

Christie Edmunds: Comprehension answers

1. Christie has just had her fortieth birthday and feels “every one of those forty years pressing down and crushing the life out of her” which suggests that she is depressed about getting older. She also mentions how empty her life is, which is another reason she would need cheering up.

2. She thinks they are dreadful, describing them as “shocking” and “nasty”. She is embarrassed to be seen buying one and “sniffs in disgust” which suggests she thinks they are not good enough for a lady like herself.

3. Here are some adjectives and pieces of evidence you might choose:

Adjective	Evidence (quote/s from the text)
miserable / grumpy	“the old woman looked at her sourly” / “the old woman grumbled” / “she asked sharply”
nasty / cruel / witch-like	“reaching out a thin claw to grab the magazine” / “chuckled at the garish cover” / “gave Christie a sly look” / “shrieked”
skinny / ancient / ugly / unwell	“hunched as usual” / “reaching out a thin claw” / “I saw him once for my backache”
greedy / rude	“the old woman ripped open the beautiful box and began to guzzle chocolates” / “Has that big fat wife”

4. She buys it to “sort out the screeching alley cats” which Mother keeps complaining about. The chemist tells her that it is strong enough to “kill a cat and scare off the rest”.

5. She glances at the title of the Penny Dreadful she is buying for Mother and sees that it is a story about a poisoner, whose victims “die in agony”. She has been thinking about ways Emily Beard could die, and happens to have just bought poison...

6. Christie hopes that if other poisoned chocolates are found to come from the sweet shop, Dr Beard will think she was just unlucky in buying poisoned ones for Emily. (I don't think it was a brilliant plan, do you?)

7. Christie does several things:

- She regularly returns poisoned chocolates to the sweet shop, to be resold.
- She pays local boys to buy chocolates, which she poisons and leaves in public places.
- She adds poison to plum cakes and baskets of fruit, then sends them to random people.

8. He wants to see the sea, because he has never seen it before (this is "his first visit to the seaside") and his mother has promised he can paddle, which seems to him "the most magnificent treat in the world".

9. Mr Maynard, the sweet shop owner, is generally suspected to be the poisoner. One headline says: "Confectioner J. G. Maynard Questioned By Police" and Dr Beard reads a report that "Maynard might stand trial for the child's death".

10. There's no right or wrong answer here, and obviously it's impossible to know for sure what was going on in Christie's mind. She must have had some kind of mental illness to even consider poisoning chocolates. There was certainly a history of instability in her family, as her father and brother had both died "raving with madness" (page 2). In those days, people didn't know a lot about mental health, so we can't know what the problem was and whether it was passed on to Christie.

Personally, I suspect that poor Christie was suffering from extreme depression (and probably her mother was too) because of her sad family history and her loneliness. She became obsessed with Dr Beard (who certainly wasn't worth it – I don't think he behaved well at all) and everything spiralled out of control. I wish it weren't a true story, so I could have made up a happier ending!