

READING TEST

35 Minutes—40 Questions

DIRECTIONS: There are four passages in this test. Each passage is followed by several questions. After reading a passage, choose the best answer to each question and fill in the corresponding oval on your answer document. You may refer to the passages as often as necessary.

Passage I

PROSE FICTION: This passage is adapted from the title story of *Only the Little Bone*, a collection of short stories by David Huddle (©1986 by David Huddle).

My grandfather has made crutches for me. These are sturdy crutches, just the right size. I am delighted with them and launch myself around the house on them.

And take a fall immediately. And continue falling several times a day, great splatting, knocking-into-furniture-and-breaking-things falls that cause everyone in the family to come running. My grandfather has forgotten to put rubber tips on the ends of my crutches. When we figure this out and buy the rubber tips and put them on the crutches, I stop falling. But by then the bone-set that was coming along nicely has slipped, and the doctor has ordered me back to the wheelchair.

The missing crutch-tips are the first clue I have to this peculiar family trait, one that for lack of any better term I must call “flawed competence.” We Bryants are a family of able and clever people, industrious, intelligent, determined, and of good will. We are careful in our work. After all, my grandfather measured me on two occasions before he made the crutches. But we usually do something wrong.

Four years later I become increasingly aware of “flawed competence” when I develop a plan for converting our old grown-over tennis court into a basketball court. My grandfather is always interested in plans, and in this planning session, we decide that he will make the hoops, and he will help me make the backboards. Clearing the ground and smoothing the surface will be my tasks. So I rip out honeysuckle and hatchet down a few little scrub cedars. We Bryants are known for setting our minds to things.

Then my grandfather delivers the hoops. They are beautifully designed and constructed, metalwork of a high order for such amateurs as my grandfather and his men. But the hoops are twice as big around as ordinary basketball hoops.

I say, simply, that they are too big. I am not ungrateful, not trying to be hateful, not in my opinion being overly fastidious. I am simply describing a char-

acteristic of the hoops. But my grandfather’s feelings are damaged. No, they can’t be made smaller, and no, he’s not interested in helping me with the backboards now or with any other part of my plan. He’s sorry he got involved in the first place. This, too, is a corollary of “flawed competence.” We are sensitive, especially about our work, especially about the flawed part of our work.

At the place where I work twenty-eight years after the basketball hoops, I am given a new office, one with a view of the lake. There’s a string attached, though, and that is that I have to build my own bookcases. I commence planning with enthusiasm. That’s another, less harmful family trait, that attraction to making plans. I measure, I look at other people’s shelves, I get someone to help me attach brackets to my office walls.

It is while I am cutting a notch in one of the uprights to allow access to the light-switch that I suddenly think of my grandfather and those basketball hoops. I feel a light sweat break out on my forehead. A pattern of genetic fate reveals itself to me: I’m going to mess up these bookshelves just as my grandfather before me would have messed them up. No doubt I’m seeing the notch in the wrong place.

The whole time I work I wait to see where the screw-up is going to come. I imagine what my colleagues will be saying about me in the hallways. Did you know that Bryant built his shelves so they tilt? Did you know that Bryant’s books rejected the color he painted his shelves? But the screw-up doesn’t appear. I paint the shelves red, and they look O.K. (Granddaddy Bryant once painted yellow a whole row of company houses he built.) I paint a chair blue and red, and it’s a little silly-looking, but it picks up the blue of the carpet and the red of the shelves. The vision isn’t nearly as impressive as I thought it would be, but then what vision ever is? We plan-makers are accustomed to things turning out not-quite-as-good-as-we-had-in-mind. Our world view includes the “diminished excellence” component. Diminished excellence is a condition of the world and therefore never an occasion for sorrow, whereas flawed competence comes out of character and therefore is frequently the reason for the bowed head, the furrowed brow. Three months later, when I try to turn the heat off in my office, I discover that I have placed one of the shelf uprights too close to

85 the radiator to be able to work the valve. The screw-up was there all along, but in this case I am relieved to find it. I am my grandfather's grandson after all.

1. The passage is written from the point of view of:
 - A. an unidentified narrator observing the relationship over time between a boy and his grandfather.
 - B. two members of the same family discovering their shared trait through joint activities.
 - C. a grown man agonizing over the mixed messages he received as a child from older relatives.
 - D. a boy and the man he becomes considering incidents that illustrate a family trait.
2. Which of the following best describes the author's approach to presenting the story of the narrator's discovery about himself?
 - F. Revealing the narrator's self-awareness about a trait through a blend of personal reflection and scenes from the narrator's youth and adulthood
 - G. Starting immediately with a statement of the discovery in the narrator's voice and continuing with scenes that reveal how the discovery came about
 - H. Describing the physical details of scenes and summarizing their significance in a concluding statement in the narrator's voice
 - J. Using dialogue in the midst of scenes fraught with tension to indicate what the narrator is experiencing internally
3. Each of the three projects described in the passage reveals:
 - A. the increasing antagonism between the grandfather and grandson.
 - B. the errors the narrator makes and the disapproval they bring from others.
 - C. that such incidents set the stage for the Bryant family traits to emerge.
 - D. that the narrator is determined to avoid being ungrateful, hateful, or overly fastidious.
4. The boy's approach to the task of converting the tennis court to a basketball court can best be described as:
 - F. reluctant until his grandfather's plans inspire him.
 - G. enthusiastic until his grandfather's error puts them both in an awkward position.
 - H. apprehensive until he discovers his error is not a devastating one.
 - J. thrilled until he remembers that his grandfather is a poor planner.
5. As he is revealed in the incident of undertaking the construction of the basketball court, the grandfather can best be characterized as:
 - A. confidently optimistic, then childishly defensive.
 - B. charmingly patient, then increasingly accusatory.
 - C. consistently encouraging in spite of setbacks.
 - D. vocally defensive, then quietly apologetic.
6. The question "Did you know that Bryant built his shelves so they tilt?" (lines 65–66) helps establish that the narrator is anxious because:
 - F. his coworkers have discovered his incompetence and have made it the subject of office humor.
 - G. his coworkers resent his having a corner office and punish him with their biting humor.
 - H. he fears his incompetence is so glaring it will make him the object of ridicule among coworkers.
 - J. the tilting bookshelves remind him that, like his grandfather, he cannot hide his mistakes.
7. Information in the second paragraph (lines 4–12) reveals that the family's response to the grandfather's error with the crutches is to:
 - A. find a workable remedy for it.
 - B. lay the blame on the narrator.
 - C. praise him for more successful projects.
 - D. fix what wasn't wrong in the first place.
8. It can most reasonably be inferred from the sixth paragraph (lines 36–46) that the statement that the basketball hoops "can't be made smaller" (line 40) is:
 - F. a fact stated by the grandfather apologetically.
 - G. an opinion stated by the grandfather indignantly.
 - H. a claim the narrator makes to humiliate a relative.
 - J. a conclusion the narrator reaches after hard labor.
9. It can most reasonably be inferred that the narrator's discovery that an error has been made in constructing the bookshelves is for him a source of:
 - A. embarrassment in the face of coworkers who anticipated it.
 - B. comfort because it reveals a trait that he shares with his family.
 - C. frustration because it will require a remedy that will be tedious to carry out.
 - D. relief because it gives him an excuse to seek the assistance of coworkers in finishing the project.
10. In the last paragraph, a comparison is made between "diminished excellence" and "flawed competence." From the narrator's point of view, the conditions are different because the one is:
 - F. a source of sorrow while the other is a source of pride.
 - G. based in the family while the other is based in the self.
 - H. inherent in the environment while the other is inherent in the individual.
 - J. a sign that the individual can improve the world while the other is a sign that the individual can't.