

COMPREHENSION

1. General comprehension. Which is the best summary of the story? Why?

a) Despite having four lovely children, Susan and Matthew's marriage, which looks fine from the outside, starts to destroy Susan's spirit. It's the 50s and early 60s in middle-class London, and Susan and Matthew are the envy of their friends. Money is no problem. He has a good job in journalism, and they move to exclusive suburb of Richmond. Susan stays at home to look after them, and when they are all old enough to be at school she tries to go back to work, but can't get a job. Matthew has affairs, but Susan forgives him. However, Susan moves slowly from the relationship into her own silent world. She tries to escape, going on a walking holiday alone in Wales, and then starts to spend time alone in a rental room in Miss Townsend's small hotel, doing nothing, and when she hears of Matthew's affair with their young German au pair, she decides to commit suicide by gassing herself in the hotel.

b) The story of a marriage that seems successful from the outside, and in many ways it is, but for Susan, wife, mother and former professional, it's a slow suffocation. The story takes place in the 50s and early 60s, in London. Susan and Matthew are happy and are reasonably rich. They buy a flat in the nice central district of South Kensington and then move to exclusive Richmond. They have four children and she stays at home to look after them, but when they are old enough to go to school, she finds she can't enjoy her freedom. Matthew isn't perfect but he is kind and loving. But Susan disappears slowly into her solitary world of frustration and maybe even madness. She begins to spend time alone in an ugly hotel room in central London, doing nothing, and she makes plans to die, even finding someone to replace her at home with her husband and children. She commits suicide by gassing herself in the hotel.

c) The story of a marriage between Susan and Matthew that seems a success from the outside, but is cold and destructive for Susan. It's hard for her to control children, and misses her old job, which gave her real stimulation. The story takes place in the 50s, in and around London. Susan and Matthew are in fact very happy. They love each other, are honest with each other, and money is no problem. They buy a new flat in the middle class area of Richmond and then move to the expensive central district of South Kensington. They have four children and Susan stays at home to look after them, although they have a woman to cook and clean for them and later, a German au pair girl. But Susan doesn't know what to do with her freedom. She disappears from the relationship and is only happy alone. She goes to live in an ugly hotel room, doing nothing, and she makes plans to die, even preparing her own replacement for her husband and her children. She commits suicide by gassing herself in her own kitchen.

2. Detailed comprehension. Choose the best answer: a), b), c) or d).

- Matthew is faithful to Susan ...
 - forever
 - for 10 years
 - until Sophie arrives
 - until she takes a lover
- When all the kids are of school age, Susan hopes to ...
 - sew
 - study
 - work again
 - have time for herself
- Connie goes on a walking holiday in Wales ...
 - alone
 - to be with friends
 - to read poetry
 - to escape from Matthew
- Miss Townsend and Susan ...
 - become friends
 - have much in common
 - meet once
 - understand each other well
- The sign on the spare bedroom saying "Do not disturb" is written by ...
 - the children
 - Susan
 - Matthew
 - everyone together

- 6. Mrs Parkes ...
 - a) is jealous of Susan
 - b) resents Sophie
 - c) wants Matthew
 - d) needs instructions
- 7. Susan sees the red-haired "devil" figure ...
 - a) once
 - b) twice
 - c) three times
 - d) often
- 8. Matthew gives Susan £5 ...
 - a) every Saturday
 - b) once
 - c) regularly
 - d) reluctantly
- 9. When Susan invents a lover, Matthew suggests ...
 - a) a confrontation
 - b) leaving
 - c) divorce
 - d) all meeting up for a meal
- 10. Fred's hotel is ...
 - a) comfortable
 - b) charming
 - c) used by lovers
 - d) not really what Susan needs

3. Cross out the wrong alternative to complete the sentences

- 1. Susan and Matthew marry for **convenience / love / the children**.
- 2. They marry when their age is **more than / the same as / less than** their friends who get married.
- 3. Matthew has an affair with one of **her / his / their** old friends.
- 4. She starts to think she is **a bad mother / mad / married to the wrong man**.
- 5. Sophie becomes **arrogant to Mrs Parkes / close to the kids / Matthew's lover**.
- 6. When she comes home, Susan feels **comfortable / like a visitor / unwelcome** in her kitchen.

TEXT COHESION

4. Renting a room. This is the description of Susan's decision to rent a room. Put the sentences in the best order to make a coherent paragraph. Then check your answer on page 82, or look in the answer key.

- a) Yet how could she?
- b) It did not occur to her that she was taking it for granted she wasn't going to tell him about the room.
- c) She decided to rent a room, telling no-one.
- d) A room would cost three or four pounds a week and she earned no money, and how could she explain to Matthew that she needed such a sum?
- e) Once, near Victoria, she found herself outside a newsagent that had **Rooms to Let** advertised.
- f) She could take the train in to Richmond and sit alone in it for an hour or two.
- g) What for?

- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

LANGUAGE WORK

5. Syntax. Put the words in the right order to make a sentence. The first word is given.

- 1. The ... needed / ordinary / just / room / anonymous / Susan / , / what / and / and / was / .
.....
- 2. She au pair / her / have / she / to / an / husband / girl / wanted / told / .
.....
- 3. Are ... work / thinking / going / you / of / to / back / ?
.....
- 4. We'll language / they'll / or / get / girl / learn / French / German / and / a / the / .
.....

6. Modal auxiliary verbs. Look at these extracts from the story, which all contain modal auxiliary verbs. Match the numbers to the functional descriptions below.

- 2. There's nothing I **have to** remind myself about, nothing I **have to** do in half an hour.
- 3. I **must** telephone Matthew.
- 4. Children **needed** their mother to a certain age, that both parents knew and agreed on.
- 5. I think there **must** be something wrong with me.
- 6. She **ought to** be thinking about her life, about herself.
- 7. Or they **shouldn't** be.
- 8. She **needed**, when she was alone, to be really alone, with no-one near.
- 9. No, no, there is something wrong with this way of thinking, there **must** be.

Logical deduction	Recommendation	External obligation	Self-imposed obligation	Necessity

7. Vocabulary gapfill. This is the description of Susan having all the kids at home again in the summer. For each gap, choose one word that fits from the list.

at ▪ bath ▪ brown ▪ calm ▪ closed ▪ controlled ▪ deep ▪ empty ▪ end ▪ expect ▪ heard ▪ in ▪ silent ▪ sit ▪ spare ▪ time

The school holidays came round, and this (1) they were for nearly two months, and she behaved with a conscious, (2) decency that nearly drove her crazy. She would lock herself (3) the bathroom, and (4) on the edge of the (5), breathing deep, trying to let go into some kind of (6) Or she went up into the (7) room, usually (8), where no-one would (9) her to be. She (10) the children calling "Mother, Mother", and kept (11), feeling guilty. Or she went to the very (12) of the garden, by herself, and looked (13) the slow-moving (14) river; she looked at the river and (15) her eyes and breathed slow and (16), taking it into her being, into her veins.

8. Adjectives. Classify these adjectives, which all appear into the story, into three categories; negative, neutral and positive.

anonymous ▪ ashamed ▪ bad-tempered ▪ crazy ▪ dingy ▪ empty ▪ fulfilled ▪ guilty ▪ handsome ▪ banal ▪ harassed ▪ inevitable ▪ insightful ▪ irrelevant ▪ irritable ▪ kind ▪ ordinary ▪ painful ▪ responsible ▪ sensible ▪ unreasonable ▪ well-off

Negative	Neutral	Positive

9. Phrasal verbs. The story uses quite a lot of phrasal verbs. Complete the sentences with the base verb in the right tense:

find ▪ give ▪ give ▪ look ▪ pick ▪ pick ▪ settle ▪ take

1. We're forward to seeing you in the summer; we'll have a great time here.
2. Hello everyone. Last minute change: tomorrow's seminar will now place in room F15, not E6.
3. When her husband out where she spending her time, she stopped going there.
4. You can't leave your things on the floor; please them up and put them on the shelf.
5. "Find a nice boy, down, have kids" that's what they said to me a million times.
6. Remember that Leonard Cohen CD of mine you borrowed? You still haven't it back.
7. We like going dancing but then men are always trying to us up, and we don't want that.
8. It is still quite normal in Japan for a woman to up her job when she gets married.

ANSWER KEY

1. Correct answer b)

Errors in a): doesn't try to go back to work, only goes to Miss Townsend's hotel once, Matthew doesn't have affair with Sophie the German au pair.

Errors in b): marriage isn't cold or destructive, doesn't find it hard to control the kids, doesn't move from Richmond to Kensington, doesn't live in the hotel, doesn't die in the kitchen.

2. 1. Matthew is faithful to Susan: **b) for 10 years**
2. When all the kids are of school age, Susan hopes to: **d) have time for herself**
3. Connie goes on a walking holiday in Wales: **a) alone**
4. Miss Townsend and Susan: **c) meet once**
5. The sign on the spare bedroom saying "Do not disturb" is written by: **a) the children**
6. Mrs Parkes: **d) needs instructions**
7. Susan sees the red-haired "devil" figure: **b) twice**
8. Matthew gives Susan £ 5: **c) regularly**
9. When Susan invents a lover, Matthew suggests: **d) all meeting up for a meal**
10. Fred's hotel is: **c) used by lovers**

3. 1. Susan and Matthew marry for **love**.
2. They marry when their age is **more than their friends who get married**.
3. Matthew has an affair with one of **their old friends**.
4. She starts to think she is **mad**.
5. Sophie becomes **close to the kids**.
6. When she comes home, Susan feels **like a visitor** in her kitchen.

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|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| 4. 1. e) | 3. f) | 5. d) | 7. b) |
| 2. c) | 4. a) | 6. g) | |

5. 1. The room was ordinary and anonymous, and just what Susan needed.
2. She told her husband she wanted to have an au pair girl.
3. Are you thinking of going back to work?
4. We'll get a French or German girl and they'll learn the language.

6.

Logical deduction	Recommendation	External obligation	Self-imposed obligation	Necessity
4 / 8	5 / 6	1	2	3 / 7

- 7.
- | | | | |
|---------------|----------|------------|------------|
| 1. time | 5. bath | 9. expect | 13. at |
| 2. controlled | 6. calm | 10. heard | 14. brown |
| 3. in | 7. spare | 11. silent | 15. closed |
| 4. sit | 8. empty | 12. end | 16. deep |

8.

Negative	Neutral	Positive
ashamed / bad-tempered / banal / crazy / dingy / guilty / harassed / irritable / painful / unreasonable /	anonymous / empty / inevitable / irrelevant / ordinary /	fulfilled / handsome / insightful / kind / responsible / sensible / well-off

- 9.
1. looking forward to seeing
 2. take place
 3. found out
 4. pick them up
 5. settle down
 6. given it back
 7. pick us up
 8. give up

Reading comprehension booklet
about *To Room Nineteen* by **Doris Lessing / B1**

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