Janitor Filipaj - Reading Comprehension

Total: 32 min | 4 passages, 1150 words | 17 questions | Skills: Detail/Inference/Vocabulary/Main Idea/Attitude

Name: _____ Class: _____ Score: _____/17

Passage 1 From Janitor to Student

8 min | 320 words | Detail / Vocabulary / Inference

For years, Gac Filipaj mopped floors, cleaned toilets and took out trash at Columbia University. A refugee from war-torn Yugoslavia, he made a living working for the Ivy League school since 1993. But Sunday, May 13, 2012, was payback time. The 52-year-old janitor put on a cap and gown to graduate with a bachelor's degree in classics.

As a Columbia employee, he didn't have to pay for the classes he took. His favorite subject was the Roman philosopher and statesman Seneca, the janitor said to the Associated Press reporter during a break from his work at the student union building he cleans. "I love Seneca's letters because they're written in the spirit in which I was educated in my family — not to look for fame and fortune, but to have a simple, honest, honorable life," he said.

For Filipaj, the degree comes after years studying late into the night in his Bronx apartment, where he'd open his books after a 2:30 to 11 p.m. shift as a heavy cleaner — his job title. Before exam time or to finish a paper, he'd pull all-nighters, then go to class in the morning and then to work. As his mother tongue is Albanian, it took him almost seven years to learn to master the English language before he was admitted to the School of General Studies. His graduation with honors resulted from his strong will to overcome all the difficulties he ran into in the following dozen years of studies.

Directions: Read the following passage and answer the questions. Choose the best answer A, B, C, or D for each question.

1-1. What was Filipaj's job at Columbia University?

A. A refugee from Yugoslavia
B. A janitor and heavy cleaner
C. A professor of classics
D. A student union officer

Answer: _____

1-2. The phrase 'payback time' (Line 5) most probably means _____.

A. Time to pay back money
B. Time to get rewarded for one's efforts
C. Time to return what was borrowed
D. Time to take revenge on someone

Answer: _____

1-3. Why didn't Filipaj have to pay for his classes?

A. He was a refugee
B. He was a Columbia employee
C. He won a scholarship
D. He was over 50 years old

Answer: _____

1-4. How long did it take Filipaj to learn English before admission?

A. About 3 years
B. About 5 years
C. About 7 years
D. About 12 years

Answer: _____

1-5. What can be inferred about Filipaj from his love of Seneca?

A. He wanted to be a philosopher
B. He valued fame and fortune
C. He preferred a simple, honest life
D. He wanted to become a statesman

Answer: _____

Passage 2 The Graduation and the Past

8 min | 280 words | Detail / Inference / Vocabulary

On Sunday morning on Columbia's Manhattan campus, Filipaj flashed a huge smile and gave a thumbs-up as he walked off the podium after receiving his certificate from President Lee Bollinger.

"This is a man with great pride, whether he's doing custodial work or academics," said Peter Awn, dean of Columbia's School of General Studies. "He is very humble and grateful, but he's an individual who makes his own future."

It's been a long road for Filipaj who fled to the United States in 1992, leaving behind his family farm in Montenegro, then a part of Yugoslavia. He had already spent a year at a Law College in Belgrade as a part-time student, but had to quit when the civil war broke out and his country collapsed.

Directions: Read the following passage and answer the questions. Choose the best answer A, B, C, or D for each question.

2-1. What did Filipaj do after receiving his certificate?

A. He gave a speech
B. He shook hands with students
C. He smiled and gave a thumbs-up
D. He cleaned the podium

Answer: _____

2-2. What does Dean Peter Awn mean by 'a man with great pride'?

A. He is arrogant about his degree
B. He takes dignity in both cleaning and studying
C. He is proud of his salary
D. He looks down on custodial work

Answer: _____

2-3. Filipaj attended Law College in Belgrade as a _____ student.

A. full-time
B. part-time
C. transfer
D. visiting

Answer: _____

2-4. The word 'fled' (Line 1, Paragraph 6) is closest in meaning to _____.

A. returned
B. escaped
C. traveled
D. moved
Answer: _____

Passage 3 Starting Over and No Regrets

8 min | 300 words | Detail / Inference / Vocabulary / Attitude

At first in New York, his uncle in the Bronx offered him shelter while he worked part-time as a delivery man and in a restaurant. He was determined to succeed, and it took him almost seven years to learn English well enough to be accepted at Columbia's School of General Studies. He chose Columbia because "I said, 'What are the best schools in New York?'" he said. Since Columbia topped his list, "I went there to see if I could get a job." Filipaj was accepted at Columbia as a janitor.

Part of his twenty-two-dollar-an-hour janitor's pay still goes back to his brother, wife and two kids in Montenegro. Filipaj has no computer, but he bought one for the family, whose income comes mostly from selling milk. Filipaj also saves by not paying for a cellphone; he can only be reached via e-mail.

During the interview with the Associated Press, Filipaj didn't show the slightest regret or bitterness about his hard life. Instead, he cheerfully described encounters with surprised younger students who wondered why their classmate was cleaning up after them.

Directions: Read the following passage and answer the questions. Choose the best answer A, B, C, or D for each question.

3-1. Why did Filipaj choose Columbia?
A. It had the highest salary
B. His uncle worked there
C. It was one of the best schools in New York
D. It was close to his home
Answer: _____

3-2. What does Filipaj do with part of his pay?
A. Saves it in a bank
B. Sends it to his family in Montenegro
C. Buys computers and cellphones
D. Pays for his classes
Answer: _____

3-3. How did Filipaj feel during the interview?
A. Bitter and regretful
B. Cheerful with no regrets
C. Sad and depressed
D. Angry about his life
Answer: _____

3-4. What can be inferred from the fact that he bought a computer for his family?
A. He was wealthy
B. He cared about his family's needs
C. He needed it for work
D. He wanted to learn technology
Answer: _____

Passage 4 Ambition and Inner Richness

8 min | 250 words | Detail / Main Idea / Vocabulary / Inference

His ambition is to get a master's degree, maybe even a Ph.D., in Roman and Greek classics. He hopes to become a teacher someday, while translating his favorite classics into Albanian.

For now, he's trying to get a better job, maybe as supervisor of custodians or something similar, at Columbia if possible. He's not interested in furthering his studies to make more money. "The richness is in me, in my heart and in my head, not in my pockets," said Filipaj, who is now an American citizen.

Soon after, the spirited, 5-foot-4 janitor picked up a broom and dustpan and went back to work.

Directions: Read the following passage and answer the questions. Choose the best answer A, B, C, or D for each question.

4-1. What is Filipaj's ultimate academic goal?
A. A bachelor's degree
B. A master's or Ph.D. in classics
C. A law degree
D. A teaching certificate
Answer: _____

4-2. What does Filipaj mean by 'The richness is in me, in my heart and in my head, not in my pockets'?
A. He is secretly wealthy
B. He values spiritual wealth over money
C. He has no money at all
D. He wants to be rich someday
Answer: _____

4-3. What is the main idea of this passage?
A. Filipaj plans to quit his janitor job
B. Filipaj values spiritual wealth and continues learning
C. Filipaj wants to become a rich man
D. Filipaj regrets his choices in life
Answer: _____

4-4. Why did Filipaj go back to work after graduation?
A. He had no choice
B. He found joy in simple work
C. He needed the money
D. He was forced to
Answer: _____

— End of Exercise —