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You have 45 minutes to complete this reading test.

Spend 10 minutes reading the story and the questions.

You can mark the story by underlining words and phrases.

Do not fill in any of the answers during this time.

After the 10 minutes is over, you will have 35 minutes to answer the questions.

YOU MAY WRITE IN EITHER INK OR PENCIL

Passage taken from 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed
5 nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no
10 wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often "came down" handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

15 Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?" No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blind men's dogs
20 doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, "No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!"

But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call "nuts" to Scrooge.

25 Once upon a time--of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve--old Scrooge sat busy in his counting house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already-- it had not
30 been light all day--and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping
35 down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

Comprehension Questions

1. In line 4, why do you think Dickens uses the phrase 'solitary as an oyster' when describing Scrooge?

(2 marks)

2. In lines 4-8, what aspect of Scrooge's character does Dickens emphasise the most?

(1 mark)

3. In paragraph 2, what phrase indicates that pleading was unlikely to move Scrooge?

(2 marks)

4. Look at paragraph 3. How do people act around Scrooge?

(2 marks)

5. In paragraph 3, why do the dogs act as they do?

(2 marks)

6. Which two words from the list best describe Scrooge?

sympathetic
friendless
compassionate
generous
excitable
unsociable

(i) _____

(ii) _____

(2 marks)

7. What do the following words mean?

tight-fisted (line 1) _____

(2 marks)

covetous (line 2) _____

(2 marks)

implored (line 16) _____

(2 marks)

Sample Answers

1. To emphasise how Scrooge has cut himself off from society and is enclosed in his own shell.
2. His coldness.
3. "no pelting rain less open to entreaty"
4. They avoid him.
5. Because they sense that he is evil.
6. (i) friendless
(ii) unsociable
7. stingy
avaricious
begged