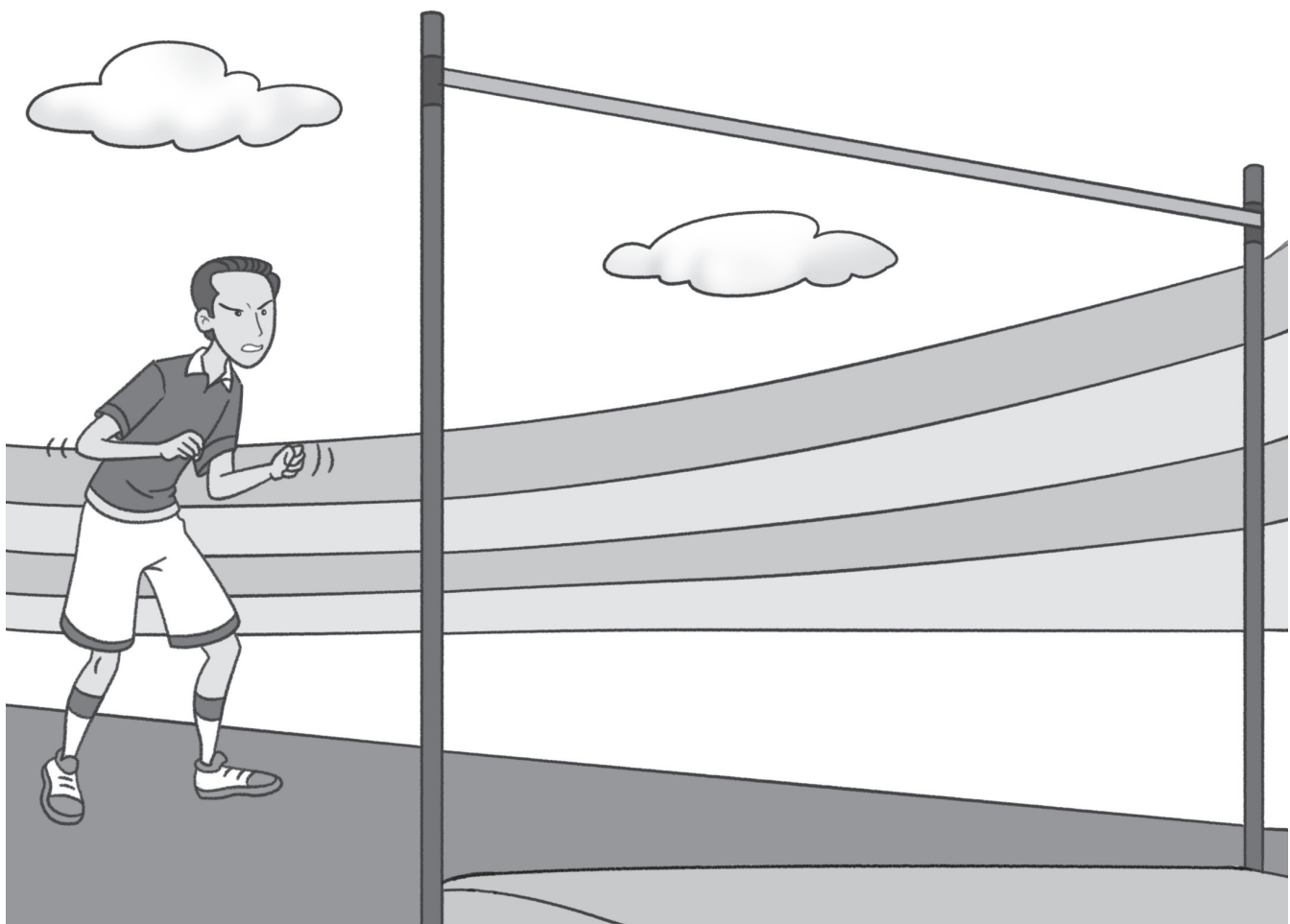


Johnny Swanson: Athletics, Autumn 1929

This passage is taken from the beginning of a novel called Johnny Swanson by Eleanor Updale. The central character, Johnny, is taking part in a sports lesson at school.

The teacher was smiling, but he wasn't smiling at Johnny. He was looking over Johnny's head at the other boys, lined up behind him to take their turn at the High Jump. And it wasn't a nice smile. It couldn't be. The scar running from Mr Murray's eye to his chin pulled the skin of his lips to one side and gave him a permanent sneer, even when he was in a good mood. But now he really was sniggering – inviting the rest of the class to laugh at the smallest, thinnest boy as he struggled with the run-up and brought down the pole.

Johnny could feel his second-hand shorts flapping against his spindly legs. He knew he looked ridiculous, and that his only hope was to pretend that he thought it was funny too. Of course he would fail. He breathed in, clenched his fists and started his run.



Mr Murray called out to him, catching the moment to put Johnny off his stride. "Right then, Squirt," he shouted. "Show us what you're made of!"

The boys gave a mock cheer. Johnny forced a smile and clattered into the bar.

After the fall he brushed the mud from his knees and swaggered to the back of the line, grinning, even though he wanted to cry. Mr Murray blew his whistle and put a stop to the laughter, swiping at Johnny's head as he passed. "It's nothing to smirk about, Swanson. This country needs men, not insects like you. You wouldn't have got far in the war."

The boys groaned. They were expecting another tale about Mr Murray's bravery in France, where his face had been torn apart at the Battle of the Somme in 1916 – two years before any of them were born. But the teacher blew his whistle again and turned to the next boy in line: the muscular captain of the football team. "Now then, Taylor. Show Swanson how it's done."

Everyone cheered as Albert Taylor cleared the bar with room to spare; and at the end of the afternoon Albert was the winner and the class hero. No one wanted to know Johnny, however much he tried to turn his humiliation into a joke.

Mr Murray put Taylor in charge of clearing the hurdles from the games field and set off for the warmth of the staff room.

Taylor delegated the job straight away. "You need building up, Quacky," he said, using the nickname he knew Johnny hated. "The extra exercise might make you grow a bit." He threw Johnny the key to the shed and turned to the others. "Who's coming for a game of marbles?"

The rest of the boys were happy to leave Johnny to lug the equipment away while they ran off to celebrate Albert's triumph, and to laugh about Johnny's shame.

Name: Class: Date:

1 When the story opens, which sport are the boys doing?

.....

2 From the second paragraph, **find** and **copy** the phrase that tells us Johnny did not expect to succeed.

.....

3 As Johnny runs up, Mr Murray calls out to him “*Show us what you’re made of!*”

a) Is he trying to encourage Johnny or trying to put him off?

.....

b) Explain your answer, referring to the passage.

.....

.....

4 After his jump, Johnny returns to the back of the line.

a) What does he do to cover his true feelings?

.....

b) How does he actually feel?

.....

5 When the next boy, Taylor, is called to jump, what makes us think he is more likely to succeed? Give **two** reasons.

.....

.....

6 Match the word used to describe the characters' facial expressions in the passage to the appropriate definition.

smile ("*Johnny forced a smile*")

An unpleasant, offensive kind of smile.

snigger ("*... he really was sniggering*")

A broad smile, often showing teeth.

smirk ("*It's nothing to smirk about ...*")

A pleasant expression made with the mouth.

grin ("*... swaggered to the back of the line, grinning*")

An unpleasant giggle, perhaps at someone's expense.

7 Where did Mr Murray get the scar on his face?

.....

8 What unfortunate effect does it have on his expression?

.....

9 As a reader, do you like Mr Murray?

Yes No

Explain your answer, referring to what happens in the text.

.....

.....

10 As a reader, do you like Johnny?

Yes No

Explain your answer, referring to what happens in the text.

.....

.....