

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

ELA March 30 - April 6, 2018

8th GRADE

Spring Break

*Worth 100 points 4

- A) Unpack The Task
- B) G.R.O.S.A.
- C) Identify distractor and best answer choice

Directions

Read this article. Then answer questions 29 through 35.

Fun 101 (aka How to Escape Boredom)

by Aaron Millar

16 Confession Time: I once had a class that was so boring I fell asleep—head flat on
desk—completely out! I’m not proud of it and I’m sure it didn’t help my grade, but it’s not
too uncommon. After all, there’s nothing more thumb-twiddle tedious than being stuck in
5 a boring class. Every second takes an eternity to tick by. You begin to wish you had your
cell phone and could at least send off a few texts.

Boredom is the enemy of fun. If fun is pulling a 360 air on your mountain bike,¹
boredom is a flat tire. If fun is the big drop of a roller coaster, boredom is waiting in line.
If we want to figure out the future of fun, we have to first figure out how to end boredom.
Imagine that: a world where each second is interesting and nothing is dull. That sounds
10 like science fiction, but new psychological research hints that being bored—even in
class—may one day be a thing of the past.

Boredom in Society

The next time your parents complain when you say you’re bored, you might remind
them that you’re not alone. A recent survey of American kids revealed that 91 percent
experience boredom. In fact, adolescence is considered a peak period for the malady.
15 One study showed that while roughly one in three teenagers were bored at school, less
than one in 20 adults were bored at work. That’s more serious than it sounds for teens.
Chronic boredom is associated with a range of mental and social problems, including drug
and alcohol abuse . . . definitely not fun!

Unfortunately, the problem seems to be getting worse. Peter Stromberg, professor of
20 anthropology at the University of Tulsa and author of *Caught in Play: How Entertainment
Works on You*, believes that the way we have fun in modern society sets us up to become
bored. “If you’re driving fast on the highway and you suddenly have to slow down to
30 miles per hour, it feels like you’re going about two. That’s because our brains adapt
really quickly to certain levels of stimulation—in this case, speed. But entertainment
25 systems do the same thing: We get used to the media providing levels of highly emotional
stimulation, and when we’re not getting them we feel bored.” As our society develops
increasingly sophisticated ways of keeping us entertained, we may discover that rather

¹ pulling a 360 air on your mountain bike: a mountain biking trick where the rider rotates
the mountain bike in a complete circle while airborne

GO ON

than eliminating boredom, we're amplifying it. Luckily, new research is hinting at a way that we can combat the trend.

So What Is Boredom?

- 30 There's no doubting it when you feel it, but defining what boredom is and how it's caused has proven tricky for scientists to pin down. A longing for something but not knowing what it is or how to get it; feeling like there's no point in doing anything; a sense of frustration, laziness, and maybe even depression are all aspects of being bored. They don't, however, describe what's going on in our brains to cause the feelings.
- 35 Professor John D. Eastwood of the University of York in Ontario decided to do something about that. Pooling all existing research on the subject, he and his team developed a new theory of boredom, which links it to the brain's attention system—literally the part of the brain that we use to focus.

- 40 Here's how it works: Imagine your brain is a spaceship. You have a high-tech control panel and each touch command controls a specific system on the ship. The attention system is very important because it's like the starship *Enterprise's* "tractor beam"—the ray of energy that extends outward from the ship pulling objects toward it like a magnet. Just like that tractor beam, anything the attention system in your brain locks onto will be automatically sucked up into your conscious awareness—it might be a bird outside the
- 45 window, the smell of lunch drifting down from the cafeteria, or even someone sleeping in the back of the class (Not me!).

- The problem is that your attention system doesn't like being told what to do. It wants to focus on stuff that you find fun and interesting. For the parts of school that you enjoy, this isn't a problem: Your tractor beam naturally and effortlessly will suck up all the
- 50 information you need. But for those classes that don't interest you, or present too much (or too little) challenge, the story is very different. In those situations, you're going to have to spend a lot of effort constantly redirecting that tractor beam to focus on things it would rather ignore. And the effort is going to wear you out. Eastwood describes it as "wanting, but being unable, to engage in a satisfying activity." It's like a block in the system. And it's
- 55 the awareness of that block (your mind won't stop wandering; you can't concentrate) coupled with a sense that the environment is to blame (math is pointless; this teacher is so boring) that leads to feelings of boredom.

The End of Boredom

- When we're bored we blame the world around us, but Eastwood's theory challenges this assumption: Boredom doesn't exist out there; it exists in here—inside your brain.
- 60 What that means is—hard as it may be to hear—boring lessons aren't *only* the fault of your teacher or the subject, they're *your* fault too. Each of us has the ability to make *every* situation interesting; all we need to do is change the way we look at it, and our attention system—our tractor beam—will do the rest.

65 Stromberg says, "We live in a society where there is a constant ratcheting-up of the level of entertainment, and boredom is a consequence of that." In this view the harder we try to constantly entertain ourselves, the more bored we're likely to become. But Eastwood's theory gives us a way out. The future of fun is not only to be found in the latest games, gadgets, and gizmos; it's found inside of us too. I just wish I knew that before I fell asleep in class . . .

GO ON

29

Which words from the article provide the best clue to the meaning of the word “tedious” in line 3?

- A “Confession Time” (line 1)
- B “head flat on desk” (lines 1 and 2)
- C “takes an eternity to tick by” (line 4)
- D “You begin to wish you had your cell phone” (lines 4 and 5)

30

Read this sentence from line 6 of the article.

Boredom is the enemy of fun.

Which quotation best helps the reader understand this sentence?

- A “If fun is the big drop of a roller coaster, boredom is waiting in line.” (line 7)
- B “If we want to figure out the future of fun, we have to first figure out how to end boredom.” (line 8)
- C “Imagine that: a world where each second is interesting and nothing is dull.” (line 9)
- D “That sounds like science fiction, but new psychological research hints that being bored—even in class—may one day be a thing of the past.” (lines 9 through 11)

31

Lines 19 through 26 connect modern entertainment to boredom by suggesting that it causes us to

- A want more challenging games to play
- B misunderstand the role of fun in our lives
- C develop expectations for high levels of excitement
- D avoid adapting to new technological innovations

32 How does Professor Eastwood's work differ from previous research?

- A by attempting to create a new definition for boredom
- B by failing to look into a connection to brain activity
- C by focusing on the human attention system
- D by using data from earlier studies on boredom

33 Read lines 9 through 11 of the article.

That sounds like science fiction, but new psychological research hints that being bored—even in class—may one day be a thing of the past.

Which quotation provides the best evidence to support this claim?

- A "... less than one in 20 adults were bored at work." (lines 15 and 16)
- B "... our brains adapt really quickly to certain levels of stimulation . . ." (lines 23 and 24)
- C "... anything the attention system in your brain locks onto will be automatically sucked up into your conscious awareness . . ." (lines 43 and 44)
- D "Each of us has the ability to make *every* situation interesting; all we need to do is change the way we look at it . . ." (lines 61 and 62)

34 The final sentence in lines 68 and 69 best contributes to the article by

- A suggesting that the author often fell asleep in classes
- B connecting the information to the incident described at the beginning
- C encouraging students to stay awake and avoid boredom in class
- D emphasizing that teenagers are often more bored than other groups

GO ON

Which sentence states a central idea that is supported throughout the article?

- A Modern entertainment decreases boredom.
- B Boredom is present in teenagers more than in adults.
- C Everyone experiences boredom occasionally.
- D People have the ability to control their boredom.

Directions

Read this story. Then answer questions 46 and 47.

It is 1866 and Malachy, only 13 years old, has been hired to help build the Pacific Railroad. In this excerpt, he describes his first train ride as he heads to Cisco, California, where his work will begin.

Excerpt from *Tracks*

by Diane Lee Wilson

The man in Sacramento had said it was ninety-two miles out to the little mountain town of Cisco. Hard to believe we were going to travel that many miles in less than a day! Like most of the others in the car, I perched at the edge of my seat once we got going, because I had one cheek pressed flat to the window to see what was coming.

5 Brina, on the other hand, was fighting a losing battle to stay awake and had balanced her jaw on my knee. She blinked and yawned, her pink tongue curling around her muzzle like a wet leaf. Occasionally she looked up at me for reassurance, then blinked some more. Finally giving in, she sank to the floor and curled up at my feet, her chin secure on my boot. I stroked her fur absently, entranced by the ever-changing spectacle framed within
10 my window.

For a while the rushing scenery was an inviting expanse of grass-covered valley baked to an autumnal gold, and we rolled along smoothly. But bit by bit my insides shifted. An unseen force pushed me back into my seat as the locomotive began chugging with more determination. It seemed we were climbing away from the earth.

15 I felt like a genie on a flying carpet then, because as we picked up speed we traveled above the land and below it, skirting over gullies and tunneling through solid rock. The man-made wonders piled one upon the other, and between each town lay yet another: a chiseled passage so narrow you held your breath until the car squeezed through or a shallow gorge dammed with the soil of ten thousand wheelbarrows. But surpassing them
20 all were the trestles—man alive, the trestles! Wildly impossible, they were. Time and again we trusted our lives to a scaffold of toothpicks and this metal monster rumbling across them. The trestle at Newcastle, in particular, sent some children screeching in wide-eyed terror. Some of the women even, catching sight of the ambitious aerial feat, shut their eyes and moved their lips in prayer. There were fools among us, of course, who looked down
25 and marveled at the height, at the sheer audacity of it all. Me? I was curious, as usual, but when my hesitant peek shot down, down, and down, meeting nothing but air, I settled back against my seat and left the looking to others.

GO ON

The scenery continued to change its costumes. It proceeded from grassland to hill and valley, then to bolder hills, and soon enough I saw this was a hard land we were entering,
30 a world of coarse-cut mountains and rock-strewn drop-offs. Vistas and gulches. A world of up and down, and these twin iron rails we clung to had been hammered onto the earth's backbone wherever they could fit without falling off into a gulley or rockslide or rushing river.

Twists and turns slowed our progress but at each new climb the engine strained to pull
35 us up the heights, and I felt myself straining with it. Seemed that if I didn't, we might lose our momentum and go whooshing backward all the way to Sacramento. There were times when it felt like I was a child hanging at the tippy top of a swing, at that one moment when you're suspended face-first in the air and hovering without wings. My insides sort of hung in the air like that, expectant, and it was tiring work to make sure we didn't fall
40 back. Before long, I was as exhausted as Brina, even though she wasn't working as hard as I was to keep the train going and, in fact, slept soundly.

We were well into the mountains now, and the spectacular, brilliantly painted scenery on both sides of the train kept everyone in high spirits. Chatter crowded the car. The smaller ones, ignoring the knees of strangers even, ran from window to window to ooh
45 and aah at the splendors. Since I was no child, I only turned my head to look out the opposite windows as well as my own, and kept my oohs and aahs to myself.

I'd not been much of a student in the time that I'd gone to school, and I'd certainly never taken to poetry, but in gazing at the outsize beauty spread in every direction I got an inkling of what drove a man to speak in perfumed words.

Brina lifted her head off my boot at that moment to give me a solemn look, and I felt
50 my cheeks grow hot. She couldn't know my thoughts, of course, but still I put a stopper on that bottle.

We braked to a halt at several towns on our climb, more passengers getting off than getting on. Shortly thereafter we'd lurch forward and return to chugging toward the skies.
55 Bits of ash and the occasional orange ember swept past the windows.

After a while, the rumble and sway got to swishing stomachs, at least it did mine, and I gritted my teeth against the queasiness fingering my throat. Luckily the mountain air delivered a bracing tonic. Clean and cold, like an ice shaving on your tongue, it was laced with the astringent scent of pine trees. Welcome to the wilderness, the wind hailed,
60 though a keen ear would have heeded the scornful laugh underlying its whistle.

- 46 What impact does the statement “I felt like a genie on a flying carpet” (line 15) have on the story? Use two details from the story to support your response.

GO ON

47

In "Excerpt from *Tracks*," how does the narrator's point of view create wonder? Use two details from the story to support your response.

GO ON

Directions

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Read this story. Then answer questions 52 and 53.

The Pod

by Maureen Crane Wartski

Couldn't Pete talk about anything but *fish*?

Jesse Waring tried to block his cousin's voice, but there was no escape.

"Dolphins aren't fish, they're mammals," Pete was lecturing. "They look big and tough, but they can get stressed or scared, like the stranded dolphin we rescued . . ."

5 "Jesse?" His mother was standing beside him, her eyes full of concern. His parents were always worrying about him these days, Jesse thought, irritably, and the other relatives were just as bad. *Poor Jesse, it's a shame about the accident. He used to be a great athlete . . .* Even when they didn't talk to him, he could feel their pitying thoughts.

10 "Can you go to the store for me?" his mother was saying. "We've run out of milk. That is," she added quickly, "if you're not too tired . . ."

" . . . And I want to make sure to visit the Cape Cod Stranding Network," Pete was droning on. "They have a hotline, and they do great work. . ."

Yada, yada, yada. "Sure, Mom," Jesse said. *Anything to get away from Pete's lectures and all these pitying eyes.*

15 He snatched up car keys from the table in the entryway, grabbing his windbreaker as he limped out the door. Once outside, he wished he'd brought his parka—the wind had an icy sting—but he wasn't going back into the house.

20 He'd always enjoyed the annual Waring family reunion, when cousins, uncles and aunts from all over the country got together and rented a house on New England's Cape Cod, but this March was different. It was the first time the clan had gathered since the accident.

Jesse didn't want to think about how a man driving a pickup had jumped a red light, slamming into his car and fracturing his legs. Until then Jesse had been the star of the school soccer team, certain of an athletic scholarship.

25 "Not anymore," he muttered, then frowned as he realized he'd passed the store. Well, OK, there was a convenience store about 30 miles away, and the drive would give him some needed alone time.

At first, the silence was great.

30 But as Jesse drove on the road that wound beside the ocean, he kept thinking how his future had been smashed along with his legs. Pep talks that people gave him made it worse. He was a cripple, and he knew it. These days Jesse always felt as if there was a tight, hard knot in his chest.

35 On impulse, he turned the wheel, pulling into an empty parking lot that faced the water. He got out and limped down some stairs. Except for screeching seagulls and a few scattered rocks, the beach was deserted.

Suddenly, Jesse tensed. *That rock . . . did it move?* He took a step closer and saw that it was no rock.

40 The dolphin wasn't very big, not even four feet long. When Jesse hobbled over, the big fish . . . *mammal*, according to Pete . . . rolled an eye at him. How long had it been there? It was breathing, but its sides were heaving painfully.

Fragments of Pete's endless monologue came back to him. His cousin had said that a dolphin's rib structure wasn't built to protect it on land. The body weight of this creature was slowly compressing its vital organs, and if it didn't get back into the water soon, it could die.

45 It was going to low tide, and the waves seemed far away. The best thing to do was to call Pete, who would know what to do. Jesse reached for his cell phone.

It wasn't there. He'd left it in the pocket of his parka! He could drive home and get Pete, but that would mean leaving the dolphin. Would it be alive when he got back? He knew nothing about this creature except that it was helpless.

50 The dolphin's eye rolled again, and Jesse felt a sudden jolt of empathy.

It looked as scared as he had felt when they'd wheeled him into the emergency room that afternoon.

"Hey, Bud . . ." Jesse knelt down beside the dolphin. "OK, I can't just leave you to die. But how do I get you back into the water?"

55 Even if he managed to drag this creature that weighed—what? maybe 75 pounds? back to the water, the coarse sand might damage its skin. Jesse looked helplessly toward the gray ocean and was surprised to see dark shapes arcing out of the waves. A *pod*—Pete's word—of dolphins was out there.

60 "I think your family's waiting for you, Bud." Carefully, Jesse reached out and patted the dolphin. Was it his imagination that his touch made the dolphin calmer?

Jesse didn't waste time thinking about that. He was trying to remember what Pete had said about how, when he'd helped rescue a stranded dolphin, they had put the creature on a sort of blanket sling and carried that contraption down to the water. Well, he didn't have a blanket handy, so his windbreaker would have to do.

65 Carefully, Jesse scooped a hollow in the soft sand under the dolphin's head, then eased part of the windbreaker under it. He was streaming with sweat by the time he'd managed to maneuver as much of the dolphin as possible onto its makeshift "blanket," then began to drag the dolphin toward the water.

70 Twice, his legs buckled under him tumbling him backward onto the sand, but he kept going until water was lapping around his ankles.

"Almost there, Bud," Jesse gritted.

As Jesse waded knee-deep into the water, the dolphin made some kind of noise and then began to swim.

75 "Woo hoo!" Jesse yelled, then yelped in dismay. The dolphin was swimming back toward the shore.

What was wrong with the crazy creature? Pete's voice began to drone in Jesse's mind again, recounting his own dolphin rescue: *"The dolphin was disoriented. It kept heading for the shore. We had to guide it back into the deep water . . ."*

80 Jesse waded deeper, past the breakers. Icy waves broke against him as he tried to head off the young dolphin. When he'd finally managed that, it wouldn't turn. He wished he had paid more attention to Pete's lecture, but wishing never helped.

Waves sent freezing spumes into his face. "Bud, you've got to save yourself," Jesse gritted through chattering teeth. "Nobody's going to do it for you. If you give up, you're finished . . ."

85 Suddenly, as if it had at last understood, the young dolphin turned toward deeper water and began to swim toward the pod. Waiting dolphins arced nearer as if in welcome, and watching them, Jesse thought of his own family. They'd be worried because he'd been gone so long.

My pod, he thought.

90 He was freezing as he limped back to his car, but he was grinning, and he was happier than he'd been in a long while. He was going to drive to the nearest store and call Pete, who would probably contact that Cape Cod Stranding Network hotline that he'd been talking about. The CCSN would make sure Bud didn't strand again.

"But that's not going to happen anyway," Jesse said aloud.

95 He had a feeling that the young dolphin was finally on the right track.

In your response, be sure to

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- This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.