1.22-5 Comprehension: Classic Fiction Set 5: 1-hour Pack

GL ASSESSMENT / CSSE 11+ Entrance English (GL Assessment / CSSE style) · about 60 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

The Counting-House at Deepwater Stairs

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The wherry had been an hour upon the river, and still the fog lay upon the water so thick and yellow that Thomas could not tell where the Thames ended and the sky began. He sat wrapped in his father's old greatcoat, too large for him by half, and watched the banks slide past in fragments: a crane here, a huddle of masts there, gone again before he could be certain he had seen them at all. The waterman, surly and uncommunicative from the moment Thomas had stepped into the boat, spoke only to name his fare, and left him to his own thoughts for the rest of the crossing. He had left Greenwich before first light, and the six weeks since his father's death had not prepared him for the strangeness of arriving, quite alone, in a city he had visited but twice before, to take up work among strangers who had never set eyes on him.

It was gone eight o'clock, and the fog no thinner for the daylight struggling somewhere above it, when the waterman set him down at a flight of green, slime-darkened steps and pointed, without a word, to a narrow lane climbing away from the water. Deepwater Stairs, when Thomas found it, proved to be less a street than a crevice between two rows of warehouses, so close together that a man might have touched both walls at once, and so overhung with sombre brick that little daylight reached the cobbles below. At the lane's end stood the counting-house of Pargiter & Vane, its brass plate green with age, its windows curtained in a fine sooty net that no amount of cleaning, Thomas would later learn, could ever wholly remove. He had been told the firm was a prosperous one, and he supposed it must be so; but nothing in the building's low, blackened frontage suggested prosperity to him now, only a kind of settled, patient gloom, as though the house had long ago given up any expectation of the sun.

The door was opened, before Thomas had properly raised the knocker, by a thin man of some sixty years, ink to the second knuckle of both hands, who looked him over with the peremptory briskness of one accustomed to weighing goods rather than persons. This was Mr Crick, senior clerk of the house these thirty years, whose manner, though never less than correct, carried an edge that put Thomas forcibly in mind of his father's old warning that some men grow, with long service, to resemble the ledgers they keep: exact, unyielding, and disinclined to waste a single unnecessary word. "You are Grey's boy," said he, not quite a question, already turning back into the passage. "Mr Pargiter is engaged until noon. You had better come through."

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Thomas followed him down a passage floored in worn deal boards, past a counting-room where two clerks, one broad and red-faced, the other so slight and stooped that he seemed scarcely older than Thomas himself, bent low over their desks and did not look up, and came at last to a narrow office at the rear of the house, furnished with nothing but a black horsehair chair and an austere iron stove, unlit, and lit only by a single grimy skylight, through which a wan and grudging light fell into the room. Here Mr Crick paused before a door of stouter oak than the rest, bound with iron and firmly locked, and Thomas, following his gaze, saw painted above the lintel, in letters once gilt and now merely faded, the word STRONG-ROOM. "The Providence was due at the Pool six weeks since," said Mr Crick abruptly, as though continuing a conversation Thomas had not heard begun, "with two hundred bales of wool and Mr Vane's own consignment of tallow aboard her. She is not come, and no word of her neither." Thomas could not tell whether this was fact or mere conjecture on Mr Crick's part, and did not like to ask; he noticed only that his guide's eyes returned to the locked door twice before he moved on, and that his obdurate, businesslike manner had, for that one moment, faltered.

They passed, on the stair, a window that overlooked the river stairs below, where gulls wheeled and cried above the incoming barges, their bills flashing white against the fog each time they turned. Mr Crick did not pause to look, but Thomas lingered a moment, glad of anything in that sombre house that moved and cried out and seemed, however briefly, alive. "Mr Vane's portrait hangs in the counting-room," said Mr Crick, when Thomas caught him up, in a voice pitched carefully low, though there was no one near enough to overhear. "You will not ask about him. Mr Pargiter does not care to speak of his old partner, and the other clerks are forbidden it besides. A man may vanish from a house, Master Grey, and yet the house go on exactly as before, on the surface of things. You would do well to remember it." Something in Thomas quailed at these words, though he could not have named what precisely he feared; he said only that he would remember, and was rewarded with a long, appraising look, as though Mr Crick doubted whether so credulous a boy could be trusted to remember anything at all.

He was set to work before the clock struck nine, copying figures into a ledger so heavy he could scarcely lift it, and it was in turning its stiff pages that he came upon an old entry, some three years past, recording a bill for two casks of tallow, unpaid these three months, against which a clerk's hand, not Mr Crick's, had scored a single decisive line; and beneath the entry, in the same hand, the name J. Vane had been struck through so hard that the pen had all but torn the page. Thomas closed the ledger quickly, ashamed, though he could not have said of what, to have been discovered prying into another man's writing. By the time the short winter daylight had failed entirely, and the two other clerks had gone home to their suppers, Thomas found himself alone in the passage, gathering his coat to follow them, when he saw, quite distinctly, a thread of candlelight beneath the strong-room door: a door he had watched Mr Crick lock, not two hours before, with his own obdurate hands, and had heard no one, in all that time, unlock again.

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1 List four details the writer gives about the appearance of the counting-house of Pargiter & Vane when Thomas first sees it.

(4)

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2 Give two details the text provides about the ship Providence and its cargo.

(2)

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3 The writer describes the counting-house 'as though the house had long ago given up any expectation of the sun'. Explain what this description suggests about the atmosphere of the counting-house and about the mood the writer wants to create as Thomas first arrives.

(4)

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4 By the end of the extract, Thomas sees candlelight beneath a strong-room door 'he had watched Mr Crick lock, not two hours before ... and had heard no one, in all that time, unlock again'. Explain what this description suggests about the mood the writer creates at the close of the extract.

(4)

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5 Re-read Mr Crick's warning: "A man may vanish from a house, Master Grey, and yet the house go on exactly as before, on the surface of things. You would do well to remember it." Explain what impression the reader forms of Mr Crick's character from this warning.

(4)

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6 Explain what impression the reader forms of Thomas's character from the final paragraph, including his reaction to the crossed-out name in the ledger and to the candlelight beneath the strong-room door.

(4)

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7 The word 'bill' appears with two different meanings in the extract: in 'their bills flashing white against the fog' (paragraph 5), and in 'a bill for two casks of tallow, unpaid these three months' (paragraph 6). Explain the meaning of the word in each of its two different uses.

(a) Explain what 'bill' means in 'their bills flashing white against the fog'. **(1)**

(b) Explain what 'bill' means in 'a bill for two casks of tallow, unpaid these three months'. **(1)**

(c) Explain how a reader can tell, from the surrounding words, which of these two meanings is intended each time. **(1)**

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8 Are the following statements about the opening of the extract True or False? Write True or False for each.

(a) Thomas travels to Deepwater Stairs by wherry across the river. **(1)**

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

(b) The waterman talks cheerfully with Thomas throughout the crossing. **(1)**

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

(c) Mr Crick opens the door himself before Thomas can knock. **(1)**

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

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9 "Mr Vane's own consignment of tallow aboard her" - 'consignment' here means:

- ☐ A) a formal written apology
- ☐ B) a batch of goods sent for delivery or sale
- ☐ C) a legal document granting ownership
- ☐ D) a type of sailing ship
- ☐ E) a sum of money owed in wages

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10 'Thomas could not tell whether this was fact or mere conjecture on Mr Crick's part' - 'conjecture' means:

- ☐ A) an official government order
- ☐ B) a written confession
- ☐ C) a type of nautical map
- ☐ D) a formal complaint
- ☐ E) an opinion formed by guesswork, without complete evidence

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11 'Something in Thomas quailed at these words' - 'quailed' means:

- ☐ A) fell fast asleep
- ☐ B) became extremely proud
- ☐ C) flinched or shrank back with fear
- ☐ D) laughed with amusement
- ☐ E) grew suddenly angry

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12 'his obdurate, businesslike manner had, for that one moment, faltered' - 'obdurate' means:

- ☐ A) stubborn and unyielding
- ☐ B) easily persuaded
- ☐ C) full of sorrow
- ☐ D) extremely polite
- ☐ E) quick to laugh

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13 'as though Mr Crick doubted whether so credulous a boy could be trusted' - 'credulous' means:

- ☐ A) rude and disrespectful
- ☐ B) physically strong
- ☐ C) extremely wealthy
- ☐ D) too ready to believe things; easily deceived
- ☐ E) unusually clever and quick-witted

---

14 'ashamed ... to have been discovered prying into another man's writing' - 'prying' means:

- ☐ A) organising papers alphabetically
- ☐ B) looking inquisitively into something private or not one's concern
- ☐ C) writing very neatly
- ☐ D) reading aloud confidently
- ☐ E) working extremely quickly

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15 Look closely at the wording of the extract.

(a) Find and copy one phrase from the first paragraph that describes the appearance of the fog. **(1)**

(b) Find and copy one phrase from the second paragraph that describes the windows of the counting-house. **(1)**

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16 Number the following events 1 to 4 to show the order in which they happen in the extract: 'Thomas notices gulls with bills flashing white above the river stairs', 'The waterman sets Thomas down at a flight of slime-darkened steps', 'Mr Crick opens the door and greets Thomas as "Grey's boy"', 'Thomas sees a thread of candlelight beneath the locked strong-room door'.

(4)

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17 'surly and uncommunicative from the moment Thomas had stepped into the boat' - 'surly' here means the waterman was:

- ☐ A) generous and kind
- ☐ B) bad-tempered and unfriendly
- ☐ C) cheerful and talkative
- ☐ D) elderly and forgetful
- ☐ E) extremely nervous

---

18 'so overhung with sombre brick that little daylight reached the cobbles below' - 'sombre' here means:

- ☐ A) brightly coloured
- ☐ B) freshly painted
- ☐ C) crumbling and dangerous
- ☐ D) covered in ivy
- ☐ E) dark and gloomy

---

19 'the peremptory briskness of one accustomed to weighing goods rather than persons' - 'peremptory' means:

- ☐ A) slow and careless
- ☐ B) apologetic
- ☐ C) commanding and allowing no argument
- ☐ D) shy and hesitant
- ☐ E) warm and affectionate

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20 'furnished with nothing but a black horsehair chair and an austere iron stove' - 'austere' here means:

- ☐ A) plain and without comfort or decoration
- ☐ B) brightly decorated
- ☐ C) extremely expensive
- ☐ D) newly installed
- ☐ E) broken beyond repair

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21 'a wan and grudging light fell into the room' - 'wan' here means the light was:

- ☐ A) warm and golden
- ☐ B) flickering rapidly
- ☐ C) coloured deep red
- ☐ D) pale and weak
- ☐ E) dazzlingly bright

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22 Compare the mood created by the writer at the very beginning of the extract with the mood at the very end. Use evidence from across the text to support your ideas.

(5)

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23 Explain how the writer structures the extract as a whole to build a growing sense of mystery around Deepwater Stairs and its inhabitants.

(5)

24 A reader said, 'By the end of the extract, the reader is given enough evidence to know exactly what has happened to Mr Vane.' To what extent do you agree? Support your response with detailed reference to the text, including the writer's use of language and structure.

(8)

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Question 1

its brass plate is green with age **B1**

its windows are curtained in a fine sooty net **B1**

its frontage is low and blackened **B1**

it seems as though it has given up any expectation of the sun (accept: a settled, patient gloom) **B1**

Answer: Any four of: its brass plate is green with age; its windows are curtained in a fine sooty net; its frontage is low and blackened; it seems to have given up any expectation of the sun.

Question 2

she was due at the Pool six weeks since (accept: is overdue) **B1**

she is not come, and no word of her (accept: she has not arrived / no news of her); OR she carries two hundred bales of wool / Mr Vane's consignment of tallow **B1**

Answer: Any two of: due at the Pool six weeks since; carrying two hundred bales of wool; carrying Mr Vane's own consignment of tallow; has not arrived and no word of her.

Question 3

Level 1 Simple identification of the description with limited or undeveloped comment on effect. **1-2**

Level 2 Clear and detailed explanation of how the description conveys a longstanding, oppressive atmosphere, with precise reference to the language used. **3-4**

Indicative content:

- Personifying the house as having 'given up' expectation suggests a longstanding, settled despair, as if gloom were a permanent condition rather than a passing mood
- 'Long ago' suggests this has been true for years, establishing a mood of stagnation before Thomas even steps inside
- The idea of abandoned 'expectation' suggests hopelessness, quietly foreshadowing the unresolved mysteries (the missing Providence, the vanished Mr Vane) that follow
- Placed as Thomas's first full view of the building, it establishes an oppressive, foreboding mood right at the story's opening

Question 4

Level 1 Simple identification of the description with limited or undeveloped comment on effect. **1-2**

Level 2 Clear and detailed explanation of how the description creates an unsettling, unresolved atmosphere, with precise reference to the language used. **3-4**

Indicative content:

- The precise detail that Thomas 'had watched Mr Crick lock' the door himself makes the candlelight impossible to explain away rationally, creating a strong sense of mystery
- Ending on an unanswered question, rather than any resolution, leaves the reader deliberately unsettled
- The image directly follows Thomas's discovery of the crossed-out name in the ledger, linking the two unexplained details and hinting at a connection the text never confirms
- The restrained, factual tone ('quite distinctly') makes the strangeness more unsettling, since Thomas is reporting exactly what he sees rather than imagining or exaggerating

Question 5

Level 1 A simple comment that Mr Crick seems guarded or secretive, with little or no reference to the text. **1-2**

Level 2 A clear and, at the top of the band, detailed explanation of the impression created, supported by relevant reference to the text. **3-4**

Indicative content:

- Warning Thomas not to ask about Mr Vane, in a voice 'pitched carefully low' so no one overhears, suggests a long-practised habit of discretion or secrecy
- The phrase 'the house go on exactly as before, on the surface of things' suggests Mr Crick is aware that outward calm conceals a hidden reality, hinting he knows more than he says
- Delivering this as advice ('you would do well to remember it') rather than open explanation suggests loyalty to Mr Pargiter's evident wish for silence, or caution for his own sake
- Together, the impression is of a guarded, watchful man who understands more about Mr Vane's disappearance than he permits himself to reveal

Question 6

Level 1 A simple comment that Thomas seems curious or honest, with little or no reference to the text. **1-2**

Level 2 A clear and, at the top of the band, detailed explanation of the impression created, supported by relevant reference to the text. **3-4**

Indicative content:

- His shame at 'having been discovered prying', even though no one actually catches him, suggests a naturally conscientious character who feels guilt even at a private, minor wrongdoing
- His quick, careful noticing of small details, such as the crossed-out name, the exact timing of the lock and the candlelight, suggests an observant, attentive nature well suited to his new work
- Rather than reacting with open alarm to the candlelight, he registers it 'quite distinctly' and factually, suggesting a controlled, watchful temperament similar to Mr Crick's own
- The final image leaves Thomas's own response unstated, inviting the reader to infer a mixture of curiosity and unease appropriate to a boy newly arrived in an unfamiliar, secretive household

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Question 7

(a) a bird's beak (accept: the hard, pointed part of a gull's mouth) **B1**

(a) Answer: A bird's beak.

(b) a written statement of money owed for goods; an invoice or account (accept: an unpaid debt/invoice) **B1**

(b) Answer: A written statement of money owed for goods; an invoice or account.

(c) recognises that 'their bills', paired with 'gulls' and 'flashing white', signals a physical, visual feature of a bird, whereas 'a bill for ... casks of tallow, unpaid' pairs the word with goods and money vocabulary, signalling a financial document, so surrounding context, not the word alone, shows which meaning is meant **B1**

(c) Answer: 'Their bills flashing white' follows 'gulls' and describes a visible, physical detail, showing it means a beak, while 'a bill for two casks of tallow, unpaid' pairs the word with goods and money, showing it means an invoice; the surrounding words, not the word 'bill' alone, signal which meaning is meant.

Question 8

(a) True **B1**

(a) Answer: True

(b) False **B1**

(b) Answer: False

(c) True **B1**

(c) Answer: True

Question 9

B - identifies 'consignment' as a batch of goods sent for delivery or sale **B1**

Answer: B) a batch of goods sent for delivery or sale

Question 10

E - identifies 'conjecture' as an opinion formed by guesswork, without complete evidence **B1**

Answer: E) an opinion formed by guesswork, without complete evidence

Question 11

C - identifies 'quailed' as flinched or shrank back with fear **B1**

Answer: C) flinched or shrank back with fear

Question 12

A - identifies 'obdurate' as stubborn and unyielding **B1**

Answer: A) stubborn and unyielding

Question 13

D - identifies 'credulous' as too ready to believe things; easily deceived **B1**

Answer: D) too ready to believe things; easily deceived

Question 14

B - identifies 'prying' as looking inquisitively into something private or not one's concern **B1**

Answer: B) looking inquisitively into something private or not one's concern

Question 15

(a) accept: 'so thick and yellow' **B1**

(a) Answer: so thick and yellow

(b) accept: 'curtained in a fine sooty net' **B1**

(b) Answer: curtained in a fine sooty net

Question 16

correctly places 'The waterman sets Thomas down at a flight of slime-darkened steps' as event 1 **B1**

correctly places 'Mr Crick opens the door and greets Thomas as "Grey's boy"' as event 2 **B1**

correctly places 'Thomas notices gulls with bills flashing white above the river stairs' as event 3 **B1**

correctly places 'Thomas sees a thread of candlelight beneath the locked strong-room door' as event 4 **B1**

Answer: 1: the waterman sets Thomas down at the steps; 2: Mr Crick opens the door and greets him; 3: Thomas notices the gulls above the river stairs; 4: Thomas sees the candlelight beneath the strong-room door.

Question 17

B - identifies 'surly' as bad-tempered and unfriendly **B1**

Answer: B) bad-tempered and unfriendly

Question 18

E - identifies 'sombre' as dark and gloomy **B1**

Answer: E) dark and gloomy

Question 19

C - identifies 'peremptory' as commanding and allowing no argument **B1**

Answer: C) commanding and allowing no argument

Question 20

A - identifies 'austere' as plain and without comfort or decoration **B1**

Answer: A) plain and without comfort or decoration

Question 21

D - identifies 'wan' as pale and weak **B1**

Answer: D) pale and weak

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Question 22

Level 1 A simple comparison identifying that the mood is similar or changes, with limited or no supporting reference. **1-2**

Level 2 A clear comparison supported by relevant evidence from both the beginning and the end of the extract. **3-4**

Level 3 A perceptive, well-developed comparison that selects precise evidence from across the extract and explores the mood in a nuanced way. **5**

Indicative content:

- At the start, the mood is a vague, disorientating apprehension, established through fog 'so thick and yellow' that Thomas cannot tell 'where the Thames ended and the sky began', and his sense of arriving 'quite alone' among strangers
- This unease develops rather than resolves across the extract, through the gloomy counting-house, the guarded Mr Crick, the locked strong-room, and the unexplained absence of the Providence
- By the end, the mood has sharpened into something more specific and immediate: a precise, physical detail (candlelight beneath a door Thomas watched being locked) that cannot easily be reasoned away
- The extract's restrained, exact narrative voice, echoing Mr Crick's own manner, means this growing unease is conveyed through implication and unexplained detail rather than open drama
- The strongest answers will note that both moments share an emphasis on things that cannot be clearly seen or accounted for, fog obscuring the river and candlelight behind a locked door, giving the extract a consistent atmosphere of concealment from beginning to end

Question 23

Level 1 A simple comment on the order of events, with limited explanation of structural effect. **1-2**

Level 2 A clear explanation of more than one structural feature and its effect, with relevant reference to the text. **3-4**

Level 3 A perceptive, well-developed explanation of how structure builds mystery across the whole extract, with precise reference. **5**

Indicative content:

- The extract opens with the wide, disorientating fog on the river, establishing a vague unease before any specific character or place is introduced
- The focus then narrows steadily, from the river, to the lane, to the counting-house frontage, to Mr Crick himself, each stage adding a more specific and personal source of unease
- The information about the missing Providence and the locked strong-room is placed only once Thomas is inside the building, so this new mystery builds directly upon, rather than replacing, the earlier gloom
- Mr Crick's warning about Mr Vane is placed immediately afterwards, linking the missing ship and the missing partner in the reader's mind, though the text never states outright that they are connected
- The final paragraph shifts from external description into Thomas's own actions, discovering the crossed-out ledger entry and then the candlelight, so the extract ends by compounding two unexplained details rather than resolving either, leaving the reader's curiosity deliberately unsatisfied

Question 24

Level 1 A simple statement of agreement or disagreement with limited or no textual support. **1-2**

Level 2 A clear response with relevant reference to language or structure, showing some understanding of how mystery is created around Mr Vane. **3-4**

Level 3 A detailed, well-supported evaluation exploring more than one aspect (for example the ledger entry and Mr Crick's warning), with well-chosen quotations. **5-6**

Level 4 A perceptive, well-structured evaluation that considers different aspects of the extract in a balanced way, with precise textual support and a convincing, considered personal judgement. **7-8**

Indicative content:

- Consideration of evidence that might seem to point to an answer: Mr Vane's name struck through so hard 'the pen had all but torn the page', Mr Crick's warning that 'a man may vanish from a house', and the candlelight in the supposedly locked, empty strong-room
- Consideration of evidence against a reading of certain knowledge: it is never stated that Mr Vane is dead, missing, or connected to the Providence's disappearance, nor is it explained who has lit the candle
- Discussion of the writer's restrained, understated language throughout, favouring suggestion over statement ('as though continuing a conversation Thomas had not heard begun'; 'on the surface of things'), which builds intrigue rather than confirming any single explanation
- Discussion of structure: ending on the unresolved candlelight, immediately after the discovery of the crossed-out name, invites the reader to connect the two mysteries without the text ever confirming that connection
- Reward well-supported personal judgements in either direction, provided they are backed by precise textual evidence from across the extract

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