



A2Z Learning: 11+

English

Reading Comprehension

An Encounter with a Scorpion (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!



An Encounter with a Scorpion

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

*In this extract, Peony and her **imaginary friend** Margot have found a scorpion and decide to keep it as a pet.*

We are halfway upstairs when Mum appears at the top of the stairs, a big dark shadow.

'What have you got?' she says.

I look at the jamjar in my hands: the little black scorpion still trying to climb up
5 the slippery glass insides, his sting up over his back and the small piece of
cheese which he has not eaten.

'Nothing,' I say, looking her in the eye.

'Peony, what's in the jar?'

'Oh it's just...I just found it by the rocks, I'm going to look after it. I've given it
10 some cheese.'

Mum starts coming down the stairs. Now the stairs are crowded, and there is
no way past her. I hold my hands around the jar, trying to hide the scorpion.
He is skittering at the sides, only the glass between his sting and my palm.

Her hand is reaching out to take the jar. I am holding it tight. I am scared of
15 dropping it but it is slippery and I am also scared of putting my fingers inside to
hold it better, although the scorpion is still now, flat to the glass bottom.
Raindrops of sweat drip down from my neck past my heart and make a
paddling pool in my belly button.

'Peony,' she snaps, 'what have you got in the jar?' She is leaning forward down
20 the stairs, one hand holding the handrail and the other reaching for the jar, her
fingers pressing around mine, looking for spaces where mine aren't. She tugs,
and I let go of the jar.

As Mum brings it up to her face, the scorpion jumps, lifting his pincers and his
tail again, ready to fight.

25 'Oh!' Mum screams and drops the jar.

The jar bounces on the step between our pairs of bare feet, then falls another two steps and bounces again. I turn to watch it, to see the glass shatter, to see what happens to the scorpion. But the jar does not break. Instead it bounces on every step, *toc, toc, toc*, and ends up on the kitchen tiles on its side.

30 I think of the scorpion escaping; Mum would be even madder than she is already going to be. I start to run back downstairs, to try and keep it in, but after two steps I feel the sting, then the burning on the side of my foot.

'Oh it stung me!' I cry.

I get down to the kitchen and climb up on to the bench, pulling my feet up
35 behind me.

'It stung me, Mum! Please, it hurts!'

My foot is already starting to go red and swell up. The kitchen feels like winter. The darkness in my stomach is spreading out into my arms and legs.

Margot has her arms around me on the bench. I squeeze my eyes shut, it is
40 black as night behind my eyes but with sparkles of colour and flashes of white. My foot is burning and I squeeze tighter and tighter. Margot is rocking me.

I am trembling in the dark, trying to think about being cuddled, but only thinking about my foot hurting more and more. Then the arms lift me up and it is not Margot anymore it is Mum, and she carries me outside into the light. She
45 puts me on the table and looks at my foot.

'Hush, Pea, it'll be OK,' Mum says. 'I'll fix it. Wait here.'

Later I learned that the most self-effacing creatures were often the most dangerous. The scorpion would lie there quietly as you examined him, only raising his tail in an almost apologetic gesture of warning if you breathed too
50 hard on him. However, scorpions do have quite a temper: a disturbing characteristic in a creature otherwise so impeccable.

When Mum comes back I am curled in a ball, sobbing. She unpeels me like an orange. She has a towel full of ice cubes. She presses it against my foot and one kind of hurt pushes away the other.

1. Where does Peony first see her mother?

(1)

2. Look at lines 1-8. What impression do we get of Peony's mother? Use your own words.

(2)

3. Look at lines 11-12. Find one word or phrase which shows that Peony feels trapped.

(1)

4. Look at lines 14-18. How does Peony feel about the jar? Use your own words.

(2)

5. Look at lines 13-24. What impression do we get of the scorpion? Use your own words.

(2)

6. Give one word or phrase of your own for "madder" as used in line 30.

(1)

7. Which of the following phrases is closest in meaning to "the kitchen feels like winter" (line 37)?

A) The heating in the kitchen has gone off.

B) Peony feels upset and uncomfortable in this situation.

C) The shock of the sting has made Peony feel very cold.

D) Peony has forgotten that it is summer outside.

(1)



8. Look at line 39 to the end of the passage. How does the sting on Peony's foot make her feel and behave? Use your own words.

(4)

9. What is meant by "an almost apologetic gesture of warning" in line 49?

(2)

10. What is meant by "a disturbing characteristic in a creature otherwise so impeccable" in lines 50-51?

(2)

11. Find a word or phrase from the final paragraph of the passage which shows Peony's mother makes her feel less frightened.

(1)

12. Looking at the whole passage, how would you describe the relationship between Peony and her mother? Give reasons for your answer.

(4)