



A2Z Learning: 11+
English
Reading Comprehension
Nicholas Nickleby (F)

These comprehensions will help you to experience the type of texts that are usually used in 11+ exams or independent school entrance exams.

The number of marks next to each question will give you an idea about how detailed your answer will need to be. Therefore, if a question is worth 3 marks then the answer will need at least 3 separate points/pieces of evidence from the text.

School selection tests are usually timed, so working within a time limit is something you will need to practise.

A reading comprehension of this length (just over a page) will be expected to be completed in 25-30 minutes.

Make sure you **read the questions carefully**. If it asks you to write a sentence make sure you do!

Good luck! You can do this!



Nicholas Nickleby by Charles Dickens

Read the following passage then answer all the questions that follow.

As the passage begins the schoolmaster, Squeers, is about to punish Smike in front of the other boys because Smike has tried to run away from his terrible boarding school.

1 "Spare me, sir!" cried Smike.

2 "Oh! That's all, is it?" said Squeers. "Yes, I'll flog you within an inch of your life,
3 and spare you that."

4 "Ha, ha, ha," laughed Mrs. Squeers, "that's a good 'un!"

5 "I was driven to do it," said Smike faintly; and casting another imploring look
6 about him.

7 "Driven to do it, were you?" said Squeers. "Oh! It wasn't your fault; it was mine,
8 I suppose – eh?"

9 "A nasty, ungrateful, pig-headed, brutish, obstinate, sneaking dog," exclaimed
10 Mrs. Squeers, taking Smike's head under her arm, and administering a cuff at
11 every epithet; "what does he mean by that?"

12 "Stand aside, my dear," replied Squeers. "We'll try and find out."

13 Mrs. Squeers, being out of breath with her exertions, complied. Squeers caught
14 the boy firmly in his grip; one desperate cut had fallen on his body – he was wincing
15 from the lash and uttering a scream of pain – it was raised again, and again about
16 to fall – when Nicholas Nickleby suddenly starting up, cried "Stop!" in a voice that
17 made the rafters ring.

18 "Who cried stop?" said Squeers, turning savagely round.

19 "I," said Nicholas, stepping forward. "This must not go on."

20 "Must not go on!" cried Squeers, almost in a shriek.

21 "No!" thundered Nicholas.

22 Aghast and stupefied by the boldness of the interference, Squeers released his
23 hold of Smike, and, falling back a pace or two, gazed upon Nicholas with looks that



24 were positively frightful.

25 "I say must not," repeated Nicholas, nothing daunted; "shall not. I will prevent it."

26 Squeers continued to gaze upon him, with his eyes starting out of his head; but
27 astonishment had actually, for the moment, bereft him of speech.

28 "You have disregarded all my quiet interference in the miserable lad's behalf,"
29 said Nicholas; "you have returned no answer to the letter in which I begged
30 forgiveness for him, and offered to be responsible that he would remain quietly
31 here. Don't blame me for this public interference. You have brought it upon
32 yourself; not I."

33 "Sit down, beggar!" screamed Squeers, almost beside himself with rage, and
34 seizing Smike as he spoke.

35 "Wretch," rejoined Nicholas fiercely, "touch him at your peril! I will not stand by
36 and see it done. My blood is up, and I have the strength of ten such men as you.
37 Look to yourself, for by Heaven I will not spare you, if you drive me on!"

38 "Stand back," cried Squeers, brandishing his weapon.

39 "I have a long series of insults to avenge," said Nicholas, flushed with passion;
40 "and my indignation is aggravated by the dastardly cruelties practised on helpless
41 infancy in this foul den. Have a care for if you do raise the devil within me, the
42 consequences shall fall heavily upon your own head!"

43 He had scarcely spoken, when Squeers, in a violent outbreak of wrath, and with
44 a cry like the howl of a wild beast, spat upon him, and struck him a blow across the
45 face with his instrument of torture, which raised up a bar of livid flesh as it was
46 inflicted. Smarting with the agony of the blow, and concentrating into that one
47 moment all his feelings of rage, scorn, and indignation, Nicholas sprang upon him,
48 wrested the weapon from his hand, and pinning him by the throat, beat the ruffian
49 till he roared for mercy.

1. How is Squeers preparing to punish Smike? (Tick one)

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|-----|
| A) | He is going to kill him. | |
| B) | He is going to sell him. | |
| C) | He is going to lock him up. | |
| D) | He is going to beat him. | |
| E) | He is going to expel him. | (1) |

2. Which word does Squeers use to make fun of Smike's explanation?
(Write down one word).

(1)

3. How does Mrs. Squeers punish Smike? (Tick two answers)

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|-----|
| A) | She put him in the pigsty. | |
| B) | She pulled his hair. | |
| C) | She insulted him. | |
| D) | She set the dog on him. | |
| E) | She smacked him repeatedly. | (2) |

4. In **one** complete sentence explain exactly what Squeers intends to 'find out'.

(2)

5. Look at the paragraph which begins "Mrs. Squeers being out of breath..."
(line 13)

A) How many times is Smike hit in this paragraph?

(1)

B) Pick **three** words in this paragraph which make the reader feel Smike's suffering.

i) _____ iii) _____

ii) _____

(3)



C) At the end of this paragraph what two things does Nicholas do to interrupt the punishment? Use your own words and answer in complete sentences.

i)

ii)

(4)

6) What techniques does the writer in this paragraph use to make this moment dramatic and exciting? (lines 13-17) (Tick 4 answers)

A) The writer uses imagery.

B) The writer uses a one word exclamation.

C) The writer puts the interruption near the end of the paragraph.

D) The writer uses alliteration.

E) The writer makes something unexpected take place.

F) The writer makes Squeers funny.

G) The writer uses personification.

H) The writer makes the reader feel sorry for Squeers.

(4)

7) Select from the passage one word which most closely corresponds to the word on the left. (Guidance is given on where to look in the passage).

A) save (lines 1-3)

B) pleading (lines 4-6)

C) exercise (lines 12-15)

D) jumped (lines 14-18)

E) amazed (lines 21-24)

F) robbed (lines 25-29)

G) worsened (lines 38-42)

H) fury (lines 43-46)

I) forced (lines 46-49)

J) bully (lines 46-49)

(10)



8. Look at the paragraph starting at line 28.

This passage was written over 100 years ago. Pick out and write down **two** phrases which show old fashioned features of language.

i)

ii)

(2)

9) What **three** things make Nicholas very angry? Answer in your own words and in **one** complete sentence.

(5)

10) Choose two words from the list below which best describe Squeers. (Tick **two** answers).

(2)

A)	amusing	B)	merciless	C)	fair	D)	domineering
E)	flexible	F)	courageous	G)	clever	H)	calm

11) Choose two words from the list below which best describe Nicholas. (Tick **two** answers).

(2)

A)	weak	B)	unkind	C)	sympathetic	D)	irresponsible
E)	lazy	F)	reserved	G)	courageous	H)	blonde

12) Look at the first sentence of the passage. Then look at the last sentence of the passage. Which **one** of the following phrases best describes the effect the writer achieves? (Choose **one** answer).

- | | |
|----|--|
| A) | Squeers is now in the same situation as Smike. |
| B) | Squeers has become a wild animal. |
| C) | Squeers feels humiliated in front of his wife. |
| D) | Squeers is furious that Nicholas has shouted at him. |
| E) | Nicholas is as bad as Squeers. |
- (2)



Question	Answer	Marks
1.	D	1 mark
2.	driven	1 mark
3.	C, E	2 marks
4.	He intends to find out why Smike was <i>forced/driven</i> to run away. (<i>Not just why he ran away</i>) 1 mark for complete sentence, 1 mark for correct answer.	2 marks
5.	A) Once B) any three of: wincing; scream; pain; desperate; caught; cut C) He (Nicholas) jumps up. He shouts 'stop' in a loud voice. (2 marks for correct answers in their own words, 2 marks for correct punctuation of sentences – candidate does not need to have used speech marks but if used they should be correct. NB: Not 'he started to talk'.)	1 mark 3 marks 4 marks
6.	B, C, D, E	4 marks
7.	A) spare B) imploring C) exertions D) starting E) aghast / stupefied F) bereft G) aggravated H) wrath I) wrested J) ruffian	10 marks
8.	my quiet interference you have returned no answer This public interference Miserable lad's behalf not I (Any reasonable answer)	2 marks
9.	Nicholas is angry because Squeers has insulted him, ignored his letter, beaten Smike, spat on him, hit him and made the young boys suffer cruelty at the school. (3 marks: one for each of any three correct answers, plus 2 marks for answering in one complete and accurate sentence and own words.)	5 marks
10.	B, D	2 marks
11.	C, G	2 marks
12.	A	1 mark
	Total	40 marks