The Backpack Litter

Arthur, the librarian, didn’t deliberately acquire cats. He couldn’t say no to a homeless critter and had ended up with eleven feline roommates. Even strangers seemed to know about Arthur’s affinity for cats.

One spring day, a college girl plunked her backpack on Arthur’s desk and slowly reached in it to lift out a sleepy white kitten. She kept dipping into her bag, and eventually she was shuffling four frisky kittens to keep them all on top of Arthur’s desk. None seemed any the worse for the ride in the backpack.

The student explained that the kittens had been born four weeks before and needed a home. Arthur’s mouth formed the words, “Oh, no!”

“I’m leaving town,” the young woman said. “I can take their mother home with me, but not the litter. If you won’t rescue them, they’re destined to go to the shelter.”

Arthur’s cat family was very upset about the newcomers, so he called Maggie, a friend who had lost a cat after twenty years. He insisted that she come and adopt just one kitten.

Reluctantly, Maggie picked up an orange kitten. When she turned to leave with it, a black and white one was perching on her foot, clinging to her pants leg. “OK,” she said, “I’ll adopt these two.”

When she got to the door, Maggie looked back at the round black kitten and the tiny white one, sadly watching their remaining family depart. They seemed to be saying, “Wait, what’s going on here?”

“All right!” Maggie said, sighing and grimacing at Arthur. “I’ll take all four and keep them together.”
Answer the questions below.

1. Which of the following best describes how Arthur feels about cats?
   A. needy
   B. suspicious
   C. protective
   D. uninformed

2. Which of these is a theme of the story?
   F. Bad decisions are generally made in great haste.
   G. Having pet animals can ease loneliness for people.
   H. Good deeds can mean taking on more than expected.
   J. Choices made based on feelings turn out to be unwise.

3. Which event is the climax of the story?
   A. A student brings four kittens in for the librarian.
   B. Arthur saves four kittens from going to the shelter.
   C. Arthur’s cat family dislikes the four new kittens.
   D. Maggie comes to take one kitten but takes all four.

4. When the student told Arthur that the kittens would go to the shelter if he didn’t take them, she was most likely
   F. trying to persuade him to take them.
   G. suggesting that the shelter might be a better place for kittens.
   H. hoping to impress Arthur with her ability to take care of cats.
   J. thinking that would scare the kittens into behaving.


Common Core State Standards

Questions 1, 2, 5: Literature 3. Describe how a particular story’s or drama’s plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution. Questions 3, 4: Literature 2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.