“Cub Pilot on the Mississippi” by Mark Twain

**Literary Analysis: Conflict and Resolution**

**Conflict** is the struggle between two opposing forces.

- In **external conflict**, a character struggles against another character, natural forces, or some aspect of society.
- **Internal conflict** is a struggle between competing feelings, beliefs, needs, or desires within a single character.

In the **resolution** of a story, problems are worked out in a way that eliminates the conflict.

The following passages from “Cub Pilot on the Mississippi” tell something about the characters’ external conflicts and about one character’s internal struggle. As you reread these passages, think about the conflicts with which the characters are struggling.

He was a middle-aged, long, slim, bony, smooth-shaven, horsefaced, ignorant, stingy, malicious, snarling, fault-hunting, mote magnifying tyrant. I early got the habit of coming on watch with dread at my heart. No matter how good a time I might have been having with the off-watch below, and no matter how high my spirits might be when I started aloft, my soul became lead in my body the moment I approached the pilothouse.

I often wanted to kill Brown, but this would not answer. A cub had to take everything his boss gave, in the way of vigorous comment and criticism; and we all believed that there was a United States law making it a penitentiary offense to strike or threaten a pilot who was on duty.

**DIRECTIONS:** Use the information in the preceding passages, along with your knowledge of the rest of the story, to answer these questions.

1. What is the external conflict in “Cub Pilot on the Mississippi”?

2. What is the internal conflict?

3. How are the conflicts resolved?
Critical Reading Identify the letter of the choice that best answers the question.

1. What does this passage tell you about how young Twain feels about Brown?
   He was a middle-aged, long, slim, bony, smooth-shaven, horsefaced, ignorant, stingy, malicious, snarling, fault-hunting, mote-magnifying tyrant.

A. Twain dislikes Brown intensely.
B. Twain respects Brown in spite of his flaws.
C. You can’t judge a book by its cover.
D. Twain finds Brown funny.

2. What do you predict is the possibility of Twain and Brown ever getting along, based on Twain’s first experiences with the pilot?
   A. Twain and Brown will find a lot to talk about.
   B. Twain and Brown will never get along well.
   C. Twain and Brown will become friends.
   D. Brown will become a good teacher for Twain.

3. What is Twain feeling in this line from “Cub Pilot on the Mississippi”?
   As soon as I could get my voice I said apologetically, “I have had no orders, sir.”

A. eagerness
B. happiness
C. discomfort
D. anger

4. In “Cub Pilot on the Mississippi,” George Ealer, Ritchie’s boss, is the opposite of Brown. Which word describes George Ealer?
   A. lazy
   B. unfair
   C. forgetful
   D. kindhearted

5. What does Twain’s friend George Ritchie like to do in “Cub Pilot on the Mississippi”?
   A. play tricks on Brown
   B. tease Twain about Brown
   C. eat meals with Brown
   D. tease Twain’s brother Henry
6. Twain tries to hold his temper when Brown gets angry. What does this describe?
   A. the external conflict
   B. Twain's internal conflict
   C. Brown's internal conflict
   D. the falling action

7. Why does Brown command Twain to “round the boat to”?
   A. Brown wants to teach Twain a new skill.
   B. Brown knows that Twain will do a good job.
   C. Brown wants Twain to fail so he can yell at him.
   D. Brown has forgotten how to do it himself.

8. In “Cub Pilot on the Mississippi,” why does Brown not hear Henry’s shouted instruction to stop at the landing?
   A. He dislikes Henry.
   B. He is too busy yelling at Twain.
   C. He has fallen asleep at the wheel.
   D. He is deaf.

9. Which sentence best describes how the captain treats Twain after Twain’s attack on Brown?
   A. The captain supports Twain.
   B. The captain is angry with Twain.
   C. The captain is surprised at Twain’s behavior.
   D. The captain is sad about what happened.

10. What does Twain find out about himself after the conflict with Brown?
    A. He finds out that he has courage.
    B. He finds out that he is reckless.
    C. He finds out that he has steering skill.
    D. He finds out that he has a sense of humor.

11. How do you predict that Twain would have reacted to Brown’s insults if Henry had not been in danger?
    A. Twain would still have attacked Brown.
    B. Twain would have insulted Brown.
    C. Twain would have held in his anger, as usual.
    D. Twain would have leaped off the steamboat.
Critical Reading Identify the letter of the choice that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. Which sentence best describes how the narrator feels about Brown in this passage from "Cub Pilot on the Mississippi"?

   He was a middle-aged, long, slim, bony, smooth-shaven, horsefaced, ignorant, stingy, malicious, snarling, fault-hunting, mote-magnifying tyrant.

   A. The narrator despises him.
   B. The narrator respects him.
   C. The narrator envies Brown.
   D. The narrator finds Brown humorous.

2. What do you predict about how Twain and Brown will get along, based on their first encounter?

   A. Brown and Twain will not get along well.
   B. Brown and Twain will find a lot to talk about.
   C. Brown and Twain will become friends.
   D. Brown will be a valuable teacher for Twain.

3. Why do you think Brown examines Twain's shoes so carefully?

   A. to make Twain feel uncomfortable and self-conscious
   B. to be sure Twain is using proper hygiene
   C. because he admires the shoes
   D. because he is curious

4. What do you know about the conflict between Twain and Brown from this passage?

   The moment I was in the presence, even in the darkest night, I could feel those yellow eyes upon me, and knew their owner was watching for a pretext to spit out some venom on me.

   A. Brown imagines that Twain dislikes him.
   B. Brown dislikes Twain because of his poor job performance.
   C. Brown is trying to help Twain.
   D. Brown's dislike for Twain is just part of Brown's disagreeable personality.

5. In "Cub Pilot on the Mississippi," George Ritchie takes great pleasure in

   A. playing pranks on Brown.
   B. teasing Twain about Brown.
   C. showing up Twain in front of Brown.
   D. showing up Twain in front of Ealer.

6. Brown commands Twain to "round the boat to" because he wants

   A. Twain to fail.
   B. Twain to learn a new skill.
   C. the job done right.
   D. to be a good teacher.
7. In "Cub Pilot on the Mississippi," Brown fails to hear Henry's shouted instruction to stop at a landing because
   A. he dislikes Henry and always ignores him.
   B. he is too busy yelling at Twain.
   C. he has fallen asleep at the wheel.
   D. he is deaf.

8. Twain struggles to hold his temper during Brown's tirades. This statement describes
   A. the external conflict.
   B. Twain's internal conflict.
   C. Brown's internal conflict.
   D. the falling action.

9. Which word describes the captain's attitude toward Twain after the attack on Brown?
   A. supportive
   B. sad
   C. angry
   D. surprised

10. Which personal quality does Twain discover as a result of his conflict with Brown?
    A. courage
    B. recklessness
    C. steering skill
    D. sense of humor

11. If Henry had not been in danger, how do you predict Twain would have reacted to Brown's insults?
    A. Twain would have attacked Brown.
    B. Twain would have insulted Brown verbally.
    C. Twain would have held in his anger, as usual.
    D. Twain would have leaped off the steamboat.

Vocabulary and Grammar

12. In which sentence is ascended used correctly?
    A. The furnace repairperson ascended the stairs to the basement.
    B. The crowd ascended enthusiastically to the entertainer.
    C. Tom ascended the stairs to the balcony.
    D. Sandy ascended the package to her aunt.

13. What does it mean if parents are indulgent?
    A. They are tolerant.
    B. They are strict.
    C. They are nervous.
    D. They have lots of rules.