

Year 10 Week 1: Reading Comprehension Practice

The Hiding Place

In this extract from 'Spies' by Michael Frayn, Stephen is out at night in a dark, disused tunnel beneath the railway line. He thinks spies are using somewhere near the tunnel to hide money, secrets or instructions.

Between the reflected disc of silver-grey behind me and the second one in front of me is a darkness whose shape is defined entirely by sound. The huge reverberations of the water plopping from the wet blackness overhead into the black water beside me merge into suites of scutterings and splashings trailed by unseen nocturnal creatures fleeing before the long echoes of my panicky breathing. In my terror I lose my footing on the unseen narrow causeway along the edge of the unseen lake, and have to keep touching the slime on the walls to steady myself.

And then at last I'm out into the open night again, and looking up in gratitude at that serene white face riding full and round above the railway embankment. A cool breath of air stirs, and the moon sails behind a cloud. The delicate white world around me evaporates.

I stand stock still, mastering my panic. Slowly I piece together a world of sorts from the different densities of blackness around me, and from a few small sounds. The stirring of the leaves in the trees along the lane. The murmur of the telegraph wires along the railway track above me. I creep forward again. By touch I find the harsh brickwork of the retaining wall... the rust links of the wire fence... the broken stalks of the cow parsley... the metallic smoothness of the box and its embossed inscription.

I listen. The rustle of the leaves, the murmur of the telegraph wires. My own breath. The distant barking of the dogs at the Cottages in the Lanes. Nothing else.

I ease the lid open. The shiny underside as it turns catches a faint gleam of light from the clouds. There's no trace of any light reflected from the bottom of the box, though. I'm looking into blackness. There's something odd about the blackness – something wrong with the *sound* of it... What's wrong is that there *is* no sound. The hard interior surfaces should give back a faint response to the tiny atmospheric breathings of the night, and no response is forthcoming.

I cautiously put my hand inside. The texture of the air seems to change and thicken around my fingers, as they sink into some substance that gives beneath them. I snatch my hand away.

What I felt, I work out with hindsight, as my surprise subsides, was a *softness*. A dry, cool softness. The box has something in it. Slowly I work out what it was.

Some sort of cloth.

I put both hands very slowly and carefully back into the box. Cloth, yes... A lot of cloth... Different sorts of cloth... Some of it smooth, some of it fibrous... A hem... A button... Another button...



Underneath my fingers now is something rough to the touch, with a pattern of ridges and furrows that seems curiously recognisable. I think I know what it is. I slowly ease my hand right round it to feel its underside and its width – then stop.

The texture of the darkness around me is changing a little. I look up, and see the suggestion of a luminous edge to the clouds overhead. At any moment the moon's going to come out again. But something else has changed, too. Something about the *sound* of the world...

I strain my ears. Nothing. Just the shifting of the leaves, the sigh of the wires, the coming and going of my breath...

I focus my attention back on the object I'm touching. The underside of it feels the same as the top. It's about as wide as my hand... Yes, I know what this is. I begin to slide my hand along it, so that I can feel the end of it to check, then stop again.

The sound that's changed, I realise, is the sound of my breathing. It's grown more complex. It no longer corresponds precisely to the rise and fall I can feel inside my chest.

I stop breathing. The sound of breathing continues.

There's someone a few feet away in the lane – someone who has come silently up to the gap in the wire fence and then stopped to listen, as I'm listening now.

Another faint sound. A hand feeling for the brickwork of the retaining wall, just as I felt for it... Now the rusty links of the fence are being eased back. A body's squeezing underneath them...

There's someone very close behind me, feeling his way towards the box. It's a man – I can hear the maleness of his level breathing. A grown man – I can hear the size of him. In another moment I shall feel his hands as they reach out towards the box and encounter my back instead.



I can't move. I can't breathe. An agonising electric coldness passes through my back as it senses the approach of those hands.

And all at once the darkness dissolves in a flood of moonlight.

The level breathing behind me ends in a sharp, raucous gasp.

Neither of us moves. Neither of us breathes.

I've only to turn and I shall see him. But I can't, any more than you can ever turn when you hear the terrible figure behind you in a nightmare.

Then the moon's behind the clouds again and the man's gone. I hear him scrambling back through the wire fence, and stumbling in his haste as he runs into the rutted depths of the Lanes.

I wait, as immobile as stone, still charged with that unbearable cold electricity.

I wait... and wait... until I hear the dogs barking in the distance again, and I know for certain he's gone. Then I turn and hurl myself unseeing through the tangle of the fence and into the booming darkness of the tunnel.

These questions are about the text *'The Hiding Place'*.

1

Which senses does Stephen most use to navigate his way through the tunnel?

Choose **two**.

hearing

Office on the web Frame

taste

smell

touch

sight

2

a) **Find** and **copy** an example of alliteration from paragraph 1.

Type it in the box below.

b) **Find** and **copy** an example of onomatopoeia from paragraph 1.

Type it in the box below.

3

What is 'that serene white face' that Stephen sees at the beginning of the second paragraph?

- 4 a) In the paragraph below, choose **the metaphor** used to describe Stephen's loss of vision.

And then at last I'm out in the open again, and looking up in gratitude at that serene white face riding full and round above the railway embankment. A cool breath of air stirs and the moon sails behind a cloud. The delicate white world around me evaporates.

- 4 b) What literary technique is the author using in the first sentence of this paragraph?

And then at last I'm out in the open again, and looking up in gratitude at that serene white face riding full and round above the railway embankment. A cool breath of air stirs, and the moon sails behind a cloud. The delicate white world around me evaporates.

Choose the **best** answer.

alliteration

onomatopoeia

personification

simile

- 5 Look at the text below.

What evidence is there that someone has been to the box's hiding place recently?

I stand stock still, mastering my panic. Slowly I piece together a world of sorts from the different densities of blackness around me, and from a few small sounds. The stirring of the leaves in the trees along the lane. The murmur of the telegraph wires along the railway track above me. I creep forward again. By touch I find the harsh brickwork of the retaining wall... the rust links of the wire fence... the broken stalks of the cow parsley... the metallic smoothness of the box and its embossed inscription.

6

Why is it so effective to make the phrase 'Some sort of cloth.' a complete paragraph on its own?

Choose the **best** answer.

It highlights Stephen's realisation.

It explains what Stephen has found in the box.

It follows on from the previous paragraph.

It leads on to more explanation in the following paragraph.

7

What is the effect of using so many ellipses in the paragraph beginning 'I put both hands very slowly and carefully back into the box'?

Choose the **best** answer.

Readers can fill in the missing parts themselves.

The ellipses make the reader read faster.

The author is working out what he wants Stephen to find.

The reader experiences Stephen's sense of discovery.

8

'The texture of the darkness around me.' What does this mean?

Choose the **best** answer.

the feel of soft cloth

the moonlight

the movement of the clouds

the amount of light

9

Stephen refers to the sound of his breathing in the paragraph beginning 'The sound that's changed'. He says that 'It no longer corresponds precisely to the rise and fall I can feel inside my chest'. Why is this?

Choose the **best** answer.

Stephen is holding his breath.

Stephen can hear someone else breathing.

Stephen's breathing is disrupted by his anxiety.

The other sounds are disguising the sound of Stephen's breathing.

Stephen is breathing more quickly.

10

Why does the man gasp?

Choose the **best** answer.

He is short of breath after finding his way to the box.

He is shocked when he touches Stephen's back.

He is shocked when he suddenly sees Stephen.

He is blinded by the moonlight.

He doesn't want to be seen.

11

Look back at the text beginning 'I can't move ...' down to '... rutted depths of the Lanes.'

a) What common experience does the author use to involve the reader in the narrative?

b) In this same section, how else does the author directly involve the reader?

12 The author uses the phrase 'still charged with that unbearable cold electricity' to describe his feelings immediately after the man has gone.

Why is the phrase effective?

Choose the **best** answer.

It uses a physical force to describe the tension in Stephen's body.

It shows that Stephen is ready for action.

It emphasises the pain that Stephen is feeling.

It shows that electrical currents in the body create icy feelings.

13 Find and copy the phrase in the final paragraph that indicates Stephen's desperation to escape.

14 Think about the whole passage. Which of the following does the writer use to make the approach of the stranger more frightening?

Choose the **best two**.

sound of breathing

noise of the rusty fence

sound of gasping

dogs barking

the lack of light