

ACT Practice Paper
ACT Reading Practice Paper 1

DIRECTIONS: There are several passages in this test. Each passage is accompanied by several questions. After reading a passage, choose the best answer to each question and fill in the corresponding oval on your answer document. You may refer to the passages as often as necessary.

Reading passage 1

1.

Click on the letter choices to determine if you have the correct answer and for question explanations. An actual ACT Reading Test contains 40 questions to be answered in 35 minutes.

LITERARY NARRATIVE: This passage is adapted from the novel *The Men of Brewster Place* by Gloria Naylor (©1998 by Gloria Naylor).

The Men of Brewster Place

Clifford Jackson, or Abshu, as he preferred to be known in the streets, had committed himself several years ago to use his talents as a playwright to broaden the horizons for the young, gifted, and black—which was how he saw every child milling around that dark street. As head of the community center he went after every existing grant on the city and state level to bring them puppet shows with the message to avoid drugs and stay in school; and plays in the park such as actors

10rapping their way through Shakespeare's A Midsummer
Night's Dream. Abshu believed there was something in
Shakespeare for everyone, even the young of Brewster
Place, and if he broadened their horizons just a little
bit, there might be enough room for some of them to
15slip through and see what the world had waiting. No, it
would not be a perfect world, but definitely one with
more room than they had now.

The kids who hung around the community center liked
Abshu, because he never preached and it was 20clear that
when they spoke he listened; so he could zero in on the
kid who had a real problem. It might be an offhand
remark while shooting a game of pool or a one-on-one
out on the basketball court, but he had a way of making
them feel special with just a word or two.

25 Abshu wished that his own family could have
stayed together. There were four of them who ended
up in foster care: him, two younger sisters, and a baby
brother. He understood why his mother did what she
did, but he couldn't help wondering if there might have

30been a better way.

Abshu was put into a home that already had two other boys from foster care. The Masons lived in a small wooden bungalow right on the edge of Linden Hills. And Mother Mason insisted that they tell anybody who asked that they actually lived in Linden Hills, a more prestigious address than Summit Place. It was a home that was kept immaculate.

But what he remembered most about the Masons was that it seemed there was never quite enough to eat. 40She sent them to school with a lunch of exactly one and a half sandwiches—white bread spread with margarine and sprinkled with sugar—and half an apple.

When Abshu dreamed of leaving—which was every day—he had his own apartment with a refrigerator overflowing with food that he gorged himself with day and night. The Masons weren't mean people; he knew he could have ended up with a lot worse.

Abshu lived with these people for nine years, won a scholarship to the local college, and moved out to

50support himself through school by working in a dough-
nut shop. By this time his mother was ready to take her
children back home, but he decided that since he was
already out on his own he would stay there. One less
mouth for her to worry about feeding. And after he
55graduated with his degree in social work, he might
even be able to give her a little money to help her along.

One thing he did thank the Masons for was keep-
ing him out of gangs. There was a strict curfew in their home
that was rigidly observed. And church was 60mandatory.
"When you're out on your own," Father Mason always
said, "you can do whatever you want, but in my home
you do as I say." No, they weren't mean people, but they
were stingy—stingy with their food and with their
affection. Existing that way all the 65time, on the edge
of hunger, on the edge of kindness, gave Abshu an
appreciation for a life fully lived. Do whatever job
makes you happy, regardless of the cost; and fill your
home with love. Well, his home became the community
center right around the corner from

70Brewster Place and the job that made him most fulfilled was working with young kids.

The kids who hung out at the community center weren't all lost yet. They wanted to make use of the tutors for their homework; and they wanted a safe place 75to hang. His motto was: Lose no child to the streets. And on occasion when that happened, he went home to cry. But he never let his emotions show at work. To the kids he was just a big, quiet kind of dude who didn't go looking for trouble, but he wouldn't run from it either. 80He was always challenged by a new set of boys who showed up at the center. He made it real clear to them that this was his territory—his rules—and if they needed to flex their muscles, they were welcome to try. And he showed many that just because he was kind, it 85didn't mean he was weak. There had to be rules some-in their world, some kind of discipline. And if they understood that, then he worked with them, long and hard, to let them see that they could make a differ-ence in their own lives.

1. The point of view from which the passage is told can best be described as that of:

- A. a man looking back on the best years of his life as director of a community center in a strife-ridden neighborhood.
- B. a narrator describing his experiences as they happen, starting with childhood and continuing through his adult years as an advocate for troubled children.
- C. an unidentified narrator describing a man who devoted his life to neighborhood children years after his own difficult childhood.
- D. an admiring relative of a man whose generosity with children was widely respected in the neighborhood where he turned around a declining community center.

2. It can reasonably be inferred from the passage that which of the following is a cherished dream that Abshu expects to make a reality in his lifetime?

- A. Establishing himself financially so as to be able to bring his original family back under one roof
- B. Seeing the children at the community center shift their interest from sports to the dramatic arts
- C. Building on the success of the community center by opening other centers like it throughout the state
- D. Expanding for some, if not all, of the children the vision they have of themselves and their futures

3. It can reasonably be inferred from the passage that Abshu and the Masons would agree with which of the following statements about the best way to raise a child?

- A. For a child to be happy, he or she must develop a firm basis in religion at an early age.
- B. For a child to be fulfilled, he or she must be exposed to great works of art and literature that contain universal themes.
- C. For a child to thrive and be a responsible member of society, he or she must develop a sense of discipline.
- D. For a child to achieve greatness, he or she must attach importance to the community and not to the self.

4. The fourth paragraph (lines 31–37) establishes all of the following EXCEPT:

- A. that Abshu had foster brothers.
- B. that the Masons maintained a clean house.
- C. how Mother Mason felt about the location of their house.
- D. what Abshu remembered most about his years with the Masons.

5. It can reasonably be inferred that which of the following characters from the passage lives according to Abshu's definition of a life fully lived?

- A. Mother Mason
- B. Father Mason
- C. Abshu as a child
- D. Abshu as an adult

6. Which of the following statements about the children entering the community center is supported by the passage?

- A. They had unrealistic expectations that Abshu toned down in the course of informal conversations.
- B. In Abshu's eyes, they were all gifted.
- C. In Abshu's eyes, the children who were likely to succeed were the ones who gave him the most trouble at the outset.
- D. They were prepared to believe in each other more than in themselves.

7. It can reasonably be inferred from the first paragraph that in obtaining outside funding for the community center, Abshu could be characterized as:

- A. thorough in seeking out potential sources for financial backing.
- B. reluctant to spoil the children with charity.
- C. excited about having the children write grant applications.
- D. determined to let the children decide how the money would be spent.

8. Which of the following statements about Abshu's attitude toward his mother's choices early in his life is supported by the passage?

- A. Abshu wishes he could get over the bitterness he feels toward her for allowing him and his siblings to be placed in foster care.
- B. Abshu is worried that his mother is troubled by her decision to place her children in foster care and wants to comfort and support her now that he is a grown man.
- C. Abshu wonders if she might have made a better decision about letting him and his siblings go into foster care, even though he understands why she did it.
- D. Abshu wants to apologize for having been ungrateful as a child to his mother, who was only doing what she felt was best for her family.

9. According to the passage, which of the following most closely identifies Abshu's definition of a life fully lived?

- A. Happiness in your work and love in your house
- B. The pursuit of your goals and the realization of your dreams
- C. Togetherness with your family and the sharing of laughter
- D. Working in the community and striving for equality

Reading Passage 2

2.

SOCIAL STUDIES: This passage is adapted from the chapter "Personality Disorders" in Introduction to Psychology, edited by Rita L. Atkinson and Richard C. Atkinson (©1981 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.).

Personality Disorders

How should the law treat a mentally disturbed person who commits a criminal offense? Should individuals whose mental faculties are impaired be held responsible for their actions? These questions are of concern to social scientists, to members of the legal

profession, and to individuals who work with
criminal offenders.

Over the centuries, an important part of Western law
has been the concept that a civilized society should
10not punish a person who is mentally incapable of con-
trolling his or her conduct. In 1724, an English court
maintained that a man was not responsible for an act if
“he doth not know what he is doing, no more than . . . a
wild beast.” Modern standards of legal responsibility,
15however, have been based on the McNaghten
decision of 1843. McNaghten, a Scotsman, suffered the
paranoid delusion that he was being persecuted by the
English prime minister, Sir Robert Peel. In an attempt to
kill Peel, he mistakenly shot Peel’s secretary. Everyone
20involved in the trial was convinced by McNaghten’s
senseless ramblings that he was insane. He was judged
not responsible by reason of insanity and sent to a
mental hospital, where he remained until his death. But
Queen Victoria was not pleased with the verdict—
25apparently she felt that political assassinations should

not be taken lightly—and called on the House of Lords to review the decision. The decision was upheld and rules for the legal definition of insanity were put into writing. The McNaghten Rule states that a defendant 30 may be found “not guilty by reason of insanity” only if he were so severely disturbed at the time of his act that he did not know what he was doing, or that if he did know what he was doing, he did not know it was wrong.

35 The McNaghten Rule was adopted in the United States, and the distinction of knowing right from wrong remained the basis of most decisions of legal insanity for over a century. Some states added to their statutes the doctrine of “irresistible impulse,” which recognizes 40 that some mentally ill individuals may respond cor - rectly when asked if a particular act is morally right or wrong but still be unable to control their behavior.

During the 1970s, a number of state and federal courts adopted a broader legal definition of insanity 45 proposed by the American Law Institute, which states: “A person is not responsible for criminal conduct if at

the time of such conduct, as a result of mental disease or defect, he lacks substantial capacity either to appreciate the wrongfulness of his conduct or to conform his conduct to the requirements of the law.” The word substantial suggests that “any” incapacity is not enough to avoid criminal responsibility but that “total” incapacity is not required either. The use of the word appreciate rather than know implies that intellectual awareness of right or wrong is not enough; individuals must have some understanding of the moral or legal consequences of their behavior before they can be held criminally responsible.

The problem of legal responsibility in the case of mentally disordered individuals is currently a topic of intense debate, and a number of legal and mental health professionals have recommended abolishing the insanity plea as a defense. The reasons for this recommendation are varied. Many experts believe that the current courtroom procedures—in which psychiatrists and psychologists for the prosecution and the defense

present contradictory evidence as to the defendant's mental state—are confusing to the jury and do little to help the cause of justice. Some also argue that the abuse of the insanity plea by clever lawyers has allowed too many criminals to escape conviction.

Others claim that acquittal by reason of insanity often leads to a worse punishment (an indeterminate sentence to an institution for the criminally insane that may confine a person for life) than being convicted and sent to prison (with the possibility of parole in a few years).

Despite the current controversy, actual cases of acquittal by reason of insanity are quite rare. Jurors seem reluctant to believe that people are not morally responsible for their acts, and lawyers, knowing that an insanity plea is apt to fail, tend to use it only as a last resort. In California in 1980, only 259 defendants (out of approximately 52,000) were successful in pleading not guilty by reason of insanity.

1. One of the author's main points about the legal concept of responsibility in the passage is that:

- A. the phrase “not guilty by reason of insanity” has made our legal system more efficient.
- B. responsibility and guilt are legal concepts, and their meanings can be modified
- C. knowing right from wrong is a simple matter of admitting the truth to oneself.
- D. people can become severely disturbed without a word of warning to anyone.

2. Based on the passage, the primary purpose for the 1970s redefinition of insanity proposed by the American Law Institute was to:

- A. eliminate the insanity defense from American courtrooms.
- B. more precisely define the concepts of responsibility and intellectual capacity.
- C. redefine legal insanity so that it might include as many criminals as possible.
- D. apply the McNaghten Rule only to trials involving cases of mistaken identity.

3. From information in the third and fourth paragraphs (lines 35–58) it can reasonably be inferred that the legal definition of insanity was changed in the 1970s after:

- A. federal courts won a dispute with state courts over a proposal made by the American Law Institute.
- B. the doctrine of “irresistible impulse” was found to contradict accepted notions of justice.
- C. proponents of the McNaghten Rule had been using the insanity defense in far too many murder trials.
- D. several courts found that justice was not always best served when the McNaghten Rule was applied.

4. According to the explanation provided in the fourth paragraph (lines 43–58), use of the word appreciate in the phrase “to appreciate the wrongfulness” (lines 48–49) instead of know implies which of the following?

- A. The difference between right and wrong is something people feel rather than know, which makes deciding legal responsibility difficult.

- B. To know implies certainty, and distinguishing right from wrong is often a subjective matter in determining legal responsibility.
- C. The word appreciate suggests that an action and that action's implications must be understood for there to be legal responsibility.
- D. An insane person would "know" something the way a sane person would "know" something, and be able to appreciate that knowledge, too.

5. The passage indicates that the McNaghten case became the basis for future decisions about legal insanity because:

- A. the House of Lords upheld the verdict of the court despite considerable political pressure.
- B. there had been an increase in cases of murder involving mistaken identity arising from delusions.
- C. McNaghten was unable to convince the jury at his trial that he was incoherent and insane.
- D. McNaghten used a gun to commit murder, thus aggravating the crime in the jury's mind.

6. The passage states that McNaghten wanted to kill the English prime minister because the Scotsman thought that he:

- A. would establish a confusing legal precedent.
- B. had been rejected by Peel's secretary.
- C. would be better off in a mental hospital.
- D. had been wronged by the minister.

7. According to the passage, one of the reasons some mental health and legal groups want to abolish the insanity defense is that:

- A. even clever lawyers are confused about when to use and when not to use it.
- B. juries that must sort out conflicting testimony become confused, and justice suffers.
- C. when it is invoked, even if the case is won, the punishment often ends up being too lenient.
- D. innocent defendants are too often being punished unfairly by unsympathetic juries.

8. The passage suggests that individuals who use the insanity defense:
- A. are not permitted to do so unless it can be proved beforehand that they are really insane.
 - B. should be tried, convicted, and punished whether or not they are really insane.
 - C. are legally responsible for their actions even if a jury decides they are not guilty.
 - D. might risk a lifelong confinement even if acquitted by a jury, if the acquittal is based on insanity.
9. According to the passage, a lawyer contemplating using insanity as a defense for a client should do which of the following?
- A. Carefully evaluate using the defense, since in actual practice it rarely works
 - B. Assemble for trial a team of expert witnesses with a wide range of viewpoints on mental illness
 - C. Make sure that the doctrine of “irresistible impulse” is not used by the prosecution in his or her client’s trial
 - D. Recommend that the client be acquitted because he or she has been judged criminally insane by a doctor
10. One of the main points made in the last paragraph is that insanity pleas were:
- A. unconvincing to most juries in California in 1980.
 - B. used in most cases in California in 1980.
 - C. often successful in California in 1980.
 - D. popular with lawyers in California in 1980.