

An Extract from *Boyhood: Scenes from provincial life*

He is healthy, full of life and energy, yet seems always to have a cold. In the mornings he wakes up tight-throated, red-eyed, sneezing uncontrollably, his body-temperature soaring and plunging. "I'm sick," he croaks to his mother. She rests the back of her hand against his forehead.

There is one more difficult moment to get through, the moment when his father says, "Where's John?" and mother says, "He's sick," and his father snorts and says, "Pretending again." Through this he lies as quiet as he can, till his father and his brother are gone and he can at last settle down to a day of reading.

Non-essential image removed

He reads at great speed and with total absorption. During his sick spells his mother has to visit the library twice a week to take out books for him: two on her cards, another two on his own. He avoids the library himself in case the librarian asks questions when he brings his books to be stamped.

He knows that if he wants to be a great man, he ought to be reading serious books. He ought to be like Abraham Lincoln or James Watt, studying by candlelight while everyone else is sleeping, teaching himself Latin and Greek and astronomy. He has not abandoned the idea of being a great man; he promises himself he will soon begin serious reading; but for the present all he wants to read are stories.

If his father likes Shakespeare, then Shakespeare must be bad, he decides. Nevertheless, he begins to read Shakespeare, in the yellowing edition with the tattered edges that his father inherited, trying to discover why people say Shakespeare is great. Besides Shakespeare, his father owns the poems of Keats. His mother owns the poems of Rupert Brooke. These poetry books have pride of place on the mantelshelf in the living-room.

One day his father comes to his room with the Wordsworth book. "You should read these," he says, and points out poems he has ticked in pencil. A few days later he comes back, wanting to discuss the poems. "The sounding cataract haunted me like a passion," his father quotes. He refuses to meet his father's eye, to play the game. It is not long before his father gives up.

He is not sorry about his churlishness. He cannot see how poetry fits into his father's life; he suspects it is just pretence. When his mother says that in order to escape the mockery of her sisters she had to take her book and creep away in the loft, he believes her. But he cannot imagine his father, as a boy, reading poetry, who nowadays reads nothing but the newspaper.

He watches his father reading the newspaper. He reads: flipping through the pages, cracking and slapping the pages as he turns them. When he is done with reading he folds it into a narrow panel and does the crossword puzzle.

Text B — An Extract from *Boyhood: Scenes from provincial life*

Answer the following questions.

13. Which words in **lines 1–11** indicate that the boy's voice is affected in the morning? Give **one** example.

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14. Which words in **lines 1–11** show that the father does not believe the boy is unwell?

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15. Why does the boy ask his mother to go to the library for him?

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16. Why does the boy think he will not be like Abraham Lincoln or James Watt for now?

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17. What opinion does the boy express that shows he disapproves of his father's literary choices?

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Find the word or phrase in **lines 12–26** which means the following:

18. concentration

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19. periods

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20. torn

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21. displayed prominently

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Choose the correct answer.

22. When the writer says, "he refuses to meet his father's eye, to play the game" (lines 29–30), it is implied that...

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- A. the boy's father is not truly willing to play.
- B. the boy does not enjoy spending time with his father.
- C. the poems the father suggests are boring.
- D. the boy is frightened of his father's reaction.

23. The boy's mother avoids being teased by her siblings by...

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- A. reading another kind of book.
- B. pretending she doesn't like reading.
- C. moving her bed into the loft.
- D. hiding to read in isolation.

24. When the boy observes his father reading the newspaper, he notices his father...

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- A. does not read in depth.
- B. skips to do the crosswords.
- C. only pretends to read.
- D. prefers to read poetry.

25. In this extract, the author mainly...

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- A. provides an account of the boy's health.
- B. portrays the role of literature in the boy's life.
- C. narrates an important event in the boy's life.
- D. reveals the boy's ambitions for his adult life.