

2 Reading Comprehension – Answer Key

Text: Theodore Dreiser, "The Lobster and the Squid"*, from: Peter Freese, *The American Dream*, Viewfinder Topics (München: Langenscheidt, 2011), pp. 48f.

1. As what kind of person is Frank Cowperwood portrayed in the first paragraph (ll. 1-12)?

- ☐ a clean, friendly and helpful boy
- ☐ an intelligent boy, who loves reading
- ☒ a courageous and very reasonable boy, who is very curious
- ☐ a sturdy, defiant and good-looking boy, who loves sports

2. In lines 13 to 17, we learn about Frank that ... (more than one option is correct)

- ☐ his father is the director of a bank.
- ☒ he sometimes takes responsibility for his brothers after school.
- ☒ at one store at the fish-market, rare fish or other things living in the sea are on display.
- ☐ he is especially interested in the construction of the tank.

3. Which of the details from lines 17 to 41 is correct?

- ☐ The "tragedy" Frank sees makes him more intellectual.
- ☐ The squid manages to disappear again and again.
- ☐ Frank comes to look at the tank every day because he wants to support the squid.
- ☒ Both the lobster and the squid are quick in their movements.

4. In the passage where Frank finds out that the squid is dead (ll. 42-66) ...

- ☐ he sees that the squid is killed by an engine.
- ☐ he thinks the lobster enjoys its meal.
- ☒ he has more regrets about missing the final fight than about the death of the squid.
- ☐ the lobster uses a calculator.

5. At the end, Frank tries to understand what can be learnt from this incident (ll. 67-105) (more than one option).

- ☐ The squid lost because he had no more ink to spray.
- ☒ The squid lost because he was unarmed.
- ☒ This experience influences Frank very much.
- ☒ Frank makes up his own philosophy about the internal logic of life.
- ☐ People kill other people in order to eat them.
- ☒ Frank is satisfied with his argumentation.

6. What do you think of Frank as a person as he is described in the first paragraph? Would you like to be his friend?Possible answer:

The narrator uses a considerable number of attributes to describe Frank, but what is strikingly absent is any mention of friendliness. He seems to be a very cold, business-minded person, which is even more remarkable considering his young age. So I think I would not want to be friends with him; anyway, it is very unlikely that he had any friends, as his “self-sufficient manner” is also emphasized (l. 11).

7. You are a couple of years older than young Frank Cowperwood is in this excerpt. What do you think: Is there a lesson that can be learnt from the squid/lobster incident?Possible answer(s):

At first sight, the only lesson that can be learnt is: If you put a squid and a lobster in a small enough tank, the lobster will finally kill the squid. There is no other lesson. The whole setup is highly artificial. In their natural surroundings, squids steer clear of lobsters, and given enough room, they will be very successful in escaping one, should they come close by accident.

But if the artificial setup is to be part of the experiment, then of course there is a lesson. It tells us that if somebody with a weapon meets somebody without a weapon who has no means of escaping, the latter loses – if the circumstances are such that the survival of the former depends on his defeating the other one.

The satisfaction that little Frank draws from his conclusion that it is all right for white men to enslave and kill “negroes” (l. 103), because the white men are armed, shows how little compassion this boy is used to feeling and how distorted his view of humankind is which was shaped by the racist explanations his father gave him (ll. 99-100).

(Peter Ringeisen)