



## EP.E79 Comprehension: Fiction Set 13

GL ASSESSMENT / CSSE 11+ Entrance English (GL Assessment / CSSE style) · Calculators not allowed ·  
about 45 minutes

Total Marks

|  |
|--|
|  |
|--|

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

**Answer ALL questions. Show all your working.**

### The Otter's Bridge

*Original short fiction written for Revision Library.*

Mira picked her way along the flooded footpath, her wellington boots sinking into mud the colour of stewed tea. The rain had not stopped in three days, and the beck behind her grandmother's cottage had swollen into something wilder, something with a voice of its own.

She had promised her grandmother she would only walk as far as the old stone bridge and back, but the sound reached her first: a thin, rasping cry, almost lost beneath the rush of water. Mira stopped and listened. There it was again, faint and pleading, drifting up from somewhere near the bridge's crumbling arch.

She hurried forward, her heart thudding harder than the rain on her hood. Wedged between two rocks at the water's edge, half submerged and shivering, was an otter. Its slick brown fur was matted with mud, and one paw was twisted beneath it at an angle that made Mira wince. The animal's dark eyes fixed on hers, wide and exhausted, too tired even to struggle.

"It's alright," Mira whispered, though she had no real reason to believe it was. She crouched at the water's edge, feeling the cold seep instantly through her jeans, and reached out both hands. The otter flinched, a small, sharp movement like a struck match, but did not pull away.

Mira's grandmother had always said that Ashbeck Bridge was older than the village itself, its stones laid by hands long since turned to dust, and that the water beneath it had never once, in living memory, run dry. Now Mira understood why the otter had chosen this place to shelter: the arch curved low and close above the rocks, a stone roof against the storm.

She wrapped the otter in her coat, feeling its heartbeat flutter frantic and quick against her palm, and began the long walk home. Behind her, the bridge stood exactly as it always had, patient and unmoving, while the flood water churned beneath it like something impatient to be somewhere else.

Her grandmother met her at the door, took one look at the bundle in Mira's arms, and did not ask a single question before fetching a towel.

It was only that evening, warm and dry beside the fire with the otter sleeping in a box lined with blankets, that Mira remembered what her father had told her at breakfast: the council was sending surveyors to Ashbeck Bridge on Monday, to decide whether the crumbling old crossing was safe to keep, or whether, after two hundred years, it would finally have to come down.

**1** Where is Mira at the start of the extract, and what has the weather been like?

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

---

**2** Find and copy the phrase from paragraph 1 that shows the beck has become much wilder because of the rain.

(Total for Question 2 is 1 mark)

---

**3** Give the meaning of each of the following words as they are used in the passage.

(a) 'swollen' (paragraph 1) (1)

(b) 'wedged' (paragraph 3) (1)

(c) 'flinched' (paragraph 4) (1)

(d) 'frantic' (paragraph 6) (1)

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

---

**4** Look at paragraph 1: 'mud the colour of stewed tea'. Explain the effect of this simile.

(Total for Question 4 is 2 marks)

---

**5** Look at paragraph 1: the beck is described as having 'a voice of its own'. Explain the effect of this personification.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

**6** According to paragraph 3, what does Mira find wedged between two rocks at the water's edge?

(Total for Question 6 is 1 mark)

---

**7** According to paragraph 3, which part of the otter's body was twisted at an angle that made Mira wince?

(Total for Question 7 is 1 mark)

---

**8** In paragraph 4, Mira whispers 'It's alright' even though she has 'no real reason to believe it was'. What does this suggest about Mira?

(Total for Question 8 is 1 mark)

---

**9** Which word class best describes 'crumbling' as it is used in the phrase 'the bridge's crumbling arch' (paragraph 2)?

**(a)** Choose the correct word class.

(1)

- ☐ A) Noun
- ☐ B) Verb
- ☐ C) Adjective
- ☐ D) Adverb

(Total for Question 9 is 1 mark)

---

**10** Look at paragraph 1: 'The rain had not stopped in three days, and the beck behind her grandmother's cottage had swollen into something wilder, something with a voice of its own.' Is this a simple, compound or complex sentence? Explain how you know.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

- 11** Look at paragraph 5: 'Now Mira understood why the otter had chosen this place to shelter: the arch curved low and close above the rocks, a stone roof against the storm.' What is the function of the colon in this sentence?

(Total for Question 11 is 1 mark)

---

- 12** Look at paragraph 4: 'The otter flinched, a small, sharp movement like a struck match.' Explain the effect of this simile.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

---

- 13** According to paragraph 5, what had never happened to the water beneath Ashbeck Bridge, in living memory?

(Total for Question 13 is 1 mark)

---

- 14** Look at paragraph 6, where the bridge is described as 'patient and unmoving' while the flood water is described as 'impatient to be somewhere else'. Explain the effect of this contrast.

(Total for Question 14 is 3 marks)

---

- 15** According to paragraph 7, what does Mira's grandmother do when she sees the bundle in Mira's arms?

(Total for Question 15 is 1 mark)

- 16** What does the detail that Mira's grandmother 'did not ask a single question' suggest about her character or her relationship with Mira?

(Total for Question 16 is 2 marks)

---

- 17** According to paragraph 8, what is due to happen at Ashbeck Bridge on Monday?

(Total for Question 17 is 1 mark)

---

- 18** Look at paragraph 4: "'It's alright," Mira whispered.' Identify how the writer's punctuation shows that these words are spoken aloud, rather than just thought.

(Total for Question 18 is 1 mark)

---

- 19** Look at paragraph 2: 'Mira stopped and listened.' Explain the effect of this short sentence.

(Total for Question 19 is 2 marks)

---

- 20** Paragraph 7 is written as a single, short paragraph. Explain the effect of this.

(Total for Question 20 is 2 marks)

---

- 21** Evaluate how effectively the writer builds sympathy for the otter in paragraphs 3 and 4. You should comment on: the writer's word choices; the description of the otter's condition; the effect on the reader.

(Total for Question 21 is 4 marks)

- 22** Using evidence from across the whole passage, explain the significance of the final paragraph in changing the reader's understanding of the story.

(Total for Question 22 is 3 marks)

---

- 23** Based on the evidence in the extract, predict what Mira might do now that she knows the bridge could be demolished. Give one reason from the text to support your prediction.

(Total for Question 23 is 2 marks)

---

- 24** Explain how the writer creates tension across the whole extract. Refer to at least two techniques in your answer.

(Total for Question 24 is 4 marks)

## Mark scheme · EP.E79 Comprehension: Fiction Set 13

---

### Question 1

- **B1** Identifies that Mira is walking along a flooded footpath (near the beck/bridge), and that it has been raining heavily for three days
- **Answer: Mira is walking along a flooded footpath, and it has been raining heavily for three days without stopping.**

### Question 2

- **B1** swollen into something wilder
- **Answer: swollen into something wilder**

### Question 3

- (a) **B1** Meaning close to 'grown larger or fuller than usual'
- (a) **Answer: grown larger or fuller than usual**
- (b) **B1** Meaning close to 'fixed or jammed tightly in a narrow space'
- (b) **Answer: fixed or jammed tightly into a narrow space**
- (c) **B1** Meaning close to 'made a sudden, small movement away from something, out of fear or pain'
- (c) **Answer: made a sudden, small movement away, out of fear or pain**
- (d) **B1** Meaning close to 'fast, wild and full of panic or urgency'
- (d) **Answer: fast, wild and full of panic or urgency**

### Question 4

- **B1** Identifies the comparison of the mud's colour to stewed tea
- **B1** Explains the effect, e.g. creates a vivid, familiar sensory image of the mud's murky brown colour, helping the reader picture the scene immediately
- **Answer: The simile compares the mud's colour to stewed tea, giving the reader a vivid, familiar sensory image of the murky brown mud and helping to picture the scene immediately.**

### Question 5

- **B1** Identifies that the personification makes the beck/stream seem alive
- **B1** Explains the effect, e.g. makes the flooded beck feel powerful and slightly threatening from the very start of the extract, creating an unsettled atmosphere
- **Answer: The personification makes the flooded beck seem alive, as if it can speak for itself, creating a powerful and slightly unsettling atmosphere from the very start of the extract.**

### Question 6

- **B1** An otter
- **Answer: An otter.**

### Question 7

- **B1** Its paw
- **Answer: Its paw.**

### Question 8

- **B1** Suggests Mira is kind/compassionate and is trying to comfort the otter even though she cannot be sure it will be alright (accept similar valid inference)
- **Answer: It suggests Mira is kind and compassionate, offering comfort to the otter even though she cannot really be sure everything will be alright.**

### Question 9

- (a) **B1** C
- (a) **Answer: C) Adjective**

#### Question 10

- **B1** Identifies the sentence as compound
- **B1** Explains that it contains two main (independent) clauses, each of which could stand alone as a sentence, joined by the coordinating conjunction 'and'
- **Answer: It is a compound sentence. It contains two main clauses, each of which could stand alone, joined by the coordinating conjunction 'and'.**

#### Question 11

- **B1** Introduces an explanation of what has just been stated, i.e. it explains exactly why the otter chose to shelter there (accept similar wording)
- **Answer: It introduces an explanation, showing exactly why the otter chose that spot to shelter.**

#### Question 12

- **B1** Identifies that the simile compares the otter's flinch to a struck match
- **B1** Explains the effect, e.g. suggests the movement was sudden, quick and instinctive, showing the otter is still fearful even though it is exhausted
- **Answer: The simile compares the otter's flinch to a struck match, suggesting the movement was sudden and instinctive and showing that the otter is still fearful, even though it is exhausted.**

#### Question 13

- **B1** It had never run dry
- **Answer: It had never run dry.**

#### Question 14

- **B1** Identifies the personification of the bridge as calm, steady and enduring ('patient and unmoving')
- **B1** Identifies the personification of the flood water as restless and urgent ('impatient to be somewhere else')
- **B1** Explains the effect of the contrast, e.g. it emphasises how solid and dependable the bridge seems compared to the wild, changeable water, creating a sense of calm strength within the storm
- **Answer: The bridge is personified as calm and steady ('patient and unmoving'), while the flood water is personified as restless and urgent ('impatient to be somewhere else'). The contrast emphasises how solid and dependable the bridge seems compared to the wild, changeable water, creating a sense of calm strength within the storm.**

#### Question 15

- **B1** She fetches a towel, without asking any questions
- **Answer: She fetches a towel, without asking any questions.**

#### Question 16

- **B1** Suggests the grandmother is calm, practical and trusting, prioritising helping the animal over asking questions
- **B1** Suggests a close, understanding relationship between Mira and her grandmother, where Mira's actions are simply accepted
- **Answer: It suggests the grandmother is calm, practical and trusting, choosing to help first and ask questions later. It also suggests a close, understanding relationship between them, where Mira's actions are simply accepted.**

#### Question 17

- **B1** The council is sending surveyors to decide whether the bridge is safe to keep or whether it will have to be demolished
- **Answer: The council is sending surveyors to decide whether the bridge is safe to keep or whether it will have to come down.**

#### Question 18

- **B1** The words are enclosed in speech marks (inverted commas), with a comma before the closing speech marks and the reporting clause 'Mira whispered' (accept any one valid feature)
- **Answer: The words are placed inside speech marks, with a comma before the closing speech marks and the reporting clause 'Mira whispered'.**

### Question 19

- **B1** Identifies that the short sentence creates a pause or moment of stillness
- **B1** Explains the effect, e.g. it mirrors Mira's own action of stopping, slowing the pace and building tension/suspense as the reader waits to find out what she has heard
- **Answer: The short sentence creates a sudden pause, mirroring Mira's own action of stopping. This slows the pace and builds tension, making the reader wait to find out what she has heard.**

### Question 20

- **B1** Identifies that the grandmother's calm reaction is compressed into a single short paragraph
- **B1** Explains the effect, e.g. it quickens the pace after the slower, more detailed paragraphs before it, and suggests that this kind of event is simply an accepted, unremarkable part of life in their home
- **Answer: Compressing the grandmother's calm reaction into one short paragraph quickens the pace after the slower, more detailed paragraphs before it, suggesting that this kind of event is simply an accepted part of life in their home.**

### Question 21

- **Level 1** (1-2): Simple comment(s) on word choice or content, with little or no reference to the effect on the reader.
- **Level 2** (3): Clear explanation of how language creates sympathy for the otter, supported by relevant evidence.
- **Level 3** (4): Detailed, well-evidenced evaluation of how the writer's choices combine to build sympathy for the otter.
- **Indicative content:**
  - Physical description ('slick brown fur... matted with mud', 'one paw was twisted') suggests injury and discomfort
  - 'wide and exhausted, too tired even to struggle' emphasises the otter's vulnerability and helplessness
  - The simile 'like a struck match' for the otter's flinch shows lingering fear despite its exhaustion
  - Mira's gentle, reassuring response ('It's alright') draws the reader further into feeling sympathy for the otter

### Question 22

- **B1** Identifies that the final paragraph reveals a new problem: the bridge that has just sheltered the otter may soon be demolished
- **B1** Explains that this recontextualises the earlier description of the bridge as ancient and dependable ('older than the village itself', 'patient and unmoving'), making its possible loss feel more significant
- **B1** Notes that the extract ends on an unresolved cliffhanger, engaging the reader to wonder what Mira will do next
- **Answer: The final paragraph reveals that the bridge which has just sheltered the otter may soon be demolished, which recontextualises the earlier description of it as ancient and dependable, making its possible loss feel far more significant. The extract ends on an unresolved cliffhanger, leaving the reader wondering what Mira will do next.**

### Question 23

- **B1** Gives a valid prediction, e.g. that Mira will try to save the bridge, tell someone about the otter living there, or oppose the demolition
- **B1** Supports the prediction with a valid reason from the text, e.g. she has just rescued an animal that depends on the bridge for shelter, showing she cares about protecting vulnerable creatures
- **Answer: Mira might try to tell the council or the surveyors about the otter sheltering under the bridge, hoping to save it, because she has just shown how much she cares about protecting vulnerable creatures by rescuing the otter.**

### Question 24

- **Level 1** (1-2): Simple, generic comments about tension with little or no reference to specific language, and little reference to more than one part of the extract.
- **Level 2** (3): Clear identification of relevant techniques with accurate quotation, and some explanation of their effect.
- **Level 3** (4): A developed, well-evidenced explanation tracking tension across most of the extract, referring closely to at least two distinct techniques and their combined effect on the reader.
- **Indicative content:**
  - Short sentences ('Mira stopped and listened.') slow the pace and create suspenseful pauses
  - Personification and simile in the setting (the beck's 'voice of its own', the otter's flinch 'like a struck match', the 'patient' bridge against 'impatient' water) create an unsettled, dramatic atmosphere
  - Withheld information builds curiosity, e.g. the unidentified 'thin, rasping cry' in paragraph 2 before the otter is revealed in paragraph 3
  - The extract ends on an unresolved dilemma about the bridge's future, leaving tension unresolved for the reader