

PART C: PROSE

Total Value: 33 marks

Suggested Time: 45 minutes

Read the excerpt from the story entitled "Canyon." Select the best answer for each question and record your choice.

adapted from **Canyon**

by Don Gayton

1. I had a ritual for my visits to that deep and narrow canyon. At the end of the walk up from the ranch, I would stop short of the mouth to wait and collect a few sticks for the fire. After a few moments I would enter, crossing from plangent¹ afternoon sun to a kind of separate and constant dusk. The canyon's layered rock walls would glow with a faint bluish tinge.
2. Buck Creek starts somewhere above treeline and flows through the canyon all the way down to sagebrush. Originally the creek ran parallel to the main river, but sometime in the distant Pleistocene² it turned abruptly, confronting a massive sandstone ridge that separated the two. The result of that unrecorded confrontation was a narrow, vertical canyon cut through bedded sandstone, and a contented Buck, now joined with its central drainage. Whatever violence had accompanied the creation of this tiny canyon was resolved in total peace. Even during spring flood, the Buck flowed like silk down its smooth and rounded bed.
3. As a dusty young hired man on an Okanagan ranch, this canyon and its water provided retreat and solace at the end of the long workday. After my token wait at the entrance, I would move to the first pool. My work clothes, sticky with hay dust and sweat, would go into a neat pile on the first ledge, next to the sagebrush sticks I had collected. Only then did I slide quietly into the water, to float on my back and look upward. The west wall of this pool was a series of ledges leading up to a sheer sandstone face; the east wall formed a broad, curved overhang, reminiscent of a church nave. Halfway up the west wall a scrappy ponderosa pine had established itself on a ledge. It presided over the canyon, a modest icon.
4. After a few minutes in the first pool I would climb the narrow sandstone spillway to the second pool, float for a time, then go to the third and finally the fourth. Sometimes I felt suspended, as if I were floating through the rooms of a fantastic sculpture gallery, each one a different statement of colour, texture and form.
5. After my swim, I would return to the ledge of the first pool to build a tiny fire from the gnarled and twisted sagebrush sticks and drink from a canteen. Pungent sage smoke would curl straight upward on its way out of the windless canyon.

¹ plangent: a deep colour

² Pleistocene: a geological time period beginning approximately one million years ago

- 6 The rancher I worked for was an old man in those days and is long since dead. At the time I saw him only as a kind of grim coordinator of cattle, grass and barbwire, but later on I realized he must have known of the very personal, mystical nature of the canyon. That would explain his casual, well-timed remark about “those pools on the Buck, up above Bigsage Pasture,” for the benefit of one he must have known would seek them out and then promptly deny anyone else’s presence there. Certainly it was not long before the water of that canyon flowed only for me.
- 7 For years I thought about revisiting the place. In my experience of natural landscapes, the canyon stood out in my memory as one of the more openly spiritual places, rising above the level of simple nostalgia. Buck Creek was prominent on my itinerary for re-exploration.
- 8 It was the potato chip, balanced on the first ledge like some obscenely alien butterfly, that first caught my eye. The chip, a nearby paper plate and several large, garish graffiti now lay strewn across a personal tapestry of my own memory, one that had lain inviolate³ for twenty-five years. The graffiti were spraypainted in orange Dayglo on the sandstone overhang of the first pool. “FERG95” and “TORCHY,” they screamed. There were a few other initials as well; “B.D.” was one. The authors would be high school graduates frantic to enhance personal identities by hijacking the spirit of the place.
- 9 My long-awaited reunion with the canyon destroyed, I stopped only long enough to survey the litter and the damage. A cold wind passed through my guts and I felt as if I had come home to a break-in. I left cleanly, not wanting to waste time in useless rage.
- 10 I was well into the long, furious walk back down through the pasture when anger finally gave way to duty and to the service of memory.
- 11 First, I built a fire on the rock ledge, reversing the old ritual, and immolated the potato chip, the plate and some bits of candy wrapper. Then I stripped, waded into the first pool, took a handful of gritty sand from the bottom, and began to scrub the graffiti off the sandstone wall. It was slow work. A handful of sand would last only a few strokes before slipping through my fingers.
- 12 Parts of the sandstone were deeply stained by the paint. I scraped those areas with the sharp edge of a stone and then feathered the slight depressions back by scrubbing with more sand. It seemed appropriate to remove the graffiti from this place with primitive technology.
- 13 The very fragility of the sandstone was an asset to my work. I was able to scrape deeply enough into the body of the wall that I could get beyond the paint’s deepest penetration. I could train my memory to accept change, since change is a dynamic of nature, but I would never let it accept degradation.⁴
- 14 When the wall was finally finished, I returned to the ledge and dressed. This time, my clothes had none of that fine old stink of hay, sweat and horses. They could still, I mused, if I had stayed on. I could even have guarded this place on grad nights.

³ inviolate: *intact, unspoiled*

⁴ degradation: *dishonour*

- 15 As I left, I took a last look up the canyon. The ponderosa pine up on the west wall had prospered, and the place was clean again. Fresh sandstone was evident on the overhang, but no paint could be seen, and I had scrubbed broadly enough that even the shapes of the letters could no longer be made out. I hoped that a few years of weathering would bring the entire wall back to its original grainy blue-white, and memory would then be served.
19. Which literary device is found in “a contented Buck”? (paragraph 2)
- A. irony
 - B. allusion
 - C. foreshadowing
 - D. personification
20. The imagery in paragraph 3 creates an overall feeling of
- A. chaos.
 - B. serenity.
 - C. violence.
 - D. determination.
21. According to paragraph 4, what does the canyon primarily provide for the narrator?
- A. a refuge
 - B. a hiding place
 - C. drinking water
 - D. washing facilities
22. What does paragraph 6 suggest about the narrator’s attitude towards the rancher?
- A. It remains the same.
 - B. It changes with time.
 - C. The narrator is skeptical.
 - D. The narrator is indifferent.
23. In paragraph 7, what does the word “itinerary” mean?
- A. map
 - B. poster
 - C. dream
 - D. schedule

24. In paragraph 8, the potato chip symbolizes the
- A. changes to the water.
 - B. defacing of the walls.
 - C. loss of personal identity.
 - D. violation of a spiritual place.
25. What does paragraph 9 suggest about the narrator's reaction to the damage?
- A. He is cynical.
 - B. He is nostalgic.
 - C. He is surprised.
 - D. He is devastated.
26. The narrator cleans the walls with
- A. his fingernails.
 - B. sagebrush sticks.
 - C. his hunting knife.
 - D. sand from the pool.
27. Paragraph 15 suggests that the narrator feels
- A. bitter.
 - B. ecstatic.
 - C. optimistic.
 - D. disgusted.