

Reading Practice

Read this selection. Then answer the questions that follow.

Love

by Jesse Stuart

My notes about
what I am reading

Jesse Stuart was the poet laureate of Kentucky, and he set many of his stories in the Appalachian Mountains in the eastern United States. The father and son in "Love" are farmers. "Stubble" is the lower end of the cornstalk after it is cut, and "cornbalk" is the unplowed strip of land between rows of corn. "Loamy" is an adjective used to describe rich, fertile dirt.

- 1 Yesterday when the bright sun blazed down on the wilted corn my father and I walked around the edge of the new ground to plan a fence. The cows kept coming through the chestnut oaks on the cliff and running over the young corn. They bit off the tips of the corn and trampled down the stubble.
- 2 My father walked in the cornbalk. Bob, our Collie, walked in front of my father. We heard a ground squirrel whistle down over the bluff among the dead treetops at the clearing's edge. "Whoop, take him, Bob," said my father. He lifted up a young stalk of corn, with wilted dried roots, where the ground squirrel had dug it up for the sweet grain of corn left on its tender roots. This has been a dry spring and the corn has kept well in the earth where the grain has sprouted. The ground squirrels love this corn. They dig up rows of it and eat the sweet grains. The young corn stalks are killed and we have to replant the corn.
- 3 I can see my father kept sicking Bob after the ground squirrel. He jumped over the corn rows. He started to run toward the ground squirrel. I, too, started running toward the clearing's edge where Bob was jumping and barking. The dust flew in tiny swirls behind our feet. There was a cloud of dust behind us.
- 4 "It's a big bull blacksnake," said my father. "Kill him, Bob! Kill him, Bob!"

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- 5 Bob was jumping and snapping at the snake so as to make it strike and throw itself off guard. Bob has killed twenty-eight copperheads this spring. He knows how to kill a snake. He doesn't rush to do it. He takes his time and does the job well.
- 6 "Let's don't kill the snake," I said. "A blacksnake is a harmless snake. It kills poison snakes. It kills the copperhead. It catches more mice from the fields than a cat."
- 7 I could see the snake didn't want to fight the dog. The snake wanted to get away. Bob wouldn't let it. I wondered why it was crawling toward a heap of black loamy earth at the bench of the hill. I wondered why it had come from the chestnut oak sprouts and the matted greenbriars on the cliff. I looked as the snake lifted its pretty head in response to one of Bob's jumps. "It's not a bull blacksnake," I said. "It's a she-snake. Look at the white on her throat."
- 8 "A snake is an enemy to me," my father snapped. "I hate a snake. Kill it, Bob. Go on in there and get that snake and quit playing with it!"
- 9 Bob obeyed my father. I hated to see him take this snake by the throat. She was so beautifully poised¹ in the sunlight. Bob grabbed the white patch on her throat. He cracked her long body like an ox whip in the wind. He cracked it against the wind only. The blood spurted from her fine-curved throat. Something hit against my legs like pellets. Bob threw the snake down. I looked to see what had struck my legs. It was snake eggs. Bob had slung them from her body. She was going to the sand heap to lay her eggs, where the sun is the setting-hen² that warms them and hatches them.
- 10 Bob grabbed her body there on the earth where the red blood was running down on the gray-piled loam. Her body was still writhing in pain. She acted like a greenweed held over a new-ground fire. Bob slung her viciously many times. He cracked her limp body against the wind. She was now limber as a shoestring in the wind. Bob threw her riddled body back on the sand. She quivered like a leaf in the lazy wind, then her riddled body lay perfectly still. The blood colored the loamy earth around the snake.

1. **poised:** suspended or balanced without motion.

2. **setting-hen:** a chicken that sits on a nest of eggs to keep them warm until they hatch.

- 11 “Look at the eggs, won’t you?” said my father. We counted thirty-seven eggs. I picked an egg up and held it in my hand. Only a minute ago there was life in it. It was an immature seed. It would not hatch. Mother sun could not incubate it on the warm earth. The egg I held in my hand was almost the size of a quail’s egg. The shell on it was thin and tough and the egg appeared under the surface to be a watery egg.
- 12 “Well, Bob, I guess you see now why this snake couldn’t fight,” I said. “It is life. Weaker devour the stronger even among human beings. Dog kills snake. Snake kills birds. Birds kill the butterflies. Man conquers all. Man, too, kills for sport.”
- 13 Bob was panting. He walked ahead of us back to the house. His tongue was out of his mouth. He was tired. He was hot under his shaggy coat of hair. His tongue nearly touched the dry dirt and white flecks of foam dripped from it. We walked toward the house. Neither my father nor I spoke. I still thought about the dead snake. The sun was going down over the chestnut ridge. A lark was singing. It was late for a lark to sing. The red evening clouds floated above the pine trees on our pasture hill. My father stood beside the path. His black hair was moved by the wind. His face was red in the blue wind of day. His eyes looked toward the sinking sun.
- 14 “And my father hates a snake,” I thought.
- 15 I thought about the agony women know of giving birth. I thought about how they will fight to save their children. Then, I thought of the snake. I thought it was silly for me to think such thoughts.
- 16 This morning my father and I got up with the chickens. He says one has to get up with the chickens to do a day’s work. We got the posthole digger, ax, spud, measuring pole and the mattock.³ We started for the clearing’s edge. Bob didn’t go along.

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3. **spud . . . mattock:** A spud is a log-peeling tool; a mattock is a tool similar to a pickaxe.

- 17 The dew was on the corn. My father walked behind with the posthole digger across his shoulder. I walked in front. The wind was blowing. It was a good morning wind to breathe and a wind that makes one feel like he can get under the edge of a hill and heave the whole hill upside down.
- 18 I walked out the corn row where we had come yesterday afternoon. I looked in front of me. I saw something. I saw it moved. It was moving like a huge black rope winds around a windlass.⁴ "Steady," I says to my father. "Here is the bull blacksnake." He took one step up beside me and stood. His eyes grew wide apart.
- 19 "What do you know about this," he said.
- 20 "You have seen the bull blacksnake now," I said. "Take a good look at him! He is lying beside his dead mate. He has come to her. He, perhaps, was on her trail yesterday."
- 21 The male snake had trailed her to her doom. He had come in the night, under the roof of stars, as the moon shed rays of light on the quivering clouds of green. He had found his lover dead. He was coiled beside her, and she was dead.
- 22 The bull blacksnake lifted his head and followed us as we walked around the dead snake. He would have fought us to his death. He would have fought Bob to his death. "Take a stick," said my father, "and throw him over the hill so Bob won't find him. Did you ever see anything to beat that? I've heard they'd do that. But this is my first time to see it." I took a stick and threw him over the bank into the dewy sprouts on the cliff.

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4. **windlass**: a machine used for lifting in which a rope or line rotates around a cylinder.

Use "Love" (pp. 58–61) to answer questions 1–9.

- 1 Which of these is the best plot summary of the story?
- A A boy and his father walk around their cornfield to plan a fence. They come upon a ground squirrel and a snake. The father orders their dog Bob to kill the snake. The next day, they find another snake in the same cornfield.
 - B A boy, his father, and their dog find a female blacksnake in their cornfield. Although the snake is harmless and attempting to lay her eggs, the father orders their dog to kill the snake. The next day, the snake's mate comes to the cornfield to look for her.
 - C A boy, his father, and their dog find a female snake in their cornfield. The father orders the dog to kill the snake. The son asks his father to let the snake live because it is not harmful, but the father says all snakes are his enemies. The next day, they find the bull snake lying next to his dead mate. The father, realizing he made a mistake, learns a lesson about love.
 - D A boy and his father walk around their cornfield and find a female snake laying her eggs. The boy is sad because their dog kills the snake and destroys her eggs. The next day the father notices his son's sadness and decides that letting the dog kill a harmless snake was a mistake.
- 2 The conflict in the story stems from —
- F the father's and son's differing attitudes toward snakes
 - G the dog attacking the snake
 - H the ground squirrels eating the corn
 - J the snake laying eggs in the cornfield
- 3 The author begins the story by —
- A introducing the conflict
 - B describing the characters
 - C explaining how cows trampled the corn
 - D flashing back to the previous day
- 4 In paragraph 8, the father refers to the snake as his "enemy." What connotation, or attitude and feelings associated with a word, does enemy have?
- F Anger toward a personal opponent
 - G Worry about an invading army
 - H Suspicion of someone harmful
 - J Irritation with a hostile neighbor
- 5 The boy thinks the female snake did not fight the dog because —
- A she was not poisonous
 - B she was waiting for her mate
 - C the dog was too quick for her
 - D she was trying to protect her eggs

- 6 The author develops the characters in the story by —
- F making them farmers who work hard on their land
 - G showing their different reactions to the snake
 - H describing their fear of the snake
 - J making them father and son

- 7 Which line from the selection is an example of a simile?
- A *We heard a ground squirrel whistle down over the bluff among the dead treetops at the clearing's edge.*
 - B *I looked as the snake lifted its pretty head in response to one of Bob's jumps.*
 - C *She was now limber as a shoestring in the wind.*
 - D *His face was red in the blue wind of day.*

- 8 Which statement best conveys a major theme of the selection?
- F All snakes are evil and an enemy of humans.
 - G Animals can sometimes show as much compassion as humans.
 - H Sons and fathers often disagree.
 - J Farming can be dangerous.

9 Look at the diagram below.

Character Contrasts

The Father		The Son
1. Thinks the reasons for an animal's behavior are unimportant	→	1. Is deeply curious about the motivations of animals
2. Sees animals as very different from human beings	→	2. Sees distinct similarities between animals and human beings
3. Does not consider whether an animal is dangerous before killing it	→	3. _____

Which of these belongs on the blank line?

- A Acts without analyzing a situation
- B Considers whether killing an animal is necessary
- C Considers blacksnakes useful to farmers
- D Thinks snakes should be respected for their beauty