



THE CHANGING PORTRAIT

Chapter 1: The Mansion Tour

The opening chapter of **The Changing Portrait**, a Scaremoor middle grade horror novel, as a 827-word reading passage. It ends on a cliffhanger, so students finish wanting the next page.

WHAT'S INSIDE

1. The passage, with numbered paragraphs for citing evidence
2. 6 multiple-choice questions
3. Words in context and the author's similes
4. Two written responses and a prediction
5. Answer key

HOW TO USE IT

- Students read on their own or with a partner (about 10 minutes), then answer the questions.
- Every question names the paragraph to look back at.
- For grade 3, read it aloud and do the questions together.
- About 40 minutes in all. No prep.

WANT TO KEEP READING?

The Changing Portrait is book 4 of the Scaremoor series, for ages 8–12, in paperback and on Kindle. Find it at scaremoor.com or on Amazon (amazon.com/gp/product/B0F8T63QBR). Every Scaremoor book is a standalone story, and every one is spooky but safe for school.





THE CHANGING PORTRAIT

Chapter 1: The Mansion Tour

Name: _____

Date: _____

- 1 If Max pokes me one more time, I'm going to accidentally-on-purpose trip him into a suit of armor.
- 2 He's been bouncing ahead of us for the last thirty minutes, pressing his grubby fingers against every glass case and pretending he's the world's most exciting tour guide.
- 3 "This is where they kept the dragons!" he yells, pointing to a perfectly normal fireplace. "And that's the room where people vanished—poof!—into thin air!"
- 4 Dad laughs like it's the most brilliant thing he's ever heard. Mom snaps a photo of Max posing dramatically beside a portrait of some old guy with a forehead the size of a laptop. Meanwhile, I trail behind like the unwanted ghost of family vacations past.
- 5 The sign out front promised historic mansion turned museum, but so far it's just been creaky floors, faded wallpaper, and enough old furniture to stage a haunted furniture commercial.
- 6 I press my hoodie sleeves into my palms and drag my feet on the rug. My stomach makes a quiet noise—half boredom, half rebellion. I told them I didn't want to come today. But of course, Max wanted to see the "real-life creepy house," so here we are.
- 7 The air changes when we pass through the next archway—colder, somehow. Like the walls hold their breath when we enter. I glance up. Even the chandeliers look nervous, with their warped little candles curled in on themselves.
- 8 "This place is so cool," Max whispers as we enter another room filled with oil paintings and chandeliers that probably haven't been dusted since electricity was invented. "Bet there's a secret door behind one of these."
- 9 I roll my eyes and mutter, "Bet there's not."
- 10 But honestly? Something is off about the air in here. It's colder than it should be—sharp, like walking into a room where someone just left. The kind of cold that slips under your shirt collar and makes the hairs on your arms rise.
- 11 Mom said the mansion was built in the 1800s by some shipping tycoon named Lord Black-something. Every room feels like it's waiting for a ghost to walk through. The kind of place that smells like damp wood, forgotten stories, and overly polished history. It's too clean and too quiet, like they're trying to keep something in—not show something off.

- 12** I drift toward the back of the group. The docent is talking about original wallpaper and imported doorknobs or something, but I'm not listening. I glance out one of the tall windows, where sunlight drips through thick, speckled glass. Dust dances in the air like it's trying to remember how to settle.
- 13** I wonder if this would be more fun if I were here alone.
- 14** Or maybe if I were someone else entirely.
- 15** We step into the biggest room yet. It's a grand gallery—high ceilings, red velvet ropes, gold-framed paintings lining the walls like solemn guards. The floor creaks even when no one's walking. Somewhere, a draft whistles through a vent.
- 16** Max twirls in the middle of the room like he's a wizard. "This is where the ghosts throw tea parties," he whispers. "Fancy haunted ones. With finger sandwiches and curses."
- 17** I snort, despite myself. Then instantly regret it, because Mom whips around with her phone.
- 18** "Haley! Finally smiling. Quick, hold still."
- 19** "I wasn't—" But she's already snapping a photo.
- 20** I fold my arms tighter and pretend I'm very interested in a painting of a lady holding a fan.
- 21** Because that's when I see her.
- 22** The painting hangs alone on the far wall, framed in something thick and dark and covered with tiny carvings I can't quite make out. A girl stands in the center of the canvas. She looks around my age—maybe twelve or thirteen—with pale skin and dark brown hair that falls in soft waves over her shoulders. She's wearing one of those stiff, old-fashioned dresses that looks like it was made to torture children. Her hands are clasped politely in front of her. There's a garden behind her, a big iron gate, a gray sky.
- 23** And her eyes—her eyes feel wrong.
- 24** They're too clear. Too focused. Not glassy and vague like every other portrait in here. It's like... she sees me.
- 25** "Creepy," I whisper before I can stop myself.
- 26** The room seems quieter now. Like someone pressed a pillow over all the sound. I glance behind me—Mom's chatting with the docent again about wallpaper glue, and Max is crouched under a table pretending to be a goblin. Classic.
- 27** I look back at the girl in the painting.
- 28** She hasn't moved, obviously. But I step closer anyway. There's a tiny plaque beneath the frame, so old the text is almost rubbed away:
- 29** "Isabella, Age 12 — The Last Summer"
- 30** That's it. No last name. No date. Just that.
- 31** The Last Summer? What does that mean?

32 I lean in closer. Her face is smooth, expression calm, but not blank. It's like she's thinking about something—something she can't say out loud. Like she's waiting.

33 A chill rolls down my neck.

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THE CHANGING PORTRAIT

Look back at the passage. Each question tells you which paragraph to check.

Name: _____

Date: _____

PART A: WHAT HAPPENED?

Circle the best answer.

1. Why is Haley's family visiting the mansion? (paragraph 6)

- A. Haley has a school project.
- B. Her mom works there.
- C. Her little brother Max wanted to see the "real-life creepy house."
- D. Haley wanted to see the paintings.

2. According to Mom, when was the mansion built? (paragraph 11)

- A. In the 1800s, by a shipping tycoon
- B. Last year, as a museum
- C. In the 1950s, by a painter
- D. Nobody knows.

3. What does Mom do when Haley finally smiles? (paragraph 19)

- A. Tells her to stop
- B. Snaps a photo
- C. Laughs at Max
- D. Buys her a snack

4. What makes the girl in the painting seem different from the other portraits? (paragraph 24)

- A. She is smiling.
- B. Her dress is bright red.
- C. She is holding a fan.
- D. Her eyes are too clear and focused, like she sees Haley.

5. What does the plaque under the painting say? (paragraph 29)

- A. "Lady with a Fan"
- B. "Isabella, Age 12 — The Last Summer"
- C. "Lord Black, 1850"
- D. "Do Not Touch"

6. What is Max doing while Haley looks at the painting? (paragraph 26)

- A. Taking photos
- B. Talking to the docent
- C. Crouching under a table, pretending to be a goblin
- D. Pressing his fingers on a glass case





THE CHANGING PORTRAIT

PART B: WORDS IN CONTEXT

Find each word in its paragraph. Use the words around it to figure out what it means.

7. **docent** (paragraph 12) means:

8. **solemn** (paragraph 15) means:

9. **clasped** (paragraph 22) means:

PART C: THE AUTHOR'S SIMILES

A simile compares two things using *like* or *as*. Explain what each one means.

10. *"Meanwhile, I trail behind like the unwanted ghost of family vacations past."* (paragraph 4)

11. *"It's a grand gallery—high ceilings, red velvet ropes, gold-framed paintings lining the walls like solemn guards."* (paragraph 15)





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PART D: THINK IT THROUGH

Answer in complete sentences. Name the paragraph your evidence comes from.

12. How does Haley feel about this family trip? Use evidence from two paragraphs.

13. How does the author make the mansion feel creepy before Haley finds the painting? Use two details.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The chapter ends with “A chill rolls down my neck.” What do you think happens next with Isabella’s painting? Use two clues from the chapter.





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Look back at the passage. Each question tells you which paragraph to check.

PART A: WHAT HAPPENED?

Circle the best answer.

1. Why is Haley's family visiting the mansion? (paragraph 6)

- A. Haley has a school project.
- B. Her mom works there.
- C. Her little brother Max wanted to see the "real-life creepy house." ✓**
- D. Haley wanted to see the paintings.

2. According to Mom, when was the mansion built? (paragraph 11)

- A. In the 1800s, by a shipping tycoon ✓**
- B. Last year, as a museum
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- A. She is smiling.
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- C. She is holding a fan.
- D. Her eyes are too clear and focused, like she sees Haley. ✓**

5. What does the plaque under the painting say? (paragraph 29)

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PART B: WORDS IN CONTEXT

Find each word in its paragraph. Use the words around it to figure out what it means.

7. **docent** (paragraph 12) means:

a guide who gives tours in a museum

8. **solemn** (paragraph 15) means:

serious and not cheerful

9. **clasped** (paragraph 22) means:

held together tightly

PART C: THE AUTHOR'S SIMILES

A simile compares two things using *like* or *as*. Explain what each one means.

10. "Meanwhile, I trail behind like the unwanted ghost of family vacations past." (paragraph 4)

Haley feels left out and ignored, drifting along behind her happy family.

11. "It's a grand gallery—high ceilings, red velvet ropes, gold-framed paintings lining the walls like solemn guards." (paragraph 15)

The paintings seem to stand watch over the room, serious and still.





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PART D: THINK IT THROUGH

Answer in complete sentences. Name the paragraph your evidence comes from.

12. How does Haley feel about this family trip? Use evidence from two paragraphs.

She is bored and feels left out: she wants to trip Max into a suit of armor (1), trails behind like an unwanted ghost (4), didn't want to come (6), and wonders what it would be like to be someone else entirely (13–14).

13. How does the author make the mansion feel creepy before Haley finds the painting? Use two details.

Any two: the air turns colder, like the walls hold their breath (7, 10); the chandeliers look nervous (7); it is too clean and quiet, like it's keeping something in (11); the floor creaks when no one is walking and a draft whistles (15).

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The chapter ends with “A chill rolls down my neck.” What do you think happens next with Isabella’s painting? Use two clues from the chapter.

Answers will vary. Strong predictions use clues such as Isabella’s eyes seeming to see Haley (24), the plaque’s “The Last Summer” (29), or Isabella seeming to be waiting (32).

