

Instructions: Read the text and answer the questions that follow

You are going to read an extract from a memoir. The writer is describing a visit to Petticoat Lane Market in London during the 1970s

My father stared blankly at the multicoloured Elton John-style disco boots I had presented to him for inspection “Those are not men’s shoes,” he pronounced finally.

“Of course they are! Lots of kids at my school have them.”

This was stretching the truth more than footwear I was now trying to squeeze into. By ‘loads of kids’ I really meant a few fashion trailblazers and I was definitely not part of that social set. Deep down, I feared that my father was right but I was fourteen and stubborn. I ploughed on, tottering unsteadily around the stall.

“How do they feel? Do they fit you?”

“Yeah,” I said, quickly wrestling them off again. “They fit fine.”

“And you’re sure you want them?”

I wasn’t but managed a feeble nod. This was enough to launch Dad into action.

“I say, chief!” he said, holding the right foot above his head like he was bidding in auction. “How much do you want for these?”

The stall owner was a big, burly man, with hands bulked out by thick gold rings. He did not look pleased to be summonsed in this way. “A tenner, Paddy,” he said.

‘Paddy’ was an unsubtle allusion my father’s nationality - just as ‘chief’ was Dad’s (unsuccessful) attempt at the local dialect.

“Ten pounds? That’s far too much!”

“It’s what I’m selling them for,” said the stall owner.

There was an edge of menace in his voice that not invite further discussion.

Dad was not discouraged. “I paid less for my car,” he said.

This was greeted with silence and a most unfriendly stare. “Let’s go,” I whispered, rapidly returning the shoes to their bed of tissue paper.

Ignoring me, Dad upped his bid. “I’ll give you two pounds,” he told the stall owner. “And you can throw in a pair of laces for that.”

“Don’t, Dad!” I hissed, my face burning. “Let’s go!”

To my surprise, the stall owner’s craggy face broke into a half-laugh. “You’ve got some brass neck, Paddy!” he said. “You’d pay twenty quid for those shoes in the shops.”

“Not the ones I go to,” said my Dad, which was true. He turned to me, winking theatrically. “Okay, son. We’ll try somewhere else.”

As we walked away, I silently cursed my father. Did he think buying shoes was like trading cattle back some one-shop town in Ireland? He just didn’t understand this country.

Three steps later the offer was called out to our departing backs. “I’ll take three quid, Paddy. That’s my final offer. And you can buy your own laces!”

Then it was all smiles. Dad handed over the cash, remarking cheerfully that he hadn’t seen shoes like them outside of the circus. “And look at this fellah!! He’s as tall as a tree!”

“It’s the fashion,” said the stall owner sympathetically. “They all want these platforms.”

My father then handed me the prize. He looked pretty pleased with himself. And, despite my teenage angst, I was impressed at his negotiating skill.

“Will you wear them to school?”

“Maybe,” I said, but as I peeked into the box I realized, with a sinking heart, that I wasn’t going to be wearing them anywhere. Dad had been right about that, too.

Part 5: Multiple Choice

For Questions 1-6, choose the correct answer A, B, C or D.

1. What does the writer's father think about the shoes?
 - A. They were for going to discos.
 - B. They are not suitable for his son.
 - C. They are poor quality.
 - D. They are good quality.

2. What does the writer say about the shoes?
 - A. They are comfortable
 - B. They are uncomfortable
 - C. They are popular at school.
 - D. They may not be right for him.

3. What are the writer's secret doubts about the shoes?
 - A. He won't like them.
 - B. They will be uncomfortable.
 - C. They are too high for him.
 - D. He won't be brave enough to wear them.

4. Why does the writer's father call the stall owner, 'chief'?
 - A. To try to sound like a local
 - B. To annoy his son.
 - C. To annoy the stall owner
 - D. To sound Irish

5. What do we learn about the father?
 - A. He is Irish but pretends to be English.
 - B. He doesn't understand his son.
 - C. He comes from an Irish farming background.
 - D. He has sold shoes in the past.

6. What does the writer realise at the end?
 - A. The shoes are poor quality.
 - B. The stall owner does not like his father.
 - C. He has underestimated his father.
 - D. He has underestimated the stall owner.