

Today you will read a passage from *The Count of Monte Cristo* as well as a scene from the play *Blessings*. After you have read the selections and answered some questions, you will write an essay analyzing the themes presented in the two texts.

Read the passage from *The Count of Monte Cristo*, in which Edmond Dantes has been imprisoned for over four years and has recently stopped eating the prison food. Then answer questions 1 through 3.

from *The Count of Monte Cristo*

by Alexandre Dumas

- 1 Suddenly, about nine o'clock in the evening, Edmond heard a hollow sound in the wall against which he was lying.
- 2 So many loathsome animals inhabited the prison, that their noise did not, in general, awake him; but whether abstinence<sup>1</sup> had quickened his faculties, or whether the noise was really louder than usual, Edmond raised his head and listened. It was a continual scratching, as if made by a huge claw, a powerful tooth, or some iron instrument attacking the stones.
- 3 Although weakened, the young man's brain instantly responded to the idea that haunts all prisoners—liberty! It seemed to him that heaven had at length taken pity on him, and had sent this noise to warn him on the very brink of the abyss.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps one of those beloved ones he had so often thought of was thinking of him, and striving to diminish the distance that separated them.
- 4 No, no, doubtless he was deceived, and it was but one of those dreams that forerun death!
- 5 Edmond still heard the sound. It lasted nearly three hours; he then heard a noise of something falling, and all was silent.
- 6 Some hours afterwards it began again, nearer and more distinct. Edmond was intensely interested. Suddenly the jailer entered.
- 7 For a week since he had resolved to die, and during the four days that he had been carrying out his purpose, Edmond had not spoken to the attendant, had not answered him when he inquired what was the matter with him, and turned his face to the wall when he looked too curiously at him; but now the jailer

<sup>1</sup>abstinence—self-denial from an action or practice

<sup>2</sup>abyss—bottomless pit

- might hear the noise and put an end to it, and so destroy a ray of something like hope that soothed his last moments.
- 8 The jailer brought him his breakfast. Dantes raised himself up and began to talk about everything; about the bad quality of the food, about the coldness of his dungeon, grumbling and complaining, in order to have an excuse for speaking louder, and wearying the patience of his jailer, who out of kindness of heart had brought broth and white bread for his prisoner.
- 9 Fortunately, he fancied that Dantes was delirious; and placing the food on the rickety table, he withdrew. Edmond listened, and the sound became more and more distinct.
- 10 "There can be no doubt about it," thought he; "it is some prisoner who is striving to obtain his freedom. Oh, if I were only there to help him!" Suddenly another idea took possession of his mind, so used to misfortune, that it was scarcely capable of hope—the idea that the noise was made by workmen the governor had ordered to repair the neighboring dungeon.
- 11 It was easy to ascertain this; but how could he risk the question? It was easy to call his jailer's attention to the noise, and watch his countenance as he listened; but might he not by this means destroy hopes far more important than the short-lived satisfaction of his own curiosity? Unfortunately, Edmond's brain was still so feeble that he could not bend his thoughts to anything in particular.
- 12 He saw but one means of restoring lucidity and clearness to his judgment. He turned his eyes towards the soup which the jailer had brought, rose, staggered towards it, raised the vessel to his lips, and drank off the contents with a feeling of indescribable pleasure. He had often heard that shipwrecked persons had died through having eagerly devoured too much food. Edmond replaced on the table the bread he was about to devour, and returned to his couch—he did not wish to die. He soon felt that his ideas became again collected—he could think, and strengthen his thoughts by reasoning. Then he said to himself, "I must put this to the test, but without compromising anybody. If it is a workman, I need but knock against the wall, and he will cease to work, in order to find out who is knocking, and why he does so; but as his occupation is sanctioned by the governor, he will soon resume it. If, on the contrary, it is a prisoner, the noise I make will alarm him, he will cease, and not begin again until he thinks everyone is asleep."
- 13 Edmond rose again, but this time his legs did not tremble, and his sight was clear; he went to a corner of his dungeon, detached a stone, and with it

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- knocked against the wall where the sound came. He struck thrice. At the first blow the sound ceased, as if by magic.
- 14 Edmond listened intently; an hour passed, two hours passed, and no sound was heard from the wall—all was silent there.
- 15 Full of hope, Edmond swallowed a few mouthfuls of bread and water, and, thanks to the vigor of his constitution, found himself well-nigh recovered.
- 16 The day passed away in utter silence—night came without recurrence of the noise.
- 17 “It is a prisoner,” said Edmond joyfully. The night passed in perfect silence. Edmond did not close his eyes.

From THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO by Alexandre Dumas—Public Domain

**1. Part A**

What is the meaning of **recurrence** as it is used in paragraph 16 of *The Count of Monte Cristo*?

- Ⓐ a desire for something hard to obtain
- Ⓑ an instance of something happening again
- Ⓒ a way of thinking about something important
- Ⓓ an understanding of something previously unknown

**Part B**

Which evidence from *The Count of Monte Cristo* supports the correct answer in Part A?

- Ⓐ “. . . I need but knock against the wall, and he will cease to work . . . .” (paragraph 12)
- Ⓑ “. . . he will soon resume it.” (paragraph 12)
- Ⓒ “Full of hope, Edmond swallowed a few mouthfuls of bread and water . . . .” (paragraph 15)
- Ⓓ “Edmond did not close his eyes.” (paragraph 17)

**2. Part A**

In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, how does the noise in the wall affect Edmond Dantes?

- Ⓐ It causes him to summon the jailer.
- Ⓑ It gives him a sense of hope.
- Ⓒ It frightens him into behaving foolishly.
- Ⓓ It proves that he will escape.

**Part B**

Which evidence from *The Count of Monte Cristo* supports the answer to Part A?

- Ⓐ "So many loathsome animals inhabited the prison, that their noise did not, in general, awake him . . . ." (paragraph 2)
- Ⓑ "It seemed to him that heaven had at length taken pity on him . . . ." (paragraph 3)
- Ⓒ "No, no, doubtless he was deceived, and it was but one of those dreams that forerun death!" (paragraph 4)
- Ⓓ "Suddenly the jailer entered." (paragraph 6)

**3. Part A**

What is a central idea of *The Count of Monte Cristo*?

- Ⓐ Poor conditions cause a man to imagine sounds in his cell.
- Ⓑ A jailer takes pity on a hungry man and offers him food.
- Ⓒ The lack of company causes a man to befriend his jailer.
- Ⓓ A confined man is energized by the possibility of escape.

**Part B**

Which evidence from *The Count of Monte Cristo* **best** supports the answer to Part A?

- Ⓐ "Dantes raised himself up and began to talk about everything; about the bad quality of the food, about the coldness of his dungeon, grumbling and complaining, in order to have an excuse for speaking louder, and wearying the patience of his jailer, who out of kindness of heart had brought broth and white bread for his prisoner." (paragraph 8)
- Ⓑ "Fortunately, he fancied that Dantes was delirious; and placing the food on the rickety table, he withdrew." (paragraph 9)
- Ⓒ "'There can be no doubt about it,' thought he; 'it is some prisoner who is striving to obtain his freedom. Oh, if I were only there to help him!'" (paragraph 10)
- Ⓓ "Unfortunately, Edmond's brain was still so feeble that he could not bend his thoughts to anything in particular." (paragraph 11)

Read the scene from *Blessings*. Then answer questions 4 through 6.

from *Blessings*

by Mary Hall Surface

LIGHTS UP on the "looking spot," an outcropping of rock on the peak of a ridge, high above the valley below. JESSE is leading the way. They are just arriving.

1 **JESSE.** (*Entering.*) It gets cooler, brighter, right at the bend. See?

2 **RENE.** (*Entering.*) And thinner. The air feels thinner.

3 **JESSE.** Cause it is.

(*RENE reaches the top. She looks out for the first time.*)

4 **RENE.** Oh my gosh.

5 **JESSE.** Like it?

6 **RENE.** I didn't know sunsets came like this! How high *are* we?

7 **JESSE.** High as you can get without ropes. See that ridge? Sheer rock-face. I scale that once a year. Since I was twelve. It's my test.

8 **RENE.** Are those little color specks houses?

9 **JESSE.** Ben Lomand. And that way, if the fog's up, you can see the ocean and the lighthouse from Seal Rock, flickering, kinda like a heartbeat.

10 **RENE.** How'd you find this?

11 **JESSE.** Sniffed it out. (*RENE laughs.*) All right. Review. First turn?

12 **RENE.** When you smell the (*Proud of remembering.*) "eucalyptus," follow the smell.

13 **JESSE.** Good. Next turn.

14 **RENE.** At the tallest redwood with the . . . uh . . .

15 **JESSE.** Burl. Think curl. Wood curling.

16 **RENE.** *Burl* that looks like a big bump on a giant nose. Then follow the nose.

17 **JESSE.** Until—

18 **RENE.** You see the blue-gray rock. Then straight up the trail, carpeted with "golden orange-brown" needles, sniffing the air cool. Watch the trees for bright, then Tah-dah!

19 **JESSE.** Great map, huh?

20 **RENE.** The best! (*RENE crosses to have a seat near the edge.*) Jeez!!

21 **JESSE.** Careful. There's no map for gettin' you back up if you fall.

22 **RENE.** Sorry.

*(They settle into sitting.)*

23 **RENE.** Man, I've got to bring my paints up here.

24 **JESSE.** You paint?

25 **RENE.** Watercolor.

26 **JESSE.** What of?

27 **RENE.** Maps. Picture maps. Of places. Uncle Randy says *you* make amazing mirrors. From redwood.

28 **JESSE.** Don't know how amazing they are. But I make 'em. And sell 'em. So people can see themselves in the—through the wood.

29 **RENE.** What else do you do?

30 **JESSE.** Like to cook. Like poems. Ever written a poem?

31 **RENE.** I don't do poems. Too many words. Is that a river?

32 **JESSE.** Runs all the way to the ocean. I hike the whole length of it. Ever seen where a river and the ocean meet?

33 **RENE.** I'm not sure.

34 **JESSE.** Down at Sunset Beach. You can see it flow clear down the mountain 'til it forms a riverbed right on the beach, in the sand. The water looks real clear. Light. Not like the ocean at all. Like it's not really supposed to be there, but it is. Then the waves just lap up and catch it, little bit at a time. Then it all changes.

35 **RENE.** What's it like having Uncle Randy live in your house?

*(JESSE looks right at RENE, surprised by her directness.)*

36 **RENE.** Do you wish he'd go away? That it could be all yours again?

37 **JESSE.** Don't know how I'm supposed to answer that.

*(RENE waits for an answer.)*

38 **JESSE.** Rene, I've spent a lot of days, nights, too, wishin' that things weren't the way they are. But yeah. I wish I'd never had to sell the cabin and all you people had stayed back in San Francisco—

39 **RENE.** San Raphael.



- 40 **JESSE.** Takes away the pattern. New rhythm—gets me off beat.
- 41 **RENE.** (*Getting up.*) I should head back now.
- 42 **JESSE.** Rene—
- 43 **RENE.** I just do the map backwards, right?
- 44 **JESSE.** Rene, wait. Please don't think . . . I'm not used to lots of new people. I'm not . . . wanting to be a . . . I don't know.
- 45 **RENE.** (*Enjoying repeating what he said to her.*) A what?
- 46 **JESSE.** (*Enjoying it, too.*) I don't know.
- 47 **RENE.** You've got stranger-invasion.
- 48 **JESSE.** (*Laughs.*) Will it kill me?
- 49 **RENE.** I don't like them either. Strangers.
- 50 **JESSE.** What do you like?
- 51 **RENE.** Being by myself. I understand me when everybody else is lost. (*JESSE laughs.*) Let's go back.
- 52 **JESSE.** Rene, first, would you read this? (*JESSE takes a piece of paper out of his shirt pocket. He hands it to RENE.*) It's a poem. Real short. I wrote it about this place.
- 53 **RENE.** (*Glancing at the page.*) It's nice.
- 54 **JESSE.** No, aloud. I need to hear it.
- 55 **RENE.** I . . . I'll read it later, Jesse. After dinner. You're gonna eat with us, aren't you?
- (*JESSE nods*)
- 56 **RENE.** Great! Now, sniffin' for that needle carpet.
- 57 **JESSE.** (*As they exit, playfully.*) They're "yellow" orange-brown, you know.
- 58 **RENE.** Golden orange-brown!
- 59 **JESSE.** (*Laughing.*) Whatever!

(RENE and JESSE exit. LIGHTS OUT. Music transition.)

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY

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## 4. Part A

What is the meaning of **scale** as it is used in speech 7 of the scene from *Blessings*?

- Ⓐ to remove in layers
- Ⓑ to increase or reduce in size
- Ⓒ to climb up or over something
- Ⓓ to create according to certain proportions

## Part B

Which phrase from the scene from *Blessings* **best** helps the reader to understand the meaning of **scale**?

- Ⓐ "And thinner. The air feels thinner." (speech 2)
- Ⓑ "High as you can get without ropes." (speech 7)
- Ⓒ "See that ridge? Sheer rock-face." (speech 7)
- Ⓓ "But I make 'em. And sell 'em." (speech 28)

5. Part A

How does the author of *Blessings* use stage directions to reveal that the two characters are learning more about each other?

- Ⓐ by describing their reactions
- Ⓑ by describing their activities
- Ⓒ by describing their relationship
- Ⓓ by describing their accomplishments

Part B

Which evidence from the scene from *Blessings* supports the correct answer in Part A?

- Ⓐ "(RENE reaches the top. She looks out for the first time.)"  
(before speech 4)
- Ⓑ "(Proud of remembering.)" (speech 12)
- Ⓒ "(JESSE looks right at RENE, surprised by her directness.)"  
(before speech 36)
- Ⓓ "(RENE waits for an answer.)" (before speech 38)

**6. Part A**

What is **one** way the stage directions help contribute meaning to the scene?

- Ⓐ by establishing a lighthearted mood
- Ⓑ by foreshadowing the play's conflict
- Ⓒ by summarizing the plot of the play
- Ⓓ by comparing the characters' points of view

**Part B**

Which **two** pieces of evidence support the answer to Part A?

- Ⓐ "*(RENE reaches the top. She looks out for the first time.)*"  
(before speech 4)
- Ⓑ "*(Proud of remembering.)*" (speech 12)
- Ⓒ "*(RENE crosses to have a seat near the edge.)*" (speech 20)
- Ⓓ "*(JESSE looks right at RENE, surprised by her directness.)*"  
(before speech 36)
- Ⓔ "*(Enjoying repeating what he said to her.)*" (speech 45)
- Ⓕ "*(As they exit, playfully.)*" (speech 57)

