Show-and-tell was a mandatory part of class when I was in fourth grade. I cannot even tell you how annoying it was. My house, when I was growing up, was a square box with small windows and yellow chipped paint. I wore clothing that my cousins had grown out of, or that my mother bought at discount stores. I had a few toys, but nothing shiny or electronic. I never went on vacations except to Cincinnati, and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania one time.

All of that is to say I never had anything fun for show-and-tell. So I used my turns to show off something I found while throwing rocks at cars from the train trestle near my house, which typically got me a look from the teacher, and sometimes a phone call home.

“It would be different if I actually had something to show off,” I’d tell my mom, after getting in trouble for bringing in a railroad tie. “My classmates go places. They do things. They have stuff to show.”

Mom couldn’t ever really get mad at me when I said that. It was true. I couldn’t compete with the things other kids brought in. So I just brought in something weird and talked about it in the most exciting way I could, and tried to ignore the giggles and snickers until my turn was over and I could sit down and forget about show-and-tell until next time.

There was one time, though, when I looked forward to show-and-tell. My class was in the middle of an otherwise boring unit on music, and having disappointed the class by telling us we were not going to be allowed to play tubas or electric guitars as part of the lesson, my teacher decided to do something different to make up for the disappointment of triangles and plastic bongo drums.

“Okay, kids, for the next few days, I am going to introduce a different kind of show-and-tell,” she began. “Instead of having one person talk about something important to them each week, I want every single one of you to get a chance to talk over the next few days, so we’ll have five or six of you share every day.

However, the theme of the show-and-tells is music, to match up with our current unit. So, I know all of you listen to music, and probably you all have a favorite band or song. What I’d like for you to do is think about your favorite song and bring it in to play for the class!”
My teacher looked so pleased with herself. It was a good idea, and I was pretty pleased, too. A show-and-tell where I could measure up!

I ran home that day, excited about the idea of standing in front of my class the next morning, an equal at last. All sorts of different people could like the same song.

I whipped the front door open so hard it hit the wall in the foyer and bounced back. It almost hit me in the nose, but I caught it as I called out, “Mom!” And then I realized: we did not own any music.

Sure, we had a little radio, but since Mom was usually balancing her budget to be able to afford cans of chickpeas, we seldom spent money on CDs. I knew of some bands from listening to the radio, and I had a few favorites based on songs my neighborhood friend and I played from his family’s collection, but Mom and I did not own any music I could bring in for show-and-tell.

So I sat on the bottom step to think about what to do next. My mind moved fast. Of course! I could borrow some music from my friend. Without waiting for my mom to answer, I ran back out the door.

My friend sat next to me, making suggestions.

“What about ABBA?” he asked. “Or what about the Beatles? Or...we liked the Clash that one time.”

“Nah. Nope. It has to be a favorite. I don’t know if those are favorites.”

And then I came across The Game, an album my friend and I had listened to three times in a row while building forts and playing army. There was one song on the CD that was perfect. “I’ve got it!” I shook the CD above my head in triumph and helped clean up the mountain of music around me.

* * *

“Okay, kids, like I explained yesterday, a few of you are going to present some show-and-tell songs today as part of our music unit! When it’s your turn, you’ll get to play your song, and then we’ll have a discussion about what makes it good, why we like or don’t like it, and what instruments we think are making the sounds we hear.”

My hand flew up first when my teacher asked who wanted to share. I practically strutted to the CD player at the front of the room.
“Okay, everyone, this is a song I heard at my neighbor’s house. It’s my favorite. I don’t know exactly why it’s my favorite, but it is really good, and that’s definitely part of it.” I hit “play.”


My song played through. When I pressed play, I was smiling, and I tapped my foot for the first three beats of the song, but then I noticed something. The looks on my classmates’ faces weren’t as excited as mine. They looked bored, confused, and then…they were giggling.

“This is so OLD!” someone whispered, but not quietly. Someone else laughed out loud. “My parents listen to this.” I stopped tapping my foot. My head got really hot, and I knew I was blushing. My teacher told the class to hush, but it was too late. They’d already laughed. They’d already made it pretty clear that, once again, I wasn’t part of their in-crowd.

When my song finished, my teacher forced a discussion about it, but I was quiet for most of it. I was too embarrassed. For the rest of the day, I slumped at my desk, hating the fact that I had no music at home and the song I’d thought was cool was actually an antique.

I had to figure out some way to get out of this trap. I was going to be known as the show-and-tell loser forever if I didn’t do something about it. So, on my way home, I made up my mind about two things. One, I was going to learn about music before anyone else knew about it. I was going to know about the coolest bands, the newest sounds, and the best songs before anyone had a chance to make fun of me.

The other was that I was going to pass on my turn at show-and-tell for the rest of my life.
1. According to the text, what was a mandatory part of class when the narrator was in fourth grade?
   A) music time
   B) silent reading
   C) show-and-tell
   D) physical education

2. What is a main problem the narrator faces in this story?
   A) The narrator never has anything fun to bring in for show-and-tell.
   B) The narrator does not like his or her fourth grade teacher.
   C) The narrator can never pick just one thing to bring in for show-and-tell.
   D) The narrator always brings in the same thing as his or her classmates for show-and-tell.

3. Read this sentence from the text.
   “So I used my turns to show off something I found while throwing rocks at cars from the train trestle near my house, which typically got me a look from the teacher, and sometimes a phone call home.”

   Based on this evidence, what conclusion can you draw about the teacher?
   A) The teacher liked what the narrator was showing to the class.
   B) The teacher did not care about what the narrator was showing.
   C) The teacher did not pay attention to what students were showing.
   D) The teacher did not approve of what the narrator showed.

4. How did the narrator most likely feel about the other kids in his or her fourth grade class?
   A) The narrator did not care what the other kids in class thought about him or her.
   B) The narrator did not feel accepted by the other kids in the class.
   C) The narrator thought he or she was cooler than the other kids in the class.
   D) The narrator thought the other kids in the class were nice and friendly.

5. What is the main idea of this text?
   A) A student had to go to a train trestle to find fun and interesting things to share with his or her class.
   B) A student was disappointed when the music unit in class did not involve playing tubas or electric guitars.
   C) A student did not own any CDs and had to go to his or her neighbor to borrow one for show-and-tell.
   D) A student felt annoyed and embarrassed whenever he or she shared something during show-and-tell.
6. Read this paragraph from the text.

“Sure, we had a little radio, but since Mom was usually balancing her budget to be able to afford cans of chickpeas, we seldom spent money on CDs. I knew of some bands from listening to the radio, and I had a few favorites based on songs my neighborhood friend and I played from his family’s collection, but Mom and I did not own any music I could bring in for show-and-tell.”

Why might the author have included the detail about affording cans of chickpeas in this paragraph?

A) to show that the narrator’s mother did not think show-and-tell is important  
B) to imply that the narrator’s family cared more about music than it does about food  
C) to hint that the narrator’s family did not have much extra money  
D) to suggest that the narrator thought his or her mom was mean for not buying CDs

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

_______ the narrator thought show-and-tell was annoying, he or she still had to participate in it.

A) For instance  
B) Even though  
C) In contrast  
D) In particular

8. What did the narrator’s classmates do when the narrator played his or her favorite song at show-and-tell? Give at least two details from the text in your answer.

________________________________________

________________________________________

9. How did the narrator feel about the other students’ reactions to his or her favorite song? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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________________________________________

10. Why did the narrator want to do well during show-and-tell? Use evidence from the passage to support you answer.

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