Grade 8 English Language Arts

Reading Comprehension

DIRECTIONS

This session contains two reading selections with fourteen multiple-choice questions and two open-response questions. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

Paul Laurence Dunbar was an African American poet who wrote in the late 1800s and early 1900s. His poem "Sympathy" speaks of the feelings of a bird in a cage. Read the poem and answer the questions that follow.

SYMPATHY

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,[1]
And the faint perfume from its chalice[2] steals—
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain[3] would be on the bough[4] a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting—
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!

—*Paul Laurence Dunbar*

[1] *opes* — opens
[2] *chalice* — a cup or goblet
[3] *fain* — gladly
[4] *bough* — branch

"Sympathy" by Paul Laurence Dunbar. In the public domain.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

1 Which of the following words **best** describes the feeling created by the description in line 3?

A. peaceful
B. surprised
C. impatient
D. suspenseful

2 In line 4, the phrase "like a stream of glass" suggests the water is

A. cold.
B. deep.
C. dirty.
D. smooth.

3 In line 5, what do the "first bird" and the "first bud" **most likely** represent?

A. the cage
B. the springtime
C. the bud's beauty
D. the bird's ancestor

4 How is the first stanza **most** different from the rest of the poem?

A. The stanza suggests the bird is bored with his life.
B. The stanza describes how the bird looks, rather than how he acts.
C. The stanza suggests the bird is unwise for wanting his life to change.
D. The stanza describes what the bird likely desires, rather than what he experiences.

5 Which of the following words **best** describes the tone of the poem?

A. fearful
B. apologetic
C. passionate
D. wondering

6 Which meaning of the word *faint* is used in line 6?

A. exhausted
B. whispered
C. lacking courage
D. barely noticeable

LIVEWORKSHEETS