The Olympic Peninsula Reading Comprehension

Word Count: 403 | Lexile 1000

The Olympic Peninsula

The Olympic Peninsula in northwestern Washington is a place of dramatic contrasts shaped by wind, water, and mountains. To the west, waves crash against rocky headlands and scatter spray over tide pools filled with anemones and sea stars. Just inland, rain-laden clouds roll off the Pacific and break against the Olympic Mountains. Their steep slopes force the air upward, cooling the moisture into persistent drizzle and winter snow.

On the wet side, temperate rainforests flourish. Giant Sitka spruce and western hemlock tower over carpets of sword fern and moss. Fallen “nurse logs” absorb water like sponges and support new seedlings along their backs. Elk browse river flats, and banana slugs recycle leaf litter into nutrients. Streams run cold and clear through shaded valleys, offering gravel beds and deep pools where salmon and steelhead rest and spawn.

Yet only a short drive east, the landscape shifts. The mountains create a rain shadow over the town of Sequim and the northeastern shore, where summers are sunnier and drier. Prairie plants withstand the wind, and open oak stands replace dense conifers. Farther south, glacier-carved valleys climb toward icefields and rocky summits. Alpine meadows bloom for a brief season before autumn storms return.

People have long called the peninsula home. The Quinault, Hoh, Makah, Quileute, and other Tribes have deep ties to rivers, fish, and cedar forests. Today, Olympic National Park protects much of the interior, while coastal reservations and communities manage shorelines and fisheries. Visitors hike, watch migrating whales, and learn how wildfire, flood, and climate change are reshaping forests and coasts.

Success in caring for the Olympic Peninsula depends on balance: respecting tribal sovereignty, keeping streams cool and connected for salmon, and planning towns that can handle powerful storms. Whether under drifting snow, steady rain, or summer sun, the peninsula’s mix of rainforest, alpine, and coast remains one of the most diverse landscapes in the Pacific Northwest.

1. **Which statement best captures the central idea of the passage?**
   A. The Olympic Peninsula is mostly desert shaped by dry winds.
   B. The peninsula is important only because of its beaches and tide pools.
   C. The Olympic Peninsula contains contrasting ecosystems—rainforest, alpine, and coast—shaped by climate and mountains and managed by Tribes and the park.
   D. The area is too stormy for people to live there.

2. **What process creates the heavy rainfall and snowfall on the west side of the mountains?**
   A. Tides pulling moisture inland
   B. Moist air rising over mountains and cooling (orographic lift)
   C. Warm winds from the east
   D. Volcanic steam from nearby peaks

3. **Which feature of the rainforest most directly supports new tree growth?**
   A. Frequent ground fires
   B. Dry prairie soils
   C. Open oak woodlands
   D. Water-holding nurse logs that sprout seedlings

4. **What does the term “rain shadow” describe in the passage?**
   A. A drier area east of the mountains with more sun
   B. A dark cloud that follows storms to the coast
   C. The evening fog that cools tide pools
   D. A forest canopy that blocks sunlight

5. **Which connection between people and place is emphasized?**
   A. Only tourists influence the peninsula today.
   B. The National Park manages all shorelines and fisheries.
   C. Tribal nations and communities manage coasts and fisheries, while the park protects interior forests and mountains.
   D. Wildfire has eliminated most rainforest.

6. **Select ALL factors the passage links to healthy salmon habitat.**
   ☐ Cold, shaded streams with pools and gravel
   ☐ Warm, slow water with no cover
   ☐ Connections from the ocean to upper rivers
   ☐ Managing roads and culverts to keep fish passages open

7. **Why do alpine meadows have such a short growing season on the Olympic Peninsula?**
   A. They receive no sunlight in summer.
   B. Snow lingers late and autumn storms return early at high elevations.
   C. Grazing eliminates wildflowers.
   D. Soil is too salty near the coast.

Page 3 – Answer Sheet

1. C
2. B
3. D
4. A
5. C
6. Cold, shaded streams with pools and gravel; Connections from the ocean to upper rivers; Managing roads and culverts to keep fish passages open
7. B