

Directions

Read this passage. Then answer questions 1 through 6.

The Hero

by Ron Woods

The book *The Hero* is about 14-year-old Jamie. In this part of the story, Jamie has been burning some leaves as part of his chores, and the fire has gotten out of control.

I wasn't one to panic, but my fun had turned to fear and desperation, and I realized help was needed. So while I still beat at the flames with my shovel, I gave up my pride, turned my face to the house, and began to shout for Mom.

The house was fifty yards away, and I didn't know if she'd hear me. I'd last seen her at the kitchen table sewing school clothes, and the kitchen was on the opposite side of the house.

* * *

At one spot, rocks and sparse grass slowed the fire's pace up the slope, and I made good progress. But I'd abandoned the other end as long as I dared. It might have been best to stay where I was, but I made a decision and ran back to the front just as flames there reached the base of the hill.

Sweat flew from my face as I pounded and dug in vain, all the while shamelessly shouting for help toward the house, like a man overboard beating off sharks while screaming at a passing ship.

Finally, I spotted Marie in the yard. She had come around the side of the house and was staring openmouthed. "Get Mom!" I yelled. "Get Mom out here!" She disappeared through the front door, blond hair flying.

Almost immediately, Mom was out the door and coming across the yard on the run. Suddenly, she stopped, turned, and ran back into the house. In a moment, she came out again with an old blanket in her arms. At the gate she stabbed a finger at Marie—probably telling her to stay in the yard—and ran across the road, her short legs pounding and her dress flying. At the irrigation ditch she stopped and threw the blanket into the water.

By now, the flames behind me had crawled through the rocky area, sprinted through thick grass, and now were halfway to the big ditch. And in spite of my present efforts, the front end of the blaze had a renewed start up the slope in heavy grass that looked like it was begging to be burned. Fire was everywhere.

I felt like sitting down and letting it go. It was too hard. My eyes stung, my throat was raw, my arm hair was singed, and my legs ached from running up and down the hill. I was soaked in sweat, and my hands—that I'd thought so tough from hoeing all summer—were already red and starting to blister from my grip on the shovel handle. What was the point? It was too late. How could we stop it now?

"Jamie! Come down! Let it go! Help me over here, Jamie!"

I looked. Mom wasn't heading for the burning hill at all. She was over by the pigpen, flailing with her soggy blanket. The pen was to the north, against the creek, and to my amazement the fire had a good start across the fifty-foot rocky swale¹ separating the garden and the pigpen fence. It had jumped our small irrigation ditch—the ready-made barrier—like a lion after a mouse.

* * *

"We'll have to let the hill go," Mom said when I reached her. "Have to. We can't stop it there." Her voice was different—lower than usual, and controlled. Mom was known as an enthusiastic person in everyday conversation. But in a crisis, she was calm. I'd seen it once when I cut my foot and we had trouble getting the bleeding stopped; another time when Marie was a baby and had a convulsion that wouldn't quit; and again when Dad developed a reaction to penicillin and his face and throat started swelling up like a movie monster. Mom was using that controlled voice right now. "Help me here, Jamie. Over here."

She was already in action, smothering flames with each throw of her sodden blanket. But it was like trying to stop a flood with a sponge—it just wasn't fast enough.

A flood! That was it! I was a genius!

"Here, Mom. I've got it! I know what to do," I shouted. Our garden ditch could save us. My shovel made four or five quick slices into the sod bank, and in a moment the stream was rushing across the small field.

The effect was impressive. The fire immediately lost its power as its roots were killed. Small plumes of steam rose from clumps of burning grass as the flames hissed out. Only their tops were left momentarily burning, like tiny volcanoes jutting from a miniature sea, until they toppled over and drowned.

Sloshing through the flood, I scooped and splashed with my shovel where water was needed most. Mom's blanket reached isolated spots, and soon the whole burn was extinguished in the little swale. In one place fire had come within a few feet of the fence, but to our relief, nowhere had the wood or the brush been touched.

¹swale: a low marshy area

1

This passage is told from the point of view of

- A Jamie
- B Marie
- C a narrator outside the story
- D a person watching the action

2

Which of these events happens first in the passage?

- A Jamie slices the sod bank.
- B Mom tells Jamie to help her by the pigpen.
- C Mom smothers the flames with a blanket.
- D Jamie sees Marie in the yard.

3

Read this sentence from the passage.

At one spot, rocks and sparse grass slowed the fire's pace up the slope, and I made good progress.

The word "pace" means about the same as

- A direction
- B magnitude
- C speed
- D warmth

4

Read this sentence from the passage.

By now, the flames behind me had crawled through the rocky area, sprinted through thick grass, and now were halfway to the big ditch.

This sentence suggests that the flames are

- A growing larger
- B moving faster
- C getting hotter
- D roaring louder

5

How does Jamie change from the beginning of the passage to the end of the passage?

- A He is angry at first, then happy.
- B He is surprised at first, then afraid.
- C He is annoyed at first, then satisfied.
- D He is scared at first, then relieved.

6

The events in this passage can mostly be described as

- A amusing
- B inspiring
- C intense
- D reflective

Directions

Read this article. Then answer questions 7 through 12.

Bindi!

by Milan Sandhu

"Why don't you have a jewel carved in your forehead?"

The little girl who asked me that was hardly six, and she knew I was from India. I was six, too, beginning first grade, and it was years before trendy tattoos became popular. I stared at the girl a moment, trying to determine whether she was serious or not. She was! A jewel carved in my head was, first of all, likely to hurt, and second, it didn't sound very attractive. "Ouch!" was my reaction.

For many mornings, I had seen my mother apply her *bindi*. She had her own style, using the round end of a lipstick cap. She would first dip the cap in petroleum jelly and then dip it in red powder. Finally, she carefully pressed the cap between her eyes, leaving a red powder dot on her forehead. I thought she was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen, and I couldn't wait to do the same thing. Sometimes, to make me happy, she'd use an eyeliner stick to apply a tiny black dot on my forehead. I'd skip away satisfied, waiting patiently until I could wear a big red one.

Hindus have adorned their bodies with bindis for thousands of years. Not that long ago, a bindi, which is also known as a *tilak*, was nothing more than ground vermilion powder applied to the forehead. It was a sign that a woman was married—like wearing a wedding ring. Vermilion powder was made from a mix of mercury and sulfur, a combination thought to have a cooling effect—very helpful in a warm country like

India. In fact, men often wore tilaks made from sandalwood paste, also to make them feel cool.

Some people think that the tradition of wearing bindis began with the ancient ritual of the bridegroom applying his blood to his wife's forehead during the wedding ceremony. Others believed that the area between the eyebrows is the spot where there is a third eye—a point of hidden energy and wisdom. Wearing a bindi on this spot helps focus concentration and brings happiness and good fortune.



No matter what its origins were, a bindi was always worn with pride, and served as a gentle reminder to others to respect a married woman. Red, the color of life-giving blood and an important color in the Hindu religion, was always used for bindis.

In the early twentieth century, bindis became more of a fashion statement. Instead of wearing only round red bindis, married and unmarried women in India started wearing bindis of different sizes and shapes on their foreheads.

Today, women wear fashion stickers—decorated with beads, crystals, sequins, or glitter—on their foreheads to match what they are wearing.

Even though the jewel in the forehead isn't far from the truth, I still don't have one carved into my head, and nobody I know does either. But I do wear stickers from time to time. I look in the mirror and smile as I think about my beautiful mother and the days she painted a black dot on my forehead.

7

How is the way the author wears her bindis different from the way they are traditionally worn in India?

- A The author's bindis are large red dots.
- B The author wears bindis that are fashion stickers.
- C The author's bindis are made from expensive jewels.
- D The author wears bindis in the middle of her forehead.

8

Read this sentence from the article.

Hindus have adorned their bodies with bindis for thousands of years.

The word "adorned" means about the same as

- A decorated
- B honored
- C perfected
- D strengthened

9

Which sentence from the article best illustrates the author's feelings about her mother's bindi?

- A "She would first dip the cap in petroleum jelly and then dip it in red powder."
- B "Finally, she carefully pressed the cap between her eyes, leaving a red powder dot on her forehead."
- C "I thought she was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen, and I couldn't wait to do the same thing."
- D "Sometimes, to make me happy, she'd use an eyeliner stick to apply a tiny black dot on my forehead."

10

Which sentence from the article **best** informs the reader about the author's culture?

- A "I was six, too, beginning first grade, and it was years before trendy tattoos became popular."
- B "A jewel carved in my head was, first of all, likely to hurt, and second, it didn't sound very attractive."
- C "It was a sign that a woman was married—like wearing a wedding ring."
- D "Vermilion powder was made from a mix of mercury and sulfur."

11

The author **most likely** wrote this article

- A to inform the reader about bindis and their history
- B to describe the way her mother applied a bindi to her forehead
- C to express her opinion about whether modern women should wear bindis
- D to entertain the reader with a story about wearing a bindi in elementary school

12

Read this sentence from the article.

In the early twentieth century, bindis became more of a fashion statement.

Now read the dictionary entry below.

state•ment *noun* 1. A written fact or intention. 2. A bill for an amount due. 3. A special announcement made to the public. 4. An expression of an idea or concept, especially by means other than words.

Which definition **best** fits the meaning of "statement" as it is used in the sentence above?

- A definition 1
- B definition 2
- C definition 3
- D definition 4

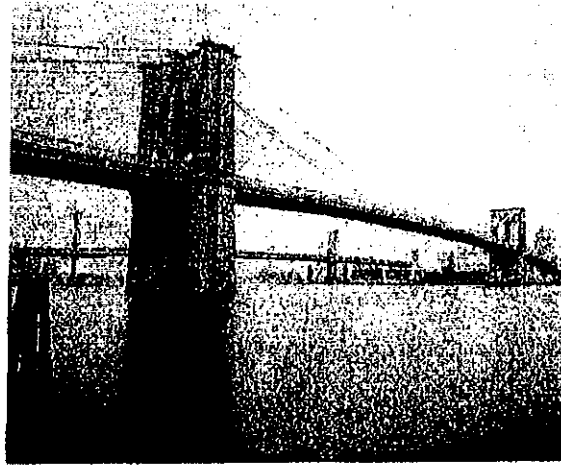
Directions

Read this passage from the story "Building Bridges." Then answer questions 13 through 17.

Building Bridges

by Andrea Davis Pinkney

The story "Building Bridges" is about a girl who lives with her grandmother, Mama Lil, and who dreams of someday becoming an engineer. In this passage from the story, the narrator is waiting for her grandmother to sign a consent form for her to participate in a summer program in which a group of students would work with a team of engineers to help repair the Brooklyn Bridge.



Ahead, in the distance, stood the Brooklyn Bridge. This was the best spot in Brooklyn's Red Hook section for seeing the bridge. I'd come to this corner and studied the bridge a million times. And on every one of those times, I was taken with what I'd come to call Brooklyn Belle.

I never got tired of looking out at its steel girders and iron cables—at its beautiful crisscross rafters that had started out in somebody's imagination, had been put to paper, formalized in an engineer's plans, then woven together, bolt by bolt. Now Belle was a powerful giant who carried all kinds of people to all kinds of places, day after day.

At night Belle was dressed in tiny lights that spanned her limbs. On a cloudless night like this one, she was a sight like no other sight in the whole city. Jeweled in light. *Beautiful.*

My fingers had tensed into fists at my sides, fists full of strength and eagerness. I uncurled my knuckles and shook them free of their strain. Then I reached into my jacket

pocket—where my consent form for the bridge project had been neatly folded for days—and pulled out my pencil. Slowly, I flipped through the pages of my sketchbook. I'd drawn Belle in the high-noon light, at sunset, on snowy days, and on foggy twilight mornings. My favorite sketches were those of Belle during rush hour, when cars and taxis danced like trinkets along her outstretched beams.

Tonight I'd draw Belle with her lighted cape. I sketched slowly at first, then faster, my pencil working with the speed of my excitement—the thrill that worked me over every time I sketched that bridge.

I was proud of my drawings (I liked to think of them as portraits), but with each page they showed a sad truth about Belle: She needed repair. She was some forty years older than Mama Lil. And as lovely as she was, she had some serious rough spots—corroded cables, rust, chipped paint, and plain old grit that had built up over the decades. That bridge renovation project needed me; and I needed it, in more ways than I could count.

13 When does this passage take place?

- A at night
- B at sunset
- C on a snowy day
- D on a foggy morning

14 What are the narrator's favorite sketches?

- A the city in lights
- B the bridge at twilight
- C the bridge at rush hour
- D the city in high-noon light

15 The author refers to the Brooklyn Bridge as "Brooklyn Belle" to help the reader

- A understand that the bridge is very old
- B remember the bridge's history
- C imagine the noise around the bridge
- D appreciate the bridge's beauty

16 Which sentence from the passage includes a metaphor used by the author to describe Belle?

- A "I was taken with what I'd come to call Brooklyn Belle."
- B "Now Belle was a powerful giant who carried all kinds of people to all kinds of places, day after day."
- C "On a cloudless night like this one, she was a sight like no other sight in the whole city."
- D "I'd drawn Belle in the high-noon light, at sunset, on snowy days, and on foggy twilight mornings."

17 In the passage, the narrator refers to the bridge renovation project. Based on information in the passage, the "renovation" project most likely refers to

- A repairing the bridge
- B removing the bridge
- C replacing the bridge
- D remembering the bridge