**Reading extract and questions:**

**Year 5-6**

**Beethoven’s Hard Life**

**Set A/B**



There is a popular saying that you have to suffer for your art. Perhaps in Beethoven’s case, the greater the art, the greater the suffering.

Ludwig van Beethoven is widely acknowledged to be one of the greatest musical composers of all time. Even if you could not name any of his works, you would undoubtedly recognise at least one if it were played to you. His Moonlight Sonata and Fifth Symphony are prime examples. It is perhaps amazing that someone could create so many works of great joy and beauty when you contemplate how much pain and ugliness there was in his life.

**Early years**

Born in Bonn, Germany, in 1770, he was one of seven children, although only three of them survived childhood. From an early age, Ludwig was seen as having a rare gift for music and his talent was developed by a succession of local tutors. Most of them were not very kind, however, and often treated him so badly they made him cry. One of them even had problems sleeping and would drag the poor little boy out of bed in order to practise.

Despite these hardships, he was soon writing his own music and his first collection of compositions was published when he was only thirteen years old. Not long after that, he travelled to Vienna – the capital of Austria and a major centre of the arts at that time – in order to continue his education. Within a year, however, he had to return to Bonn as his mother had died and his father was unable to look after his brothers, so that responsibility fell to Ludwig for the next five years.

Along with his family tragedies, his love-life was causing him a great deal of heartache. His musical ability and reputation meant that he was often asked to give lessons to members of upper-class families. He fell in love with at least two of the young women he was tutoring but was unable to marry them as he had not been born into wealth and privilege, which meant he was not seen as being good enough for them.

**Loss of hearing**

Of all your senses, which would be cruellest to lose if you were a musician? Perhaps the greatest tragedy to befall Beethoven was when he started losing his hearing in his late twenties. It is not clear what caused it, but we do know that he suffered from a severe form of tinnitus – a condition which makes you hear noises which are not there, such as buzzing or bells ringing. By the time he was 44 years old, he was totally deaf. Amazingly, he continued composing wonderful music but when one of his works was performed for the first time, he had to be turned around to see the audience clapping because he couldn’t hear the thunderous applause.

It also didn’t help that much of Europe was at war while he was composing. The famous French general and emperor Napoleon was rampaging all over the continent and, in 1809, he attacked Vienna. The noise of the bombardment was so loud that Beethoven was worried it would ruin what was left of his hearing. In order to protect himself, he hid underground during the assault and covered his head with pillows.

**Bad behaviour**

Given all his problems, it is perhaps not surprising that Beethoven was known to be rather rude. If he noticed people in the audience talking while he was performing, he would just stop. He also refused to show much respect for the ruling classes. One archduke decided that the normal rules of polite society should not apply to Ludwig, presumably because there was no point in hoping he would follow them!

His health deteriorated and he eventually died in 1827 at the age of 56. Some 20,000 people turned out to show their respects at his funeral procession. For all his faults and misfortunes, he had still managed to produce an enormous collection of outstanding music. He may have suffered terribly but we have all benefited from his genius, whether we know it or not.

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**Questions for *Beethoven’s Hard Life***

**Set A**

**Vocabulary:**

**1.** Look at the second paragraph. **Find** and **copy** one word meaning *accepted*.

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**2.** … *when you contemplate* … What does the word *contemplate* mean in this sentence?

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**3.** … *His health deteriorated* … This means that his health … Circle **one**.

 **stopped him working got worse kept people away improved**

**Retrieval:**

**4.** Where was Beethoven born?

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**5.** How many of Beethoven’s brothers and sisters died in childhood?

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**6.** What is the name of the hearing disorder Beethoven suffered from?

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**Inference:**

**7.** Complete the table below with **one** piece of evidence to support each statement.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Evidence** |
| Beethoven’s ability was recognised during his life. |  |
| Beethoven continued to be respected after his death. |  |

**8.** How does the author suggest that Beethoven was unusually young to have his work published?

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**9.** Why was it hard for Beethoven to focus on his music after his mother died?

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**Summarise:**

**10.** Here are some summaries of different events in the text. Number them from 1 to 4 to show the order in which they appear.

Beethoven first travelled to Vienna.

 Beethoven’s mother died.

 Beethoven had horrible teachers.

 Beethoven lost his hearing.

**Meaning as a whole:**

**11.** Draw lines to match each section to its main content.

Most people can recognise at least one of Beethoven’s compositions.

Introduction

Early years

People made excuses for Beethoven’s rudeness.

Beethoven developed tinnitus.

Loss of hearing

Beethoven was dragged out of bed to practise music.

Bad behaviour

**Authorial intent:**

**12*.*** *… in Beethoven’s case, the greater the art, the greater the suffering ...* What impression does this give you of both Beethoven and his life?

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 **Questions for *Beethoven’s Hard Life***

**Set B**

**Vocabulary:**

**1.** Look at the second paragraph.

… *you would undoubtedly recognise at least one*… What does *undoubtedly* mean?

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**2.** Look at the paragraph beginning *Born in Bonn* … **Find** and **copy** a word meaning *series*.

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**3.** … *Napoleon was rampaging all over the continent* ... What does *rampaging* mean? Circle **one**.

 **marching dancing climbing running riot**

**Retrieval:**

**4.** When was Beethoven born?

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**5.** Why did Beethoven have to look after his brothers?

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**6.** How old was Beethoven when he died?

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**Inference:**

**7.** How does the author suggest that Beethoven had a harder life than most other people?

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**8.** Why does the author suggest that Beethoven’s hearing problems were perhaps his *greatest tragedy*?

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**9.** How do we know that people were sad when Beethoven died?

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**Meaning as a whole:**

**10.** Using information from the whole text, tick one box in each row to show whether each statement is true or false.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | True | False |
| Beethoven was Austrian. |  |  |
| Beethoven taught himself music. |  |  |
| Rich people wanted him to marry their daughters. |  |  |
| Beethoven lived through a time of peace in Europe.  |  |  |

**Authorial intent:**

**11*.*** … *so many works of great joy and beauty when you consider how much pain and ugliness there was in his life.* Why did the author use these words to describe Beethoven’s music and his life?

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**Compare:**

**12.** According to the text, give one way that:

1. Beethoven’s life was very difficult.

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1. Beethoven’s life wasn’t all bad.

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**Answers for *Beethoven’s hard life***

**Set A:**

**Vocabulary:**

**1.** acknowledged

**2.** think about/consider

**3.** got worse

**Retrieval:**

**4.** Bonn (Germany)

**5.** four

**6.** tinnitus

**Inference:**

**7.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Evidence** |
| Beethoven’s ability was recognised during his life. | * His first works were published when he was thirteen.
* He was invited to give lessons to upper-class families.
* His work received thunderous applause.
 |
| Beethoven continued to be respected after his death. | * He is (present tense) acknowledged to be a great composer.
* Most people today would recognise at least one of his works.
* 20,000 people attended his funeral procession.
 |

**8.** The author says he was only thirteen years old.

**9.** He had to look after his brothers for five years (because his father was unable to).

**Summarise:**

**10.**

 **2** Beethoven first travelled to Vienna.

 **3** Beethoven’s mother died.

 **1** Beethoven had horrible teachers.

 **4** Beethoven lost his hearing.

**Meaning as a whole:**

**11.**

Most people can recognise at least one of Beethoven’s compositions.

Introduction

People made excuses for Beethoven’s rudeness.

Early years

Beethoven developed tinnitus.

Loss of hearing

Beethoven was dragged out of bed to practise music.

Bad behaviour

**Authorial intent:**

**12.** This tells you that the author thinks Beethoven was an exceptionally talented composer and that his life was unusually hard, even for someone who is creative.

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**Answers for *Beethoven’s hard life***

**Set B:**

**Vocabulary:**

**1.** certainly/surely/definitely, etc.

**2.** succession

**3.** running riot

**Retrieval:**

**4.** 1770

**5.** because his mother died and his father wasn’t able to

**6.** 56

**Inference:**

**7.** Accept references to *the greater the art, the greater the suffering* or *how much pain and ugliness there was in his life.*

**8.** Beethoven was a musician and composer and you would think that hearing would be essential for that/ he wouldn’t be able to hear the music he composed.

**9.** 20,000 people attended his funeral procession.

**Meaning as a whole:**

**10.**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | True | False |
| Beethoven was Austrian. |  | **√** |
| Beethoven taught himself music. |  | **√** |
| Rich people wanted him to marry their daughters. |  | **√** |
| Beethoven lived through a time of peace in Europe.  |  | **√** |

**Authorial intent:**

**11.** Accept references to the clear contrasts between joy and pain and beauty and ugliness.

**Compare:**

**12.**

1. deaths of family members/unhappy childhood/extra responsibilities/hearing problems/unable to marry the women he loved/war
2. he had a gift for music/his work was published when he was young/invited to work for rich families/his work received thunderous applause

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