

The six reading passages in this task are original summaries written for educational purposes as part of the PROF-L project. Each summary is based on a theatrical work that is in the public domain.

Source plays:

- *The Front Page* by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur (1928)
- *The Valiant* by Holworthy Hall and Robert Middlemass (1920)
- *Trifles* by Susan Glaspell (1916)
- *The Scarecrow* by Percy MacKaye (1908)
- *Bürger Schippel (Citizen Schippel)* by Carl Sternheim (1913)
- *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry (1896)

Hinweis:

Dies ist eine **Beispielaufgabe im Format der PROF-L Prüfung** und keine **Originalprüfungsaufgabe**. Inhalt und Schwierigkeitsgrad können abweichen.

Curtain Up: Exploring Theatre

Indicative time: 15 minutes

Situation

As a future teacher, you may need to recommend age-appropriate cultural events, explain the content of a play or performance to learners or parents, or select material for school-related projects. To do this, it is essential to understand short written descriptions of literary works — such as programme notes, educational brochures, or press summaries.

Task

You are going to read six short summaries of theatre plays. Then, match statements A–H to the correct text (1–6). Each statement matches only one text. There are two extra statements you do not need to use. Write the correct letter (A–H) in the space provided.

1. *The Front Page* (Hecht & MacArthur, 1928)

In a smoky pressroom in 1920s Chicago, a group of fast-talking reporters waits for the execution of a man accused of killing a policeman. Their banter is filled with gossip, cynicism, and one-liners, all reflecting the intense pressure and competition of tabloid journalism. The central figure, Hildy Johnson, is planning to leave the newspaper world behind to settle down and marry, but his editor has other ideas. When a jailbreak throws the newsroom into chaos, Hildy finds himself chasing one last explosive story—while being manipulated by his editor and caught between personal life and professional loyalty. As the tension rises, moral boundaries blur, and the line between news and spectacle begins to dissolve. The play uses rapid dialogue and satirical humour to expose the ruthless ambition and ethical compromises in the world of reporting. Beneath the surface, it questions whether freedom of the press is really about truth—or just another way to sell drama. *The Front Page* is not only a comedy of errors but also a critique of the media's influence and the public's appetite for scandal. Despite its era-specific setting, the play's themes remain surprisingly relevant in the age of sensational headlines and 24-hour news cycles.

2. *The Valiant* (Hall & Middlemass, 1920)

In a quiet prison cell on the eve of his execution, a man named James Dyke awaits death. Convicted of murder, Dyke has accepted his fate with calm dignity, never appealing or explaining his past. But there is a mystery: he refuses to give any details about his true identity. As the guards speculate, a young woman arrives, claiming she may be his sister. She's travelled from afar, hoping to find the brother who disappeared years ago. Dyke, however, insists he is not the man she's looking for. Their conversation is tense, filled with guarded words and silent emotions. After she leaves, disappointed but unconvinced, Dyke quietly quotes lines from *Shakespeare*—passages she had mentioned her brother loved. This subtle gesture raises a powerful question: was Dyke truly protecting her from the shame of knowing her brother was a condemned man? Or was it all coincidence? *The Valiant* is a short play, but it resonates with deeper themes of identity, sacrifice, and the human need for redemption. It invites the audience to reflect on what it means to be noble—not in life's achievements, but in its final, silent decisions. With its restrained drama and moral ambiguity, the play offers a quietly powerful study of human dignity.

3. *Trifles* (Susan Glaspell, 1916)

In a remote rural farmhouse, a murder has taken place. The county attorney and sheriff arrive to investigate, accompanied by their wives. While the men search for official evidence upstairs, the women remain in the kitchen, observing the household's everyday details. Dismissed by the men as irrelevant "trifles," these domestic observations soon form a narrative of their own. A broken birdcage, a dead canary, and uneven stitching in a quilt suggest a deeply unhappy life. The women piece together the psychological state of the suspect—Mrs. Wright—who was likely driven to desperation by emotional abuse and isolation. Although the men overlook these subtle clues, the women reach a quiet understanding about the motive and choose not to share their findings. *Trifles* explores gender roles, power dynamics, and the underestimated intelligence of women. It raises timeless questions about justice and whose voices are heard in society. Through its restrained storytelling, the play criticises how female perspectives were historically dismissed and how emotional suffering can remain invisible in plain sight. It's a quietly radical piece that transforms seemingly minor details into powerful evidence, showing that what is considered trivial can carry profound meaning—especially in the hands of those willing to truly observe.

4. *The Scarecrow* (Percy MacKaye, 1908)

Based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's tale *Feathertop*, this philosophical fantasy tells the story of a scarecrow brought to life by a witch to exact revenge. Transformed into the elegant "Lord Ravensbane," the scarecrow is introduced into high society. At first, he mimics the manners of a gentleman, fooling others and falling in love with a kind young woman. But over time, Ravensbane develops real emotions, questioning his identity and purpose. When a magic mirror reveals his true origins, he faces a moral crisis: continue living a lie or embrace his humanity by letting go. In a selfless act, he breaks the enchanted pipe that keeps him alive, choosing to die rather than deceive the woman he loves. *The Scarecrow* is both a romantic tragedy and a philosophical allegory, asking what it means to be truly human. It explores transformation, empathy, and the nature of authenticity, showing how even a fabricated being can achieve moral depth. The play critiques superficial social structures and suggests that nobility lies not in one's birth or appearance, but in one's choices. Though written over a century ago, the story's central conflict—between self-image and self-awareness—feels enduringly relevant.

5. *Citizen Schippel (Bürger Schippel)* (Carl Sternheim, 1913)

In this German social satire, Paul Schippel, a working-class clarinetist, is reluctantly invited to join a prestigious male vocal quartet. The quartet desperately needs a strong tenor to compete in a major music competition, but Schippel, who lacks their refined manners and elite background, is viewed with quiet contempt. At first flattered, he soon discovers he is being used. As class tensions build, Schippel becomes more assertive, challenging the group's hypocrisy and gaining admiration from some members. A romantic entanglement with a general's daughter forces a confrontation of values: love, reputation, and personal pride collide. In the end, a compromise is reached, but Schippel's dignity is damaged, and the audience is left to reflect on who has truly won. *Citizen Schippel* critiques the rigid class system and the superficial codes of "respectable society." Through wit and irony, the play reveals how social inclusion often masks hidden prejudice, and how ambition and self-worth clash in a world built on status. Despite its comic tone, the play explores serious themes: the longing for acceptance, the cost of assimilation, and the subtle cruelty of class distinction. It remains a sharply observed study of how power and prejudice operate beneath polished appearances.

6. *Ubu Roi* (Alfred Jarry, 1896)

Ubu Roi opens with a violent and absurd declaration: "Père Ubu" plans to murder the King of Poland and seize the throne. Encouraged by his equally greedy wife, he carries out the plot with brutal efficiency, only to reveal himself as a grotesque tyrant. Obsessed with power, wealth, and control, Ubu institutes a reign of terror, jailing nobles, overtaxing citizens, and displaying absurd cruelty. The play is filled with crude language, slapstick violence, and wild imagery, all intended to mock traditional theatre, politics, and human greed. At its 1896 premiere in Paris, the audience erupted in shock—some called it genius, others a disgrace. Seen now as a forerunner of modernist and absurdist theatre, *Ubu Roi* uses exaggeration to reflect the worst traits in authority figures. Its satire is not subtle, but that is precisely its strength: the grotesque becomes a mirror for societal corruption. Though the characters are far from realistic, the world they inhabit feels disturbingly familiar. The play questions what happens when chaos replaces order and whether power inevitably corrupts. Ubu, as an anti-hero, lives on as one of literature's most outrageous—and unsettling—creations.

Statements

A	A life's truth remains untold, even when time has almost run out.
B	A character conceals their true identity to achieve a selfish goal.
C	A humble outsider disrupts elitist harmony, exposing hidden prejudice.
D	A decision made in silence raises the question of whether ambition can outweigh truth.
E	A created being chooses truth over illusion, sacrificing himself for the sake of love.
F	A bizarre political figure exaggerates the absurdity of authority through disruptive behaviour.
G	A satirical take on the way ambition in reporting can distort reality.
H	A quiet domestic space becomes the backdrop for discovering an invisible act of resistance.

Plays	Statements
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	

Key

Plays	Statements
1	G
2	A
3	H
4	E
5	C
6	F

Distractors: B, D