

The following passage comes from the short story titled "Indian Education" from the book *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. In this darkly comic short story collection, Sherman Alexie, a Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian, brilliantly weaves memory, fantasy, and stark realism to paint a complex, grimly ironic portrait of life in and around the Spokane Indian Reservation.

"Second Grade"

Betty Towle, missionary teacher, redheaded and so ugly that no one ever had a puppy crush on her, made me stay in for recess fourteen days straight.

"Tell me you're sorry," she said.

"Sorry for what"? I asked.

"Everything," she said and made me stand straight for fifteen minutes, eagle-armed with books in each hand. One was a math book; the other was English. But all I learned was that gravity can be painful.

For Halloween I drew a picture of her riding a broom with a scrawny cat on the back. She said that her God would never forgive me for that.

Once, she gave the class a spelling test but set me aside and gave me a test designed for junior high students. When I spelled all the words right, she crumpled up the paper and made me eat it.

"You'll learn respect," she said.

She sent a letter home with me that told my parents to either cut my braids or keep me home from class. My parents came in the next day and dragged their braids across Betty Towle's desk.

"Indians, indians, indians." She said it without capitalization. She called me "indian, indian, indian."

And I said, *Yes, I am. I am Indian. Indian, I am.*

1. The tone of this passage can best be described as
 - a. violently angered
 - b. bitterly sympathetic
 - c. calmly sarcastic
 - d. pessimistically didactic
2. The syntax of the last line serves to reinforce all of the following EXCEPT the
 - a. narrator's disrespect for Betty Towle
 - b. narrator's refusal to believe the white man's story
 - c. narrator's self-worth
 - d. narrator's lack of self-worth
3. The point of view in the passage is best described as
 - a. Third-person omniscient
 - b. Third-person limited
 - c. First person
 - d. Second person

4. The author's intent in adding the line, "She said it without capitalization" suggests
 - a. the interpretation of the narrator's worth through Betty's eyes.
 - b. Betty's lack of emotion toward the narrator.
 - c. Betty's feeling of inferiority.
 - d. the narrator's feelings of his self-worth.

5. The passage suggests that the narrator
 - a. has learning difficulties.
 - b. understands his position in society.
 - c. is far above average intelligence.
 - d. Does not have a close relationship with his parents.

6. The opening line of the passage suggests all of the following EXCEPT
 - a. Betty's ugliness is attributed to her punitive manner.
 - b. The narrator resents Betty's authority
 - c. Betty is devoted to her religious beliefs.
 - d. The narrator and Betty are involved in a conflict.

7. Betty's concept of God is best described as
 - a. a merciful benefactor.
 - b. a non-judgmental entity
 - c. an uninvolved deity.
 - d. a punitive judge.

8. The parent's reaction to the teacher's request suggests
 - a. pride/defiance
 - b. that they can not speak English
 - c. compliance to Betty's request
 - d. that their braids are very long

9. The line "You'll learn respect" reveals that Betty
 - a. thinks harsh punishment creates respect.
 - b. is a fair teacher.
 - c. is understanding of other cultures.
 - d. thinks she can earn respect.

10. What is it that Betty blames the narrator for when she says, "Tell me you're sorry" in the first part of the passage?
 - a. for misbehaving in class.
 - b. his heritage.
 - c. for his lack of intelligence.
 - d. for mistreating other students.

*didactic: preachy or morally instructive

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1. c: the passage is not didactic, which means morally instructive; the tone is not violent or angry; the tone may be somewhat bitter but certainly not sympathetic
2. d: note c and d are opposites, so the answer should be one of those. As the narrator says, "*Yes, I am. I am an Indian. Indian, I am*" he implies his self-worth in italics. Therefore, lack of self-worth is the EXCEPT. Make sure you answer the question and watch out for "EXCEPT" as time-waster questions that throw you off the correct answer.
3. c: "I asked" in line 4 = first person
4. a: Betty does not "lack" emotion as suggested by b, nor does she feel inferior. She is suggesting the narrator's worth, but she cannot suggest his "self-worth" as implied in d. Therefore, a is the correct answer.
5. c: the teacher gives the narrator a spelling test for junior high students, and the narrator spells the words correctly; some students have felt the correct answer is b; however, the passage seems to imply the narrator's rebellion against his position in society rather than an understanding of that position. If you want to give credit --if they can prove it-- that's up to you. C is the best answer because support is right in the passage.
6. c: "missionary teacher" implies a link to religion but not a devotion to her religious beliefs. The placement of "so ugly..." and "made me stay in for recess..." implies a connection to the teacher's ugliness and her punitive manner (a). The diction "made me stay in for recess fourteen days straight" shows a resentment for Betty's authority and a conflict between her and the student (b/d).
7. d: students will most likely miss this as a result of vocabulary. The narrator says, "her God would never forgive me for that" implying that her God is not merciful or non-judgmental (a/b). An "uninvolved deity" implies an apathetic God who would not care one way or another about punishment (c). Punitive (as from previous questions) relates to punishment, and Betty's God would certainly be a punitive judge as she is.
8. a: When the parents come in, they drag their braids across the teacher's desk (not literally). If the students assume that they have actually cut their braids, they may assume they are in compliance (c). However, they are proud of their heritage and culture and show their pride and defiance by waving their own braids in Betty's hair.
9. a: As in #6 and 7, Betty believes punishment is related/earns respect. She is not a fair teacher, nor is she understanding of other cultures. Nothing in the passage suggests she can earn respect without it stemming from punishment.
10. a : When Betty initially says, "Tell me you're sorry," she blames the narrator for misbehaving in class. When she replies, "everything" and the narrator then draws a picture of her riding a broom, etc..., we are to assume that Betty means this at a literal level. It is not until later in the passage that we see the narrator's heritage as a factor, so the best answer to this question is a. The narrator does not lack intelligence, nor does he mistreat other students.