

• Reading Comprehension 4 Level 12

Directions: Read the passage. Then answer the questions below.

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a range of psychological conditions characterized by abnormalities in social interaction, behavior, interests, and communication. The five forms of ASD include classical autism, Asperger syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Rett syndrome, and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder. Although the number of reported cases of ASD has experienced a dramatic increase in the past 25 years, the majority of doctors agree that this increase is due to changes in diagnostic practices and advances in the understanding of psychiatric health. While there is no general consensus among medical professionals about the underlying causes of ASD, theories range from genetic inheritance to environmental factors. One of the most controversial theories to have emerged in recent times is the hypothesis that ASD could be caused by the MMR vaccine, which is an immunization against measles, mumps, and rubella that was first developed in the 1960's. The vaccine is a mixture of three live viruses and is administered via injection to children when they are one year old. By the late 1990's, this vaccination had led to the near-eradication of measles in countries that employed widespread inoculation. However, a combination of **spurious** scientific data and alarmist media attention led to an entirely preventable resurgence in measles cases in the early 21st century.

The first claims of a connection between the MMR vaccine and autism were made in 1998, when an article in *The Lancet*, a respected British medical journal, reported on eight cases of autism that could possibly be traced back to the administration of an MMR vaccine. The parents of the children in this study contended that the symptoms of autism in their children developed within days of vaccination. During a press conference, Andrew Wakefield, one of the authors of the article, called on British doctors to stop giving combined MMR vaccines, instead advocating for individual inoculations against measles, mumps, and rubella.

Following the publication of this article, Wakefield published several follow-up papers that further questioned the safety of the MMR vaccine. An onslaught of media coverage then began. Parents appeared on television sharing anecdotal evidence linking their child's inoculation to the onset of ASD. The popular press quickly seized upon this story; in 2002, over 1200 articles were written about the link between MMR vaccines and ASD. Less than 30% of these articles mentioned that an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence suggested that these vaccinations were completely safe.

Since the initial panic, fears that MMR vaccines cause ASD have generally subsided. A survey completed in 2004 showed that only 2% of people in the United Kingdom thought that there was a legitimate link between MMR vaccines and ASD. Fears were most likely allayed when, in 2004, an investigative reporter discovered that Andrew Wakefield had received a large sum of money from lawyers seeking evidence to use in cases against vaccine manufacturers. It was then discovered that Wakefield had applied for patents on an alternate MMR vaccine. These severe **conflicts of interest** damaged the credibility of Wakefield's study beyond repair. In 2010, Wakefield was tried by Britain's General Medical Council under allegations that he had falsified data and manipulated test results. The Council found that Wakefield had acted "dishonestly and irresponsibly," and consequently *The Lancet* officially retracted Wakefield's 1998 article.

The anti-MMR vaccine panic that arose immediately after Wakefield's article was published had a significant negative effect on the health of thousands of children. Once the controversy began, the number of parents in the United Kingdom who inoculated their children with the MMR vaccine experienced a sharp decline. Not surprisingly, the number of reported cases of measles increased; while there were only 56 confirmed cases of measles in the UK in 1998; in 2008 there were over 1300. Between 2002 and 2008, there were outbreaks of measles throughout Europe and North America. These outbreaks cost millions of dollars in health care and resulted in the deaths of dozens of children and adults with compromised immune systems.

Who is to blame for these deaths? It is easy to hold Andrew Wakefield accountable, but the media must also bear some of the responsibility. The media's appetite for a sensational medical story overshadowed the fact that there was very little scientific evidence behind Wakefield's claim. Although Wakefield is certainly not the first person to publish fraudulent scientific findings in a respected medical journal, the magnitude of this event was **anomalous**, as most medical hoaxes are discredited before they can reach the popular media. While *The Lancet* should not have published Wakefield's article without checking it thoroughly, the popular media should not have blown the study out of proportion without fully considering the consequences.

Questions

- 1) The primary purpose of the passage is to
 - A. warn parents about the dangers of not vaccinating their children against measles
 - B. criticize *The Lancet* for publishing Wakefield's article without vetting it more thoroughly
 - C. provide an overview of the MMR vaccine controversy, including its consequences and responsible parties
 - D. inform readers about the history of the MMR vaccine, especially in the U.S. and the UK
 - E. blame parents who believed alarmist media reports for the measles outbreaks
- 2) As used in paragraph 1, which is the best antonym for **spurious**?
 - A. reassuring
 - B. safe
 - C. clear
 - D. necessary
 - E. legitimate
- 3) Which of the following statements most accurately summarizes the author's explanation for the increase in reported cases of ASD over the past 25 years?
 - A. Over the past 25 years, parents have been more likely to have their young children inoculated against MMR.
 - B. Since the results of Wakefield's study were published, parents have been less likely to have their young children inoculated against MMR.
 - C. In the past 25 years, doctors have developed a better understanding of genetics, which is thought to be the leading factor in whether or not a child will develop ASD.
 - D. The drastic changes in our environment that have occurred over the past 25 years have most significantly contributed to an increase in cases of ASD.
 - E. The increase in reported cases of ASD is mainly the result of an increased understanding of how to recognize ASD.
- 4) Which of the following pieces of evidence from paragraphs 2 and 3 support(s) the author's claim that popular media is partially responsible for creating unnecessary panic?
 - I. "An article published in *The Lancet*, a respected British medical journal, reported on eight cases of autism that could possibly be traced back to the administration of an MMR vaccine."
 - II. "In 2002, over 1200 articles were written about the link between MMR vaccines and ASD. Less than 30% of these articles mentioned that an overwhelming amount of scientific evidence suggested that these vaccinations were completely safe."
 - III. "Parents appeared on television sharing anecdotal evidence regarding the links between their child's inoculation and the onset of ASD."
 - A. I only
 - B. II only
 - C. I and II only
 - D. II and III only
 - E. I, II, and III

5) In paragraph 4, the author cites all of the following as ways that Wakefield's study was discredited except

- investigators discovered that the parents of children in Wakefield's study were litigants in a lawsuit against the pharmaceutical company that made the MMR vaccine
- The Lancet* eventually retracted Wakefield's original article
- it was discovered that Wakefield accepted money from lawyers who were filing a suit against the pharmaceutical companies responsible for making the MMR vaccine
- an investigation into Wakefield's research found that he had falsified data in his initial study
- Wakefield himself had apparently been working on an alternate vaccine to compete with MMR

6) Based on its use in paragraph 4, it can be inferred that the phrase "conflicts of interest" means situations in which people

- unethically accept large sums of money
- have interests that fail to accord with those of the mainstream media
- falsify data and manipulate test results
- have personal interests that threaten their official objectivity
- stand to gain financially through illegal means

7) As used in paragraph 6, which is the best synonym for **anomalous**?

- timely
- calamitous
- abnormal
- unacceptable
- coincidental

8) Which of the following pieces of evidence, if true, would best strengthen the author's argument in paragraph 6?

- An estimated 1.4 million measles deaths are averted each year due to MMR immunization.
- 90% of parents in the UK who decided not to immunize their children against measles reported that they did so against their doctors' wishes.
- Measles outbreaks in Japan can be traced back to Japanese exchange students who were studying in the UK.
- In the United States, over 60% of children who are not immunized against MMR never exhibit any symptoms of the measles.
- Andrew Wakefield sued the investigative reporter who accused him of fraud.

• Reading Comprehension 3 Level 12

Directions: Read the passage. Then answer the questions below.

The biggest house of cards, the longest tongue, and of course, the tallest man: these are among the thousands of records logged in the famous *Guinness Book of Records*. Created in 1955 after a debate concerning Europe's fastest game bird, what began as a marketing tool sold to pub landlords to promote Guinness, an Irish drink, became the bestselling copyright title of all time (a category that excludes books such as the Bible and the Koran). In time, the book would sell 120 million copies in over 100 countries— quite a leap from its humble beginnings.

In its early years, the book set its sights on satisfying man's innate curiosity about the natural world around him. Its two principal fact finders, twins Norris and Ross McWhirter, scoured the globe to collect empirical facts. It was their task to find and document aspects of life that can be sensed or observed, things that can be quantified or measured. But not just any things. They were only interested in superlatives: the biggest and the best. It was during this period that some of the hallmark Guinness Records were documented, answering such questions as "What is the brightest star?" and "What is the biggest spider?"

Once aware of the public's thirst for such knowledge, the book's authors began to branch out to cover increasingly obscure, little-known facts. They started documenting human achievements as well. A forerunner for reality television, the *Guinness Book* gave people a chance to become famous for accomplishing eccentric, often pointless tasks. Records were set in 1955 for consuming 24 raw eggs in 14 minutes and in 1981 for the fastest solving of a Rubik's Cube (which took a mere 38 seconds). In 1979 a man yodeled non-stop for ten and a quarter hours.

In its latest incarnation, the book has found a new home on the internet. No longer restricted to the confines of physical paper, the *Guinness World Records* website contains seemingly innumerable facts concerning such topics as the most powerful combustion engine, or the world's longest train. What is striking, however, is that such facts are found sharing a page with the record of the heaviest train to be pulled with a beard. While there is no denying that each of these facts has its own, individual allure, the latter represents a significant deviation from the education-oriented facts of earlier editions. Perhaps there is useful knowledge to be gleaned regarding the tensile strength of a beard, but this seems to cater to an audience more interested in seeking entertainment than education.

Originating as a simple bar book, the *Guinness Book of Records* has evolved over decades to provide insight into the full spectrum of modern life. And although one may be more likely now to learn about the widest human mouth than the highest number of casualties in a single battle of the Civil War, the *Guinness World Records* website offers a telling glimpse into the future of fact-finding and record-recording.

Questions

- 1) Which of the following statements would best serve as the headline for this passage?
 - A. The encyclopedia of the extremes reflects the changing interests of modern society.
 - B. A book of simple origins makes it to the top as sales total a staggering 120 million copies.
 - C. Facts are often displayed in a boring, uninteresting manner, but not in the *Guinness Book of Records*.
 - D. The *Guinness World Records* website proves itself a valuable resource for insight into the full spectrum of modern life.
 - E. Where other books fall short, the index of superlative sciences never ceases to amaze.
- 2) According to the author, the most significant difference between older editions of the *Guinness Book of Records* and the new *Guinness World Records* website involves
 - A. an end to the use of facts as a means to promote Guinness
 - B. an overall increase in the total number of facts presented
 - C. a move from fact-finding to the recording of achievements
 - D. a shift in focus from educational to entertaining material
 - E. a departure from book sales being limited to local pubs and bars
- 3) As used in paragraph 2, which is the best definition for **empirical**?
 - A. natural
 - B. derived from experience
 - C. recordable
 - D. excellent or unmatched
 - E. convenient or handy
- 4) Based on its use in paragraph 2, which of the following best describes something that is **superlative**?
 - A. Students give presentations about their favorite subjects for a grade. Amy Newhouse receives an 87% for her presentation, while Dustin Lincoln receives a 92%.
 - B. Although sharks are significantly bigger and have razor-sharp teeth, dolphins are smarter and can therefore successfully evade attack.
 - C. The lake holds a contest to see who can catch the biggest fish. Tommy wins, having caught a 6 lb. 5 oz. smallmouth bass.
 - D. A man built an enormous house of cards. It took him 44 days and 218,792 individual playing cards to complete.
 - E. Ichiro likes tennis and practices every day. In his last tournament, he placed 3rd of over 350 competitors, winning the bronze trophy.
- 5) Using the passage as a guide, it can be inferred that the author most likely believes reality television to be
 - A. corrupt
 - B. absurd
 - C. idiotic
 - D. invaluable
 - E. shallow

6) In the final paragraph, the author writes, "And although one may be more likely now to learn about the widest human mouth than the highest number of casualties in a single battle of the Civil War, the *Guinness World Records* website offers a telling glimpse into the future of fact-finding and record-recording." Which of the following literary devices is used in this quotation?

- A. *Aphorism*, characterized by the use of a concise statement that is made in a matter of fact tone to state a principle or an opinion that is generally understood to be a universal truth. Aphorisms are often adages, wise sayings and maxims aimed at imparting sense and wisdom.
- B. *Alliteration*, characterized by the use of adjacent words that begin with the same sound or letter, creating a repetition of similar sounds in the sentence. This is used to add character to the writing and often adds an element of playfulness.
- C. *Amplification*, characterized by the embellishment or extension of a statement in order to give it greater worth or meaning. This is often used for rhetorical purposes.
- D. *Anagram*, characterized by the jumbling of the syllables of a phrase or the individual letters of a word to create a new word. Anagram is a form of wordplay that allows the writer to infuse mystery and a fun into the writing so that the reader can decipher the actual word on his or her own and discover enhanced depth of meaning.
- E. *Anthropomorphism* in which a human quality, emotion or ambition is attributed to a non-human object or being. This is often used in order to relate the object to the reader on a familiar level and also to increase the level of relativity between the humans and objects while lending character to the subject.

7) Which of the following best summarizes the organization of this passage?

- A. introduction, history, conclusion
- B. history, examples, explanations, conclusion
- C. exposition, history, conclusion
- D. introduction, thesis, supporting paragraphs, conclusion
- E. introduction, history, exposition, conclusion

• Reading Comprehension 2 Level 12

Directions: Read the passage. Then answer the questions below.

Concussions are brain injuries that occur when a person receives a blow to the head, face, or neck. Although most people who suffer a concussion experience initial bouts of dizziness, nausea, and drowsiness, these symptoms often disappear after a few days. The long-term effects of concussions, however, are less understood and far more severe. Recent studies suggest that people who suffer multiple concussions are at significant risk for developing chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a degenerative brain disorder that causes a variety of dangerous mental and emotional problems to arise weeks, months, or even years after the initial injury. These psychological problems can include depression, anxiety, memory loss, inability to concentrate, and aggression. In extreme cases, people suffering from CTE have even committed suicide or homicide. The majority of people who develop these issues are athletes who participate in popular high-impact sports, especially football. Although new sports regulations and improvements in helmet technology can help protect players, amateur leagues, the sports media, and fans all bear some of the responsibility for reducing the incidence of these devastating injuries.

Improvements in diagnostic technology have provided substantial evidence to link severe—and often fatal—psychological disorders to the head injuries that players receive while on the field. Recent autopsies performed on the brains of football players who have committed suicide have shown advanced cases of CTE in every single victim.

In response to the growing understanding of this danger, the National Football League (NFL) has revised its safety regulations. Players who have suffered a head injury on the field must undergo a “concussion sideline assessment”—a series of mental and physical fitness tests—before being allowed back in the game. In an effort to diminish the amount of head and neck injuries on the field, NFL officials began enforcing stricter penalty calls for helmet-to-helmet contact, leading with the head, and hitting a defenseless player. Furthermore, as of 2010, if a player’s helmet is accidentally wrenched from his head during play, the ball is immediately whistled dead. It is hoped that these new regulations, coupled with advances in helmet design, will reduce the number of concussions, and thus curb further cases of CTE.

Efforts by the NFL and other professional sports leagues are certainly **laudable**; we should commend every attempt to protect the mental and physical health of players. However, new regulations at the professional level cannot protect amateur players, especially young people. Fatal cases of CTE have been reported in victims as young as 21. Proper tackling form—using the arms and shoulders to aim for a player’s midsection—should be taught at an early age. Youth, high school, and college leagues should also adopt safety rules even more stringent than those of the NFL. Furthermore, young athletes should be educated about the serious dangers of head injuries at an early age.

Perhaps the most important factor in reducing the number of traumatic brain injuries, however, lies not with the players, the coaches, or the administrators, but with the media and fans. Sports media producers have become accustomed to showcasing the most aggressive tackles and the most intense plays. NFL broadcasts often replay especially violent collisions while the commentators marvel at the players’ physical prowess. Some **sports highlights television programs** even feature weekly countdowns of the “hardest hits.” When the media **exalts** such dangerous behavior, professionals are rewarded for injuring each other on the field and amateurs become more likely to try to imitate their favorite NFL athletes. Announcers, commentators, television producers, and sportswriters should engage in a collective effort to cease glorifying brutal plays. In turn, fans should stop expecting their favorite players to put their lives on the line for the purposes of entertainment. Players must not be encouraged to trade their careers, their health, their happiness, and even their lives for the sake of a game.

Questions

- 1) Based on information in the passage, it can be inferred that all of the following statements are true except
 - A. tackling is not always dangerous; however, players who use improper tackling form may injure others
 - B. scientists have established a definitive link between players who die untimely deaths and the onset of CTE
 - C. NFL officials have done little to address the problem of CTE
 - D. athletes who are praised for exceptionally brutal hits are likely to continue engaging in such dangerous behavior
 - E. the NFL has done more to mitigate future cases of CTE than youth, high school, or college leagues have done
- 2) According to the passage, which of the following factors contribute(s) to the incidence of CTE in amateur players?
 - I. inconsistent application of safety regulations for all levels
 - II. lack of education about the dangers of head injuries
 - III. amateur players' desire to emulate professionals
 - A. I only
 - B. II only
 - C. I and II only
 - D. II and III only
 - E. I, II, and III
- 3) As used in paragraph 3, which is the best synonym for **laudable**?
 - A. praiseworthy
 - B. ineffectual
 - C. memorable
 - D. audacious
 - E. satisfactory
- 4) The author's tone in the final paragraph can best be described as
 - A. remorseful
 - B. hopeless
 - C. perplexed
 - D. insistent
 - E. arrogant
- 5) As used in the final paragraph, which is the best antonym for **exalts**?
 - A. mitigates
 - B. venerates
 - C. mollifies
 - D. expedites
 - E. castigates

6) In describing the sports media, the author emphasizes its

- A. responsibility
- B. entertainment value
- C. senselessness
- D. danger
- E. sensationalism

7) In the final paragraph, the author mentions "sports highlights television programs" as an example of how

- I. the media glorifies violence
- II. amateurs learn to mimic professional athletes
- III. professional athletes gain approval

- A. I only
- B. II only
- C. I and II only
- D. II and III only
- E. I, II, and III

8) In the last sentence of this passage, the author writes, "Players must not be encouraged to trade their careers, their health, their happiness, and even their lives for the sake of a game." Which of the following literary devices is used in this quotation?

- A. *Irony*, characterized by the use of words to convey a meaning that is the opposite of its literal meaning. In irony, the deeper, real layer of significance is revealed by the situation and the context in which they are placed and not by the words themselves.
- B. *Climax*, characterized by the arrangement of words, phrases, or causes in an order of ascending power that culminates into the highest or most intense point. This works to deliver the main action or integral message to the reader in a powerful way.
- C. *Authorial intrusion*, characterized by a point at which the author speaks out directly to the reader. This establishes a one to one relationship between the writer and the reader where the latter is no longer a secondary player or an indirect audience to the progress of the story but is the main subject of the author's attention.
- D. *Hyperbole*, characterized by the use of specific words and phrases that exaggerate and overemphasize the core of the statement in order to produce a grander, more noticeable effect. This usually works to convey an action or sentiment that is generally not realistically possible or plausible but helps to emphasize an emotion
- E. *Anastrophe*, in which the order of the noun and the adjective in the sentence is exchanged. In standard parlance and writing the adjective comes before the noun but when one is employing an anastrophe the noun is followed by the adjective. This reversed order creates a dramatic impact and lends weight to the description offered by the adjective.