Idylls of the King – Alfred Lord Tennyson – PARCC Narrative Task Practice

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Tennyson had a life-long interest in the legend of King Arthur, and after the huge success of his poem “Morte d’Arthur”, he built on the theme with a series of twelve poems, written over the span of twenty years, which would become his masterpiece Idylls of the King. As you read the excerpt below from the final poem, “The Passing of Arthur”, you should focus on the details that help you visualize scenes, objects, and people being described. These details will help you decide what ideas, moods, and attitudes the poem conveys. For example, “funeral scarf” and “stillness of the dead world’s winter dawn” from “Idylls of the King” suggest emptiness and desolation. You also want to identify any reasons why Arthur’s death could be beneficial to the people of Britain.

As you read the excerpt, please annotate on the right hand side of the chart. The more you can interact with the text here, the stronger your written response will be. Questions, conclusions, and other thoughts are all required for good annotation.

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| “Idylls of the King” | Your thought process |
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You have now read and paid close attention to the language choices within the narrative passage, particular the ways in which the characters are developed and the underlying motivations of each. Now it’s time to look at the type of reading comprehension questions the PARCC will ask.

PART A –

Based upon the excerpt from Beowulf, what can you infer about Wiglaf’s relationship with Beowulf?

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| a. They are father and son. | b. They have no connection to each other whatsoever. |
| c. Beowulf feels no sympathy for Wiglaf and therefore, is not upset with him. | d. There is a strong, deep familial connection between the two. |

PART B –

What excerpt from the passage best supports your answer from Part A?

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| a. “Then Wiglaf went back, anxious/To return while Beowulf was alive, to bring him/Treasure they’d won together.” | b. “You’re the last of all our far-flung family/Fate has swept our race away/Taken warriors in their strength and led them/To the death that was waiting. And now I follow them.” |
| c. “He was sitting near Beowulf’s body, wearily sprinking/Water in the dead man’s face, trying/To stir him. He could not. No one could have kept/Life in their lord’s body, or turned/Aside the Lord’s will. | d. “Then Wiglaf turned and angrily told them/What men without courage must hear/Wexstan’s brave son stared at the traitors/His heart sorrowful, and said what he had to.” |

PART C –

Choose one word that describes Beowulf’s personality as shown in the excerpt from Beowulf. There is more than one correct choice listed below:

a. dejected

b. exuberant

c. jaded

d. proud

e. duplicitous

f. arrogant

g. sorrowful

h. bitter

PART D –

Find a sentence in the passage with details that support your response to Part A. A computer based test would say, “Click on that sentence and drag and drop it into the box below.” Here, please write the sentence in the box.

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Find another sentence in the passage with details that support your response to Part A.

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PROSE-CONSTRUCTED RESPONSE: BEOWULF

In this excerpt from Beowulf, the text tells us how Wiglaf addresses the cowardly warriors who chose to save themselves rather than help Beowulf fight the dragon: “Too few of his warriors remembered/To come, when our lord faced death, alone.”

Think about the character Wiglaf as developed through this section. Write an original story, ***from Wiglaf’s point of view***, to continue where the passage ended. In your story, be sure to use what you have learned about Wiglaf when you write from his point of view.

The task at hand basically requires two things from you: 1) You need to write an original story from Wiglaf’s point of view and 2) You need to make sure that your original story is based upon the characteristics of Wiglaf as derived from your reading of the excerpt. This is where your annotation of the excerpt comes into play again. We have learned all we need to know about Wiglaf; we just have to create a story around these characteristics.

Consider the graphic organizer that follows. It is set up to reveal Wiglaf’s defining characteristics. On the left side, we will identify Wiglaf’s personality traits. On the right, we will provide evidence from the text.

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| Textual Evidence | Wiglaf’s Characteristics |
| Wiglaf desperately wants to get back to Beowulf with the treasure to show his lord before he dies. | Absolute dedication to Beowulf |
| Beowulf places Wiglaf as the new king, by giving him the necklace, the helmet, the rings, and the mail-shirt. | Beowulf has absolute faith in Wiglaf’s ability to lead |
| Wiglaf addresses the crowd of cowardly warriors, who wait to hear what he has to say. | Wiglaf commands their attention with just his own personality; nothing else is needed |
| Wiglaf strips the warriors of their money, riches, and land. | Wiglaf is confident in his leadership abilities |

As you can see, we have ample ammunition now with which to create our original story from Wiglaf’s point of view. Keep in mind the following:

1) Be actively engaged when you first read the excerpt and be sure to comment on Wiglaf’s PERSONALITY and MOTIVATIONS

2) Always prewrite.