

Connotation and Denotation

Question 1 .

from Great Expectations
by Charles Dickens

[Miss Havisham] was dressed in rich materials—satins, and lace, and silks—all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe on—the other was on the table near her hand—her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom lay with those trinkets, and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a prayer-book, all confusedly heaped about the looking glass.

It was not in the first few moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed. But, I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its luster, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could.

Directions: Select all the correct answers.

Which of the following words have a similar denotation to the word luster as it is used in the passage?

- ☐ candor
- ☐ glisten
- ☐ radiance
- ☐ matte
- ☐ iniquity

Question 2 .**Race to the Punch Line**

by J. Robbins

"Why is it so hard to be funny?" moaned Zooey as she doodled on her notebook. Her writing partner, Perrault, barely looked up from his laptop.

"I know what you mean," Perrault replied. "The comedians on Weekend Evening Live make it look easy." Zooey leafed through the skit she and Perrault had been working on for two days. Both students were ragged around the edges but determined to finish their project before the deadline.

"No one in our high school will laugh at this," she sighed. "These jokes are lame, and I don't want to risk getting an F in drama class. I need good grades to win a scholarship to the Second City Training Center."

"What is that again?" asked Perrault absentmindedly as he continued pecking at the keyboard.

"It's a comedy improvisational school," Zooey told him. "A lot of famous comedians went to Second City, including Tina Fey, Mike Myers, and Stephen Colbert."

"Tina Fey?" exclaimed Perrault. "Wow, maybe I should put in an application so I can meet her. She is as adorable as she is clever. In fact, she is one of my inspirations for becoming a comedy writer." Zooey rolled her eyes at him.

"She has graduated and moved on, doofus," she laughed. "However, neither you nor I will be going anywhere until we finish writing this script."

"Done!" called Perrault triumphantly. "This skit will have everyone rolling in the aisles."

"I sure hope so," Zooey replied as she began to read over his shoulder.

"Well, look at the two eggheads hard at work," said Warwick, a fellow drama student, as he walked past with his girlfriend. "You two may get good grades, but your last skit fell as flat as a pancake. People always enjoy my skits because they are enhanced by my natural comedic talent. I don't have to worry about passing the final, but you guys are toast."

"You're so funny, Warwick," Veruschka giggled at her boyfriend's boasting.

"Our new script will get an A, and you'll be eating your words," exclaimed Zooey resentfully. Zooey and Perrault watched with narrowed eyes as Warwick strolled arrogantly out of the library with Veruschka at his side.

"Why can't he ever be civil?" Perrault groaned. "I hope he's not right about our grade."

"Have a little faith in yourself, P," said Zooey with a grin. "With this script, our spots in the Second City Training Center are guaranteed. Everyone in school will want to watch 'Garvick' and 'Meruschka' make fools of themselves onstage. This parody of Warwick and Veruschka is brilliant."

"Thanks," Perrault replied, his face burning with embarrassment and delight. "Let's get started!"

Read the following sentence from the passage.

"Zooney and Perrault watched with narrowed eyes as Warwick strolled arrogantly out of the library with Veruschka at his side."

What is the connotative meaning of the phrase "with narrowed eyes" as it is used in this sentence?

- ☐ **A.** They are glaring at Warwick and Veruschka.
- ☐ **B.** They are both experiencing severe eye pain.
- ☐ **C.** Their glasses make it difficult for them to see.
- ☐ **D.** Their eyes are naturally smaller than other people's.

Question 3 .

adapted from **On Benjamin Franklin**
by William Wirt

In this essay, the narrator recalls an encounter with Benjamin Franklin.

Never have I known such a fireside companion. Great as he was, both as a statesman and a philosopher, he never shone in a light more winning than when he was seen in a domestic circle. It was once my good fortune to pass two or three weeks with him, at the house of a private gentleman, in the back part of Pennsylvania; and we were confined to the house during the whole of that time, by the unintermitting constancy and depth of the snows.

But confinement could never be felt where Franklin was an inmate. His cheerfulness and his colloquial powers spread around him a perpetual spring. When I speak, however, of his colloquial powers, I do not mean to awaken any notion analogous to that which James Boswell has given us when he so frequently mentions the colloquial powers of Dr. Samuel Johnson.

The conversation of the latter continually reminds one of "the pomp and circumstance of glorious war." It was, indeed, a perpetual contest for victory, or an arbitrary and despotic exaction of homage to his superior talents. It was strong, acute, prompt, splendid, and vociferous; as loud, stormy, and sublime, as those winds which he represents as shaking the Hebrides, and rocking the old castles that frowned upon the dark rolling sea beneath.

But one gets tired of storms, however sublime they may be, and longs for the more orderly current of nature. Of Franklin, no one ever became tired. There was no ambition of eloquence, no effort to shine, in anything which came from him. There was nothing which made any demand either upon your allegiance or your admiration.

His manner was as unaffected as infancy. It was nature's self. He talked like an old patriarch; and his plainness and simplicity put you at once at your ease, and gave you the full and free possession and use of all your faculties.

In paragraph 3, which definition is a connotative meaning of the word vociferous?

- ☐ A. ruinous
- ☐ B. boisterous
- ☐ C. scandalous
- ☐ D. tumultuous

Question 4 .

To Ella Nora Andrews, calm, unruffled, in her crisp blue linen school suit, serenely humming a gay little tune, gathering her school things together—came the sound of the telephone.

"That you, Ella? Have you heard the news? Jim Sheldon is coming here the last of the week. And get ready now for the climax—he's bringing his bride. Wha' say? Yes, his wife—" And on and on went the rasping, wheezing voice of Fate, while, through the window, Ella watched the red and yellow and orange zinnias in the back yard fade and run together into a smudge of prismatic coloring.

Ella hung up the receiver and leaned against the window. There was a pounding in her throat, and she couldn't seem to concentrate her thoughts. From the chaotic jumble of her mind the leering truth picked itself out: It had happened at last—Jim was married.

adapted from "A Long-Distance Call From Jim" by Bess Streeter Aldrich

Read the following sentence from the passage.

"From the chaotic jumble of her mind the **leering** truth picked itself out: It had happened at last—Jim was married."

What does the word **leering** suggest?

- ☐ **A.** Her mind is playing confusing tricks.
- ☐ **B.** The truth is obvious and mocking her.
- ☐ **C.** She can hear the truth cheering in her mind.
- ☐ **D.** The truth is nothing more than gossip.

Question 5 .

adpated from **Moby Dick**
by Herman Melville

In this excerpt from the first chapter of the novel, the narrator observes people in Manhattan, New York, as he prepares to go back to the sea.

There now is your insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs—commerce surrounds it with her surf. Right and left, the streets take you waterward. Its extreme downtown is the battery, where that noble mole is washed by waves, and cooled by breezes, which a few hours previous were out of sight of land. Look at the crowds of water-gazers there.

Walk about the city on a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Corlears Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What do you see?—Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some leaning against the spiles; some seated upon the pier-heads; some looking over the bulwarks of ships from China; some high aloft in the rigging, as if striving to get a still better seaward peep. But these are all landsmen; of week days pent up in lath and plaster—tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks. How then is this? Are the green fields gone? What do they here?

But look! Here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling. And there they stand—miles of them—leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets, avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither?

Once more. Say you are in the country; in some high land of lakes. Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in it. Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries—stand that man on his legs, set his feet a-going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region. Should you ever be athirst in the great American desert, try this experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical professor. Yes, as everyone knows, meditation and water are wedded forever.

What is the connotative meaning of the word insular as it is used in paragraph 1?

- ☐ **A.** completely isolated

- ☐ B. like an island
- ☐ C. narrow-minded
- ☐ D. standing alone

Question 6 .



Which of the following is a connotation of the use of the word "hero" in this advertisement?

- ☐ A. A dog that goes on dangerous rescue missions is a hero.
- ☐ B. Only this particular rescue dog, Benny, is a hero.
- ☐ C. Any dog food your dog eats will make him a hero.
- ☐ D. Your dog will be a hero if he eats this dog food.

Question 7 .

The denotative meaning of the phrase "each bite better than the last" is that

- ☐ A. the first bite will be the best.
- ☐ B. other tofu dogs do not taste as good.
- ☐ C. the last bite will be the best.
- ☐ D. other tofu dogs taste best first.

Question 8 .

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The author uses the word colloquial three times in paragraph 2. Which definition is the literal, or denotative meaning, of colloquial as it is used in paragraph 2?

- ☐ A. bantering
- ☐ B. literary
- ☐ C. conversational
- ☐ D. distinctive

Question 9 .

To Ella Nora Andrews, calm, unruffled, in her crisp blue linen school suit, serenely humming a gay little tune, gathering her school things together—came the sound of the telephone.

"That you, Ella? Have you heard the news? Jim Sheldon is coming here the last of the week. And get ready now for the climax—he's bringing his bride. Wha' say? Yes, his wife—" And on and on went the rasping, wheezing voice of Fate, while, through the window, Ella watched the red and yellow and orange zinnias in the back yard fade and run together into a smudge of prismatic coloring.

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adapted from "A Long-Distance Call From Jim" by Bess Streeter Aldrich

In paragraph 1, the description "crisp blue linen school suit" suggests that Ella Nora

- ☐ A. is strict and unapproachable.
- ☐ B. is clean and well-composed.
- ☐ C. is trapped in her school uniform.
- ☐ D. is starched and uncomfortable.

Question 10 .

One evening, at the end of August, in Dunnet Landing, I heard Mrs. Todd's firm footstep crossing the small front entry outside my door, and her conventional cough which served as a herald's trumpet, or a plain New England knock, in the harmony of our fellowship.

"Oh, please come in!" I cried, for it had been so still in the house that I supposed my friend and hostess had gone to see one of her neighbors. The first cold northeasterly storm of the season was blowing hard outside. Now and then there was a dash of great raindrops and a flick of wet lilac leaves against the window, but I could hear that the sea was already stirred to its dark depths, and the great rollers were coming in heavily against the shore. One might well believe that Summer was coming to a sad end that night, in the darkness and rain and sudden access of autumnal cold. It seemed as if there must be danger offshore among the outer islands.

"Oh, there!" exclaimed Mrs. Todd, as she entered. "I know nothing ain't ever happened out to Green Island since the world began, but I always do worry about mother in these great gales. You know those tidal waves occur sometimes down to the West Indies, and I get dwellin' on 'em so I can't set still in my chair, nor knit a common row to a stocking. William might get mooning, out in his small bo't, and not observe how the sea was making, an' meet with some accident. Yes, I thought i'd come in and set with you if you wa'n't busy. No, I never feel any concern about 'em in winter 'cause then they're prepared, and all ashore and everything snug. William ought to keep help, as I tell him; yes, he ought to keep help."

from "The Foreigner" by Sarah Orne Jewett

What does a "flick of wet lilac leaves" imply, or connote, in the second paragraph?

- ☐ A. The storm is building and beginning to whip the flowers and trees around.
- ☐ B. It implies that someone's outside, flicking branches against the windows.
- ☐ C. It just means that leaves from the lilac bush are making sounds against the house.
- ☐ D. It's the author's way of implying that the storm is just about to let up.

Answers

1. --
2. A
3. B
4. B
5. B
6. D
7. C
8. C
9. B
10. A

Explanations

1. While connotation refers to the implied or inferred meanings of a word, denotation refers to the literal dictionary definition of a word. The word "luster" as a noun has several dictionary definitions: a glass pendant or chandelier, the quality of shining, a polish used to make objects shine, and excellence.
The words "glisten" and "radiance" have similar denotations to the word "luster" as it is used in the passage. The narrator is describing the reality of Miss Havisham and her possessions—they no longer sparkle and shine, as they did so many years ago.
2. Connotations and implications of words and phrases often depend on the context in which they are found. In this passage, Warwick and Veruschka antagonize Zooey and Perrault. Zooey and Perrault watch their antagonists leave "with narrowed eyes," and this phrase suggests that they are glaring at Warwick and Veruschka.
3. In the context of paragraph 3, vociferous has a negative connotation, as the narrator describes Johnson's manner of communicating as "loud, stormy, and sublime." The connotative meaning of vociferous is "boisterous."
4. Words have both denotations (literal meanings) and connotations (suggestive meanings). To **leer** literally means "to look with a sideways glance", but it also suggests sly intentions—such as to gloat, tease, or stare obscenely.
5. To help determine a connotative meaning, consider what meaning is implied by the use of the word. The author uses the word as an adjective to describe the city, and the connotation of the word insular is neutral in this context. The best answer is "like an island."
6. Advertising often relies on the connotations of words and pictures. Simply by saying that Benny is a rescue dog and that Benny eats this particular dog food, the audience is supposed to make the connection that feeding their dogs this dog food will make them heroes, too.
7. Although the connotative meaning is that this tofu dog will taste great, the literal or denotative meaning is simply that the last bite will be the best.

8. In paragraph 2, colloquial literally means "conversational." The context helps the reader determine that the author refers to Franklin's conversational powers.
9. Words have both denotations (literal meanings) and connotations (suggestive meanings). The description of Eleanor's school suit suggests she is clean and well-composed, which is consistent with other descriptions of her as calm and unruffled. The word "crisp" suggests that she looks both clean and sharp. If the author wanted her to seem stuffy or unapproachable, the author might have described her suit as "stiff."
10. An occasional "dash of wet raindrops and the flick of wet lilac leaves" against the window is meant to imply or connote that the storm is beginning to build. These are sounds we may associate with the early stages of a storm that the author describes as steadily building in strength.