Name _____ Date _____

Characterization Through Dialogue: Parent-Teacher Night

Directions: Read the story carefully, listening to what each character says and how each one says it. Then answer each question, checking every choice against the exact words of the story before you decide.

Parent-Teacher Night

Owen's father arrived at Parent-Teacher Night twenty minutes late, still wearing the gray work jacket with his name stitched over the pocket, and he lowered himself into a student desk across from Ms. Lindqvist as if he did not trust it to hold him.

"So what did he do?" he asked before she had finished sitting down.

"Nothing," Ms. Lindqvist said. "That isn't why I asked you to come."

"Then why did I leave the shop early?" he asked, and instead of answering, she slid a battered composition notebook across the desk and asked, "Have you ever seen this?"

"He doesn't show me his homework," his father said, nudging the notebook back toward her an inch.

"It isn't homework, it's his lab notebook," she said, opening it to a page crowded with Owen's small, slanted handwriting. "Most of my students write down what happened in an experiment, but Owen writes down why he thinks it happened, and then he writes down what result would prove him wrong."

His father frowned at the page for a long moment before he asked, "Is that good?"

"It's what scientists do," she said, and Owen, who had been studying a crack in the floor tile, felt his face go warm.

"He's always been like that," his father said, and something in his voice loosened. "When he was eight, he took the toaster apart to find out why it burned the bread."

"It was the thermostat," Owen said quietly, without looking up from the floor.

"It was the thermostat," his father agreed, "and the toaster still doesn't work."

Ms. Lindqvist laughed, and then she folded her hands on top of the notebook and explained that there was a regional science competition in March that she wanted Owen to enter. When his father answered that March was busy at the shop, she pointed out that it was only one Saturday.

"Saturdays are when he works with me," his father said, flatly, the way he announced prices to customers who wanted to argue.

For a moment no one spoke, and then Ms. Lindqvist asked, "What does he do on Saturdays?"

"Fixes whatever the customers broke," his father said, and he glanced at Owen. "Half the time he figures out what's wrong before I do."

"Then he already knows how to do the hard part," she said.

His father was quiet for so long that Owen finally looked up. "When I was his age," his father said, more slowly now, "I built a radio for the science fair, but my father needed me at the shop that Saturday." He turned the notebook a little, as if to see the page better. "I never found out whether it worked."

Then he looked straight at Owen and asked, "You want to do this?" When Owen said yes, his father stood, straightened his jacket and held out his hand to Ms. Lindqvist. "Then the shop can survive one Saturday," he said. "Show me where I sign."

1. In "Parent-Teacher Night," Owen's father asks, "So what did he do?" before Ms. Lindqvist has even finished sitting down. What does this opening line suggest about what he expects from the conference?

A. He is eager to hear the teacher praise his son's accomplishments.

B. He has attended many previous conferences with Ms. Lindqvist.

C. He is irritated that the teacher kept him waiting outside the classroom.

D. He assumes that the teacher has called him in because Owen is in some kind of trouble.

2. When the father demands to know what Owen did, Ms. Lindqvist answers, "Nothing," and says that this "isn't why I asked you to come." When he asks why he left the shop early, she slides the notebook across the desk instead of answering and asks, "Have you ever seen this?" How does her way of speaking contrast with his?

A. She delivers a long lecture, while he remains calm and quiet.

B. She is just as suspicious as he is, so the conversation quickly becomes an argument.

C. She remains calm and answers his short, suspicious questions with evidence and a question of her own.

D. She avoids his question by describing her own teaching methods instead.

3. Ms. Lindqvist explains that most of her students record only what happened in an experiment, but "Owen writes down why he thinks it happened, and then he writes down what result would prove him wrong." What does this explanation show about her?

A. She is complaining that Owen writes unnecessarily long entries in his notebook.

B. She believes that Owen's experiments are usually unsuccessful.

C. She pays close attention to how Owen thinks, and she supports her point with a specific example from his work.

D. She expects the father to supervise Owen's homework every evening.

4. After frowning at the page "for a long moment" the father asks only, "Is that good?" What does this short, plain question reveal about the father?

A. He is criticizing the handwriting in the notebook as too messy.

B. He already knows that Owen is the most talented student in the class.

C. He is mocking the teacher for praising something completely ordinary.

D. He does not know how to evaluate what he is seeing, and he is honest enough to ask.

5. When Owen corrects the story with "It was the thermostat," his father repeats the words and adds, "and the toaster still doesn't work." What does this exchange show about the relationship between the father and his son?

A. The father's teasing is affectionate, showing warmth beneath his gruff manner.

B. The father is still furious with Owen about the ruined toaster.

C. The father wants the teacher to know that Owen carelessly breaks things.

D. The father disagrees with Owen's explanation about the thermostat.

6. When Ms. Lindqvist points out that the competition takes "only one Saturday" of Owen's time, the father replies that "Saturdays are when he works with me" and says it "flatly, the way he announced prices to customers who wanted to argue." What does this description of his voice suggest?

A. He is uncertain and is asking the teacher for advice.

B. He is joking and expects the teacher to laugh at his exaggeration.

C. He intends the matter to be settled and not open to negotiation.

D. He is angry with Owen for wanting to enter the competition.

7. Instead of arguing about the Saturday, Ms. Lindqvist asks, "What does he do on Saturdays?" How does this question move the conversation forward?

A. It shows that the teacher has abandoned the idea of the competition.

B. It changes the subject so that the father will forget about the competition.

C. It tricks the father into admitting that Owen does not really work on Saturdays.

D. It invites the father to describe Owen's work at the shop, which leads him to reveal how skilled Owen is.

8. Which two details show, through the way the father speaks, that his attitude is beginning to soften before he makes his decision? Select two.

☐ A. He asks what Owen did before the teacher has finished sitting down.

☐ B. He asks why he had to leave the shop early.

☐ C. When he talks about the toaster, "something in his voice loosened."

☐ D. He says "Saturdays are when he works with me" flatly, like a price.

☐ E. He speaks "more slowly now" as he begins the story of his radio.

9. The father tells Ms. Lindqvist that when he was Owen's age, "I built a radio for the science fair, but my father needed me at the shop that Saturday." Then he adds, "I never found out whether it worked." What does this story reveal?

A. He is bragging that his own project was better than Owen's.

B. He is warning Owen that science fairs are a waste of time.

C. He once lost the same kind of chance that Owen is being offered, and the loss still stays with him.

D. He blames Owen for keeping him at the shop on Saturdays.

10. At the end, the father looks straight at Owen and asks, "You want to do this?" and after Owen says yes, he tells Ms. Lindqvist, "Then the shop can survive one Saturday," and "Show me where I sign." What do these final lines show about him?

A. He wants Ms. Lindqvist to make the decision for Owen.

B. He changes his mind and gives Owen the Saturday that he never had himself, though he says it in his usual blunt, practical way.

C. He is still refusing, but he is too polite to say so directly.

D. He agrees only because the teacher has pressured him into it.