

Reading SAT Practice Test 20

U.S. and World Literature Passage, Higher Text Complexity

The following passage from a literary text is of higher complexity, although some aspects of the passage are less challenging than others

This passage is adapted from Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome*, originally published in 1911. Mattie Silver is Ethan's household employee.

Mattie Silver had lived under Ethan's roof for a year, and from early morning till they met at supper he had frequent chances of seeing her; but no moments in her company were comparable to those when, her arm in his, and her light step flying to keep time with his long stride, they walked back through the night to the farm. He had taken to the girl from the first day, when he had driven over to the Flats to meet her, and she had smiled and waved to him from the train, crying out, "You must be Ethan!" as she jumped down with her bundles, while he reflected, looking over her slight person: "She don't look much on housework, but she ain't a fretter, anyhow." But it was not only that the coming to his house of a bit of hopeful young life was like the lighting of a fire on a cold hearth. The girl was more than the bright serviceable creature he had thought her. She had an eye to see and an ear to hear: he could show her things and tell her things, and taste the bliss of feeling that all he imparted left long reverberations and echoes he could wake at will.

It was during their night walks back to the farm that he felt most intensely the sweetness of this communion. He had always been more sensitive than the people about him to the appeal of natural beauty. His unfinished studies had given form to this sensibility and even in his unhappiest moments

25 field and sky spoke to him with a deep and powerful  
persuasion. But hitherto the emotion had remained in him as  
a silent ache, veiling with sadness the beauty that evoked it. He  
did not even know whether any one else in the world felt as he  
30 did, or whether he was the sole victim of this mournful  
privilege. Then he learned that one other spirit had trembled  
with the same touch of wonder: that at his side, living under  
his roof and eating his bread, was a creature to whom he could  
say: "That's Orion down yonder; the big fellow to the right is  
Aldebaran, and the bunch of little ones—like bees swarming—  
35 they're the Pleiades . . ." or whom he could hold entranced  
before a ledge of granite thrusting up through the fern while  
he unrolled the huge panorama of the ice age, and the long  
dim stretches of succeeding time. The fact that admiration for  
his learning mingled with Mattie's wonder at what he taught  
40 was not the least part of his pleasure. And there were other  
sensations, less definable but more exquisite, which drew them  
together with a shock of silent joy: the cold red of sunset  
behind winter hills, the flight of cloud-flocks over slopes of  
golden stubble, or the intensely blue shadows of hemlocks on  
45 sunlit snow. When she said to him once: "It looks just as if it  
was painted!" it seemed to Ethan that the art of definition  
could go no farther, and that words had at last been found to  
utter his secret soul. . . .

As he stood in the darkness outside the church these  
50 memories came back with the poignancy of vanished  
things. Watching Mattie whirl down the floor from hand  
to hand he wondered how he could ever have thought that  
his dull talk interested her. To him, who was never gay but  
in her presence, her gaiety seemed plain proof of  
55 indifference. The face she lifted to her dancers was the  
same which, when she saw him, always looked like a  
window that has caught the sunset. He even noticed two or  
three gestures which, in his fatuity, he had thought she  
kept for him: a way of throwing her head back when she  
60 was amused, as if to taste her laugh before she let it out,  
and a trick of sinking her lids slowly when anything  
charmed or moved her.

### Question 1

Over the course of the passage, the main focus of the narrative shifts from the

- A) reservations a character has about a person he has just met to a growing appreciation that character has of the person's worth.
- B) ambivalence a character feels about his sensitive nature to the character's recognition of the advantages of having profound emotions.
- C) intensity of feeling a character has for another person to the character's concern that that intensity is not reciprocated.
- D) value a character attaches to the wonders of the natural world to a rejection of that sort of beauty in favor of human artistry.

## Question 2

In the context of the passage, the author's use of the phrase "her light step flying to keep time with his long stride" (lines 4-5) is primarily meant to convey the idea that

- A) Ethan and Mattie share a powerful enthusiasm.
- B) Mattie strives to match the speed at which Ethan works.
- C) Mattie and Ethan playfully compete with each other.
- D) Ethan walks at a pace that frustrates Mattie.

## Question 3

The description in the first paragraph indicates that what Ethan values most about Mattie is her

- A) fitness for farm labor.
- B) vivacious youth.
- C) receptive nature.
- D) freedom from worry.

## Question 4

Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A) Lines 1-6 ("Mattie . . . farm")
- B) Lines 6-12 ("He had . . . anyhow")
- C) Lines 12-14 ("But it . . . hearth")
- D) Lines 15-19 ("She had . . . will")

## Question 5

The author includes the descriptions of the sunset, the clouds, and the hemlock shadows (lines 42-45) primarily to

- A) suggest the peacefulness of the natural world.
- B) emphasize the acuteness of two characters' sensations.
- C) foreshadow the declining fortunes of two characters.
- D) offer a sense of how fleeting time can be.