Oliver Twist

Scene One – The Workhouse

(Narrator stands in front of the closed stage curtain, illuminated by a spotlight.)

Narrator: Through no fault of his own, Oliver Twist finds himself under the care of an elderly female three miles from where he once lived. He spends his days alongside 20 or 30 other children, who lay sprawled across the floor with rumbling stomachs. On his ninth birthday, Oliver is pale, thin, small in stature and in need of a wash. Yet, despite his circumstances, Oliver is in good spirits.

Unexpectedly, Mr Bumble – the beadle of the parish who had given Oliver his name – visits the workhouse. As Oliver has now turned nine years old, Mr Bumble explains to Mrs Mann that he is too old to stay in her care and must return to the workhouse. Mr Bumble takes Oliver to begin yet another new life.

(Curtains open as Narrator exits to stage right. Five workhouse orphans, including Oliver, walk across the stage towards stage left, holding empty bowls in front of them. At stage left, the boys join the back of the queue that has formed in front of two women and The Master, who wear aprons and ladle gruel into each boy's bowl.)

Boy 1: **(clutching his stomach)** I'm so hungry. If I don't have an extra ladle of gruel today, I'm scared that I might end up eating the boy who sleeps next to me!

Boy 2: **(hushed tones)** One of us should say something. We should ask for more food.

Boy 3 and Boy 4: **(together)** Not me!

(All characters move forward one place in the queue as those before them are served and move to sit around the table.)

Boy 2: What about you, Oliver?

Boy 1: Yes, Oliver, will you ask The Master for more supper?

Oliver: **(hesitant)** Well, I don't know. I guess we are hungry. Just another spoonful wouldn't hurt, would it?

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(All orphans move through the queue, receive their gruel and take their seats at the table. Boy 1 sits next to Oliver. The Master and the two women remain stood at stage left, observing the orphans as they eat.)

Boy 2: **(winks at Oliver)** Now's your chance, Oliver. Ask him.

Boy 1: Go on, Oliver. Ask. **(nudges Oliver with his elbow)**

(Oliver stands up and walks towards The Master. He carries his bowl and spoon in front of him and has an unsure expression on his face.)

Oliver: **(meekly)** Please, sir, I want some more.

The Master: **(open-mouthed, with a faint voice)** What?!

Oliver: Please, sir, I want some more.

(The Master tries to hit Oliver over the head with the ladle but Oliver ducks just in time. The Master grabs Oliver by the arm.)

The Master: **(loudly calling to offstage right)** MR BUMBLE!

(Mr Bumble and Mr Limbkins enter quickly from stage right.)

The Master: Mr Limbkins, I beg your pardon, sir! Oliver Twist has asked for more!

(Orphans around the table gasp and look at one another with shocked faces.)

Mr Limbkins: For more?! **(turns to Mr Bumble)** Compose yourself, Bumble, and answer me distinctly. Do I understand that he asked for more after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary?

Mr Bumble: He did, sir.

Mr Limbkins: That boy will be hung! I know that boy will be hung!

(Lights fade. Curtains close.)

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Questions

1. Which word from the Narrator's first sentence of dialogue means the same as 'old'?
   Tick one.

   - ○ fault
   - ○ care
   - ○ elderly
   - ○ miles

2. **(hushed tones) One of us should say something. We should ask for more food.**
   How should Boy 2 deliver this line? Tick one.

   - ○ confidently
   - ○ quietly
   - ○ arrogantly
   - ○ repeatedly

3. Find and copy one word from the first stage direction which means the same as 'lit up'.

   _____

4. **... who lay sprawled across the floor with rumbling stomachs.**
   What word could the author have used instead of 'sprawled' in this phrase?

   _____

5. **Compose yourself, Bumble, and answer me distinctly.**
   Rewrite this line in your own words so that it keeps the same meaning.

   _____

6. Explain **two** ways in which the author makes it clear that Boy 1 is very hungry.

   _____

   _____

   _____

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7. **(loudly calling to offstage right) MR BUMBLE!**
When delivering this line, why does The Master need to call offstage?

8. Summarise why it was a good choice to end the scene after Mr Limbkins's last line of dialogue.

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