

Reading and Use of English Part 5 – Multiple-choice text.

You are going to read an extract from a novel. For questions 1–6, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text. Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

the glitter wars

Time being what it is, we got older. We thickened and sagged in ways that would have seemed implausible, comical even, to our younger selves, just as our son, before our eyes, began to elongate. We accumulated things; vast quantities of moulded plastic, picture books, scooters, tricycles, bicycles, shoes and clothes and coats and paraphernalia that no longer served a purpose but which we couldn't quite throw away. Connie and I entered our forties in quick succession, and though we suspected we'd never need a bottle steriliser or rocking horse again, we found we couldn't quite discard them, and now there was a piano, too, now a train set, a castle, a tangled box kite.

My new salary meant that the fridge seemed fuller, the wine tasted better and we bought a bigger car, took Albie on trips abroad and came back to the same small flat we'd bought together before we were married, cramped and tatty now. We ought to move house, we knew it, but the effort required was beyond me. Five years of commuting against the tide had begun to take their toll, and I was perpetually tired, perpetually stressed and bad-tempered, so that my nightly homecoming brought no pleasure to either Albie or Connie, or indeed myself.

Take, for example, the famous Glitter Wars that scarred the December of Albie's ninth year. Albie and Connie had been making Christmas cards at the kitchen table, heads close together in that way they had, Phil Spector's *Christmas Album* playing, the kind of home-spun artsy-craftsy activity that occupied their evenings while I struggled to stay awake on the 1957 into Paddington, self-medicating with a warm gin and tonic from the station buffet then another from the trolley, hurrying through the rain to a flat that felt too small and entering to no greeting, no loving kiss or filial hug, just a scene of utter disarray; music blaring, tissue-paper and cotton wool everywhere, poster paint daubed all over the table. Here were my son and wife in their own little self-contained world, laughing at a self-contained joke, and here was Albie shaking glitter onto PVA glue and the table, too, and the floor and onto his pyjamas. Anyone who has attempted to clean away large quantities of spilt glitter will know that it is a pernicious and vile substance, a kind of festive asbestos that clings to clothes and burrows into carpets, sticks to the skin and stays there, and now here were great snowdrifts of the awful stuff blowing across the table.

'What the hell is going on in here!' I said, I shouted. They noticed me now.

'We're making Christmas cards!' said Connie, still smiling. 'Look! Isn't this a beauty?' She held up one of Albie's efforts and a shower of gold and silver cascaded to the floor. 'Your son is an artist!'

'Look! Look what you're doing. It's going everywhere! For Christ's sake, Connie,' and I threw down my briefcase and went to the sink to dampen a cloth. 'Would it kill you to put newspaper down first?'

'It's glitter, Douglas,' she said, forcing a laugh. 'Because it's Christmas?'

'And I'll be picking it out of my food and brushing it off my clothes until July! Look at this paint! Paint and glue on the table. Is it washable? No, stupid question, of course, it isn't—' I stopped scrubbing, threw the cloth down. 'Look! Look, it's on my hands!' I held them up to the light, to show how brightly they sparkled. 'I've got to go into meetings like this. I have to do presentations! Look! How is anyone supposed to take me seriously when I'm covered in this bloody . . .' My son was staring at the table now, his brow creased, lips protruding. Here you are, my darling boy –some memories for you.

'Egg, can you go next door please?' said Connie.

He shifted off his seat. 'Sorry, Dad.'

'I like your Christmas card!' I said to his back, but it was too late now.

Connie and I were left alone.

'Well, you can really suck the joy out of pretty much anything these days, can't you?' said Connie.

But I was not quite ready to apologise yet and the battle that followed, erupting in skirmishes over the remaining days and weeks leading up to Christmas, was too painful and unpleasant to recount in great detail here. The glitter, as predicted, found its way into clothes and hair and the grain of the kitchen furniture; its sparkle would catch my eye as I ate a solitary breakfast in the dark, and the silences, the sniping and bickering continued until Christmas.

If my own mother ever caught me pulling faces, pouting or sneering, she would tell me: if the wind changes direction, you'll stay that way. I was sceptical at the time, but as the years passed I was not so sure. My everyday face, the one I wore at rest or when alone, had set and hardened, and wasn't one I cared for much any more.

1. In the first paragraph, we learn that the narrator
 - A. thought that his hoarding habits were a product of his getting old.
 - B. was becoming increasingly worried about going through a middle-age crisis.
 - C. felt that he would miss the chance to see his son grow.
 - D. had shared strong connections with things from his younger years.
2. In the second paragraph, we can infer that
 - A. Douglas seemed content with the life he had.
 - B. making more money would allow him to spend more time with his family.
 - C. Connie and Douglas thought they couldn't find a good excuse to move house.
 - D. Albie didn't mind that they all lived in a small flat.
3. Why does Douglas use the "Glitter Wars"?
 - A. To illustrate how a small flat can get really messy.
 - B. To let the reader know how much he was drifting away from his family.
 - C. To vent his feelings and state how much he hated glitter.
 - D. To contrast his work habits then and now.
4. It can be inferred from Douglas and Connie's argument that
 - A. they both agreed that glitter was indeed a nuisance.
 - B. Douglas hated not being taken seriously when he arrived home from work.
 - C. Albie was the main reason for Douglas' fit.
 - D. Connie thought that Douglas may have been overreacting.
5. Why did Connie tell Albie to go next door?
 - A. To force Douglas to apologise for causing a scene.
 - B. To spare him from his father rage.
 - C. Because she may still have faith in their marriage.
 - D. Because she wanted Albie to remember what happened that day.
6. What's the purpose of Douglas' memory of his mother in this scene?
 - A. To hint at how sad she would feel if she saw him eating alone.
 - B. To emphasise how much he's changed along the years.
 - C. To let the readers know how strict she was.
 - D. To show how much he understood her when he was younger.