

Joan Bracey: Comprehension answers

1. Joan is bored because she has nothing to do, apart from 'ladylike' activities such as sewing, playing the piano and flower-arranging, which she finds dull. She thinks that in the future she will have to marry. This tells us that young women were not expected to study or have careers, just be wives and mothers.

2. His plan was to marry Joan, so that one day he would inherit all her father's money.

3. Crimes Joan commits:

- Running away without paying for meals
- Stealing apples, cider and strawberries from stallholders at country fairs
- Cutting ladies' purses from their belts
- Pickpocketing watches from men's pockets
- Stealing from country markets.

4. Joan's career as a pub landlady doesn't go well because:

- The bar attracts unpleasant customers who start fights
- They never make money because they keep having to replace breakages
- Edward gambles away a lot of money
- They can't be bothered to smarten up the bar
- She finds it hard work to clear up the mess every morning.

5. There are several reasons why Joan enjoys being a highway robber:

- It's fun because it's so risky
- She gets to dress up in a glamorous outfit
- It's easy to do as their victims are always terrified
- They end up with money, gold and expensive jewellery
- She loves the excitement of galloping away on her horse
- She enjoys letting Edward do the talking; they work well as a team.

6. The best places to hide out are wooded areas, “not so near a town that pesky local watchmen might be out on patrol”.

7. His big plan is to rob the coach of the Duke of Staffordshire, who will be travelling with a fortune he won the day before at the horse races. It will be so much money that Edward and Joan can then afford to go abroad and start a new life.

8. Examples of verbs which help to describe the chaos and panic of the scene:

lurched	rocked	rearing	whinnying	yelling
puncturing	whirling	stumbled	hurling	pinned
struggling	tugged	urged	screamed	swallowed

9. People are used to highwaymen entertaining the crowd at their executions (by looking good, telling jokes, singing songs and blowing kisses) and, because Joan is a woman, people think she might be “even more glamorous”. In fact, she is just a “small, pathetic figure” in tattered, dirty clothing. She isn’t in her highwayman costume and won’t even lift her head and speak – in other words, she refuses to put on the usual highwayman display of bravery and defiance.

10. Obviously this is your opinion, so there’s no right or wrong answer.

You could say that she made the right choice to run away with Edward Bracey because she had such a dull future ahead, but personally I think she was behaving like a spoiled brat! She was lucky to be wealthy, and she later realises how silly it was to throw all that away: she would never “be able to sleep soundly without keeping one eye out for danger”.

Also, a life as a thief is clearly wrong – and although she sometimes feels slightly guilty, thinking about “how those ordinary people felt when they realized their hard-earned savings were gone forever”, she doesn’t feel bad enough to stop robbing them! She also has many chances to go home but doesn’t take them. I do have sympathy for Joan, though, because she was only young, and trusted Edward too much.