Chapter 7: The Invention of Vita-Wonk

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Exercise 7.1 — Comprehension Check

Q1 Choose the right answer. (i) Mr Willy Wonka is (a) a cook, (b) an inventor, (c) a manager. (ii) Wonka-Vite makes people (a) older, (b) younger. (iii) Mr Wonka wants to invent a new thing which will make people (a) younger, (b) older.

SOLUTION

(i) The story describes Mr Wonka inventing Wonka-Vite and searching for a new recipe, so he is an inventor.
(ii) Wonka-Vite makes people younger — so young that some people's age becomes Minus and they disappear.
(iii) Because Wonka-Vite is too strong, Mr Wonka now wants a new thing to 'make people old… old, older, oldest'.

Answer: (i) (b) an inventor. (ii) (b) younger. (iii) (b) older.

Q2 Can anyone's age be a minus number? What does "minus 87" mean?

SOLUTION

In real life no one's age can be a minus number — age begins at zero, at birth.
In the story it is imaginary: Wonka-Vite makes a person so young that their age drops below zero.
'Minus 87' means the person has become minus eighty-seven years old, so he has disappeared and must wait eighty-seven years before he can come back (be born again).

Answer: No, in real life age cannot be a minus number. In the story, "minus 87" means Wonka-Vite has made a person so much younger that his age has gone eighty-seven years below zero — he has disappeared and has to wait eighty-seven years before he can come back.

Q3 Mr Wonka begins by asking himself two questions. What are they? (i) What is _____? (ii) What lives _____?

SOLUTION

As the ideas began to come, Mr Wonka cried, ‘What is the oldest living thing in the world? What lives longer than anything else?’

Answer: (i) What is the oldest living thing in the world? (ii) What lives longer than anything else?

Exercise 7.2 — Working with the Text

Q1 (i) What trees does Mr Wonka mention? Which tree does he say lives the longest? (ii) How long does this tree live? Where can you find it?

SOLUTION

(i) Mr Wonka mentions the Douglas fir, the oak, the cedar and the Bristlecone pine. He says the Bristlecone pine lives the longest.
(ii) The Bristlecone pine can live for over 4000 years. It grows upon the slopes of Wheeler Peak in Nevada, U.S.A.

Answer: (i) Mr Wonka mentions the Douglas fir, the oak, the cedar and the Bristlecone pine; he says the Bristlecone pine lives the longest. (ii) The Bristlecone pine lives for over 4000 years, and it can be found on the slopes of Wheeler Peak in Nevada, U.S.A.

Q2 How many of the oldest living things can you remember from Mr Wonka's list? (Don't look back at the story!) Do you think all these things really exist, or are some of them purely imaginary?

SOLUTION

Some of the items on the list are real: sap from a 4000-year-old Bristlecone pine, toe-nail clippings from a 168-year-old Russian farmer, an egg laid by a 200-year-old tortoise of the King of Tonga, the tail of a 51-year-old horse in Arabia, the whiskers of a 36-year-old cat, an old flea, the tail of a 207-year-old giant rat from Tibet, the teeth of a 97-year-old grimalkin (cat), and the knucklebones of a 700-year-old cattaloo from Peru.
Creatures like the whistle-pig, the bobolink, the skrock, the pollyfrog, the giant curlicue, the stinging slug and the venomous squerkle are made-up (imaginary) names invented by the author.

Answer: The list includes things such as sap from a 4000-year-old Bristlecone pine, toe-nail clippings of a 168-year-old Russian farmer, an egg from a 200-year-old tortoise, the tail of a 51-year-old horse, a cat's whiskers, an old flea, a giant rat's tail and the knucklebones of a cattaloo. Not all of them really exist — creatures like the whistle-pig, the skrock, the pollyfrog and the venomous squerkle are purely imaginary, invented by the author.

Q3 Why does Mr Wonka collect items from the oldest things? Do you think this is the right way to begin his invention?

SOLUTION

Mr Wonka wants to make people old, so he collects a little bit from the oldest living things, hoping their great age can be put into his new mixture.
It is not really a scientific way to begin an invention — age cannot be transferred from an animal or tree to a person — so it is imaginary and fun rather than correct.

Answer: Mr Wonka collects items from the oldest living things because he wants to make people old, and he believes their great age can be captured in his new mixture. This is not truly a scientific way to begin an invention — age cannot really be passed from an old tree or animal into a medicine — so it is only an imaginary, funny method.

Q4 What happens to the volunteer who swallows four drops of the new invention? What is the name of the invention?

SOLUTION

The brave twenty-year-old Oompa-Loompa volunteer swallowed four drops of the oily black liquid.

The moment he swallowed it he began wrinkling and shrivelling up all over, his hair started dropping off and his teeth started falling out, and he suddenly became an old fellow of seventy-five.

The new invention was called Vita-Wonk.

Answer: The twenty-year-old Oompa-Loompa volunteer began wrinkling and shrivelling all over the moment he swallowed the four drops — his hair dropped off, his teeth fell out, and he suddenly became an old man of seventy-five. The invention is called Vita-Wonk.

Exercise 7.3 — Working with Language

Q1 Fill in the blanks in the recipe given below with words from the box. [shred, cooker, times, tomatoes, half, onion, oil] Easy Palak-Dal. INGREDIENTS: One _____; One cup dal; Two thin green chillies; _____ a teaspoon red chilli powder; Eight small bunches of palak; Two _____; Salt to taste. Wash and cut the vegetables; _____ the palak. Put everything in a pressure _____. Let the cooker whistle three _____, then switch it off. Fry a few cumin seeds in _____ and add to the palak-dal.

SOLUTION

Read the recipe and fit each word by sense: an ingredient measured as ‘one’ (onion), ‘half a teaspoon’ of chilli powder, ‘two tomatoes’, to ‘shred’ the palak, a pressure ‘cooker’, three ‘times’ whistle, and fry cumin seeds in ‘oil’.

Answer: One onion; Half a teaspoon red chilli powder; Two tomatoes; shred the palak; pressure cooker; whistle three times; fry cumin seeds in oil.

Exercise 7.4 — Working with the Poem (Dad and the Cat and the Tree)

Q1 Why was Dad sure he wouldn't fall?

SOLUTION

Dad boasted that he was an expert climber — 'A climber like me?' — and thought rescuing the cat would be 'Child's play'.

Because he was so confident of his climbing skill, he was sure he would not fall.

Answer: Dad was sure he wouldn't fall because he was over-confident about his climbing skill. He boasted, "A climber like me? Child's play, this is!", believing that rescuing the cat would be very easy for an expert climber like him.

Q2 Which phrase in the poem expresses Dad's self-confidence best?

SOLUTION

Dad repeats 'a climber like me', showing how proud he is of his own ability.

Answer: The phrase "A climber like me?" (also repeated as "To a climber like me!") best expresses Dad's self-confidence.

Q3 Describe Plan A and its consequences.

SOLUTION

In Plan A, Dad got out the ladder from the garden shed and set it against the tree to climb up and rescue the cat.

But the ladder slipped and Dad landed in the flower bed.

Answer: In Plan A, Dad got the ladder out of the garden shed to climb up the tree and rescue the cat. But the ladder slipped and Dad fell down, landing in the flower bed.

Q4 Plan C was a success. What went wrong then?

SOLUTION

In Plan C, Dad climbed up high on the garden wall and this time he did not fall.

He then gave a great leap and landed flat in the crook of the tree-trunk — right on the cat.

The frightened cat gave a yell and sprang to the ground, safe and sound, while Dad was left stuck up the tree.

Answer: In Plan C, Dad climbed onto the garden wall without falling, then leaped and landed right on the cat in the crook of the tree-trunk. The cat gave a yell and sprang safely to the ground — but poor Dad was now left stuck up the tree himself.

Q5 The cat was very happy to be on the ground. Pick out the phrase used to express this idea.

SOLUTION

After springing to the ground, the cat was described as ‘Pleased as Punch to be / Safe and sound.’

Answer: The phrase is “Pleased as Punch to be safe and sound.”

Q6 Describe the Cat and Dad situation in the beginning and at the end of the poem.

SOLUTION

In the beginning, the cat was stuck up in the tree and Dad was safely on the ground, boasting that he would easily rescue it.

At the end, the situation is completely reversed: the cat is safe on the ground, smiling and smug, while poor old Dad is left stuck up the tree.

Answer: In the beginning, the cat was stuck up in the tree while Dad stood safely on the ground, sure he could rescue it easily. At the end the situation is reversed — the cat is happily back on the ground, smiling and smug, and it is poor old Dad who is now stuck up the tree.

Q7 Why and when did Dad say each of the following? (i) Fall? (ii) Never mind (iii) Funny joke (iv) Rubbish

SOLUTION

(i) ‘Fall?’ — Dad said this scornfully when Mum warned him “For goodness’ sake don’t fall!”; he thought it was impossible for a climber like him to fall.

(ii) ‘Never mind’ — he said this after the ladder slipped and he fell into the flower bed (Plan A failed), brushing off the dirt and staying cheerful.

(iii) ‘Funny joke’ — he said this when Mum warned “Don’t fall again, O.K.?” before Plan B; he treated her warning as a joke.

(iv) ‘Rubbish’ — he said this after the branch broke and he fell again (Plan B failed) and Mum said “You’ll break your neck!”; he dismissed her worry and got ready for Plan C.

Answer: (i) “Fall?” — said scornfully when Mum told him not to fall; he thought a climber like him could never fall. (ii) “Never mind” — said after the ladder slipped and he fell into the flower bed, brushing off the dirt. (iii) “Funny joke” — said when Mum warned him not to fall again before Plan B; he laughed off her warning. (iv) “Rubbish” — said after the branch broke and he fell a second time and Mum feared he’d break his neck; he brushed her worry aside and moved on to Plan C.

Exercise 7.5 — Working with the Poem (Garden Snake)

Q1 Answer the following questions. (i) Pick out the line that suggests that the child is afraid of snakes. (ii) Which line shows a complete change of the child's attitude towards snakes? Read it aloud. (iii) "But mother says that kind is good…" What is mother referring to?

SOLUTION

(i) The very first line shows the child's fear of snakes.
(ii) By the end the child no longer runs away but calmly watches the snake, showing a complete change of attitude.
(iii) The mother is referring to the harmless garden snake, which is good because it eats up insects.

Answer: (i) "I saw a snake and ran away…" shows the child is afraid of snakes. (ii) "I'll stand aside and watch him pass" shows the complete change in the child's attitude. (iii) By "that kind" mother is referring to the harmless garden snake, which is good because it eats up insects.

Q2 Find the word that refers to the snake's movements in the grass.

SOLUTION

The poem says 'when he wiggles in the grass', so the word for the snake's movement is 'wiggles'.

Answer: The word is "wiggles" ("when he wiggles in the grass").

Q3 There are four pairs of rhyming words in the poem. Say them aloud.

SOLUTION

Reading the line-endings in pairs gives the rhymes: away–say, good–food, grass–pass, mistake–snake.

Answer: The four pairs of rhyming words are: away – say; good – food; grass – pass; mistake – snake.

Q4 Can you recall the word used for a cobra's long sharp teeth? Where did you come across this word first?

SOLUTION

A cobra's long sharp teeth are called 'fangs'.
This word was first met earlier in the textbook, in the poem/lesson about the cobra ('Meadow Surprises' unit / the cobra piece "Chivvy" context) — recall the earlier chapter where the cobra's fangs were mentioned.

Answer: The word used for a cobra's long sharp teeth is "fangs." This word was first come across earlier in the textbook, in the lesson dealing with the cobra.