

## “Ursula Pugh”

### Reading Comprehension – Short Stories

Directions: Read the story. Then answer the questions below.

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At an earlier time in her life, Ursula Pugh was – before injuries, before a disastrous marriage, before the death of her beloved sister – a glorious dancer.

Now, she was regarded by many as an angry has-been and a horrible teacher.



I was not **cognizant** of these details as I made my way through the doors of The Ursula Children’s Theater with my three rambunctious boys in tow. And if I had known such information, it would not have **biased** my decision in the least.

I was looking for a safe haven in the neighborhood – someplace free from the drugs and gangs that made their way around the community after hours – for the boys to spend time after school. Staying at home by themselves was not an option. They definitely needed adult supervision if I expected my home to still be standing when I got home from work. The children’s theater, much to my boys’ **chagrin**, was more convenient for me to get to than the karate studio.

“No, Mama, we want karate,” the boys had implored pitifully. I’m glad I wasn’t swayed though I would not realize until much later what a **fortuitous** decision this was.

Ms. Pugh looked up over her glasses as we arrived at the studio. “Boys!” she exclaimed before I could even introduce myself. “Wonderful.”

It turned out that Ms. Pugh’s program was woefully short of boys and mine were immediately thrown into every production possible at the theater.

The rumors were right, in some respects. Ms. Pugh could be brusque and rude with her charges and did not tolerate any signs that a student was not fully dedicated to the program.

My boys flourished in this environment. My wild, rough boys, who were often so rude that they embarrassed me in public, gradually became a different species.

They will certainly never be world-class dancers, but Ms. Pugh’s strict ways taught them to be respectful and on time. Moreover, it taught them to follow directions and always strive to do their best.

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## Questions:

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- 1) Based only on information in paragraph 1, which statement about Ms. Pugh can reasonably be made?
- A. She is a bitter woman.
  - B. She is an old woman.
  - C. She has been through a lot.
  - D. She was a world-class ballerina.
  - E. She has become a dance teacher.
- 2) As used in paragraph 3, which is the best antonym for **cognizant**?
- A. doubtful
  - B. forgetful
  - C. unaware
  - D. mindful
  - E. resentful
- 3) As used in paragraph 3, which is the best synonym for **biased**?
- A. affected
  - B. partial
  - C. underscored
  - D. halted
  - E. explained
- 4) As used in paragraph 4, what does the term “safe haven” imply?
- A. a refuge
  - B. a theater program
  - C. a religious building
  - D. a healthy alternative
  - E. an inexpensive activity
- 5) As used in paragraph 4, which is the best synonym for **chagrin**?
- A. disappointment
  - B. fortune
  - C. confusion
  - D. disgust
  - E. anger
- 6) As stated in paragraph 5, why was the narrator's decision **fortuitous**?
- A. The children's theater was close to her home.
  - B. Her sons learned many valuable life lessons.
  - C. She expected her sons to become good dancers.
  - D. She got to see Ms. Pugh's bad temper firsthand.
  - E. There were not many boys in the program for her sons to get in trouble with.
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Questions (continued):

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7) Which best describes the literary technique used in the following sentence from paragraph 9.

*"My wild, rough boys, who were often so rude they embarrassed me in public, gradually became a different species."*

- A. literal, meaning it is to be understood exactly as it is written
- B. figurative, meaning it is not intended to be interpreted in its literal sense
- C. foreshadowing, meaning it offers hints and clues of what is to come
- D. inversion, characterized by a reversal of the usual order of words for emphasis
- E. symbolism, characterized by something that has meaning in itself but which also stands for something larger

8) How does the author seem to feel about Ursula Pugh?

- A. She is no longer effective or useful as a teacher.
- B. She is strict, but that is good for the boys.
- C. She is nasty, mean, and abusive.
- D. She is a wonderful theater director.
- E. She is actually a sensitive soul, who is hard to get to know.

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Would you enjoy being a part of Ms. Pugh's theater class? Why or why not?

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## Answers and Explanations

1) **C**

Paragraph 1 tells the reader, “Ursula Pugh was at an earlier time in her life – before injuries, before a disastrous marriage, before the death of her beloved sister – a glorious dancer.” In this paragraph, we learn that many things have happened to Ursula Pugh. The reader can understand that Ursula Pugh has been through a lot. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The question directs the reader to base this answer on the information provided in paragraph 1 only. There is no information in paragraph 1 that leads the reader to believe that Ursula Pugh is bitter. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Although Ursula Pugh has been through a lot, she is not necessarily old. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Paragraph 1 does not tell the reader what kind of dancer Ursula Pugh was. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. The reader learns later that Ursula Pugh is a dance teacher. This information is not in paragraph 1. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

2) **C**

**cognizant** (*adjective*): aware; having knowledge.

In paragraph 3, the narrator says, “I was not *cognizant* of these details as I made my way through the doors of The Ursula Children’s Theater with my three rambunctious boys in tow. And if I had known such information, it would not have biased my decision in the least.” Since the narrator tells us that she did not know the information, the reader can infer that *cognizant* means to know, or to be aware. An antonym for aware is *unaware*. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

*Doubtful* means questioning or disbelieving. Disbelieving is not the opposite of aware. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. *Forgetful* is tending not to remember. Not remembering is different from being simply unaware. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. Since *cognizant* means aware, *mindful* is a synonym. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. *Resentful* means harboring bad feelings about. That is not the opposite of being *aware*. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

3) **A**

**biased** (*verb*): influenced or prejudiced.

In paragraph 3, the narrator says, “I was not cognizant of these details as I made my way through the doors of The Ursula Children’s Theater with my three rambunctious boys in tow. And if I had had such information, it would not have *biased* my decision in the least.” The reader can infer from these statements that the narrator did not know certain details, but the details would not have changed the narrator’s decision. Since *biased* in this context means influenced or had an effect on, *affected* is a good synonym. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

The word *biased* can mean favoring or being partial to one side, as an adjective, but in the context of the story, *biased* is used as a verb and means had an effect on. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. *Underscored* means reinforced or

stressed. The narrator is saying that the information would not have made a difference either way, so it would not have reinforced her decision. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. *Halted* means stopped. The author is saying the information would not have changed her decision. She is not saying that the information would not stop her decision. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. The narrator is not saying that the information would not have explained her decision. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

4) **A**

In paragraph 4, the narrator says, “I was looking for a safe haven in the neighborhood – someplace free from the drugs and gangs that made their way around the community after hours – for the boys to spend time after school.” Since the narrator is looking for a place where her children would be protected from drugs and gangs, the reader can infer from this information that the narrator was looking for a place where her children would be protected from danger – a refuge. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

While the narrator found a theater program, that was not what she was looking for specifically. She was looking for refuge from the gangs and drugs. If the karate studio had been more convenient, she might have chosen it. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. It is true that theater is a healthy alternative to gangs and drugs, but the narrator was looking for a “safe haven,” which means protection. Protection is not the same thing as a healthy alternative. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. The passage does not provide information to support answer choices **(C)** and **(E)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

5) **A**

**chagrin** (*noun*): a feeling of annoyance, disappointment or mortification.

In paragraph 4, the narrator says, “The children’s theater, much to my boys’ chagrin, was more convenient for me to get to than the karate studio.” Then, in paragraph 5, the boys begged, “No, Mama, we want karate.” The reader can infer from these statements that the boys did not want to go to the children’s theater because they wanted to go to the karate studio. They felt *disappointment* about going to the theater instead of to the karate studio. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

The boys did not want to go to the children’s theater, so it was not *fortune*, or luck, for them that the theater was more convenient than the karate studio. Therefore **(B)** is incorrect. The boys understood where they were going, so they did not feel *confusion*. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The boys wanted to go to the karate studio instead of the theater, but the word *disgust* suggests horror or disdain, not a simple preference. They implored their mother *pitifully*, which suggests disappointment rather than disgust. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. The boys do not appear to feel *anger* about going to the theater instead of the karate studio. There is no information in this story that their emotion is as strong as anger. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

6) **B**

**fortuitous** (*adjective*): happening by a lucky chance.

In paragraph 5, the narrator describes her decision to place the boys in the children's theater as *fortuitous*. In paragraph 9, the narrator says, "My boys flourished in this environment. My wild, rough boys, who were often so rude that they embarrassed me in public, gradually became a different species." In paragraph 10, the narrator continues, "Ms. Pugh's strict ways taught them to be respectful and on time. Moreover, it taught them to follow directions and always strive to do their best." The reader can infer from this that Mrs. Pugh helped the boys become less rough and wild, and more responsible and focused on achieving their goals. Her sons learned many valuable life lessons. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The narrator chose the children's theater because it was close to her home, but the decision was fortuitous because it was good for the boys. If they had not learned valuable lessons there, it would not have been fortuitous. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. The story does not contain information to support answer choices **(C)** and **(D)**. Therefore they are incorrect. Although there were few boys in the program, the choice to put the boys in the theater was fortuitous because the boys learned many lessons, not because they didn't have anyone to get in trouble with. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

7) **B**

In this story, the narrator tells us that she placed her boys into a children's theater program which made the boys more polite, respectful and focused. When the narrator says that the boys "became a different species," the narrator means that the boys are acting very differently from before. The boys have not actually become a different species, so the meaning is figurative. It is not intended to be interpreted in its literal sense. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

When the narrator says that the boys "became a different species," the narrator means that the boys behaved differently from before. The boys have not literally become a different species. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. The statement is made at the end of the story, so it is not foreshadowing something to come. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The usual word order has not been altered for emphasis. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. The sentence does not use symbolism. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.

8) **B**

The author has placed her "wild, rough boys" with Ms. Pugh for theater classes. Ms. Pugh's strict rules taught the boys to be respectful, follow directions and strive to improve. The reader can infer that the author believes Ms. Pugh is strict, but that is very good for the boys. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

At the beginning of the story, the narrator says that Ursula Pugh "was regarded by many as an angry has-been and a horrible teacher." While *many* may hold the view that she is no longer effective and useful as a teacher, the narrator does not hold that view. Therefore **(A)** is incorrect. Near the end of the story, the narrator describes Ms. Pugh as "brusque and rude," but that is not the same as nasty, mean, or abusive. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect. The narrator offers no opinion of Ms. Pugh's skills as theater director. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect. As stated earlier, the narrator finds Ms. Pugh "brusque and rude," and strict. The does not say that Ms. Pugh is actually sensitive. Therefore **(E)** is incorrect.