

Reading Comprehension - Rising Through the Storm: Understanding Resilience

When 16-year-old Marcus transferred to Hillcrest Secondary School, he expected the usual challenges of adapting to a new environment: unfamiliar teachers, different routines, and the awkwardness of making new friends. What he did not expect was the overwhelming sense of isolation that followed him during his first few months. Although he had always been a confident student in his previous school, the sudden change left him feeling uncertain and invisible.

The situation worsened when his father lost his job unexpectedly. Overnight, the atmosphere at home shifted. Conversations became tense, and Marcus noticed his parents whispering anxiously late at night. His father, once cheerful and energetic, now spent long hours searching for work, often returning home exhausted and discouraged. Marcus wanted to help, but he felt powerless. The stress seeped into his school life, affecting his concentration and motivation.

One afternoon, after receiving a disappointing grade on a science test, Marcus stayed behind in the classroom long after the bell rang. His teacher, Mr. Patel, noticed him sitting alone and approached quietly. "Rough week?" he asked. Marcus nodded, unsure of how much to share. Mr. Patel sat beside him and said, "You know, resilience isn't about pretending everything is fine. It's about finding ways to move forward even when things feel heavy."

Marcus had heard the word "resilience" before, but he had always associated it with people who seemed naturally strong or fearless. He never imagined it was something he could develop. Mr. Patel continued, "Life will always throw challenges at us. What matters is how we respond. Resilience grows when we learn to adapt, ask for help, and keep going even when progress feels slow."

These words stayed with Marcus. That evening, he searched online for stories of people who had overcome adversity. He read about athletes who returned to competition after severe injuries, students who rebuilt their confidence after academic failure, and families who supported each other through financial hardship. For the first time in months, Marcus felt a spark of hope. If others could rise from difficult situations, perhaps he could too.

The next day, Marcus made a small but significant decision: he would stop trying to handle everything alone. He approached the school counsellor, Ms. Cheng, and explained what had been happening at home. She listened patiently and assured him that his feelings were valid. She also taught him practical strategies for managing stress, such as breaking tasks into smaller steps, setting realistic goals, and practising mindfulness. “Resilience,” she said, “is built through consistent effort, not sudden transformation.”

Encouraged, Marcus began applying these strategies. Instead of panicking about his falling grades, he created a study schedule and asked classmates for help with topics he found difficult. He joined a lunchtime study group, where he discovered that many students were also dealing with personal challenges. Sharing experiences made him feel less alone.

At home, Marcus started helping his father with job applications by proofreading documents and organising emails. Although he could not change the situation, he realised he could still contribute. His father appreciated the support and gradually became more open about his struggles. Their conversations, once filled with tension, slowly shifted toward mutual encouragement.

Despite these improvements, progress was not always smooth. There were days when Marcus felt overwhelmed again, especially when his father faced repeated rejections from employers. On one particularly difficult evening, Marcus felt the familiar weight of hopelessness creeping back. Instead of withdrawing, he remembered what Ms. Cheng had told him: resilience does not mean avoiding negative emotions; it means acknowledging them and choosing not to give up.

He decided to take a walk around the neighbourhood to clear his mind. As he passed the community centre, he noticed a poster advertising a youth volunteer programme. The idea intrigued him. He had always enjoyed helping others, and volunteering might give him a sense of purpose. The following week, he signed up.

The programme paired students with elderly residents who needed assistance with daily tasks or simply wanted companionship. Marcus was assigned to visit Mr. Wong, a retired bus driver who lived alone. At first, their conversations were awkward, but over time, Marcus found himself looking forward to the visits. Mr. Wong shared stories about his years driving through the city, the challenges he faced, and the resilience he developed during difficult times. “Life is like a long bus route,” he said once.

“Sometimes the road is smooth, sometimes it’s bumpy. But you keep driving because someone is counting on you.”

These words resonated deeply with Marcus. He realised that resilience was not a rare trait possessed only by extraordinary people. It was something ordinary individuals practised every day, often quietly and without recognition.

As months passed, Marcus noticed changes in himself. He was more patient, more organised, and more willing to seek support when needed. His grades improved steadily, and he began participating more actively in class. His father eventually secured a new job, and although the family still faced challenges, the atmosphere at home felt lighter.

Looking back, Marcus understood that resilience had not come to him in a single moment of inspiration. It had grown gradually through small decisions: asking for help, supporting others, and refusing to let setbacks define him. He realised that resilience was not about being unbreakable, but about learning how to rebuild.

In his end-of-year reflection, Marcus wrote, “I used to think resilience meant being strong all the time. Now I know it means allowing yourself to struggle, but choosing to rise anyway.”

Part A: Close-Ended Questions (10 questions)

1. Why did Marcus struggle during his first months at Hillcrest Secondary School?

- A. He disliked the teachers
- B. He felt isolated and uncertain
- C. He had difficulty with homework
- D. He missed his old neighbourhood

2. What major event increased stress at home?

- A. His mother became ill

- B. His father lost his job
 - C. His family moved again
 - D. His sister left for university
3. What did Marcus originally believe resilience meant?
- A. Being naturally strong
 - B. Asking for help
 - C. Accepting failure
 - D. Avoiding challenges
4. What did Mr. Patel say resilience was about?
- A. Pretending everything is fine
 - B. Ignoring problems
 - C. Finding ways to move forward
 - D. Working harder than others
5. What inspired Marcus after reading stories online?
- A. He realised others had overcome challenges
 - B. He wanted to become famous
 - C. He decided to quit school
 - D. He felt his problems were worse
6. What strategy did Ms. Cheng teach Marcus?
- A. Setting unrealistic goals
 - B. Breaking tasks into smaller steps
 - C. Avoiding difficult emotions
 - D. Studying without breaks
7. Why did Marcus join the youth volunteer programme?

- A. He needed extra credit
- B. He wanted a sense of purpose
- C. His teacher forced him
- D. He wanted to earn money

8. What did Marcus learn from Mr. Wong?

- A. Life is always predictable
- B. Resilience is only for strong people
- C. Ordinary people practise resilience daily
- D. Challenges should be avoided

9. What change did Marcus notice in himself over time?

- A. He became more patient and organised
- B. He became more competitive
- C. He stopped caring about school
- D. He avoided social interactions

10. What does Marcus's final reflection suggest?

- A. Resilience means never struggling
- B. Resilience means ignoring problems
- C. Resilience means choosing to rise despite difficulties
- D. Resilience means being perfect

Part B: Short-Response Questions (3 questions)

11. Why did Marcus feel powerless when his father lost his job? (2–3 sentences)

12. Identify one way Marcus supported his father during the job search. (One sentence)

13. Explain how volunteering helped Marcus develop resilience. (2–3 sentences)

Part C: Open-Ended Questions (2 questions)

14. Do you think resilience is something people are born with or something they develop? Use examples from the passage and your own experience. (6–8 sentences)

15. Describe a situation in which you or someone you know demonstrated resilience. What helped the person overcome the challenge? (6–8 sentences)

Part D: Writing Task

Write an essay of 350–450 words on the following topic:

A Time I Learned to Be Resilient

In your essay, you may describe:

- the challenge you faced
- how you responded to it
- what helped you stay resilient
- what you learned about yourself

Your writing will be assessed on content, organisation, language accuracy, and insight.

Full Answer Key

Part A: Close-Ended

1. B
2. B
3. A
4. C
5. A
6. B
7. B
8. C
9. A
10. C

Part B: Short-Response (Sample Answers)

11. Marcus felt powerless because he could not change his father's situation and did not know how to help. The stress at home made him feel overwhelmed and unsure of what to do.

12. He helped his father by proofreading job application documents and organising emails.

13. Volunteering gave Marcus a sense of purpose and allowed him to learn from Mr. Wong's experiences. It helped him understand that resilience is something ordinary people practise every day.

Part C: Open-Ended

Answers will vary. Accept any logical, well-supported response.