1.1-3 Comprehension: Fiction Set 3: 30-minute Pack

GL ASSESSMENT / CSSE 11+ Entrance English (GL Assessment / CSSE style) · about 30 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

The Signal on the Roof

Source written for Revision Library (original, copyright-free). Fictional narrative created for 11+ comprehension practice.

Aaliyah had lived on the ninth floor of Nelson House for as long as she could remember, yet she had never once been through the door at the end of the corridor marked ROOF ACCESS - STAFF ONLY. It was painted the same tired grey as everything else in the block, and the handle rattled uselessly whenever anyone tried it. Today, though, someone had wedged a folded newspaper beneath it, and the door hung open by the width of a hand.

She should have gone straight to the shops, as her mother had asked. Instead, she found herself climbing the last flight of concrete steps, her trainers slapping against stone that smelled of rain and pigeons. At the top, a second door led out into daylight so sudden and bright that she had to blink several times before the roof came into focus.

It was nothing like she had expected. Rows of terracotta pots lined the edge nearest the railings, sprouting runner beans and a tangle of nasturtiums the colour of flame. A wooden bench, silvered with age, stood beside a shed no bigger than a garden cupboard. Crouched beside the shed, sorting through a wooden crate of brightly coloured flags, was a man she recognised at once: Mr Adeyemi from the third floor, who fixed clocks in his kitchen window and never seemed to go anywhere in a hurry.

'You found the garden, then,' he said, not looking up. His voice carried the trace of an accent she could never quite place, softened by forty years in the city. 'Took someone long enough. I stopped locking that door months ago.' Aaliyah stayed by the railings, unsure whether she was in trouble. 'What are the flags for?' she asked.

'Semaphore,' Mr Adeyemi said. He held up two flags, one yellow and one blue, and crossed them into an X above his head before letting his arms fall. 'Before radios were reliable, sailors signalled to each other across open water this way. Each position of the arms means a different letter.' He nodded towards the horizon, where the glass tower of an office block caught the afternoon sun. 'There is somebody over there who still remembers it, if you know where to look.' Aaliyah followed his gaze but saw only windows, dozens of them, blank and identical. 'Nobody could see flags from all the way over there,' she said doubtfully. 'Watch,' he said simply, and began to move.

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She had assumed the flags would be clumsy in his weathered hands, but instead they became fluid, almost graceful, cutting sharp angles against the sky. Left arm high, right arm low; both arms wide; both crossed at the chest. He repeated the sequence twice, unhurried, as though he had all the patience in the world and nowhere better to spend it.

For a long moment, nothing happened. Aaliyah began to suspect the whole thing was a game, harmless but pointless, the kind of story old men told to fill an afternoon. Then, high on the seventeenth floor of the glass tower, a single light flickered. On. Off. On, on. Off.

'There,' Mr Adeyemi said, and for the first time he smiled properly, deep creases folding around his eyes. 'My brother. Eighty-one years old and still faster with a torch than most people are with a telephone.' 'He lives all the way over there?' Aaliyah asked. 'He cleans the offices at night,' Mr Adeyemi said. 'Has done for eleven years. We are not permitted visitors, and neither of us much likes the telephone, so.' He shrugged, as though this explained everything, and perhaps, Aaliyah thought, it did.

She looked again at the flags in the crate, their colours dulled by years of sun, and then at the small steady light still blinking its patient reply across the rooftops. Somewhere beneath her, buses groaned along the high street and a siren rose and fell, but up here, none of it seemed to matter very much. 'Could you teach me?' she asked.

Mr Adeyemi held out the yellow flag without a word, and Aaliyah realised, taking it, that her hand was shaking, though she could not have said whether it was nerves or something closer to excitement. She lifted her arm the way he showed her, felt the flag catch the wind and pull taut, and for a moment she was not a girl who had forgotten to go to the shops. She was a signal, waiting to be read.

1 Why, most likely, does the writer wait until paragraph 3 to reveal that the rooftop is a garden, rather than describing it as soon as Aaliyah opens the door?

- ☐ A) To show that Aaliyah does not like gardens
- ☐ B) To make the passage longer than necessary
- ☐ C) To make the ending of the story less predictable
- ☐ D) Because rooftop gardens are always described last in stories
- ☐ E) To build surprise, contrasting Aaliyah's (and the reader's) uncertain expectations with the unexpected garden she actually finds

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2 In paragraph 6, what does the word 'weathered' suggest about Mr Adeyemi's hands? Give one idea.

.....

(1)

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3 What can the reader infer about how long Mr Adeyemi has been visiting the rooftop garden?

- ☐ A) He has never been there before today
- ☐ B) He has been going there for a long time, since he speaks about the garden and the flags with ease and familiarity
- ☐ C) He is a brand new resident of Nelson House
- ☐ D) He visits the roof only once a year
- ☐ E) He was forced to go there today by the caretaker

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4 What two colours are the first flags that Mr Adeyemi holds up?

- ☐ A) Yellow and blue
- ☐ B) Red and green
- ☐ C) Blue and white
- ☐ D) Orange and purple
- ☐ E) Black and white

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5 Look at paragraph 6. Explain how the writer's use of language shows that Mr Adeyemi is skilled at semaphore. Refer closely to the language in your answer.

(2)

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6 Why does Aaliyah 'begin to suspect the whole thing was a game, harmless but pointless' in paragraph 7?

- ☐ A) Because she wants to go back down to the shops instead
- ☐ B) Because the flags are too heavy for Mr Adeyemi to use properly
- ☐ C) Because she does not believe semaphore is a real method of communication
- ☐ D) Because Mr Adeyemi told her the signals were not real
- ☐ E) Because nothing appears to happen for a while after he finishes signalling

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7 Which word from paragraph 7 is closest in meaning to 'flashed on and off quickly'?

- ☐ A) flickered
- ☐ B) repeated
- ☐ C) suspect
- ☐ D) rose
- ☐ E) fill

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8 Look at paragraph 8. Why do Mr Adeyemi and his brother communicate using semaphore and light signals rather than visiting each other or using the telephone? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

(2)

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9 On which floor of the glass tower does the light flicker?

- ☐ A) Eighty-first
- ☐ B) Ninth
- ☐ C) Seventeenth
- ☐ D) Third
- ☐ E) Eleventh

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10 What is the effect of the short sentence 'Watch,' he said simply, and began to move.' at the end of paragraph 5?

- ☐ A) It slows the pace right down to create a sense of boredom
- ☐ B) It creates a sudden shift into action, drawing the reader's attention sharply to what Mr Adeyemi is about to do
- ☐ C) It shows that Mr Adeyemi is annoyed with Aaliyah
- ☐ D) It suggests the story is about to end
- ☐ E) It has no particular effect on the reader

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11 In paragraph 8, what does the word 'permitted' mean?

- [ ] A) Invited
- [ ] B) Warned
- [ ] C) Forgiven
- [ ] D) Allowed
- [ ] E) Expected

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12 What does the phrase 'she found herself climbing the last flight of concrete steps' (paragraph 2) suggest about Aaliyah's decision to go up to the roof?

- [ ] A) She had visited the roof many times before
- [ ] B) She was completely unaware that she was climbing the stairs
- [ ] C) She was drawn there almost without deciding to, despite knowing she should be doing something else
- [ ] D) She was forced to climb by Mr Adeyemi
- [ ] E) She had planned carefully to visit the roof that day

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13 In paragraph 2, what does the word 'focus' mean in the phrase 'before the roof came into focus'?

- [ ] A) A sudden loud noise
- [ ] B) An important decision
- [ ] C) Became clear and easy to see
- [ ] D) A type of camera lens
- [ ] E) A place to concentrate

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14 What was growing in the terracotta pots on the roof?

- [ ] A) Sunflowers and daffodils
- [ ] B) Ivy and moss
- [ ] C) Tomatoes and herbs
- [ ] D) Runner beans and nasturtiums
- [ ] E) Roses and daisies

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15 Look at paragraph 3. Explain what the description of the bench as 'silvered with age' and the shed as 'no bigger than a garden cupboard' suggests about the rooftop garden.

(2)

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16 On which floor of Nelson House did Aaliyah live?

- [ ] A) Third
- [ ] B) Eighty-first
- [ ] C) Seventeenth
- [ ] D) Seventh
- [ ] E) Ninth

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17 What was written on the door at the end of the corridor?

- [ ] A) Fire Exit
- [ ] B) No Entry
- [ ] C) Private Property
- [ ] D) ROOF ACCESS - STAFF ONLY
- [ ] E) Keep Out

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18 What had Aaliyah's mother asked her to do?

- [ ] A) Go to the shops
- [ ] B) Visit Mr Adeyemi
- [ ] C) Clean her room
- [ ] D) Do her homework
- [ ] E) Water the plants

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19 In paragraph 1, what does the phrase 'the handle rattled uselessly' suggest about the door handle?

- [ ] A) It was painted grey
- [ ] B) It did not work properly
- [ ] C) It was very heavy
- [ ] D) It was brand new
- [ ] E) It was kept locked with a key

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20 Find and copy one word from paragraph 1 that shows the newspaper had been pushed firmly under the door.

(1)

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21 At the end of the passage (paragraph 10), Aaliyah 'was not a girl who had forgotten to go to the shops. She was a signal, waiting to be read.' Explain what this final image suggests about how Aaliyah's feelings have changed during the passage.

(2)

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22 The writer compares Aaliyah to 'a signal, waiting to be read' in the final line of the passage. Explain why this is an effective way to end the passage.

(2)

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23 Which statement best explains why the writer chooses to reveal Mr Adeyemi's connection to his brother gradually, rather than explaining it fully at the start of the passage?

- ☐ A) Because Mr Adeyemi does not want Aaliyah to know about his brother
- ☐ B) Because the brother is not actually important to the story
- ☐ C) To make the passage shorter overall
- ☐ D) To mirror Aaliyah's own growing understanding, so the reader discovers the truth about the signals at roughly the same time she does
- ☐ E) To confuse the reader unnecessarily

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24 Using evidence from across the whole passage, explain how the writer presents the relationship between Mr Adeyemi and his brother as meaningful despite the distance between them.

(3)

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Mark scheme · 1.1-3 Comprehension: Fiction Set 3: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

E **B1**

Answer: E) To build surprise, contrasting Aaliyah's (and the reader's) uncertain expectations with the unexpected garden she actually finds

Question 2

accept any idea that his hands appear worn, rough or aged, for example shaped or roughened by age and years of outdoor or physical work **B1**

Answer: That his hands look worn or roughened by age and years of use.

Question 3

B **B1**

Answer: B) He has been going there for a long time, since he speaks about the garden and the flags with ease and familiarity

Question 4

A **B1**

Answer: A) Yellow and blue

Question 5

identifies relevant language showing skill, for example 'fluid, almost graceful', 'cutting sharp angles against the sky', or 'unhurried' **B1**

explains the effect or link to skill and experience, for example the contrast with Aaliyah's expectation that the flags would be 'clumsy' emphasises how surprisingly expert and practised his movements actually are **B1**

Answer: The writer contrasts Aaliyah's expectation that the movements would be 'clumsy' with the reality that they are 'fluid, almost graceful' and 'unhurried', showing that Mr Adeyemi is highly skilled and experienced at semaphore.

Question 6

E **B1**

Answer: E) Because nothing appears to happen for a while after he finishes signalling

Question 7

A **B1**

Answer: A) flickered

Question 8

idea that they are not allowed visitors, evidenced by 'We are not permitted visitors' **B1**

idea that neither of them likes using the telephone, evidenced by 'neither of us much likes the telephone' **B1**

Answer: Because they are not permitted visitors, and because neither of them much likes using the telephone, so signalling is the way they have found to stay in contact.

Question 9

C **B1**

Answer: C) Seventeenth

Question 10

B **B1**

Answer: B) It creates a sudden shift into action, drawing the reader's attention sharply to what Mr Adeyemi is about to do

Question 11

D **B1**

Answer: D) Allowed

Question 12

C **B1**

Answer: C) She was drawn there almost without deciding to, despite knowing she should be doing something else

Question 13

C **B1**

Answer: C) Became clear and easy to see

Question 14

D **B1**

Answer: D) Runner beans and nasturtiums

Question 15

idea that the garden has existed for a long time and has been used and cared for over many years, evidenced by 'silvered with age' **B1**

idea that the garden is small, modest or improvised rather than grand or official, evidenced by 'no bigger than a garden cupboard' **B1**

Answer: The description suggests the garden is long-established, having been tended for many years, but also small and homemade rather than an official or grand space.

Question 16

E **B1**

Answer: E) Ninth

Question 17

D **B1**

Answer: D) ROOF ACCESS - STAFF ONLY

Question 18

A **B1**

Answer: A) Go to the shops

Question 19

B **B1**

Answer: B) It did not work properly

Question 20

wedged **B1**

Answer: wedged

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Question 21

idea that she has become fully absorbed in this new experience, leaving behind the ordinary errand she was meant to be running **B1**

idea that she now feels part of something meaningful or connected, full of anticipation or possibility, rather than feeling like an ordinary girl doing an everyday task **B1**

Answer: The image suggests Aaliyah has become completely absorbed in this new, meaningful experience, so much that her ordinary errand no longer matters; she now feels full of anticipation and connected to something bigger than herself, like a signal about to be read and understood.

Question 22

recognises that it links back to the semaphore and signalling idea established earlier in the passage, giving the ending a sense of unity or circularity **B1**

explains the effect, for example it suggests Aaliyah stands on the edge of a new connection, understanding or adventure, leaving the ending open and thought-provoking rather than fully resolved **B1**

Answer: It is effective because it echoes the semaphore and signalling imagery used throughout the passage, giving the ending a sense of unity, while also suggesting that Aaliyah is on the edge of something new and meaningful, leaving the ending open and thought-provoking.

Question 23

D **B1**

Answer: D) To mirror Aaliyah's own growing understanding, so the reader discovers the truth about the signals at roughly the same time she does

Question 24

evidence of long-standing, practised communication, for example 'still faster with a torch than most people are with a telephone', or the fluid, confident, unhurried flag movements **B1**

evidence of restriction on ordinary contact making signalling their only means of contact, for example 'not permitted visitors', disliking the telephone **B1**

evidence of emotional significance or warmth, for example Mr Adeyemi's genuine smile, 'deep creases folding around his eyes', or the patient, careful exchange of signals across the rooftops **B1**

Answer: The writer shows the brothers' bond is long-practised and skilled, shown by the confident flag movements and the brother being 'faster with a torch than most people are with a telephone'; that signalling is their only real means of contact, since they are 'not permitted visitors' and dislike the telephone; and that the connection remains emotionally warm, shown by Mr Adeyemi's genuine smile and the patient, careful exchange of signals across the rooftops despite the physical distance between them.

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