

SAT Reading Practice

This passage is adapted from MacDonald Harris, *The Balloonist*. ©2011 by The Estate of Donald Heiney. During the summer of 1897, the narrator of this story, a fictional Swedish scientist, has set out for the North Pole in a hydrogen-powered balloon.

My emotions are complicated and not readily verifiable. I feel a vast yearning that is simultaneously a pleasure and a pain. I am certain
Line of the consummation of this yearning, but I don't
5 know yet what form it will take, since I do not understand quite what it is that the yearning desires. For the first time there is borne in upon me the full truth of what I myself said to the doctor only an hour ago: that my motives in this undertaking are not
10 entirely clear. For years, for a lifetime, the machinery of my destiny has worked in secret to prepare for this moment; its clockwork has moved exactly toward this time and place and no other. Rising slowly from the earth that bore me and gave me sustenance, I am
15 carried helplessly toward an uninhabited and hostile, or at best indifferent, part of the earth, littered with the bones of explorers and the wrecks of ships, frozen supply caches, messages scrawled with chilled fingers and hidden in cairns that no eye will ever see.
20 Nobody has succeeded in this thing, and many have died. Yet in freely willing this enterprise, in choosing this moment and no other when the south wind will carry me exactly northward at a velocity of eight knots, I have converted the machinery of my
25 fate into the servant of my will. All this I understand, as I understand each detail of the technique by which this is carried out. What I don't understand is why I am so intent on going to this particular place. Who wants the North Pole! What good is it! Can you eat
30 it? Will it carry you from Gothenburg to Malmö like a railway? The Danish ministers have declared from their pulpits that participation in polar expeditions is beneficial to the soul's eternal well-being, or so I read in a newspaper. It isn't clear how this doctrine is to
35 be interpreted, except that the Pole is something difficult or impossible to attain which must nevertheless be sought for, because man is

condemned to seek out and know everything whether or not the knowledge gives him pleasure. In
40 short, it is the same unthinking lust for knowledge that drove our First Parents out of the garden.

And suppose you were to find it in spite of all, this wonderful place that everybody is so anxious to stand on! *What* would you find? Exactly nothing.
45 A point precisely identical to all the others in a completely featureless wasteland stretching around it for hundreds of miles. It is an abstraction, a mathematical fiction. No one but a Swedish madman could take the slightest interest in it. Here I am. The
50 wind is still from the south, bearing us steadily northward at the speed of a trotting dog. Behind us, perhaps forever, lie the Cities of Men with their teacups and their brass bedsteads. I am going forth of my own volition to join the ghosts of Bering and
55 poor Franklin, of frozen De Long and his men. What I am on the brink of knowing, I now see, is not an ephemeral mathematical spot but myself. The doctor was right, even though I dislike him. Fundamentally I am a dangerous madman, and what
60 I do is both a challenge to my egotism and a surrender to it.

1. Over the course of the passage, the narrator's attitude shifts from

- A)** fear about the expedition to excitement about it.
- B)** doubt about his abilities to have confidence in them.
- C)** uncertainty of his motives to recognition of them.
- D)** disdain for the North Pole to appreciation of it.

2. Which choice best describes the narrator's view of his expedition to the North Pole?

- A)** Immoral but inevitable
- B)** Absurd but necessary
- C)** Socially beneficial but misunderstood
- D)** Scientifically important but hazardous

3. The question the narrator asks in lines 30-31 ("Will it . . . railway") most nearly implies that

- A)** balloons will never replace other modes of transportation.
- B)** the North Pole is farther away than the cities usually reached by train.
- C)** people often travel from one city to another without considering the implications.
- D)** reaching the North Pole has no foreseeable benefit to humanity.

1. Students first read the prompt and answer questions with a 5-minute timer.
2. Don't go over the answers to questions, but have students grade themselves on the following:
 - a. Did you finish the questions in time?
 - b. Did you experience unconscious reading? (eyes move but no information)
 - c. Did you read the intro preamble for context clues?
 - d. Did you check from time to time for understanding?
 - e. Did you answer the questions with full confidence?
 - f. Did you have distracting thoughts?
 - g. Were you distracted by other people or things in the room?
3. Try to read again, but write a brief summary for every 10 lines. Then answer questions.
Take 10 minutes
4. Grade your questions: C, B, D

Note that these questions are related to each other. Like on the SATs, the questions may be interrelated. If you know the answer to one, it can help you with others.

Add these items to your logs:

On General Strategy Log:

Invest Time in Points	You can spend 5 minutes getting no points or 10 minutes getting 3 points. Focus on implementing specific skills that may require more time, but can get you points
I'm So Excited	I cannot wait to answer questions and read passages. Get into an excited mindset.

On the Reading Strategy Log

Summarize Chunks	Promote active reading by stopping to summarize every paragraph, or every 10 lines, or 5 lines, etc. Too easy to fall into passive reading.
Read Context at the Top	Reading the little section at the beginning takes only a few seconds, but can give you a big boost in understanding what you're reading.
Before & After	For questions like "lines 31-32..." read 3 lines before and 3 lines after for context.