

Grade 8 – English Language Arts

This task requires students to read a passage and use context clues to determine the author’s meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary words.

Read the website entry below from – *“Brian’s Winter”*

Then answer these questions. (Answers to questions follow text)

QUESTIONS:

Part A: What is the meaning of the word **adversary** as it is used in paragraph 21?

- A. problem’s solution
- B. indication of trouble
- C. opposing force
- D. source of irritation

Part B: Which phrase from paragraph 21 best helps clarify the meaning of **adversary**?

- A. “own worst enemy”
- B. “the primary rule”
- C. “missed the warnings”
- D. “most dangerous thing”

From *Brian's Winter*

by Gary Paulsen

1. Then the bear came.
2. Brian had come to know bears as well as he knew wolves or birds. They were usually alone – unless it was a female with cubs – and they were absolutely, totally devoted to eating. He had seen them several times while picking berries, raking the bushes with their teeth to pull the fruit off – and a goodly number of leaves as well, which they spit out before swallowing the berries – and, as with the wolves, they seemed to get along with him.
3. That is to say Brian would see them eating and he would move away and let them pick where they wanted while he found another location. It worked for the bears, he thought, smiling, and it worked for him, and this thinking evolved into what Brian thought of as an understanding between him and the bears: Since he left them alone, they would leave him alone.
4. Unfortunately the bears did not know that it was an agreement, and Brian was suffering under the misunderstanding that, as in some imaginary politically correct society, everything was working out.
5. All of this made him totally unprepared for the reality of the woods. To wit: Bears and wolves did what they wanted to do, and Brian had to fit in.
6. He was literally awakened to the facts one morning during the two-week warm spell. Brian had been sleeping soundly and woke to the clunking sound of metal on rock. His mind and ears were tuned to all the natural sounds around him and there was no sound in nature of metal on stone. It snapped him awake in midbreath.
7. He was sleeping with his head in the opening of the shelter and he had his face out and when he opened his eyes he saw what appeared to be a wall of black-brown fur directly in front of him.
8. He thought he might be dreaming and shook his head but it didn't go away and he realized in the same moment that he was looking at the rear end of a bear. No, he thought with a clinical logic that surprised him – I am looking at the very *large* rear end of a very *large* bear.
9. The bear had come to Brian's camp – smelling the gut-smell of the dead rabbit, and the cooking odor from the pot. The bear did not see it as Brian's camp or territory. There was a food smell, it was hungry, it was time to eat.
10. It had found the pot and knife by the fire where Brian had left them and scooped them outside. Brian had washed them both in the lake where he finished eating, but the smell of food was still in the air. Working around the side of the opening, the bear had bumped the pan against a rock at the same moment that it had settled its rump in the entrance of Brian's shelter.

11. Brian pulled back a foot. “Hey – get out of there!” he yelled, and kicked the bear in the rear.
12. He was not certain what he expected. Perhaps that the bear would turn and realize its mistake and then sheepishly trundle away. Or that the bear would just run off.
13. With no hesitation, not even the smallest part of a second’s delay, the bear turned and ripped the entire log side of the shelter with one sweep of a front paw and a moist “*whouuff*” out of its nostrils.
14. Brian found himself looking up at the bear, turned now to look down on the boy, and with another snort the bear swung its left paw again and scooped Brian out of the hollow of the rock and flung him end over end for twenty feet. Then the bear slipped forward and used both front paws to pack Brian in a king of ball and whap him down to the edge of the water, where he lay, dazed, thinking in some way that he was still back in the shelter.
15. The bear stopped and studied Brian for a long minute, then turned back to ransacking the camp, looking for where that delicious smell had come from. It sat back on its haunches and felt the air with its nostrils, located another faint odor stream and followed it down to the edge of the water where the fish pool lay. It dug in the water – not more than ten feet from where Brian now lay, trying to figure out if his arms and legs were still attached to where they had been before – and he pulled up the rabbit skull, still with bits of meat on it, and swallowed it whole. It dug around in the water again and found the guts and ate them and went back to rummaging around in the pool, and when nothing more could be found the bear looked once more at Brian, at the camp, and then walked away without looking back.
16. Other than some minor scratches where the bear’s claws had slightly scraped him – it was more a boxing action than a clawing one – Brian was in one piece. He was still jolted and confused about just exactly which end was up, but most of all he was grateful.
17. He knew that the bear could have done much more damage than it had. He had seen a bear tear a stump out of the ground like a giant tooth when it was looking for grubworms and ants. This bear could just as easily have killed him, and had actually held back.
18. But as the day progressed Brian found himself stiffening, and by the time he was ready for bed his whole body ached and he knew he would be covered with bruises from the encounter.
19. He would have to find some way to protect himself, some weapon. The fire worked well when it was burning, but it had burned down. His hatchet and knife would have done nothing more than make the bear really angry – something he did not like to think about – and his bow was good only for smaller game. He had never tried to shoot anything bigger than a foolbird or rabbit with it and doubted that the bow would push the arrow deep enough to do anything but – again – make the bear really mad.
20. He bundled his bag that night, the end of the two weeks of warm weather. He kept putting wood on the fire, half afraid the bear would come back. All the while he tried to think of a solution.

21. But in reality, the bear was not his primary adversary. Nor was the wolf, nor any animal. Brian had become his own worst enemy because in all the business of hunting, fishing and surviving he had forgotten the primary rule: Always, *always* pay attention to what was happening. Everything in nature means something and he had missed the warnings that summer was ending, had in many ways already ended, and what was coming would be the most dangerous thing he had faced since the plane crash.

ANSWERS:

Part A Answer Choice Rationales: Option C is the correct answer; the word “adversary” means “opposing force.” In the context of this excerpt, Brian’s lack of preparation for winter has made him guilty of being his own opposing force to survival. Option A is incorrect; Brian is looking for an answer to his problem about how to survive winter, but “adversary” does not mean “problem’s solution.” Option B is incorrect; although Brian realizes he has troubles ahead, “adversary” does not mean “indication of trouble.” Option D is incorrect; although Brian may be irritated at himself for not planning ahead and creating his own problem, “adversary” does not mean “source of irritation.”

Part B Answer Choice Rationales: Option A is the correct answer. Brian’s lack of preparing for winter has made him his own “adversary,” or “own worst enemy.” Option B is incorrect; the phrase “the primary rule” applies to always paying attention to what is happening around you. Breaking this rule has created Brian’s problem, but it does not provide context for the meaning of “adversary.” Option C is incorrect; although Brian “missed the warnings,” which led to his current problem of not being prepared, these words do not help the reader determine the meaning of “adversary.” Option D is incorrect; although the “most dangerous thing” in Brian’s world is his lack of preparedness for the coming of winter, the words do not help the reader determine the meaning of “adversary.”