**Assessment Task for Reading**

**Topic: The Prisoner**

This assessment task focuses on developing senior secondary students’ reading skills.

This set of materials contains the following:

* **The reading text**
* **A set of questions**
* **Suggested answers**

**Reading Text**

**The Prisoner**

Angela got out at the 16th floor and saw the Serenity Guest House. It was one of scores of hostels or guest houses in this complex, targeting back-packers or businessmen from the third-world who could not afford normal hotel prices. There was a reception of sorts with a spray of artificial flowers in a vase. “Tacky,” thought Angela but the place smelt clean, hospital clean in fact.

“I’m here to visit Joe. Which room is he in? My friend asked me to keep an eye on Joe while he’s away.”

“He needs all the friends he can get,” said the caretaker, whose nickname was Mr. Serenity, even though he was just an employee. “He’s in the room at the end of the corridor.”

At first glance, the man on the bed didn’t look like an invalid. He was fidgeting and wriggling as he introduced himself. He had an unhealthy pallor and had obviously not seen any sunshine for a long time. His face was gaunt, but his eyes twinkled. She then saw that he could not control his movements. He swayed towards her with an outstretched hand.

“I’m a friend of Frank. He asked me to see if you needed anything while he’s away for the summer.”

“Who’s Frank?” It was as if his mind had gone blank. Another symptom of Parkinson’s Disease she would later discover.

“Oh yes, of course, Frank’s a good bloke. He fetches me food from downstairs and gets my shopping. Will you get my shopping now? I have a list ready. But let’s have a cup of tea first and a chat.”

Joe loved talking. She found out that he had had Parkinson’s for 15 years. One morning he had woken up to discover one finger tingling. It was some years before the tremors took hold. They spread from one side of his body to all over. When he’d first moved in to Serenity Guesthouse 10 years before, Joe was still mobile, but now he was trapped in his room, a hostage to this insatiable predator. He had a weekly visit from the Salvation Army but apart from this he depended on the other residents of the guesthouse to bring him food. His door was always open and people shouted down the corridor to see if he wanted anything, but few stopped to have a conversation. They were busy with their own lives.

The following Sunday, Angela visited Joe again. The takeaway containers from the previous week were still there. Empty potato crisp packets had been flattened and kept in a pile. There were half-eaten triangles of processed cheese wrapped in silver paper and slices of buttered bread. She started to pick them up, but Joe stopped her.

“No, my dear, don’t touch it! I’ll eat it later; no point in wasting food.”

Angela looked around her. It was not only left-over food that was accumulating. Joe was a hoarder. The rickety shelves around his bed were weighed down with old books, yellowing newspaper cuttings, letters and documents.

“Take any book you like, Angela. I normally charge $10 but, for you, it’s free. Just stay with me for a while.”

She stayed for a little longer each visit. Frank would be away for three more months and then she could have her Sundays back.

Angela enjoyed Joe’s company at first, but when he wheedled her to stay longer, she felt pressured. She was young and fit, and free to follow any of the interesting diversions that Hong Kong had to offer. Joe was trapped by his condition and starved of company in this airless room. A routine developed. She would bring them both a masala tea from the Indian takeaway on the ground floor. He would chatter on about his week and who had visited. He asked her polite questions about her life, but more often than not was drawn back into his own past. His anecdotes started off well, but after an hour or so, he started to ramble and get sleepy as the drugs wore off. She would try to tiptoe out, but then he would wake up refreshed and ask her to eat with him. She would have to go all the way down again to the takeaway and then wait till he finished eating, often well into the evening.

Joe refused to entertain Mr. Serenity’s idea of moving into a nursing home where he could be ‘looked after properly’, so Angela had no choice but to continue her visits. He trusted her to get money from the ATM so that he could pay for his daily necessities and settle his bills with Mr. Serenity.

One day Joe was very agitated when she turned up.

“All my money’s gone. I know who’s stolen it.” He jerked his head wildly in the direction of the reception. He cleaned my room while I was asleep and when I woke up it had gone.”

Angela knew that paranoia was another symptom of his terrible affliction. He had told her of dark figures hovering outside the window peering in at him. He was prone to lying awake at night watching the luminous hour hand on his ten-dollar plastic clock moving slowly round. He told her he could never remember whether he’d taken his tablet or not. If he took it twice, his heart beat double quick time. Even Joe was beginning to realise that he needed help.

“Angela, I know I’m not much of a catch, but I’d like to marry you. I have savings, you know, and if you will take care of me, what’s mine is yours.”

He must have seen her look of horror because he added: “Will you at least think it over?”

“I’m very flattered by your kind offer, but I’m not ready to settle down.”

“You know I’m very fond of you. I’m very lonely when you’re gone. I just lie here and wait for Sunday afternoons. You won’t leave me alone, will you?”

She nodded, and dutifully went down to fetch dinner for them to share.

One Sunday, Angela went to visit Joe as usual. She went straight to Joe’s room but the bed was made, and it was clean and uncluttered.

She tracked down Mr. Serenity, who was as usual dragging his bucket of soapy water around and mopping the corridors. He told her that he had at last found Joe a place in a residential home for the elderly in the New Territories, where he would receive around-the-clock care. He gave Angela the name card of the home. She stuffed it into the bottom of her bag and skipped down 16 flights of stairs.

She was free. A whole Sunday afternoon lay ahead of her. Should she go to the shopping mall or the gym or have a facial? Why not all of them? She stepped out into the sunshine.

**END OF READING TEXT**

Permission for use of the story has been given by the author.

**Questions**

**Refer to the text ad answer Questions 1-20. Write your answers in the spaces provided. For multiple-choice questions, choose the best answer and blacken ONE circle only.**

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| 1. | Angela’s first impression of the Serenity Guest House was that, compared to many hotels in Hong Kong, it was: | | | | | | | |
|  | *(1 mark)* | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | | | | | | |
|  | A. | inexpensive | |  | | | | |
|  |  |  | |  | | | | |
|  | B. | quite expensive | |  | | | | |
|  |  |  | |  | | | | |
|  | C. | expensive | |  | | | | |
|  |  |  | |  | | | | |
|  | D. | very inexpensive | |  | A | B | C | D |
|  |  | | |  | ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ | ⭘ |
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|  |  | | | | | | | |
| 2. | Why did Angela go to the Serenity Guesthouse? | | | | | | | |
|  | *(1 mark)* | | | | | | | |
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| 3. | Why did Angela find the caretaker’s nickname surprising? *(2 marks)* | | | | | | | |
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| 4. | Complete the table below with a word or phrase in lines 1-14 that has an opposite meaning to that given in the right column. | | | | | | | |
|  | *(4 marks)* | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | | | | | | |
|  | **Word used by the writer** | | **Opposite meaning** | | | | | |
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|  |  | | real | | | | | |
|  |
|  |  | | elegant | | | | | |
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|  |  | | calm | | | | | |
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| 5. | In line 12, why did Joe have his hand “outstretched? | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | *(1 mark)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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|  |  | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | A. | | to ask for money | | |  | | | | | | | | |
|  |  | |  | | |  | | | | | | | | |
|  | B. | | to point towards the bed | | |  | | | | | | | | |
|  |  | |  | | |  | | | | | | | | |
|  | C. | | to help him balance | | |  | | | | | | | | |
|  |  | |  | | |  | | | | | | | | |
|  | D. | | to try and hold her | | |  | | A | B | | C | D | | |
|  |  | |  | | |  | | ⭘ | ⭘ | | ⭘ | ⭘ | | |
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| 6. | Why did Joe say “Oh yes, of course…” in line 17? | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | *(1 mark)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 7. | How did Joe’s neighbours help him? | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | *(1 mark)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 8. | Why was Joe “trapped in his room” (line 23)? | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | *(1 mark)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 9. | What word in the passage describes a person who is obsessed with keeping things and unable to throw things away? | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | *(1 mark)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 10. | Identify two sentences in lines 38 to 47 of the story where the writer indicates that Angela is becoming reluctant to continue visiting Joe. A third sentence has been done for you. | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | *(2 marks)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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|  | (i) | |  | | | | | | | | | | | |
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|  | (ii) | |  | | | | | | | | | | | |
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|  | (iii) | | *She would have to go all the way down again to the takeaway and then wait till he finished eating, often well into the evening.* (line 47-49) | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 11. | When Joe was talking to Angela, what was the usual topic of his stories? | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | *(1 mark)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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|  | A. | the things Joe had done that week | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  |  |  | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | B. | Angela’s past | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  |  |  | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | C. | Joe’s past | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  |  |  | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | D. | the drugs Joe took | | |  | | A | | | B | | | C | D |
|  |  |  | | |  | | ⭘ | | | ⭘ | | | ⭘ | ⭘ |
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| 12. | What does “it” refer to in line 56? | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | *(1 mark)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 13. | In lines 57-58, who were the “dark figures”? | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | *(1 mark)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 14. | Complete the table below with the words or expressions used by the writer in the paragraph beginning on line 57 that match the meanings given. | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | *(4 marks)* | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  |  | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|  | **Word or expression used by the writer** | | | **Meaning** | | | | | | | | | | |
|  |
|  |  | | | indication | | | | | | | | | | |
|  |
|  |  | | | illness or disease | | | | | | | | | | |
|  |
|  |  | | | floating in the air | | | | | | | | | | |
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|  |  | | | looking intently | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 15. | Give two reasons from the paragraph beginning on line 57 why even Joe finally realised that he needed help? | | |
|  | *(2 marks)* | | |
|  |  | | |
|  | (i) |  | |
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|  |  | | |
|  | (ii) |  | |
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| 16. | When proposing to marry Angela, Joe says: “I know I’m not much of a catch”. What is Joe comparing himself to? (line 63) | | |
|  | *(1 mark)* | | |
|  |  | | |
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| 17. | Complete the table below with a word or phrase with similar meanings to those in the text. | | |
|  | *(2 marks)* | | |
|  |  | | |
|  | **Adjective used by the writer** | | **Meaning** |
|  |
|  | flattered (line 65) | |  |
|  |
|  | uncluttered (line 70) | |  |
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| 18. | Why did Angela skip down the stairs (lines 74-5)? |
|  | *(1 mark)* |
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| 19. | Why do you think the writer ended the story with the line: “She stepped out into the sunshine.” (line 77)? |
|  | *(1 mark)* |
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| 20. | Who do you think was “The prisoner” of the title and why? |
|  | *(2 marks)* |
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**END OF QUESTIONS**

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| **Suggested Answers** | |
| 1. | A. inexpensive (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 2. | to visit Joe // keep an eye on Joe (line 5) (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 3. | it is the name of the hotel (line 6) (1 mark)  the caretaker is not the owner (line 7) (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 4. | artificial (line 3) (1 mark)  tacky (line 4) (1 mark)  fidgeting // wriggling (line 8) (1 mark)  gaunt (line 10) (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 5. | C. to help him balance (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 6. | he remembers who Frank is (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 7. | they brought him food / anything he needed (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 8. | because of (the effects of) his illness / he was sick / he has tremors (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 9. | hoarder (line 29) (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 10. | |  | | --- | | Frank would be away for three more months and then she could have her Sundays back. (lines 38-39) | | Angela enjoyed Joe’s company at first, but when he wheedled her to stay longer, she felt pressured. (line 40) | | She would try to tiptoe out, but…. (lines 46-47) | | Angela had no choice but to continue her visits. (line 51) |   Any 2 of 4 answers – 1mark each |
|  |  |
| 11. | C. Joe’s past (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 12. | Joe’s money (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 13. | imaginary figures / ghosts / demons / spirits / they are not there (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 14. | |  | | --- | | symptom (1 mark) | | affliction (1 mark) | | hovering (1 mark) | | peering (1 mark) | |
|  |  |
| 15. | paranoia // seeing dark figures // imagining things  loss of memory // forgetting to take tablet  unable to sleep at night // insomnia  Any 2 of 3 answers – 1 mark each |
|  |  |
| 16. | He compares himself to a fish (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 17. | |  | | --- | | pleased / happy / honoured (1 mark) | | tidy / clear (1 mark) | |
|  |  |
| 18. | she felt relieved / happy // she was free (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 19. | it captures Angela’s sense of relief and/or freedom from having to visit Joe / leaving behind the darkness of Joe’s illness / moving from darkness of Joe’s illness into light  (1 mark) |
|  |  |
| 20. | Joe (1 mark): his disease (1 mark) /  Angela (1 mark): her obligation (1 mark) |

END OF SUGGESTED ANSWERS

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