

Scorpions: Comprehension

Read the following passage carefully and answer the questions below.

In this extract Gerald Durrell describes watching scorpions when he was a boy living on the Greek island of Corfu. Scorpions are common in Mediterranean countries, but their sting can be fatal, and parents would usually not let children go near these dangerous creatures.

You hardly ever saw one unless you looked for it, and yet there must have been several hundred living in the cracks of the wall. Slide a knife-blade carefully under a piece of loose plaster and lever it gently away from the brick, and there, crouching beneath it, would be a little black scorpion, an inch long, looking as though he were made out of polished chocolate. They were weird-looking things, with their flattened oval bodies, their neat crooked legs, the enormous crab-like claws, bulbous and neatly jointed as armour, and the tail like a string of brown beads ending in a sting like a rose-thorn. The scorpion would lie there quite quietly as you examined him, only raising his tail in an almost apologetic gesture of warning if you breathed too hard on him. If you kept him in the sun too long he would simply turn his back on you and walk away, and then slide slowly but firmly under another section of plaster.

I grew very fond of these scorpions. I found them to be pleasant, unassuming creatures with, on the whole, the most charming habits. Providing you did nothing silly or clumsy (like putting your hand on one) the scorpions treated you with respect, their one desire being to get away and hide as quickly as possible.

They must have found me rather a trial, for I was always ripping sections of the plaster away so that I could watch them, or capturing them and making them walk about in jam-jars so that I could see the way their feet moved. By means of my sudden and unexpected assaults on the wall I discovered quite a bit about the scorpions. I found that they would eat bluebottles (though how they caught them was a mystery I never solved), grasshoppers, moths, and lacewing-flies. Several times I found them eating each other, a habit I found most distressing in a creature otherwise so impeccable.

QUESTIONS

1. In the chart below list 3 parts of the scorpion's body which are compared to something (by using a simile) in the first paragraph, and the three things they are compared to.

a part of the scorpion's body what it is compared to

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

2. Choose a word or phrase from the first paragraph, which suggests that Gerald likes the scorpions, write it below, and explain why you have chosen it.

3. From the first paragraph, explain in full sentences, in your own words,

- a) two things that Gerald sometimes did to the scorpions that they did not like, and
- b) the two different ways that they showed this.

4. Explain the meaning of the following two words, as they are used in the passage. (They are in bold in the passage.)

- a) trial
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b) assaults

5. Gerald Durrell often writes about animals as if they have human thoughts and feelings.

Find two examples of this in the passage.

a) Write them below,

b) Explain in what way they make the scorpions seem like humans, not animals.
