**Reading Comprehension**

**Directions** *Read the following selection. Then answer the questions that follow.*

**The First Snow Fall**

**James Russell Lowell**

The snow had begun in the gloaming[[1]](#footnote-1),

And busily all the night

Had been heaping field and highway

With a silence deep and white.

**5** Every pine and fir and hemlock

Wore ermine[[2]](#footnote-2) too dear for an earl,

And the poorest twig on the elmtree

Was ridged inch deep with pearl.

From sheds new-roofed, with Carrara[[3]](#footnote-3)

**10** Came Chanticleer’s[[4]](#footnote-4) muffled crow,

The stiff rails softened to swan’s-down

And still fluttered down the snow.

I stood and watched by the window

The noiseless work of the sky,

**15** And the sudden flurries of the snowbirds,

Like brown leaves whirling by.

I thought of a mound in sweet Auburn[[5]](#footnote-5)

Where little headstone stood;

How the flakes were folding it gently,

As did robins the babes in the wood.

Up spoke our own little Mabel,

Saying, “Father, who makes it snow?”

And I told of the good All-father

Who cares for us here below.

**25** Again I looked at the snowfall,

And thought of the leaden sky

That arched o’er our first great sorrow,

When that mound was heaped so high

I remember the gradual patience

**30** That fell from that cloud like snow,

Flake by flake, healing and hiding

The scar that renewed our woe.

And again to the child I whispered,

“The snow that huseth all,

**35** Darling, the merciful Father

Alone can make it fall!”

Then, with eyes that saw not, I kissed her;

And she, kissing back, could not know

That *my* kiss was given to her sister,

Folded close under deepening snow.

**Multiple Choice**

*Identify the choice that best completes the statement or answer the question.*

1. In line 17 and line 28, mound refers to what two words?
2. daughter’s grave/sorrow
3. daughter’s grave/calm
4. pile of snow/sadness
5. tombstone/pile of snow
6. What mood does the speaker create at the end of the poem by invoking the “merciful Father”?
   1. hopeful
   2. spiritual
   3. bitter
   4. unwelcoming
7. Lowell shows that the speaker of “The First Snowfall” finds the snow beautiful when the speaker
8. Says snow looks like expensive furs
9. Describes the trees as royalty
10. Wears pearls while walking in the snow
11. Describes the snow’s white silence
12. How does Lowell use figurative language in line 29-32 of “The First Snowfall” to create a soothing mood?
    1. Snow from the cloud removes the scars on the speaker.
    2. Snowflakes remind the speaker of the uniqueness of his life.
    3. Clouds become like the snow to shelter the speaker from a storm.
    4. Snow becomes healing patience to deal with the terrible loss.
13. Choose the best paraphrase of line 34-36 of “The First Snowfall.”
    1. Snow falls on people from God to hush them.
    2. Snow comes from God instead of from weather.
    3. The merciful Father makes the quieting snow fall.
    4. The Father sends snow to his darling children.
14. The speaker in “The First Snowfall” would most likely describe the effect that the snow has on the outside world as
    1. an unwelcoming distraction
    2. a danger to children
    3. a happy reminder
    4. a beautiful change
15. What technique does the poet of “The First Snowfall” use in lines 29-32 to create a calm mood?
    1. imagery of clouds to emphasize easiness
    2. repetitive meter to highlight life’s changes
    3. rhyming words that stress the need for healing
    4. figurative language comparing patience to snow

**Written Response**

**Short Response**

1. On your answer sheet**,** paraphrase lines 25-28 of “The First Snowfall.”

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| (2) | (1) | (0) |
| Student has included all elements of paraphrasing. | Student is missing some elements of paraphrasing but not key elements. | Student is missing key elements of paraphrasing. |

**Extended Response**

**Directions** *On your answer sheet*, *write a CSET paragraph to answer the question.*

1. How does the mood in “The Snowfall change? Use three details from the poem to support your response.

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| (2) | (1) | (0) |
| Student responds to the specific question using written and implied information from the text as support for the response. Student spells out connections and extends understanding beyond what is there on the page. | Student responds with few or general details from the text only showing a basic understanding of the text and/or the questions. Student may not fully or clearly connect the supporting details to the response. | Student’s response is off-topic or the question is left blank. Off-topic includes major misunderstandings of the text. |

**Reading Comprehension**

**Directions** *Read the following selection. Then answer the questions that follow.*

***from* The Sister Years**

**Nathaniel Hawthorne**

The New Year-for this young maiden was no less a personage-carried all her goods and chattels in a basket of no great size or weight, which hung upon her arms. She greeted the disconsolate Old Year with great affection, and sat down beside her on the steps of the City Hall, waiting for the signal to begin her rambles through the world. The two were own sisters, being both granddaughters of time; and though one looked so much older than the other, it was rather owing to hardships and trouble than to age, since there was but a twelvemonth’s difference between them.

“Well, my dear sister,” said the New Year, after the first salutations, “you look almost tired to death. What have you been about during your sojourn in this part of

**10** Infinite Space?”

“Oh, I have it all recorded here in my Book of Chronicles,” answered the Old Year in a heavy tone. “There is nothing that would amuse you; and you will soon get sufficient knowledge of such matters from your own personal experience. It is but tiresome reading.”

Nevertheless, she turned over the leaves if the folio, and glances at them by the light of the moon, feeling an irresistible spell of interest in her own biography, although its incidents were remembered without pleasure The volume, though she termed it her Book of Chronicles, seemed to be neither more nor less than the Salem Gazette for 1838, in the accuracy of which journal the sagacious Old Year had so much confidence

**20** that she deemed it needless to record her history with her own pen.

“What have you been doing in the political way?” asked the New Year.

“Why, my course here in the United States,” said the Old Year, “though perhaps I ought to blush at the confession, my political course, I must acknowledge, has been rather vacillatory, sometimes inclining toward the Whigs-then causing the Administration party to shout for triumph-and now again uplighting what seemed the almost prostrate banner of the Opposition; so that historians will hardly know what to make of me in this respect.

But the Loco Focos-“

“I do not like these party nicknames,” interrupted her sister, who seemed remarkably touch about some points. “Perhaps we shall part in better humor if we avoid **30** any political discussion.”

With all my heart,” replied the Old Year, who had already been tormented half to death with squabbles of this king. “I care not if the names of Whig or Tory, with their interminable brawls about Banks and Subtreasury, Abolition, Texas, the Florida War, and a million of other topics-which you will learn soon enough for your own comfort-I care not, I say, if no whisper of these matters ever reaches may ears again. Yet they have occupied so large a share of my attention that I scarcely know what else to tell you. There has indeed been a curious sort of war on the Canada border, where blood has streamed in the names of Liberty and Patriotism; but it must remain for some future, perhaps far distant year, to tell whether or no those holy names have been

**40** rightfully invoked. Nothing so much depresses me, in my view of mortal affairs, as to see high energies wasted, and human life and happiness thrown away, for ends that appear oftentimes unwise, and still oftener remain unaccomplished. But the wisest people and the best keep steadfast faith that the progress of Mankind is onward and upward, and that the toil and anguished of the path serve to wear away the imperfections of the Immortal Pilgrim, and will be felt no more when they have done their office.”

“Perhaps,” cried the hopeful New Year, “perhaps I shall see that happy day!”

“I doubt whether it be so close at hand,” answered the Old Year, gravely smiling.

“You will soon grow weary of the looking for that blessed consummation, and will turn for amusement (as has frequently been my own practice) to the affairs of some sober

**50** little city, like this of Salem. Here we sit on the step of the new City Hall, which has been completed under my administration, and it would make you laugh to see how the game of politics, of which the Capital of Washington is the great chessboard, is here played in miniature. Burning Ambition finds itself its fuel here; here Patriotism speaks boldly in the people’s behalf, and virtuous Economy demands retrenchment in the emoluments of a lamplighter! Here the Aldermen range their senatorial dignity around the Mayor’s chair of state, and the Common Council feel that they have liberty in charge. In short, human weakness and strength, passion and policy, Man’s tendencies, his aims and modes of pursuing them, his individual character and his character in the mass, may be studies almost as well here as in the theatre of nations…”

**Multiple Choice**

*Identify the choice that best completes the statement or answer the question.*

10. What do the sisters in the story symbolize?

* 1. countries at war
  2. the passing of time
  3. political parties
  4. patriotism and freedom

11. Which sentences best paraphrase the sentence in lines 9-10?

1. What have you done this year?
2. How have you felt during your trip?
3. Did you visit any new parts of the world?
4. Have your experienced changed you?

12. How do you know that lines 31-35 are a satire about political arguments?’

1. Each political party is named.
2. The topics are discussed in detail.
3. There is a humor and exaggeration.
4. Only political parties are discussed.

13. In Lines 37-42, the author satirizes war by suggesting that it is often

* 1. substitution for patriotism
  2. the only way to achieve liberty
  3. a waste of energy and human life
  4. an unwise attempt to gain happiness

14. In lines 47-59, the author satirizes

1. patriotism
2. recreation
3. business
4. politics

15. The “basket of no great size or weight” in line 2 mostly likely symbolizes

1. the pointlessness of war
2. a weak economy
3. political ethics
4. the future

16. What comment is Hawthorne making with the satire in line 22-27?

1. Confusion about politics is embarrassing.
2. People political loyalties are fickle.
3. One political party should dominate.
4. Nobody records political events correctly.

17. Which sentence best paraphrases the sentence in line 40-42?

1. Nothing bothers me more than having to waste my time watching the actions and interactions of human beings.
2. When people are unwise and lack the initiative to accomplish results, I want to take away their happiness.
3. I hate to see people spend their lives trying to do things that cannot and should not be done.
4. People who cannot envision the potential results of an action are wasting their lives and depressing me.

18. Based on the satire in lines 48-56, you can guess that Hawthorne most likely would characterize city-hall politics as

1. empty posturing
2. noble public service
3. a passionate clash of ideals
4. a show of human weaknesses

**Written Response**

**Short Response**

19. In two to three sentences tell which sister from *The Sister Years* symbolizes the future, and explain how you know she is the future.

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| (2) | (1) | (0) |
| Student responds to the specific question using written and implied information from the text as support for the response. Student spells out connections and extends understanding beyond what is there on the page. | Student responds with few or general details from the text only showing a basic understanding of the text and/or the questions. Student may not fully or clearly connect the supporting details to the response. | Student’s response is off-topic or the question is left blank. Off-topic includes major misunderstandings of the text. |

**Extended Response**

**Directions** *Choose* ***one*** *of the extended responses and**write two paragraphs to answer the question on the answer sheet. Be sure to use at least two details from the text to support your answer.*

20. In *The Sister Years*, how do the sisters’ personalities help express the symbolism in this story? Support your answer with two examples from the test.

OR

20. Reread lines 29-32 of “The Snowfall.” What does the figurative language in this stanza suggest about the family’s grief and the relation of their sorrow to the natural world?

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| (3) | (2) | (1) | (0) |
| Student accurately responds to the specific question using written and implied information from the text as support for the response. Student spells out connections and extends understanding beyond what is there on the page. | Student responds with general details from the text only showing a basic understanding of the text and/or the questions. Student may not fully or clearly connect the supporting details to the response. | Student responds with unclear, few or no details from the text. Student may not explain how the details support the response because they have listed the examples. Minor misunderstandings of the text and/or question are evident. | Student’s response is off-topic or the question is left blank. Off-topic includes major misunderstandings of the text. |

Winter Common Assessment Student Answer Sheet 2011-2012

8. Paraphrase lines 25-28 of “The First Snowfall.”

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| (2) | (1) | (0) |
| Student has included all elements of paraphrasing. | Student is missing some elements of paraphrasing but not key elements. | Student is missing key elements of paraphrasing. |

Answer the following question in a CSET paragraph.

9. How does the mood in “The Snowfall change?

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| Student responds to the specific question using written and implied information from the text as support for the response. Student spells out connections and extends understanding beyond what is there on the page. | Student responds with few or general details from the text only showing a basic understanding of the text and/or the questions. Student may not fully or clearly connect the supporting details to the response. | Student’s response is off-topic or the question is left blank. Off-topic includes major misunderstandings of the text. |

20. Choose **one** of the extended response questions to answer below.

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| Student accurately responds to the specific question using written and implied information from the text as support for the response. Student spells out connections and extends understanding beyond what is there on the page. | Student responds with general details from the text only showing a basic understanding of the text and/or the question. Student may not fully or clearly connect the supporting details to the response. | Student responds with unclear, few or no details from the text. Student may not explain how the details support the response. Minor misunderstandings of the text and/or question. | Student’s response is off-topic or the question is left blank. Off-topic includes major misunderstandings of the text. |

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| Question | Skill (GLE) | Answer and points |
| 1 | Inference (4.2a) | A (1pt) |
| 2 | Mood (2.4c) | B (1pt) |
| 3 | Drawing conclusions (4.2a) | A (1pt) |
| 4 | Figurative language (2.4c) | D (1pt) |
| 5 | Paraphrase/restating (2.4d) | C (1pt) |
| 6 | Inference (4.2a) | D (1pt) |
| 7 | Figurative language (2.4c) | D (1pt) |
| 8 | Paraphrase/restating (2.4d) | Drop down box of: 0,1, and 2 (2 pts) |
| 9 | Mood (2.4c) | Drop down box of: 0,1, and 2 (2 pts) |
| 10 | Symbolism (2.4c) | B (1pt) |
| 11 | Satire (2.4c) | A (1pt) |
| 12 | Satire (2.4c) | C (1pt) |
| 13 | Satire (2.4c) | C (1pt) |
| 14 | Satire (2.4c) | D (1pt) |
| 15 | Symbolism (2.4c) | D (1pt) |
| 16 | Satire (2.4c) | B (1pt) |
| 17 | Paraphrase/restating (2.4d) | C (1pt) |
| 18 | Satire (2.4c) | A (1pt) |
| 19 | Symbolism (2.4c) | Drop down box of: 0,1, and 2 (2 pts) |
| 20 | Symbolism (2.4c) or inference (4.2a) | Drop down box of: 0,1,2, and 3 (3 pts) |

8. Key elements of a paraphrase include:

Students’ own words

Maintain original idea

Does not summarize main idea

Is a detailed restatement

9. Responses will vary. Students may say that the mood in "The First Snowfall" changes from pleasant and reflective as the speaker watches the snowfall to melancholy and trusting as the snowfall reminds the speaker of his deceased daughter. Students may use any of the following details from "The First Snowfall" to support their responses:

a. The poem expresses a pleasant mood at first when the speaker describes the snowfall in a positive way (lines 2-4), compares the snow-covered trees to expensive furs (lines 5 6) and the snow-covered sheds to Italian marble (line 9), and describes the snow as "swan's-down" on the rails (lines 11-12).

b. The poem expresses a reflective mood when the speaker observes the snowfall and watches the birds (lines 13-16).

c. The poem expresses a melancholy mood when the speaker recalls the snow falling on his daughter's gravestone (lines 17-20).

d. The poem expresses a melancholy mood when the speaker thinks about the gray winter sky and snow that covers the mound of Earth over his daughter's grave (lines 25 28).

e. The poem expresses a soothing mood when the speaker describes the soft snowfall as "gradual patience" that covers the family's grief (lines 29-32).

f. The poem expresses a trusting mood when the speaker describes God as a "merciful Father" despite the fact that one of his daughters is dead (lines 33-36).

g. The poem expresses a melancholy mood at the end when the speaker kisses his living daughter while he yearns for the deceased daughter (lines 37-40).

20.*The Sister Years*

Responses will vary. Students may suggest that the sisters' personalities contribute to the story's symbolism by representing the resignation with which many people accept the events of a year that is ending and the optimism with which they anticipate a new year. Students may provide the following support to show that the Old Year symbolizes a resigned acceptance of reality:

a. The Old Year is disconsolate and weary (lines 2-9) but seems to harbor no ill will toward her idealistic sister.

b. The Old Year is interested in her own biography-her Book of Chronicles-even though she feels no pleasure from the memories (lines 15-17).

c. The Old Year claims that she "ought to blush at the confession" that her political course has been vacillatory (lines 22-24); however, there is no evidence that she actually feels embarrassed by the situation.

d. The Old Year does not take seriously the politics of the year. She uses party nicknames (line 27), refers to political debates as "squabbles" and "brawls" (lines 31-35), and compares politics to a game (lines 48-53).

e. The Old Year understands and accepts the fact that humans will not achieve perfection anytime soon (lines 47-48).

Students may provide the following support to show that the New Year symbolizes an optimistic outlook:

a. The New Year exhibits upbeat qualities, such as affection and inquisitiveness (lines 2-3, 8-10, and 21).

b. The New Year's principles have not yet been worn away by experience. For example, she does not want to diminish the importance of political parties by using their nicknames (line 28-30).

c. The New Year hopefully suggests that humans might achieve perfection during her tenure-or within a year's time (line 46).

20. “The Snowfall”

ANS: The simile of “graduated patience” falling “from that cloud like snow” suggests that the pain of sorrow eventually softens and that the family may find some solace in nature.

1. **gloaming**: twilight. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **ermine**: the expensive white fur of a type of weasel. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **Carrara**: Carrara marble, a white marble named after the Italian city where it is mined. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **Chanticleer’s**: a rooster’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. **Auburn**: Mount Auburn Cemetery, located in Cambridge, Massachusetts. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)