Year 6 reading comprehension: passage pack

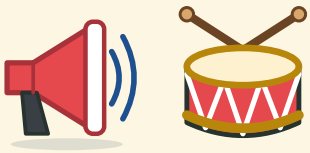
English · Reading comprehension
Level: Easy, medium and hard

Student: _____ Date: _____

Instructions
- Read each text first. There are 31 questions. Read each one carefully.
- Circle the best answer. Look back at the text to find the words that tell you.
- A grown-up can read the text aloud — that's fine.
- The answers are at the end. Check them together when you have finished.

Questions

Read this, then answer questions 1–3.



How We Hear

Sound is made when something shakes, and the shaking travels through the air as waves. Your ear catches these waves and turns them into messages for your brain. First, the funnel-shaped outer ear collects the waves and sends them down a short tunnel. At the end of the tunnel the waves hit the eardrum, a thin skin that shakes like the top of a drum. The shaking moves three tiny bones in the middle ear, the smallest bones in your body. The smallest of them, the stirrup, is only about 3 millimetres long. The bones make the shaking stronger and pass it on to the inner ear. There the waves reach the cochlea, a tube curled like a snail shell and filled with fluid. Thousands of tiny hairs inside the cochlea move in the fluid, and each hair sends a signal along a nerve to the brain. Young people can hear sounds from about 20 shakes a second, which is a deep rumble, to about 20 000 shakes a second, which is a very high squeak. Many older adults cannot hear the highest sounds, because some of the tiny hairs wear out over time.

1. A child’s eardrum is torn and cannot shake properly. What is most likely to happen?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** The child would be able to hear only very high squeaks.
- ○ **B** The outer ear would stop collecting waves.
- ○ **C** Less of the shaking would reach the three tiny bones.
- ○ **D** The cochlea would stop having fluid in it.

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2. Why can many older adults not hear the highest sounds?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** Some of the tiny hairs wear out over time.
- ○ **B** The cochlea has filled with too much fluid.
- ○ **C** The eardrum becomes too thick to shake.
- ○ **D** The three tiny bones grow too small to pass on the shaking.

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3. How many times as many shakes a second is the highest sound a young person can hear as the lowest?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** 10 000 times as many
- ○ **B** 100 times as many
- ○ **C** 19 980 times as many
- ○ **D** 1000 times as many

Read this, then answer questions 4–6.



The Life of a Monarch Butterfly

A monarch butterfly begins life as a tiny egg, about as big as a pinhead, stuck to the underside of a leaf. The female lays her eggs only on milkweed plants, because milkweed leaves are the only food her caterpillars will eat. After about 4 days, a caterpillar chews its way out of the egg and eats its own eggshell first. Then it eats leaves almost non-stop for about 2 weeks. During this time its skin does not stretch, so it sheds its skin 4 times and grows a new one each time. When it is fully grown, the caterpillar hangs upside down from a twig and makes a green case called a chrysalis. Inside the chrysalis, its body is slowly rebuilt, and this stage lasts about 10 days. Just before the butterfly comes out, the chrysalis turns clear and the orange wings can be seen through it. The new butterfly pumps fluid into its crumpled wings, then waits for a few hours for them to dry before it flies. Most adult monarchs live for 2 to 6 weeks, but monarchs that rest through the cold winter months can live for several months.

4. A gardener pulls up every milkweed plant in a garden. What is most likely to happen to the monarchs there?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** The caterpillars would start eating other plants.
- ○ **B** The butterflies would lay their eggs inside chrysalises.
- ○ **C** No new monarch caterpillars would hatch in that garden.
- ○ **D** The adult monarchs would live for several months.

5. Why does a caterpillar shed its skin?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** The leaf it sits on has become too cold.
- ○ **B** Its skin does not stretch.
- ○ **C** It eats leaves almost non-stop.
- ○ **D** It is getting ready to make a chrysalis.

6. Which of these is NOT given in the text?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** Monarch caterpillars eat many kinds of plant.
- ○ **B** A caterpillar sheds its skin 4 times.
- ○ **C** The chrysalis turns clear before the butterfly comes out.
- ○ **D** Most adult monarchs live for 2 to 6 weeks.

Read this, then answer questions 7–8.




Why the Sea Rises and Falls

If you spend a day at the beach, you may notice that the water creeps up the sand and then slides away again. These regular rises and falls of the sea are called tides. Tides are caused mainly by the pull of the moon's gravity on the Earth's oceans. The moon pulls on the water, and the ocean on the side of the Earth facing the moon bulges outwards. A second bulge forms on the opposite side of the Earth, so there are always two bulges of water. As the Earth spins, each coastline passes through both bulges about once a day, so most places have two high tides and two low tides. The time from one high tide to the next is a little more than 12 hours. The sun also pulls on the oceans, but it is so far away that its effect is weaker than the moon's. When the sun, moon and Earth line up at new moon and full moon, their pulls combine and the tides are extra high and extra low. Boat owners read tide tables before they launch, because the water at a boat ramp can be too shallow at low tide.

7. What does 'bulges' mean in the fourth sentence?

Circle one answer.

○ **A** sinks inwards ○ **B** moves in circles ○ **C** swells outwards ○ **D** freezes solid

8. High tide is at 6 am. When is the next high tide most likely?

Circle one answer.

○ **A** a little after 6 pm ○ **B** at about 9 am ○ **C** at 6 am the next day ○ **D** at exactly 6 pm

Read this, then answer questions 9–11.




Opening Hour at the Fete

By nine o’clock the school oval was a patchwork of stalls, flags and flapping banners. Parents carried trestle tables across the grass, and the Year 6 students pinned prizes to the noticeboard. The sausages sizzled on the barbecue, and the smell drifted over the oval, tugging at everyone’s noses. Mrs Alvarez, who runs the cake stall, had baked enough cupcakes to feed an army. Stuart’s face was as red as a beetroot after his third miss at the coconut shy. Boing! went the bouncy castle as the first children piled in. Beside it, a line of parents waited with cameras and cold drinks. The queue for face-painting was a long, wriggling snake. The principal said that the fete had raised enough money to buy every book in Australia.

9. What does ‘tugging at everyone’s noses’ help us to feel about the smell?

Circle one answer.

○ **A** It was so unpleasant that people hurried away.

○ **B** It was so tempting that it pulled people towards the barbecue.

○ **C** It was so faint that nobody noticed it.

10. Why does the writer call the queue ‘a long, wriggling snake’?

Circle one answer.

○ **A** To show the children in the queue were scared of the face-painters.

○ **B** To show the line was long and kept twisting and moving.

○ **C** To show the queue was short and moved quickly.

11. Which technique does the writer use in ‘enough cupcakes to feed an army’?

Circle one answer.

○ **A** personification ○ **B** a simile ○ **C** hyperbole

Read this, then answer questions 12–14.



How Sandstone Forms

The golden cliffs around Sydney Harbour are made of sandstone, a rock built from sand that was once loose. The story began more than 200 million years ago, when rivers carried sand and mud down from distant highlands. Each flood dropped a fresh layer of sand on top of the one before, and the layers slowly built up. A sand grain is small, between about 0.06 and 2 millimetres across. As more layers piled on top, their weight squeezed the lower sand grains tightly together. Water seeping between the grains left behind minerals, which acted like a natural glue. Over millions of years, the loose sand was glued into solid rock. Later the land was lifted, and wind and rain began to wear the rock away. They have been shaping it into cliffs and valleys ever since. Sandstone is soft enough to cut into blocks, so early builders in Sydney used it for houses and bridges.

12. A builder finds a sandstone block whose grains fall apart when she rubs it. What does this suggest?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** Little natural glue holds the grains together.
- ○ **B** The block was made from mud with no sand in it.
- ○ **C** The block is more than 200 million years old.
- ○ **D** The block was squeezed by too few floods.

13. Why did the loose sand become solid rock?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** Minerals left by seeping water glued the squeezed grains together.
- ○ **B** The sun baked the sand dry.
- ○ **C** Each flood dropped a fresh layer.
- ○ **D** The land was lifted up.

14. Which of these is NOT given in the text?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** Sydney sandstone was made from lava that cooled.
- ○ **B** Early builders in Sydney cut sandstone into blocks.
- ○ **C** Minerals in seeping water acted like a natural glue.
- ○ **D** Each flood dropped a fresh layer of sand.

Read this, then answer questions 15–16.




How a Vacuum Flask Works

A vacuum flask keeps hot drinks hot and cold drinks cold for many hours. It works by slowing down the three ways that heat can travel: conduction, convection and radiation. Conduction is the movement of heat from particle to particle, through solids, liquids and gases, as when a spoon in a hot cup becomes hot. Convection is the movement of heat by currents in a liquid or a gas. Radiation is the movement of heat as invisible rays, the way warmth reaches you from a campfire. A flask has two walls, one inside the other, with almost all the air pumped out of the gap between them. That gap is a vacuum, and a vacuum has almost no particles, so heat cannot cross it by conduction or convection. The inner wall has a shiny coating, which reflects heat rays back towards the drink, so little escapes by radiation. The stopper is made of plastic or cork, which are poor conductors, so little heat leaks out through the top. The Scottish scientist James Dewar invented the vacuum flask in 1892. Even the best flask cannot stop heat for ever, so a drink slowly cools over many hours.

15. What does ‘reflects’ mean in the eighth sentence?

Circle one answer.

○ **A** sends back ○ **B** makes hotter ○ **C** soaks up ○ **D** hides away

16. How many years before the year 2000 was the vacuum flask invented?

Circle one answer.

○ **A** 92 years ○ **B** 98 years ○ **C** 118 years ○ **D** 108 years

Read this, then answer questions 17–20.




The Spelling Bee

The hall was a pressure cooker, and Lena's heart hammered against her ribs like a trapped bird. Her name was called, and she walked to the microphone on legs that wobbled like jelly. 'Accommodate,' said the judge, in a voice as dry as chalk. It was the final round, and only Lena and a boy from another school were still standing. Lena closed her eyes, and the letters lined up in her mind like ducklings following their mother. 'A-C-C-O-M-M-O-D-A-T-E,' she said, and the silence stretched thin as a wire. A single bell rang, and the hall erupted with applause. The judge announced that Lena had won the trophy for the Year 6 section. Lena returned to her seat, walking on air.

17. What feeling does 'the silence stretched thin as a wire' give us?

Circle one answer.

○ **A** Sadness, because Lena had lost.

○ **B** Calm, as if nothing mattered.

○ **C** Tension, as if something might snap.

18. What does 'walking on air' mean?

Circle one answer.

○ **A** floating above the floor

○ **B** feeling very nervous and heavy

○ **C** feeling extremely happy

19. Which technique does the writer use in 'The hall was a pressure cooker'?

Circle one answer.

○ **A** a simile ○ **B** personification ○ **C** a metaphor

20. In 'the letters lined up like ducklings following their mother', what do the letters and the ducklings share?

Circle one answer.

○ **A** Both are yellow and fluffy.

○ **B** Both are small and very noisy.

○ **C** Both are neatly in order, one behind the other.

Read this, then answer questions 21–22.




The Morning Ferry

That morning at seven, the Manly ferry pulled away from Circular Quay. Seagulls trailed the stern like a white scarf blown by the wind. Hugo, a new commuter, clutched his coffee and watched the harbour glide past. Ahead, the Opera House was a cluster of white shells on the water's edge. The engines groaned, and the old deck shuddered beneath his feet. Hugo had a lot on his plate that day. A million people were crammed into the cabin. By the time they reached Manly, the sun had risen above the headland. Hugo stepped onto the wharf, and his worries were water off a duck's back.

21. Why does the writer say the engines 'groaned'?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** To make the old engines sound strained, like a tired person.
- ○ **B** To say the passengers were complaining.
- ○ **C** To say the engines were switched off.

22. What does the writer really mean by 'a million people were crammed into the cabin'?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** The cabin was very crowded.
- ○ **B** The cabin was nearly empty.
- ○ **C** A million people really were on board.

Read this, then answer questions 23–25.




How a Fossil Forms

A fossil is the preserved remains, or traces, of a living thing that died long ago. To become a fossil, the animal or plant must first be buried quickly, usually by mud or sand in a lake, river or sea, before it is eaten or rots away. Soft parts such as skin and muscle almost always decay, so it is mainly hard parts like bones, teeth and shells that are left. As more mud and sand pile up, the layers above press down on the buried remains. Water carrying dissolved minerals then seeps through the layers and slowly fills the tiny spaces in the bone or shell. Sometimes the original material dissolves completely, and minerals take its place to form a stone copy. Over millions of years, the sediment around the remains hardens into rock. Finally, wind, rain or movements of the Earth may wear away the rock above, and a fossil hunter may find the fossil at the surface. Fossils are rare, because only a tiny fraction of the animals that ever lived became fossils. Some of the oldest fossils in Australia are the stromatolites of the Pilbara in Western Australia, which are about 3.5 billion years old, while the dinosaur fossils of Queensland are about 100 million years old.

23. A hiker finds a fossil shell lying at the foot of a cliff. What is the best guess?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** The shell was never buried.
- ○ **B** The cliff is made of Pilbara stromatolites.
- ○ **C** The animal died only a few years ago.
- ○ **D** Rock that once covered the fossil has probably worn away.

24. Why are fossils mostly made from bones, teeth and shells?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** Minerals fill the tiny spaces.
- ○ **B** Hard parts are always buried faster than soft parts.
- ○ **C** Mud and sand pile up on top of the remains.
- ○ **D** Soft parts almost always decay.

25. About how many times as old as the Queensland dinosaur fossils are the Pilbara stromatolites?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** about 35 times as old
- ○ **B** about 3400 times as old
- ○ **C** about 3.5 times as old
- ○ **D** about 350 times as old

Read this, then answer questions 26–27.




Lightning and Thunder

During a thunderstorm, you always see the lightning flash before you hear the thunder. This happens even though both are made at the same moment, in the same place. Lightning is a giant spark of electricity that jumps between a cloud and the ground, or between parts of a cloud. The spark heats the air around it to nearly 30 000 degrees Celsius, which is hotter than the surface of the sun. The air expands so suddenly that it sends out a shock wave, and we hear that shock wave as thunder. Light travels about 300 000 kilometres every second, so the flash reaches your eyes almost at once. Sound travels much more slowly, at about 340 metres every second in air. That means that sound takes about three seconds to travel one kilometre. So if you count the seconds between the flash and the thunder, you can estimate how far away the lightning struck. If you count nine seconds, the strike was about three kilometres away. If the gap is only a few seconds, the lightning is very close.

26. What does ‘estimate’ mean in the ninth sentence?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** write down in a record
- ○ **B** measure exactly
- ○ **C** work out roughly
- ○ **D** stay away from

27. You count 15 seconds between a flash and its thunder. About how far away did the lightning strike?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** 1.5 kilometres
- ○ **B** 5 kilometres
- ○ **C** 15 kilometres
- ○ **D** 45 kilometres

Read this, then answer questions 28–29.




How Eucalypts Recover After Fire

After a bushfire, a forest of eucalypts can look dead, yet within weeks green shoots often appear along the black trunks. This is possible because many eucalypts have buds hidden deep beneath their thick bark. These are called epicormic buds, and they stay dormant until the tree is damaged. The bark acts like insulation, so the heat of a fire usually cannot reach the buds. Fire often burns away all of a tree's leaves. Losing its leaves signals the buds to grow, because without leaves the tree cannot make food. Within weeks, the buds burst through the bark and grow into new leafy shoots, which let the tree make food again. Many mallees have a swollen woody lump underground called a lignotuber, which stores energy and is protected by the soil. If a fire kills every stem above the ground, new stems can sprout from the lignotuber. A few species, such as the mountain ash, are killed outright by very hot fires. Their survival depends on seeds, which drop from woody capsules after the fire and sprout in the ash-rich soil, although a mountain ash does not make seed until it is about 20 years old.

28. What does 'outright' mean in the tenth sentence?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** gently, without harm
- ○ **B** completely, with no chance of recovery
- ○ **C** slowly over many years
- ○ **D** partly, but only a little

29. Which of these is NOT true, using the text?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** A lignotuber stores energy for a mallee.
- ○ **B** Mountain ash seeds sprout in the ash-rich soil.
- ○ **C** Epicormic buds stay dormant until the tree is damaged.
- ○ **D** Mountain ash trees always survive very hot fires.

Read this, then answer questions 30–31.



The Night Train

The night train to Broken Hill slid out of Central Station like a silver snake. Inside, the carriage was a sleepy cocoon of low lights and soft snoring. Isla pressed her nose to the window as the lights of Sydney shrank to tiny dots. Her aunt had warned her that the journey would take forever. Outside, the moon kept watch over the sleeping plains. Isla had planned to stay up all night and finish her book, but her eyelids felt like lead. By dawn, the red desert was a vast sea of dust and stone. Broken Hill came into view, and the station was a sight for sore eyes. Isla felt the long night slip behind her like a closed book.

30. Why does Isla’s aunt say the journey would ‘take forever’?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** To say the train was broken.
- ○ **B** To say the journey would never end.
- ○ **C** To stress how long the trip would feel.

31. What is really happening when ‘the moon kept watch over the sleeping plains’?

Circle one answer.

- ○ **A** Moonlight shone over the land all night.
- ○ **B** The moon was following the train on purpose.
- ○ **C** A guard was looking up at the moon.

Answer key

Year 6 reading comprehension: passage pack · Sheet 600001

1. C — Less of the shaking would reach the three tiny bones.
The text says: “At the end of the tunnel the waves hit the eardrum, a thin skin that shakes like the top of a drum. The shaking moves three tiny bones in the middle ear, the smallest bones in your body.” The waves make the eardrum shake, and the shaking moves the three tiny bones. So: A torn eardrum shakes badly, so less shaking reaches the bones.

2. A — Some of the tiny hairs wear out over time.
The text says: “Many older adults cannot hear the highest sounds, because some of the tiny hairs wear out over time.” The words because and so point to the reason.

3. D — 1000 times as many
The text says: “Young people can hear sounds from about 20 shakes a second, which is a deep rumble, to about 20 000 shakes a second, which is a very high squeak.” 20 000 ÷ 20 = 1000. So the highest sound has about 1000 times as many shakes a second.

4. C — No new monarch caterpillars would hatch in that garden.
The text says: “The female lays her eggs only on milkweed plants, because milkweed leaves are the only food her caterpillars will eat.” The female lays her eggs only on milkweed, because her caterpillars eat nothing else. So: No milkweed means no eggs are laid there, so no new caterpillars hatch.

5. B — Its skin does not stretch.
The text says: “During this time its skin does not stretch, so it sheds its skin 4 times and grows a new one each time.” The words because and so point to the reason.

6. A — Monarch caterpillars eat many kinds of plant.
The text says: “The female lays her eggs only on milkweed plants, because milkweed leaves are the only food her caterpillars will eat.”

7. C — swells outwards
The text says: “The moon pulls on the water, and the ocean on the side of the Earth facing the moon bulges outwards.” The sentence around the word tells you what it means here.

8. A — a little after 6 pm
The text says: “The time from one high tide to the next is a little more than 12 hours.” Ask what the figure is counting or measuring.

9. B — It was so tempting that it pulled people towards the barbecue.
‘Tugging’ gives the smell a pulling force. It suggests the smell was inviting.

10. B — To show the line was long and kept twisting and moving.
The writer compares the queue to a snake so we can see its shape and movement.

11. C — hyperbole
No one needs to feed a whole army with cupcakes. The writer exaggerates to show there were very many.

12. A — Little natural glue holds the grains together.
The text says: “Water seeping between the grains left behind minerals, which acted like a natural glue.” Minerals acted like a natural glue to hold the sand grains together. So: Grains that fall apart suggest the glue is weak.

13. A — Minerals left by seeping water glued the squeezed grains together.
The text says: “Water seeping between the grains left behind minerals, which acted like a natural glue.” The weight of the layers squeezed the grains together, and the minerals glued them. Over time the loose sand became solid rock.

14. A — Sydney sandstone was made from lava that cooled.
The text says: “The golden cliffs around Sydney Harbour are made of sandstone, a rock built from sand that was once loose.”

15. A — sends back
The text says: “The inner wall has a shiny coating, which reflects heat rays back towards the drink, so little escapes by radiation.” The sentence around the word tells you what it means here.

16. D — 108 years
The text says: “The Scottish scientist James Dewar invented the vacuum flask in 1892.” 2000 − 1892 = 108. So it was invented 108 years before 2000.

17. C — Tension, as if something might snap.
A thin, stretched wire is tight and can snap. The image makes the waiting feel tense.

18. C — feeling extremely happy
‘Walking on air’ is an idiom for being delighted. Lena has just won applause for a correct spelling.

19. C — a metaphor
The hall is said to be a pressure cooker without using like or as. That is a metaphor.

20. C — Both are neatly in order, one behind the other.
The simile compares letters in order with ducklings in a line behind their mother.

21. A — To make the old engines sound strained, like a tired person.
Engines do not have voices. The writer gives them a groan, a human sound, to show the noise and strain. The picture or feeling is the reason the writer chose the words.

22. A — The cabin was very crowded.
A ferry cabin cannot hold a million people. The exaggeration shows that it was packed. Ask: could this really happen? If not, find what is really going on.

23. D — Rock that once covered the fossil has probably worn away.
The text says: “Finally, wind, rain or movements of the Earth may wear away the rock above, and a fossil hunter may find the fossil at the surface.” Wind, rain or movements of the Earth may wear away the rock above, and a fossil is then found at the surface. So: The rock covering it has probably worn away.

24. D — Soft parts almost always decay.
The text says: “Soft parts such as skin and muscle almost always decay, so it is mainly hard parts like bones, teeth and shells that are left.” The words because and so point to the reason.

25. A — about 35 times as old
The text says: “Some of the oldest fossils in Australia are the stromatolites of the Pilbara in Western Australia, which are about 3.5 billion years old, while the dinosaur fossils of Queensland are about 100 million years old.” 3.5 billion is 3500 million, and 3500 ÷ 100 = 35. So the stromatolites are about 35 times as old.

26. C — work out roughly
The text says: “So if you count the seconds between the flash and the thunder, you can estimate how far away the lightning struck.” The sentence around the word tells you what it means here.

27. B — 5 kilometres

The text says: “That means that sound takes about three seconds to travel one kilometre.” 15 ÷ 3 = 5. So the lightning struck about 5 kilometres away.

28. B — completely, with no chance of recovery

The text says: “A few species, such as the mountain ash, are killed outright by very hot fires.” The sentence around the word tells you what it means here.

29. D — Mountain ash trees always survive very hot fires.

The text says: “A few species, such as the mountain ash, are killed outright by very hot fires.”

30. C — To stress how long the trip would feel.

No journey takes forever. The exaggeration warns Isla that the trip is long.

31. A — Moonlight shone over the land all night.

The moon cannot watch. The writer gives it a human job, keeping watch, to describe light falling on a quiet land. Ask: could this really happen? If not, find what is really going on.