

Sample SAT Reading Questions

Questions 1-5 are based on the following passage.

This passage is adapted from Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly, *Frankenstein*, originally published in 1818. Victor Frankenstein is telling his story to a new acquaintance.

Line I am by birth a Genevese, and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic. My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics, and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation. He was respected by all who knew him for his integrity and indefatigable
5 attention to public business. He passed his younger days perpetually occupied by the affairs of his country; a variety of circumstances had prevented his marrying early, nor was it until the decline of life that he became a husband and the father of a family.

As the circumstances of his marriage illustrate his character, I cannot refrain
10 from relating them. One of his most intimate friends was a merchant who, from a flourishing state, fell, through numerous mischances, into poverty. This man, whose name was Beaufort, was of a proud and unbending disposition and could not bear to live in poverty and oblivion in the same country where he had formerly been distinguished for his rank and magnificence. Having paid
15 his debts, therefore, in the most honourable manner, he retreated with his daughter to the town of Lucerne, where he lived unknown and in wretchedness. My father loved Beaufort with the truest friendship and was deeply grieved by his retreat in these unfortunate circumstances. He bitterly deplored the false pride which led his friend to a conduct so little worthy of the
20 affection that united them. He lost no time in endeavouring to seek him out,

with the hope of persuading him to begin the world again through his credit and assistance.

25 Beaufort had taken effectual measures to conceal himself, and it was ten months before my father discovered his abode. Overjoyed at this discovery, he hastened to the house, which was situated in a mean street near the Reuss. But when he entered, misery and despair alone welcomed him. Beaufort had saved but a very small sum of money from the wreck of his fortunes, but it was sufficient to provide him with sustenance for some months, and in the
30 meantime he hoped to procure some respectable employment in a merchant's house. The interval was, consequently, spent in inaction; his grief only became more deep and rankling when he had leisure for reflection, and at length it took so fast hold of his mind that at the end of three months he lay on a bed of sickness, incapable of any exertion.

35 His daughter attended him with the greatest tenderness, but she saw with despair that their little fund was rapidly decreasing and that there was no other prospect of support. But Caroline Beaufort possessed a mind of an uncommon mould, and her courage rose to support her in her adversity. She procured plain work; she plaited straw and by various means contrived to earn
40 a pittance scarcely sufficient to support life.

Several months passed in this manner. Her father grew worse; her time was more entirely occupied in attending him; her means of subsistence decreased; and in the tenth month her father died in her arms, leaving her an orphan and a beggar. This last blow overcame her, and she knelt by Beaufort's coffin
45 weeping bitterly, when my father entered the chamber. He came like a protecting spirit to the poor girl, who committed herself to his care; and after the interment of his friend he conducted her to Geneva and placed her under the protection of a relation. Two years after this event Caroline became his wife.

- 1) The first paragraph of the passage indicates that the core of Victor Frankenstein's identity is
- a) having the approval of a father that he greatly admires.
 - b) his pride in his country and love of Geneva.
 - c) living up to the high ideals of his family.
 - d) **belonging to a high-status family engaged in public service.**

Explanation: Frankenstein introduces himself first as a citizen of Geneva (answer b), but rapidly goes on to talk about his ancestry and spends the rest of the passage trying to demonstrate why his family is so respectable. Although he clearly admires his father, there is no indication that he worries about his father's approval (answer a). He may very well want to measure up to the high standard set by his father and more remote ancestors, but this is not discussed in the passage (answer c). His introduction of himself is first and foremost an introduction of his family as high-status and disposed to serve others (answer d).

- 2) Victor Frankenstein tells the story in paragraphs 2-5 in order to
- a) impress his listener with his family's social status and wealth.
 - b) **illustrate his claim that his father is a noble and charitable man.**
 - c) defend his father from public criticism over marrying Caroline.
 - d) delay the moment when he has to reveal more about himself.

Explanation: Although it is possible to speculate that Frankenstein is stalling for time (answer d), there is no evidence in the text to support this. The reader may wonder at the ethics of a man marrying a much younger woman for whom he functions as guardian, but the passage does not support the idea that these ethics are being questioned by anyone in the text, and so there is no need for Frankenstein to mount a defense (answer c). He is clearly proud of his family's status, which makes this a tempting way to answer the question (answer a), but the story he tells is focused on his father's character, not on the entire family or their social status. In addition, in lines 9-10, he explicitly says "As the circumstances of his marriage illustrate his character, I cannot refrain from relating them." This indicates that the best answer is that Frankenstein is trying to use the story to prove that his father is a wonderful man (answer b).

- 3) In the context of the passage, the assertion that "Caroline Beaufort possessed a mind of an uncommon mould" (lines 36-37) is primarily meant to convey the idea that
- a) **Caroline has a strong character and is not easily defeated.**
 - b) Caroline's thinking is unusual for her time and place.
 - c) Caroline has been driven insane by her poverty.
 - d) Caroline sees opportunity where others see obstacles.

Explanation: The passage does assert that Caroline's thinking is unusual (answer b), but there is no support for the idea that this has to do with a particular time and place. The sentences that

conclude this paragraph and begin the next paragraph rule out the idea that she has been “driven insane” by poverty (answer c), because these sentences describe Caroline making intelligent, though difficult, choices. It is too much to say, however, that she sees these difficult choices as “opportunity” (answer d); there is no evidence that she sees her adversity this way. Instead, the passage is focused on showing that Caroline is practical and courageous in the face of adversity (answer a).

- 4) Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?
- a) Lines 34-36 “His daughter...of support”
 - b) Lines 37-39 “her courage...support life”
 - c) Lines 40-43 “Several months...a beggar”
 - d) Lines 43-45 “This last...his care”

Explanation: Details of Caroline’s response to her situation can be found in all of the lines mentioned in the possible answers a-d. Some of these details explain the seriousness of her situation (answers a and c), and some explain her emotional response to her father’s death and her rescue by Frankenstein’s father. Only one set of lines contains details that demonstrate Caroline’s unusual courage and pragmatism (answer b).

- 5) The details and diction in lines 43-45 reinforce Frankenstein’s depiction of his father’s relationship to young Caroline as similar to the relationship between
- a) a benign god and a devoted worshipper.
 - b) a wise king and a hopeful petitioner.
 - c) a guardian angel and a desperate human.
 - d) a brave father and a frightened child.

Explanation: Lines 43-45 offer details such as Caroline’s kneeling and weeping at the side of her father’s coffin and diction like “protecting spirit” and “committed herself.” Caroline is not portrayed as “hopeful” (answer b), or “devoted” (answer a). Although she is kneeling, which suggests prayer, there is no explicit mention of prayer--she may be kneeling for practical or emotional reasons besides prayer, and “devoted worshipper” is therefore too strong a description for this circumstance. The details create a picture of Caroline’s loss of hope and the importance of her rescue by Frankenstein’s father, which might support the idea that they are like parent and child (answer d). But there is little language here to suggest the idea of a father-child relationship. Rather, Frankenstein’s father is like a “protecting spirit” who enters as Caroline kneels and sobs, and she then “commits herself” to his care. This suggests a more spiritual kind of protection--as of that offered by a guardian angel to a human being (answer c).