

**YEAR 5**

Comprehension: The Last of the Summer

Ten questions on the passage below, in the style of the CSSE English paper. Write your answers in full sentences and watch the marks: a three mark question wants three separate things, not one thing said three ways. Spend about thirty minutes on this.

Nora is twelve. Her family have spent every August at the same rented cottage by the sea for as long as she can remember. This is the last afternoon of the last summer they will come.

- 1 The suitcases were already in the hall, standing in a row like people waiting to be told something. Nora had packed hers first, which was unusual, and she had done it quickly and badly, and she did not want to think
5 about why.

- She went out through the kitchen door and down the path to the beach for the last time, counting the steps as she always did. There were forty-one. There had been forty-one when she was six and had to be carried down
10 half of them, and there were forty-one now, and it seemed to her both remarkable and slightly unfair that the path had not noticed anything.

- The tide was a long way out. The wet sand held the sky in it, so that walking across it felt like walking on
15 the underside of the afternoon. She did not take her shoes off. Taking her shoes off would have been the sort of thing you do when you are coming back.

- At the rocks she stopped and looked at the pool where, at eight, she had found a crab the size of her thumbnail
20 and named it and cried when her father made her put it back. The pool was still there. It was smaller than she remembered, and there was nothing in it but weed and a crisp packet, and she stood over it for a while waiting

to feel something particular.

- 25 What she felt instead was hungry, and cross with herself for being hungry, and then, underneath that, a kind of quietness. She thought: I will remember standing here. And then she thought that deciding to remember something is probably the surest way of losing it, and she turned
- 30 round and went back up the path, and she did not count. Her mother was at the kitchen door with a tea towel. "Well?" she said. "It was fine," said Nora, and went upstairs to repack her case properly.

Section One: Comprehension

- 1 Why had Nora packed her suitcase "quickly and badly"? (lines 3 to 4) **[1 mark]**
Because she did not want to think about leaving, so she got it over with rather than doing it carefully.
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- 2 The suitcases stand "in a row like people waiting to be told something". (line 2)
(a) What kind of image is this? **[1 mark]** **A simile.**
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- 3 (b) What does it suggest about the mood in the house? **[2 marks]** **That everything is paused and uncertain; the family are waiting for something to happen or to be decided, and there is an uncomfortable stillness.**
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- 4 Nora counts the steps down to the beach. Why does she find it "both remarkable and slightly unfair" that there are still forty-one? (line 11) **[2 marks]** **Because everything has changed for her and nothing has changed about the path. It seems unfair that something so important to her has left the world completely unmarked.**
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- 5 "She did not take her shoes off. Taking her shoes off would have been the sort of thing you do when you are coming back." (lines 16 to 17)
Explain what this tells us about how Nora is feeling. **[3 marks]** **She is holding herself back from enjoying the beach because she knows it is the last time. Taking her shoes off would mean treating it as an ordinary visit, and she cannot pretend that. It is a small refusal that shows she is protecting herself from the loss.**
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- 6 Explain what you think the word **quietness** means as it is used here. (lines 26 to 27) **[1 mark]** **A calm, settled feeling inside her rather than an absence of noise; a kind of acceptance.**
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- 7 Write down three things that show Nora is trying not to feel too much. **[3 marks]**
Any three of: she packs quickly and badly rather than thinking about it; she keeps her shoes on; she says only "It was fine" to her mother; she goes back up without counting; she is cross with herself for feeling hungry.
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- 8 Look at the rock pool. Why does Nora stand over it "waiting to feel something particular"? (lines 23 to 24) **[2 marks]** **She expects the place to produce a strong memory or emotion because it mattered to her as a child, and she is disappointed that it does not arrive on demand.**
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- 9 "deciding to remember something is probably the surest way of losing it" (line 29)
What do you think Nora means by this? **[2 marks]** **That trying too hard to fix a moment in your memory makes you watch yourself instead of living it, so what you keep is the effort rather than the moment.**
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- 10 At the end Nora says only "It was fine", and then goes and repacks her case properly.
What do these two actions together tell us about her? **[3 marks]** **That she will not put her feelings into words, but she has settled something inside herself. Repacking carefully is her way of accepting that they are leaving; the short answer to her mother shows she would rather deal with it privately than be asked about it.**
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