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Comprehension 1

The Tower of London

The Tower of London remains the most perfectly preserved fortress in Britain. It was first constructed during the reign of William I and added to by successive monarchs. The Tower has served as a palace, a place of execution and a prison. It has also housed the Royal Mint, where the nation's coins were manufactured. Thirty-seven Yeoman Warders – commonly known as Beefeaters – act as guards and the
5 Tower is their permanent home all year round.

The Tower of London houses the priceless Crown Jewels which are used in coronations and other grand state occasions. They comprise crowns, sceptres, orbs and swords and were first created in 1661, when Charles II was crowned. The original medieval jewels – which dated from the time of Edward the Confessor – were all destroyed after the execution of Charles I in 1649. Coronation ceremonies of a new
10 king or queen are steeped in history and begin with him or her proceeding to Westminster Abbey to be anointed with holy oil. They are then invested with royal robes and the Royal Sword. Then, the Crown of St Edward is placed on the new sovereign's head, trumpets begin to sound and guns at the Tower are fired and heard all over London. The last coronation was that of Queen Elizabeth II, in 1953.

One of the Tower's darkest mysteries concerns two boy princes – the sons and heirs of Edward IV –
15 Edward and Richard. The king died suddenly in 1483 and his son Edward came to London to be prepared to be crowned. His ambitious uncle, Richard of Gloucester, met Edward and had him lodged at the Tower. He then persuaded the queen to allow her younger son to be sent to the Tower as company for Edward. However, during the ensuing summer, the young princes were seen less and less until one day they simply vanished and were never seen again. Uncle Richard became Richard III later that same year. Much later, in
20 1674, when Charles II was king, two skeletons were found hidden under the staircase leading into St John's Chapel in the Tower of London. At the time, it was widely believed that their uncle had them murdered.

The exchange of exotic animals was customary between medieval monarchs and, upon receipt of three lions as a gift from Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II in the year 1235, King Henry III established a Royal Menagerie at the Tower. In 1252, a polar bear arrived as a gift from the King of Norway. Tigers, monkeys,
25 elephants, snakes and even alligators followed and the menagerie proved to be a hugely popular attraction. Ultimately, however, the workers at the Tower lacked the skills to be able to control the animals properly and appreciate how dangerous they were. In 1821, after yet another attack on a staff member – who was mauled and then killed by a lion – the Duke of Wellington ordered that the menagerie be closed. The animals were all taken to The Regent's Park which became the location of the present London Zoo.

An 'unkindness' of ravens are the traditional guardians of the Tower of London. Legend has it that should the ravens ever leave, the White Tower would crumble and a great disaster would befall England. There is a Raven Master who knows each bird by name – they are called Hardey, Thor, Odin, Gwyllum, Cedric, Hugine and Munin – and who feeds them raw meat twice a day, plus bird biscuits soaked in blood and the occasional rat. To prevent the ravens from flying away, they have part of their wings clipped on the right
35 side. This procedure does not hurt the birds, but just unbalances their flight and ensures that they stay safe and don't stray too far from the Tower. The ravens are very clever and they will happily play together and steal and hoard shiny objects like pieces of metal and small stones to impress each other.

Carefully read through the passage on the previous page and circle the correct answers below.

1 What is the nickname of the warders who guard the Tower of London?

- A. Raven Masters
 - B. Beefeaters
 - C. Mudlarks
 - D. Costermongers
-

2 In which year were the Crown Jewels made?

- A. 1649
 - B. 1625
 - C. 1661
 - D. 1483
-

3 Which monarch did Richard of Gloucester become?

- A. Richard I
 - B. Richard the Lionheart
 - C. Richard III
 - D. Richard II
-

4 How did Henry III come to own a great white bear?

- A. He brought it back with him from a royal visit to Iceland.
- B. He was gifted it by another king.
- C. He rented it from London Zoo.
- D. His wife, the queen, bought it for him as a gift.

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Comprehension 14

Snake

DH Lawrence wrote Snake in about 1920 while he was living in Sicily, Italy. In it, he explores the conflicted feelings humans and wild animals often have towards each other. This is an extract from the poem.

A snake came to my water-trough
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,
To drink there.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob-tree
5 I came down the steps with my pitcher
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough before me.

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the edge of the stone trough
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,
10 And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness,
He sipped with his straight mouth,
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,
Silently.

Someone was before me at my water-trough,
15 And I, like a second comer, waiting.
He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,
And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused a moment,
And stooped and drank a little more,
20 Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the earth
On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.
The voice of my education said to me
He must be killed,
For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous.

25 And voices in me said, If you were a man
You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off.

But must I confess how I liked him,
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my water-trough
And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,
30 Into the burning bowels of this earth?

Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?
Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?
Was it humility, to feel so honoured?

I felt so honoured.

D H Lawrence

Carefully read through the extract from the poem on the previous page and circle the correct answers below.

1 Which literary device is the author using in line 4 of the poem?

A. Metaphor

C. Allusion

B. Oxymoron

D. Alliteration

2 How does the author think that cows appear when they are drinking?

A. They look excited and refreshed.

B. They have an unclear expression on their faces.

C. They begin to look sleepy.

D. They appear to become aggressive.

3 From which material was the water-trough made?

A. Plastic

C. Stone

B. Glass

D. Tin

4 What colour bodies do venomous Sicilian snakes typically have?

A. Black

C. Green

B. Yellow

D. Silver

5 From where did the snake first appear before arriving at the water-trough?

A. It slid down through a small crack in a wall.

B. It slithered out from behind a tree.

C. It threw itself across the garden and onto the patio.

D. It was coiled up next to the trough and suddenly sprang up when the author first approached the trough.