1.1-4 Comprehension: Fiction Set 4: 30-minute Pack

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

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

The Dawn Flight

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

Jamal had set his alarm for twenty past four, though nothing about being awake at that hour felt remotely sensible. Beyond his window, Compton Meadow lay hidden beneath a soft grey mist, and it was only the occasional flare of orange light, blooming and fading like a heartbeat, that told him the other balloon crews were already at work.

'You came, then,' said Aunt Bethan, not looking up from the enormous folds of red and gold fabric spread across the wet grass. She ran her own balloon company from a converted barn on the edge of the village, and every August she launched from this same meadow at first light, when the air was calm enough to trust. 'Grab the crown line and keep it clear of the fan. I need both hands free.'

Jamal did as he was told, though his stomach had already begun its familiar, unhelpful flutter. He was not, and had never been, a fan of heights. Two summers ago, at the county fair, he had frozen solid at the top of the helter-skelter, certain that letting go of the rail would somehow unmake the whole world beneath him. He had never quite lived it down.

The huge industrial fan roared into life, and the balloon's envelope began to stir, filling slowly like some vast, patient creature waking from sleep. Aunt Bethan moved between the burner and the basket with the calm, unhurried confidence of someone who had done this a thousand times before, checking cables, calling instructions to the two volunteers steadying the crown line beside Jamal.

'Burner,' she called, and a column of blue flame roared upward into the half-inflated fabric, lighting the mist from within like a paper lantern. The balloon lifted from the grass, first at one end, then all along its great curved length, until it stood fully upright above the basket, straining gently against its tethers.

It was then that the wind changed. Jamal felt it before he understood it, a sudden cold shove against his cheek, and the crown line jerked hard in his hands. Beside him, one of the volunteers stumbled and lost her grip entirely. The huge balloon swung sideways, dragging the basket with it, straight towards a wooden fence post where a row of spectators stood watching, phones raised.

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'Jamal, the line!' Aunt Bethan's voice cracked with an urgency he had never heard from her before. There was no time to think about heights, or fear, or the county fair. He planted both feet and hauled backwards with everything he had, the rope burning across his palms, until the great shape above him steadied, groaning, and swung slowly back the other way. The spectators scattered, laughing nervously, out of range of the basket's swaying corner.

For a long moment nobody spoke. The balloon settled, upright once more, tugging gently but obediently at its lines. Aunt Bethan crossed the wet grass and took Jamal's rope-burned hands in her own, turning them over as though checking for damage. 'That,' she said quietly, 'was exactly the right thing to do.' Jamal, still shaking slightly, found he could not quite answer.

By the time the sun cleared the hedgerow at the far side of the meadow, a dozen balloons hung suspended above Compton Meadow, glowing gold against a pale sky, and Aunt Bethan's basket was ready for its short, tethered rise above the grass. 'Come on, then,' she said, holding out a hand. 'Twenty feet. I'll keep both ropes tied down myself.' Jamal looked up at the great curved shape above him, no longer a stranger, and, to his own considerable surprise, climbed in.

The basket lifted gently, creaking, and the meadow spread out beneath him, mist unravelling from the hedges like smoke. Jamal gripped the wicker rim, waiting for the old fear to close around his chest as it always had before. It did not come. Instead, watching the small, scattered shapes of the volunteers below, he felt something closer to wonder, as though the fear he had carried for two whole years had, quite suddenly, let go of the rope.

1 Look at paragraph 4. Explain what the simile 'filling slowly like some vast, patient creature waking from sleep' suggests about the balloon.

(2)

2 What colour was the flame when the burner was fired, according to paragraph 5?

- [ ] A) Orange
- [ ] B) Yellow
- [ ] C) Blue
- [ ] D) Red
- [ ] E) White

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3 Look at paragraph 5. Explain what the simile 'lighting the mist from within like a paper lantern' suggests about how the balloon appeared.

(2)

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4 What was the first sign, described in paragraph 6, that the wind had changed?

- ☐ A) Aunt Bethan shouting a warning
- ☐ B) A loud crack of thunder
- ☐ C) The burner flame going out
- ☐ D) The spectators starting to run away
- ☐ E) A sudden cold shove against Jamal's cheek

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5 According to paragraph 6, what caused the balloon to swing dangerously towards the fence post?

- ☐ A) One of the volunteers stumbled and lost her grip on the crown line
- ☐ B) A spectator grabbed hold of the rope
- ☐ C) The fan was switched off too early
- ☐ D) The basket tipped over on its own
- ☐ E) Aunt Bethan let go of the burner controls

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6 In paragraph 7, what does 'cracked' suggest about Aunt Bethan's voice?

- ☐ A) It became unusually loud and confident
- ☐ B) It broke or wavered with fear or urgency, unlike her usual calm manner
- ☐ C) It became difficult to hear at all
- ☐ D) It sounded amused and relaxed
- ☐ E) It stayed exactly the same as before

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7 Number the following events 1 to 4 to show the order in which they happen in the extract: 'Aunt Bethan tells Jamal to hold the crown line clear of the fan', 'the wind changes and the balloon swings towards the fence post', 'Jamal hauls backwards on the rope until the balloon steadies', 'Jamal climbs into the basket for the tethered flight'.

(4)

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8 What did Jamal do to stop the balloon swinging towards the fence post (paragraph 7)?

- ☐ A) He climbed straight into the basket
- ☐ B) He shouted for Aunt Bethan to let go of the burner
- ☐ C) He ran towards the spectators to warn them
- ☐ D) He released the crown line completely
- ☐ E) He planted both feet and hauled backwards on the rope with all his strength

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9 Explain what the phrase 'the rope burning across his palms' (paragraph 7) suggests about the effort Jamal made to hold on.

(2)

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10 What is the effect of the short sentence 'For a long moment nobody spoke.' at the start of paragraph 8?

(2)

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11 In paragraph 8, 'obediently' (describing how the balloon tugged at its lines) suggests that the balloon was:

- [ ] A) Making a loud noise
- [ ] B) Deflating rapidly
- [ ] C) Behaving in a calm, controlled way, as though following instructions
- [ ] D) Struggling wildly to break free
- [ ] E) Completely motionless

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12 How many balloons were visible above Compton Meadow by the time the sun cleared the hedgerow (paragraph 9)?

- [ ] A) Four
- [ ] B) Six
- [ ] C) Twenty
- [ ] D) A dozen
- [ ] E) Fifty

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13 What job did Aunt Bethan first give Jamal to do?

- [ ] A) Hold the crown line clear of the fan
- [ ] B) Fold the balloon fabric into the basket
- [ ] C) Direct the watching spectators
- [ ] D) Light the burner herself
- [ ] E) Check the ropes tying down the basket

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14 In paragraph 1, what does the word 'crews' mean?

- [ ] A) Pieces of equipment
- [ ] B) Loud noises
- [ ] C) Teams of people working together
- [ ] D) Types of weather
- [ ] E) Small boats

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15 What had happened to Jamal two summers ago at the county fair?

- [ ] A) He fell from a helter-skelter
- [ ] B) He refused to go to the fair at all
- [ ] C) He won a prize for bravery
- [ ] D) He froze at the top of the helter-skelter and would not let go of the rail
- [ ] E) He got lost in the crowd

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16 What does the phrase 'he had never quite lived it down' (paragraph 3) suggest?

- [ ] A) Jamal has completely forgotten about the incident at the fair
- [ ] B) People still remembered or reminded him of the helter-skelter incident, so it continued to embarrass him
- [ ] C) Jamal was praised for his bravery at the fair
- [ ] D) The helter-skelter broke down completely afterwards
- [ ] E) Jamal has never been back to the county fair since

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17 In paragraph 4, 'unhurried' is closest in meaning to:

- [ ] A) Calm and unrushed
- [ ] B) Confused and uncertain
- [ ] C) Angry and impatient
- [ ] D) Loud and forceful
- [ ] E) Anxious and rushed

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18 What time had Jamal set his alarm for?

- [ ] A) Half past three
- [ ] B) Six o'clock
- [ ] C) Quarter to five
- [ ] D) Midnight
- [ ] E) Twenty past four

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19 What did Jamal see when he looked out of his window at the start of the extract?

- ☐ A) A crowd of spectators already gathering
- ☐ B) Snow settling on the grass
- ☐ C) Bright morning sunshine
- ☐ D) Compton Meadow hidden beneath a soft grey mist
- ☐ E) Heavy rain clouds

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20 Where did Aunt Bethan run her balloon company from?

- ☐ A) A shop in the village
- ☐ B) A converted barn on the edge of the village
- ☐ C) An airfield hangar several miles away
- ☐ D) Her own back garden
- ☐ E) A tent pitched in Compton Meadow

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21 Find and copy one word from paragraph 1 that means a sudden, brief burst of light.

(1)

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22 Look at paragraph 8. Explain what Aunt Bethan's action of taking Jamal's rope-burned hands and turning them over 'as though checking for damage' suggests about her feelings towards him.

(2)

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23 Explain how the writer creates a sense of relief and calm in paragraph 9, using evidence from the text.

(2)

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24 Using evidence from across the whole passage, explain how the writer's structure shows a change in Jamal's feelings about heights from the beginning of the extract to the end.

(3)

25 Explain why the final sentence, 'the fear he had carried for two whole years had, quite suddenly, let go of the rope', is an effective way to end the passage.

(2)

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Mark scheme · 1.1-4 Comprehension: Fiction Set 4: 30-minute Pack

Question 1

idea that the balloon is personified as alive, almost animal-like, evidenced by 'creature' **B1**

idea that its movement is slow, powerful and unhurried, suggesting great scale and calm strength, evidenced by 'vast, patient... waking from sleep' **B1**

Answer: The simile personifies the balloon as a huge, living creature, suggesting its slow, powerful movement as it inflates has an almost calm, unhurried strength to it.

Question 2

C **B1**

Answer: C) Blue

Question 3

idea of a soft, warm glow of light shining through the fabric of the balloon **B1**

idea that the balloon appears delicate, beautiful or almost magical against the misty, grey morning **B1**

Answer: The simile suggests the balloon glows softly from within, appearing delicate and almost magical against the grey, misty morning.

Question 4

E **B1**

Answer: E) A sudden cold shove against Jamal's cheek

Question 5

A **B1**

Answer: A) One of the volunteers stumbled and lost her grip on the crown line

Question 6

B **B1**

Answer: B) It broke or wavered with fear or urgency, unlike her usual calm manner

Question 7

correctly places 'Aunt Bethan tells Jamal to hold the crown line clear of the fan' as event 1 **B1**

correctly places 'the wind changes and the balloon swings towards the fence post' as event 2 **B1**

correctly places 'Jamal hauls backwards on the rope until the balloon steadies' as event 3 **B1**

correctly places 'Jamal climbs into the basket for the tethered flight' as event 4 **B1**

Answer: 1: Aunt Bethan tells Jamal to hold the crown line; 2: the wind changes and the balloon swings towards the fence post; 3: Jamal hauls backwards on the rope until the balloon steadies; 4: Jamal climbs into the basket for the tethered flight.

Question 8

E **B1**

Answer: E) He planted both feet and hauled backwards on the rope with all his strength

Question 9

idea of physical pain or friction caused by gripping the rope tightly **B1**

idea that he was pulling with great force and determination despite the pain, showing how hard he was trying to hold on **B1**

Answer: The phrase suggests Jamal gripped and pulled on the rope so hard that it hurt his hands, showing the sheer effort and determination he put into holding the balloon steady despite the pain.

Question 10

idea that it creates a pause or stillness immediately after the earlier chaos and danger **B1**

idea that it lets the reader absorb the seriousness or relief of what has just happened, building tension or reflection before the dialogue resumes **B1**

Answer: The short sentence creates a sudden pause and stillness after the earlier chaos, giving the reader (and the characters) a moment to absorb the seriousness and relief of what has just happened before the dialogue resumes.

Question 11

C **B1**

Answer: C) Behaving in a calm, controlled way, as though following instructions

Question 12

D **B1**

Answer: D) A dozen

Question 13

A **B1**

Answer: A) Hold the crown line clear of the fan

Question 14

C **B1**

Answer: C) Teams of people working together

Question 15

D **B1**

Answer: D) He froze at the top of the helter-skelter and would not let go of the rail

Question 16

B **B1**

Answer: B) People still remembered or reminded him of the helter-skelter incident, so it continued to embarrass him

Question 17

A **B1**

Answer: A) Calm and unrushed

Question 18

E **B1**

Answer: E) Twenty past four

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Question 19

D **B1**

Answer: D) Compton Meadow hidden beneath a soft grey mist

Question 20

B **B1**

Answer: B) A converted barn on the edge of the village

Question 21

flare **B1**

Answer: flare

Question 22

idea that she is concerned about his wellbeing and checking that he is not seriously hurt **B1**

idea that this action also conveys quiet pride, gratitude or care for what he has just done, beyond simply checking for injury **B1**

Answer: The gesture shows Aunt Bethan's concern for whether Jamal is hurt, but also, combined with her quiet words of praise, conveys a deeper sense of pride and gratitude for what he has just done.

Question 23

idea of peaceful, positive imagery, for example 'a dozen balloons... glowing gold against a pale sky', contrasting with the earlier danger **B1**

idea that Aunt Bethan's calm, ordinary dialogue ('Come on, then') contrasts with her earlier urgent shout ('Jamal, the line!'), reinforcing that the danger has passed **B1**

Answer: The peaceful image of a dozen balloons glowing gold against a pale sky contrasts sharply with the earlier danger, while Aunt Bethan's calm, ordinary invitation, 'Come on, then', contrasts with her earlier urgent shout, together creating a strong sense of relief and calm.

Question 24

evidence of established fear early on, for example the county fair memory in paragraph 3 where he had 'frozen solid' and 'had never quite lived it down' **B1**

evidence of Jamal overcoming this fear through necessity during the crisis, for example hauling on the rope in paragraph 7 despite there being 'no time to think about heights, or fear' **B1**

evidence of resolution at the end, for example climbing into the basket 'to his own considerable surprise' and the final line stating the old fear 'did not come' and had 'let go of the rope', showing the fear has genuinely lessened **B1**

Answer: The writer establishes Jamal's fear of heights early through the county fair memory in paragraph 3; shows him briefly overcoming it out of necessity during the crisis in paragraph 7, where there is 'no time to think about heights, or fear'; and resolves it at the end, where he climbs into the basket 'to his own considerable surprise' and the old fear simply 'did not come', suggesting his feelings about heights have genuinely changed by the close of the passage.

Question 25

recognises that it echoes or links back to the rope Jamal held onto during the crisis earlier in the passage, giving the ending a sense of unity or circularity **B1**

explains the effect, for example it suggests the long-held fear has finally been resolved or released, providing a satisfying, symbolic conclusion to Jamal's emotional journey **B1**

Answer: The final image is effective because it echoes the rope Jamal gripped so tightly during the earlier crisis, giving the ending a sense of unity, while also suggesting that his long-held fear has finally been released, providing a satisfying and symbolic close to his emotional journey.

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