

More about Comprehension

We will now look at a longer piece. The next Activity puts the skills we have been studying in the following categories; *Word Definition; Substitution; Synonyms and Antonyms ; Paraphrase; Comprehension.*

It will be a longer Passage, so it may take you a time to work through it, and as suggested before, more than one reading will probably be necessary, three is the recommended number. Please have your dictionary ready for consultation, and if possible a thesaurus.



You can almost certainly borrow one from your local library, and in fact they are not too expensive: Longman's Pocket Thesaurus costs in the region of £10 and you can buy a medium sized dictionary (I would recommend the Oxford) for about £10 - £12.

Activity 3

Read through the following passage and answer the questions:

Music was always the great influence, Mother being a professional pianist. Inevitably Jessica and I went to her concerts, though Father never came, - at least we didn't see him. Maybe he was there somewhere, or went at other times, but he refused to get involved with our little excursions. We went to lots of concert halls, the *Wigmore* being the main one, but we also went to the *Purcell*, and other lesser known venues. There I revelled in the music of *Chopin, Stravinsky, and Shostakovich*, plus other less well known composers whose names now escape me.

It was great to sit in the concert hall which was usually pretty full for Mother was really quite a celebrity and her concerts always got into the press with invariably good reviews. She preferred solo performances, though every now and again she played with an orchestra, she was quite keen on the Liverpool Philharmonic, a few times Jessica and me we travelled up to Merseyside to see her play at the Phil.

Mother was amazing. She wasn't one of those temperamental divas, all nerves before a big performance, nothing special seemed to be happening at all. She'd sit with us and chat, and you would never have thought that very soon she'd be coming out before a vast audience to play a concerto by *Rachmaninov* or *Tchaikovsky*. To watch your own mother perform there and be feted by the audience, who presented her afterwards with encores and bouquets, that was something special. Long afterwards I was still thinking back to those great musical occasions.

But I was still getting ready for my own concert, that was why Mother

was always so anxious for me to keep up with my practices, never missing out with my teacher at Dimchurch academy. In fact it wasn't until later I discovered Mother had chosen for us to live in Dimchurch, because apart from being a jewel of a Surrey village complete with thatched cottages and a main street perfect for a period drama by Jane Austen, it had a private music school, not so well known in the big world of professional music as the *Menuhin*, but still a worthy rival even though on a slightly less grandiose scale. I'd been studying there now for about five years with a wonderful piano teacher, *Miss Humphreys*, whose name only those really familiar with the classical piano will recognize. Mind you, she never said I was a genius, far from it, to listen to her you would have thought I was rather mediocre, and looking back maybe she was right. Apart from my mother's sincere conviction she had spawned a female Ashkenazy, there was little hard evidence I was anything so very special. However, being young, innocent, and with a touching faith in my mother, I persisted...

The concert was to be a solo performance by myself at the Wigmore Hall. Mother had booked it over a year in advance, and during the time between the booking and the concert, I was grilled in every imaginable way by Miss Humphreys - and of course my mother. I wondered at times if I had any social life at all, and in the end if it was really worth it. Where the hell was I going? I asked myself desperately after not one hour's intense practice at that cursed piano, but two...

My programme at least was chosen by myself My beloved Stravinsky featured, not with 'Petruchka' my favourite, but with the "Rite of Spring", which had long attracted me, mainly because I had read somewhere that as a ballet it was almost impossible to dance, even though it had been specially composed for the great Russian ballet dancer Diaghilev.

I said to myself rather cynically: 'If the "Rite of Spring" is that difficult, the critics can't pan me too much.' At least I hoped they couldn't. I had to include Beethoven, omitting Mozart, because most learned pundits dismiss his sonatas as too easy. 'Too easy?' I muttered angrily to myself as I tried to bash Stravinsky into some kind of submission. Can genius be that easy?' So I settled for Beethoven's "Appassionata" and hoped it would reflect me to some extent... I completed the programme with Britten; I always liked Britten, a square peg if you like, but like many square pegs, he changed the hole, not the other way round...

The day of the concert arrived, - everything does in the end, - and in the morning we set out from Dimchurch to London. We were only three, Mother, me, and Jessica, as Father wasn't with us, in fact I hadn't seen him for a few days. Maybe his liking for whisky in the bedroom had proved too much and he was out for the count. At that point, I didn't care at all, and we made a curiously silent trio, Mother driving as usual, but though she looked her normal self, firm and purposeful, there was none of the small talk she usually peppered us with, especially when we were going somewhere we weren't too keen about.

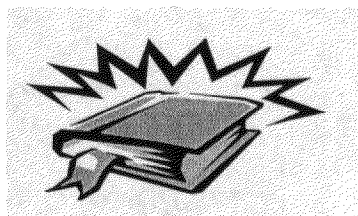
Before the journey, I had spoken to Jessica first thing in the morning but not since. As she went into the bathroom, she said with a small half grin: 'Good luck, sis,' and disappeared. I could never work out what she really thought about my piano playing, she was strangely secretive, and though she seemed pleased at my performances at the academy and at our school, she never looked over enthusiastic and definitely kept her cards very close to her chest.

1. Complete the following sentences using words from the

Passage:

- a) The strongest _____ parents in children's lives will be their
- b) Sports grounds, cinemas, and theatres are all _____
- c) A duo has two performers, but a _____ is just one!
- d) Actors and performers who lose their tempers easily are often called _____
- e) A singer giving by request another song is presenting an _____
- f) The most precious or valuable part of any collection is often called a _____
- g) That actor is neither very good, nor very bad, he is just _____
- h) My lad, your parents have _____ a genius, I am sure!
- i) The police cannot convict that man, they haven't enough _____ evidence
- j) That film must be pretty bad; it was well and truly _____ by the critics

Polonius: What do you read, my lord?
Hamlet: Words, words, words.
Shakespeare



2. Change the words in bold to words with the **opposite meaning**:

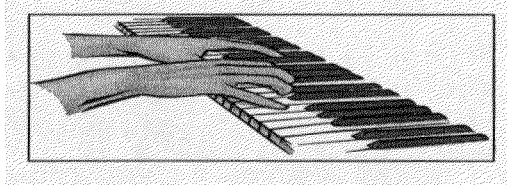
e.g. music was always the **great** influence
music was always the **small** influence

- a) he **refused** to get involved with our little excursions
- b) **a few times** Jessica and me we travelled up to Merseyside
- c) she wasn't one of those **temperamental** divas
- d) it had a **private** music school
- e) you would have thought I was **mediocre**

- f) my **beloved** Stravinsky featured
- g) If the “Rite of Spring” is that **difficult**
- h) though she seemed **pleased** at my performances
3. Explain what is meant by the following expressions:
- e.g. a square peg = someone who doesn't fit in
- a) apart from being a jewel of a Surrey village
- b) he was out for the count
- c) (she) kept her cards very close to her chest
4. Divide the following rather over-long sentence into shorter sentences:
- In fact it wasn't until later I discovered Mother had chosen for us to live in Dimchurch, because apart from being a jewel of a Surrey village complete with thatched cottages and a main street perfect for a period drama by Jane Austen, it had a private music school, not so well known in the big world of professional music as the Menuhin, but a worthy rival even though on a slightly less grandiose scale.
5. **Paraphrase: Write in your own words** (about 100 to 120) without looking at the text the Paragraph starting: “**But I was still getting ready for my own concert.**” (Key guide after this Lesson)
- To do this, as advised, read through the paragraph two to three times writing notes that you can keep, then without looking at the text, try rewriting the gist of what you can remember of the Passage. It will be interesting to compare this with the original. Please remember that in your notes you should only include the most important details that have to go into your Paraphrase...
6. Answer the following Questions about the Passage:
- a) Why did the father of Joanne, (the storyteller) fail to appear at his wife's concerts?
- b) What was special about the village of Dimchurch, apart from being very pretty?
- c) Try to say in your own words why the village was popular for presenting period drama?
- d) What is a **pundit** and why is Mozart not very popular in

competitions?

- e) Why, do you think, was Joanne not very keen on going to her concert, and how can you tell her mother was nervous?



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