

TEXT 1 — STORY

Questions 1–5

The Substitute

Room 9B had eaten three substitute teachers since the start of Term 2, and the rumour in the corridor was that the fourth would not last until recess. When Mr Okafor walked in on Monday, wearing a mustard cardigan and carrying a violin case instead of a briefcase, Priya was sure the rumour would come true.

He did not shout. He did not even say good morning. He simply opened the case, lifted out the violin and drew the bow across a single string. The note hung in the air, thin and shivering, until the last whisper in the room had died. Then he lowered the bow. “That,” he said, “is what silence sounds like when you finally listen to it.”

Somebody snorted. Dylan, who had made it his mission to defeat every substitute, leaned back and folded his arms. “Is this English or music?” he called. Mr Okafor smiled as though he had been waiting for the question. “Both,” he replied. “Today we are writing the sounds of this school. Take a pencil and one page. Go and find something nobody else has noticed.”

To Priya’s surprise, the class went. She drifted past the gym, where the basketballs thudded like a slow heartbeat, and stood beneath the jacaranda, whose dropped flowers crunched underfoot like tiny purple bones. Back in the classroom, the page was full. Even Dylan had written something, which he hid behind his hand.

At the end of the lesson, Mr Okafor read a few lines aloud without naming the authors. When he read, “The bell is a bird that eats the whole afternoon,” Priya felt her cheeks burn, because it was hers. He glanced at her and nodded once, almost invisibly. The rumour, she realised, had been wrong. Room 9B had not eaten Mr Okafor. He had simply given it something better to chew on.

1. What did Mr Okafor bring to the lesson instead of a briefcase?

- A a stack of books
- B a violin case
- C a set of pencils
- D a box of music tests

2. Why did Dylan call out, “Is this English or music?”

- A He wanted to leave the room early.
- B He had forgotten his timetable.
- C He was confused and testing the teacher.
- D He was sincerely keen to play.

3. “The basketballs thudded like a slow heartbeat” suggests that the sound was

- A sharp and sudden
- B loud and angry
- C steady and rhythmic
- D faint and fading

THE WORKED ANSWERS TO THOSE 3 QUESTIONS

1. What did Mr Okafor bring to the lesson instead of a briefcase? [Detail]

Correct answer: B — a violin case

- What is the question asking? It asks for a fact that the text states.
- Go back to the text and find the evidence: “carrying a violin case instead of a briefcase”
- The first paragraph names the object.
- So the correct answer is B (a violin case).
- Why the other options are wrong:
 - A (a stack of books): Books are tempting because Mr Okafor is an English teacher, but the text says he walks in carrying a violin case instead of a briefcase, so no stack of books is mentioned at all.
 - C (a set of pencils): Pencils do appear later, but Mr Okafor only tells the class to take one when he sets the writing task. He does not bring them; the thing he carries in is the violin case.
 - D (a box of music tests): ‘Music tests’ may seem to fit because of the violin, yet no tests are mentioned anywhere. The violin is played to quieten the room, not to examine anyone.
- Check it against the evidence. Check the detail: “carrying a violin case instead of a briefcase” points to ‘a violin case’, so the other choices do not fit.

LOS: EN4-RVL-01: uses a range of personal, creative and critical strategies to read texts

KEY TAKEAWAY

Go back to the text and find the exact words that answer the question, then match them to an option.

2. Why did Dylan call out, “Is this English or music?” [Inference]

Correct answer: C — He was confused and testing the teacher.

- What is the question asking? It asks what the clues in the text show.
- Go back to the text and find the evidence: “Dylan, who had made it his mission to defeat every substitute”
- Dylan tests every substitute, so the question is a challenge.
- So the correct answer is C (He was confused and testing the teacher).
- Why the other options are wrong:

- A (He wanted to leave the room early.): Dylan does not seem to want to leave. He leans back and folds his arms, which shows he is settling in to challenge the teacher, not slipping away from the lesson.
- B (He had forgotten his timetable.): A timetable is never mentioned in the story. His question is a taunt, and the text explains why: he had made it his mission to defeat every substitute.
- D (He was sincerely keen to play.): Because the question mentions music he might look keen, but the text says he 'folded his arms' and wanted to defeat the substitute. He is testing Mr Okafor, not showing sincere interest.
- Check it against the evidence. Look for the clue: "Dylan, who had made it his mission to defeat every substitute" points to 'He was confused and testing the teacher', so the other choices do not fit.

LOS: EN4-RVL-01: uses a range of personal, creative and critical strategies to read texts

KEY TAKEAWAY

When the text does not say it directly, use the clues it gives, then ask: what must be true?

3. "The basketballs thudded like a slow heartbeat" suggests that the sound was [Figurative]

Correct answer: C — steady and rhythmic

- What is the question asking? It asks how the writer's special language works.
- Go back to the text and find the evidence: "basketballs thudded like a slow heartbeat"
- A heartbeat is a regular, repeated sound.
- So the correct answer is C (steady and rhythmic).
- Why the other options are wrong:
 - A (sharp and sudden): 'Sharp and sudden' suits a bang, but a heartbeat that is slow is spaced out and even. The word 'slow' in the comparison points to a regular beat, not a sudden noise.
 - B (loud and angry): 'Thudded' sounds heavy, so loud and angry may tempt you. But a heartbeat is not angry, and the comparison is about the steady pattern of the sound, not its temper.
 - D (faint and fading): Fading would suit a sound that dies away, yet a heartbeat keeps repeating. The basketballs keep thudding in a regular rhythm, so the sound is not getting fainter.
- Check it against the evidence. Think about what the comparison suggests: "basketballs thudded like a slow heartbeat" points to 'steady and rhythmic', so the other choices do not fit.

LOS: EN4-URA-01: analyses how meaning is created through language forms, features and structures

KEY TAKEAWAY

A comparison with like or as paints a picture. Ask what the two things have in common.

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