

NAME: SCHULE:

READING COMPREHENSION:

a) You are going to read an article about superheroes. In which section (A – F) of the text are statements 1 - 12 mentioned. Put the letter on the dots beside the statement. There is an example at the beginning.

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| a seemingly endless collection of costumes | 1 ...F.. |
| an assault on an innocent person | 2 3 |
| a box-office hit for superheroes | 4 |
| a heroine frightened of beginning relationships with men | 5 |
| a summary of the drawbacks of being a superhero | 6 7 |
| a secret and harmful invention that is uncovered | 8 |
| a heroine who seems to detest herself | 9 |
| an expert that advises and guides a heroine | 10 11 |
| a search for something which causes global suffering | 12 |

A

Batman has flapped to the top of the charts, with \$200m in his vault. Superman has put in yet another appearance; to those who inhabit out-of-town multiplexes, it is easy to believe that we are being held hostage by larger-than-life male superheroes. If little boys have the bat and the alien that wears turquoise tights, who can little girls admire? I have a few hours to spare one night after work, so I head off in search of an inspirational female superhero at the DVD shop and take out four films: *Catwoman*, *Elektra*, *Lam Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* and *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*. They will have a heroine to send Batman back to his cave for me, won't they?

B

My first supergirl is Catwoman. Patience Philips, played by Halle Berry, is a graphic designer at a cosmetics company. When Patience discovers that evil genius Laurel Hedare has designed a new face cream that will make all Americans ugly, Hedare ensures that she meets with a fatal accident. Although Patience dies, she is reanimated by cats. She finds a guru who says, 'Catwomen are not contained by the rules of society. You will often be lonely and misunderstood.' I begin to despair. Catwoman, I decide, is a loser. She finds a cop boyfriend and looks up at him adoringly. She steals a shopful of jewellery and returns it in a paper bag marked: 'Sorry'. Doesn't being a supergirl mean never having to say you're sorry? She is also thick. Hedare frames her for murder - easily. Kitty has to sob (to a man!) to be released from jail. My finger trembles over 'Eject' but relents. Perhaps she'll improve. She doesn't. Although she does succeed in rescuing the world from killer face-cream, as the credits roll the boyfriend is dumped and Patience pads into the moonlight alone. This is not superheroic, it's a pathetic example of unnecessary self-sacrifice.

C

My next potential idol is Elektra, from the 'supergirl' class. Elektra is a reincarnated, knife-throwing, ninja babe-assassin who can only stab people if she is wearing a red satin bustier. 'Legend tells of a warrior - a lost soul,' says a disembodied voice on the film. A pattern is emerging here - a superheroine always has to be lost; she gets good thighs but is denied street maps. 'It is her destiny to tip the balance of good and evil.' Elektra is not only lost, she is, according to mentor Terence Stamp, 'poisoned by tragedy.' Even her protector cannot protect her from the truth. My heart sinks. Elektra has an obsessive compulsive disorder and likes to arrange bananas and shampoo into rows. She's bitter - 'Nobody tells the truth about themselves' - and her dialogue is culled from television scripts - 'My mother died when I was young. I should go. Thanks for dinner.' Like Catwoman, Elektra is not super enough to have a functioning relationship. When she does kiss a man, she panics. I'm not the kind of person you should get involved with,' she sobs.

D

Another pattern seems to be emerging. At one point, the villainous Hand breathes on Elektra's face and gives her spots. In Superland, the worse thing you can do to a superwoman (after making her a superwoman) is to give her acne. Elektra triumphs over Hand but, like the Cat, she pays the price and takes the fall. Just two films in, the message to women from Hollywood is : You want to be a superwoman? Are you sure? Well, unhappiness is mandatory and being miserable, vital. This is the sad reality of what you will have to endure as a heroine. Elektra clearly does not like it and slumps into a puddle of self-loathing. She stares at a ninja girl of thirteen and whines: 'Please don't let her turn out so like me.'

E

The girls with supernatural powers were unsuper. So I turn to the girls with superskills, beginning with Lara Croft, as played by Angelina Jolie in *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life*. Lara is like the girls I was at school with: an ordinary suburban girl who talks like a film actress and lives in a large house in the countryside. Her quest is to find the mythical Pandora's Box, the source of the world's grief, before evil scientists get hold of it. She drives a motorbike along the Great Wall of China and sky-dives off a bank, but then 'The Message' pops up again. 'You're afraid of letting anyone in,' says her boyfriend. Lara shoots him, without any apparent justification, then strikes the pose of a noble superheroine-in-solitude. Do you understand, ladies?

Superwoman can't have a super relationship or super contentment and the pay-off for her super gift is isolation, loneliness, misanthropy and, eventually, no doubt, contracting some ghastly disease in her old age.

F

My quest for a superwoman ends with *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*. In scene one, the Angels, wearing very tight clothes, get rid off a gaggle of cheery gangsters. They return to LA, to serve their patriarch Charlie -an elusive man who delivers their orders, assists from afar, and congratulates them at appropriate moments - and are informed they have to recover some important data for the FBI. I watch as they succeed with a combination of looking gorgeous, karate, and disco-dancing. They change their outfits practically every thirty seconds and wear aquamarine mascara and, after two hours, the Angels see off baddie Demi Moore. It is certainly not heroic. My TV screams for mercy. My girls-night-out in Superland is over. Under their masks, I saw only weakness. Batman has won.

Score:/11