

## Commentary on learner responses to each question

The comments below are informed suggestions about the ways in which young people have arrived at responses, right or wrong.

There were 5 questions in all, three in multiple choice format and two in open response format.

The two hardest questions (Q1 & Q3) were both in multiple choice format. Both related to the way the boy was feeling at different points in the narrative and on the face of it, look very similar. The similarity may of itself have misled some less skilled or confident readers.

*Q3, 'How did the boy feel **just after** the present was put in his hands?' (Bold type as in question text)*

Multiple choice question, 4 options.

- This was the hardest of the five items for children to answer correctly. It looks quite like Q1. Around half of the sampled pupils chose the correct answer, A: 'Puzzled'. Just over a quarter, however, chose option C, 'Happy'. Nearly 1 in 5 chose option B, 'Frightened'. Very few chose option D, 'Upset'.
  - The key to finding the correct answer here is understanding the importance of 'just after', in bold in the question, in relation to 'the present was put in his hands'. Supposing that pupils do go back to the original text, finding the right answer involves identifying the single sentence, 'Something was very gently placed in my upturned palms' as equating to 'the present was put in his hands' in the question (no matching words) and then the "Hmm. This is strange" (in italics) at the start of the next paragraph as representing puzzlement.
  - Pupils will be helped by the chronological sequence of the questions in relation to the text, so that they look for the next 'chunk', but we do not know if the textual conventions of bold type and italics will draw attention to particular bits of text as we might assume. In this text, it is quite important to understand that the words in italics are what the narrator was thinking.
  - Both words in the term 'upturned palms' may be unfamiliar to less experienced readers. However, the phrase does relate to the picture at the start of the text. We do not know if pupils made use of the cues in the picture to shape their reading of the text, but it seems likely that if they did, they might have been more likely to answer this question correctly.
  - Some pupils who chose 'happy' may have referred to the previous bit of text. Having done so, if they missed the 'almost' in 'I could almost feel my new puppy's warm and furry bottom in my hands', (or even if they didn't) they might well have identified the boy's main feeling as 'happy' rather than 'puzzled'.

*Q1, 'Why were the boy's hands shaking?'*

Multiple choice question, 4 options.

- Around 6 in 10 of the sampled pupils chose the correct answer, C: 'Because he was excited'. Over a quarter, however chose option A, 'Because he was afraid'. A rather smaller number,

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around 1 in 10, chose option B, 'Because he was cold'. Very few chose option D, 'Because he was angry'.

- The 'Why?' question with possible answers framed as 'Because ...' offers a likely familiar pattern of questioning. It clearly signposts the opening line of the text, which is where pupils might expect to begin the task: the words 'shaking' and 'hands' both appear here.
- We might wonder if pupils had read through the whole text before attempting their answers (as advised), or tackled one bit at a time, this being the first, without any sense of the overall story or meaning.
- Possibly the 'hardly daring to breathe' immediately following the sign-posted line, with the word 'daring' associated with risk and danger, might have misled some.
- It is possible that those who chose option A or option B selected a response without any (further) reference to the main text, relying only on the text of the question. In this case, both fear and cold are plausible reasons for 'shaking' hands, and possibly more familiar from experience as a cause of shaking than 'excitement'.

*Q4: The boy's present was about as heavy as ....*

Multiple choice question, four options.

- This question followed on in sequence from Q3 to the next sentence in the text. Around three-quarters of the sampled pupils chose the correct answer, D: 'A full lunch box'. Nearly one in five, however, chose option B, 'An empty lunch box'. Just a few chose Option B, 'A book'.
  - Thus almost all of the pupils were able to find the appropriate section of text and associate 'about as heavy as' in the question with 'weighed about the same as' in the text, and then identify 'my school lunch box' following as part of the correct answer.
  - The word 'weighed' may have been difficult for a few less competent readers, so that they did not make the link with 'heavy' in the question.
  - It seems likely that those who chose Option B either ignored or misunderstood the following text in brackets and selected the first option in the list that contained 'lunch-box'.
  - The last sentence in the paragraph, referring to a new lunch-box, may have led them towards the empty lunch-box option, as a new lunch-box would likely contain no food.
  - It is also possible that the use of brackets may of itself have confused some pupils, who might not have been familiar with the convention and treated the text they contained as separate and not relevant.

*Q2: What did the boy **hope** his present would be?*

Open-response question.

- This question followed on in sequence from Q1, referring to the next section of text. Around three-quarters of the sampled pupils chose the correct option A, 'A puppy'. Nearly one in seven, however, chose to write an alternative, the most popular being a (empty) lunch-box. More than 10% made no response to this question.

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- Choosing the correct answer depended on identifying and understanding the short paragraph beginning '*Him? Oh my goodness, they had...*'. Both this first phrase and the final sentence of the paragraph may have presented particular difficulties for less competent readers.
- The first of these two sentences is in italics (see also Q3 above), with meaning that is implicit rather than explicit. It also involves two uses of punctuation, ? and ....., whose function in this context, to indicate how the words might be said, may have been unfamiliar.
- In the last sentence understanding that the word '*almost*' indicates anticipation of feeling, linking to 'hope' in the question, rather than an actual experience, is important for understanding (see also Q3 above).
- For those pupils whose recall and mental 'mapping' of the text from a first reading was only partial or fragmented, the middle paragraph in the text contained several references to a lunch-box, and so might be a plausible choice if they did not return to the text to check their response.
- There is no way of knowing why one in ten of the sampled pupils made no response to this question, but as almost all did answer the last (open-ended) question, it seems unlikely that the question type was the reason. It may be that they did not really understand what the question was asking, or did not grasp the significance of the '**hope**' in bold type.

Q5: *What had his parents given him?*

Open-response question.

- This was the easiest of the five questions for the sampled pupils, with four in five correctly identifying the final sentence as containing the right answer, a tortoise. Of the 20% who made an incorrect response, 'helmet' was the most popular alternative, with a few choosing 'puppy'.
  - The answer was clearly signposted by the question, being the last in the sequence, thus matching the narrative in the text. The wording contained the word 'parents', which was repeated in this final, stand-alone sentence. The syntax of the question matched that of the text, with 'given' substituting for 'got'. 'Tortoise' was the final word in the text, thus likely to have been in pupils' minds from a first reading.
  - Those pupils who chose 'helmet' may have been misled into thinking that the helmet was real, rather than used as a simile, by the phrase '..... shot out from beneath the helmet' in the previous paragraph. The words 'something resembling' to introduce the simile may also have been difficult for some less skilled readers.
  - It seems likely that those who chose 'puppy' or other alternatives may have struggled to read the whole passage, and recalled only a few disconnected fragments of the first few lines.