young knight with you." . . .
- 5 Then was the young man led by the reverend man to the Siege Perilous¹, and sat him thereon, and men marvelled to see that the death-stroke did not flash like lightning and slay him.
- 6 "Sir," said the old man to him, "wit ye well that that is your seat. For you are he that shall surely achieve the Holy Graal,² and such of these your fellows as are pure in heart and humble shall achieve it with you."
- 7 "Sir," said the king, "if it may be that ye know, will ye tell us what my knights must do to achieve the Holy Vessel, and thus bring peace into my kingdom in place of war? For many of those that are kings and barons under me are warring with each other, and threaten to rend this island of Britain, . . . And it goeth to my heart to know this, and I have much dread."

¹Siege Perilous: mystical chair that would slay any but the greatest knight who tried to sit in it

²Graal: alternate spelling of Grail, as in Holy Grail

- 8** “Sir king,” said the old white man, “none may tell you what shall be the end of this quest of the Holy Graal, . . . ye war with each other, and are evil livers and full of pride and mastery, and if ye do not repent and stay your dishonour, then shall the Holy Vessel pass from Britain, and ruin and death and civil war shall stalk through the land and leave it desolate.” . . .
- 9** Then uprose Sir Gawaine, who was a faithful knight and true man to his king, though a proud one and a hasty. He was filled with sorrow for the ruin that threatened his fair land.
- 10** “Now I do here avow,” he said, “that to-morrow, without fail, I shall set forth, and I shall labour with all the strength of my body and my soul to go in quest of the Holy Graal, so that if I be fit to see it and to bring it hither, this dear land may be saved from woe.”
- 11** So hot were his words that many of the better knights rose also, and raising their right hands did make a like avowal; . . .

Excerpt from *King Arthur’s Knights* by Henry Gilbert. In the public domain.

1. Fill in the circles before two details from Passage 1 that show why Gawaine chooses to pursue the Graal.

- 9** A Then uprose Sir Gawaine, B who was a faithful knight and true man to his king, C though a proud one and a hasty. D He was filled with sorrow for the ruin that threatened his fair land.
- 10** E “Now I do here avow,” he said, F “that to-morrow, without fail, I shall set forth, G and I shall labour with all the strength of my body and my soul H to go in quest of the Holy Graal, I so that if I be fit to see it and to bring it hither, J this dear land may be saved from woe.”
- 11** K So hot were his words L that many of the better knights rose also, M and raising their right hands did make a like avowal; . . .

2. What does the use of the word trial suggest in this excerpt from Passage 1?

3 “Sir, I bring here a young knight, the which is of king’s lineage, whereby the marvels of this court shall be accomplished, and the trial of this thy kingdom shall be brought to a happy end, if that may be. And the name of him is Galahad.”

- A. The kingdom is under pressure from enemy countries.
- B. The kingdom has endured many hardships in the past.
- C. The old man will judge those who fail to obtain the Graal.
- D. The knights have a legal responsibility to pursue the Graal.

Day Two

Read “**Walcott Farm**” by **Ryan Effgen**. Using it and the Day One reading from *King Arthur’s Knights* by **Henry Gilbert**, answer the questions that follow.

Passage 2: **Walcott Farm by Ryan Effgen**

- 12** Graham sat at the kitchen table and sweated over the pile of crop reports and bank statements. Outside, rain plummeted down on the farm, as if to mock him. After the long drought, this August rain would do him no good. His sons disagreed about how to save the farm, and arguments had led to threats of lawsuits. Graham remained determined; the farm had been established by an ancestor who was one of Paul Revere’s Minutemen—or so the story went—and the main house, built of cobblestone, had the original potbellied stove and other archaic features.
- 13** Bleary-eyed and exhausted, Graham continued to look for a decimal point in the wrong place, but the numbers always came up the same. He heard a loud banging at the door, as if the storm itself was trying to force its way in. Probably the rusty latch failing him now, too. He got up to tighten the lock, but as he fiddled with the chain, the banging increased. Graham cracked the door open, and it spun back on its hinges in the storm’s wind. An old man, rain-drenched and wild-eyed, stood on the doorstep.
- 14** He said, “We never used to keep that door locked, not even when times were hard and folks took to robbing one another.”
- 15** The man shouldered past Graham into the kitchen. He looked around the room, and as his eyes met various objects, he seemed to acknowledge them. Graham had no idea who this person was, but he felt he ought to deal gently with him; the man was clearly confused.
- 16** “How can I help you, sir?” Graham asked. “I think you’ve ended up at the wrong house.”
- 17** The man seemed to think this was funny. “I know exactly where I am: the legendary Walcott Farm. This farm’s been up and running ever since this nation became a nation. And you, if I’m not wrong, are Graham Walcott.”
- 18** This gave Graham pause. The man’s familiarity annoyed him, but Graham still felt it best to deal with him carefully. “And you are?”
- 19** “I’m Caleb Walcott, your father’s brother, and I grew up in this house. I’m the one who ran off to find his fortune out West. Wish I could say it panned out, but it didn’t. Luckily for me—for the both of us, looks like—the real fortune is right here, beneath our feet.”
- 20** Graham’s father had never mentioned having a brother; this man’s story was preposterous. A bolt of lightning cracked outside, and with it came a flash of inspiration. Graham returned to his seat and gestured to a large, carved oak chair that stood against the center wall. “Well, Caleb, why don’t you pull that chair up to the table and you can tell me about this fortune that we’re both standing on?”

- 21** The old man smiled. "I can't blame you for testing me, but we both know that chair's chiseled from a tree trunk rooted forty feet into the earth. A twister could carry off this house and that chair would still be standing upright in that exact place."
- 22** Graham stood. "Nobody outside of this family knows about that chair."
- 23** The man added, "And even fewer know what I'm about to tell you. My grandfather told me this story, and only once. When the founder of this farm came over from England, he brought with him some priceless object, something royal, maybe a scepter or a crown. Whether he buried it from thieves or tax collectors, I don't know. Either way, somewhere out there," the man gestured grandly towards the farm outside the window, "is a treasure."
- 24** Outside, lightning cracked again and a ripple of thunder shook the windows. The logical explanation was that the man was delusional, or perhaps he was a thief and this was the start of some elaborate scam. But the man knew about the chair—nobody knew about the chair. Graham paced, wondering if he was imagining it all—if, at the end of his rope, his mind had conjured up a fantastic story as a way of avoiding the plain truth: the family farm was done for. Graham sat down in the large oaken chair. He ran his hands along the armrests that had been carved by his ancestors hundreds of years before. Was it impossible that some priceless relic was out there buried in his land? What did he lose by giving the idea a chance?
- 25** Graham turned to the old man and asked, "How are we going to find it?"

"Walcott Farm" by Ryan Effgen. Written for educational purposes.

3. Select two ways that the story in Passage 2 is similar to the story in Passage 1.

- A. Both stories feature characters who share a common goal.
- B. Both stories include dialogue between characters with conflicting views.
- C. Both stories feature central characters who change their point of view in the end.
- D. Both stories describe the details of the setting to create a mysterious atmosphere.
- E. Both stories present a challenge and a way for the central character to overcome it.

4. Part A: In Passage 2, what theme is suggested by Graham’s situation?

- A. People will do whatever is necessary to keep what is important to them.
- B. A sense of adventure can solve many problems.
- C. Planning ahead can help one understand a situation more clearly.
- D. First instincts are usually correct.

5. Part B: Which quotation helps develop the theme in Part A?

- A. “Graham’s father had never mentioned having a brother; this man’s story was preposterous.” (paragraph 20)
- B. “‘Luckily for me—for the both of us, looks like—the real fortune is right here, beneath our feet.’” (paragraph 19)
- C. “‘Either way, somewhere out there,’ the man gestured grandly towards the farm outside the window, ‘is a treasure.’” (paragraph 23)
- D. “Graham turned to the old man and asked, ‘How are we going to find it?’” (paragraph 25)

Day Three

Using the Day One reading from *King Arthur's Knights* by Henry Gilbert and the Day Two reading "Walcott Farm" by Ryan Effgen, answer the following questions.

6. How does the speaker's point of view in this excerpt increase the tension of Passage 1?

7 "Sir," said the king, "if it may be that ye know, will ye tell us what my knights must do to achieve the Holy Vessel, and thus bring peace into my kingdom in place of war? For many of those that are kings and barons under me are warring with each other, and threaten to rend this island of Britain, . . . And it goeth to my heart to know this, and I have much dread."

8 "Sir king," said the old white man, "none may tell you what shall be the end of this quest of the Holy Graal, . . . ye war with each other, and are evil livers and full of pride and mastery, and if ye do not repent and stay your dishonour, then shall the Holy Vessel pass from Britain, and ruin and death and civil war shall stalk through the land and leave it desolate."

- A. by showing that the power of the Graal has the potential to do harm
- B. by showing that the Graal has likely been lost to the kingdom forever
- C. by showing that the knights share responsibility for the condition of Britain
- D. by showing that Britain is less powerful than the knights believe it to be

7. Part A: How is the structure of Passage 2 different from the structure of Passage 1?

- A. Passage 2 ends by foreshadowing what will happen next.
- B. Passage 2 builds toward a climax as the story progresses.
- C. Passage 2 describes the characters' thoughts and actions in between dialogue.
- D. Passage 2 introduces the main character's conflict before anything else occurs.

8. Part B: Which aspect of the passages is affected by this difference in structure?

- A. how the reader imagines the stories will end
- B. the way the characters' goals are revealed
- C. the number of ways the stories can be understood
- D. how the reader knows what the main characters are thinking

Day Four

Read **“The Brilliance of Classical Music”** and answer the questions that follow.

from **“The Brilliance of Classical Music”**

- 1** Everyone knows that Beethoven and Mozart and Bach were geniuses. But did you know that listening to those geniuses can be good for you? That’s right. Studies have shown that classical music can make you healthier, safer, and even smarter.
- 2** First, the health benefits. Classical music has been shown to be a good way to reduce stress and decrease anxiety. A 1995 review of existing research found that listening to music can reduce stress and anxiety. It also has benefits as a sleep aid. In fact, in one Hawaiian study, an eye surgeon who actually played classical music on his piano to his patients before surgery reported a decrease in anxiety and a decrease in heart rate compared to patients who did not have music played for them.
- 3** Classical music has also been shown to decrease crime in some situations. For instance, in 2001, officials mounted a set of speakers on a particularly crime-ridden street corner in West Palm Beach, Florida. They played classical music by Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven 24 hours a day. The result was a reduction in loitering and a substantial drop in drug-related calls to police. Other venues have tried similar schemes. In London at the Elm Park Tube station, a program of classical music launched in 2003 reduced robberies by 33 percent, vandalism by 37 percent, and assaults on staff by 25 percent.
- 4** But while these health and safety benefits of classical music are striking, the single most famous benefit of classical music is what has been called the “Mozart effect.” In a 1993 study, subjects were asked to look at a piece of paper, and then try to figure out what it would look like if it were unfolded. Those who listened to Mozart were able to complete the task more quickly than either those who listened to nothing or those who simply listened to relaxing noises.
- 5** Because of the Mozart effect, there has been a boom in sales of classical music for babies. Doting parents are encouraged by these studies to play Mozart to their infants in hopes of boosting their intelligence. When babies get old enough, classical music may be even more beneficial. There is evidence that learning to play classical piano can increase IQ by up to three points in some cases. Not only was Mozart a genius, but those who listen to and play his music are smarter as well — not to mention healthier, safer, and, of course, more cultured.

9. Which statement accurately describes two of the central ideas developed in “The Brilliance of Classical Music”?

- A. Listening to Mozart can improve spatial reasoning skills, and learning to play classical music can reduce crime.
- B. Listening to classical music improves human behavior, and listening to classical music can increase the intellect of children.
- C. Listening to classical music can decrease heart rate, and playing Bach for babies helps them sleep.
- D. Listening to classical music can reduce anxiety, and playing classical music in public can reduce criminal activity.

Day Five

Using the article “**The Brilliance of Classical Music**” from Day Four, answer the questions that follow.

10. Which statement describes the organizational structure used in “The Brilliance of Classical Music”?

- A. The author uses chronological order to explain research studies on the benefits of classical music.
- B. The author explains benefits of classical music in order from most important to least important.
- C. The author names several benefits of classical music and then gives examples to support each point.
- D. The author describes the causes behind research on classical music, then states the effects of the research on society.

11. What is the purpose of the author including the 1993 study included in paragraph 4 of the “The Brilliance of Classical Music”?

- A. to prove that the concept has been researched
- B. to prove that the “Mozart effect” is true for everyone
- C. to provide a counterclaim for those who might disagree
- D. to provide textual evidence for the paragraph’s central idea



GRADE EIGHT

ANSWERS FOR WEEK OF MARCH 14-18 READING

1. **D and J** (RL.8.1)
2. **B** (RL.8.4)
3. **A and E** (RL.8.9)
4. **A** (RL.8.2)
5. **D** (RL.8.2; RL.8.1)
6. **C** (RL.8.6)
7. **D** (RL.8.5)
8. **B** (RL.8.5; RL.8.1)
9. **D** (RI.8.2)
10. **C** (RI.8.5)
11. **A** (RI.8.6)