



7

C H A P T E R

Tone, Point of View, and Allusions

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

In Chapter 7 several elements you have studied thus far come together. In this second chapter dealing with the importance of language, you will enhance your understanding of what you read by examining some rather sophisticated elements, including:

- Point of view
- Tone
- Allusions

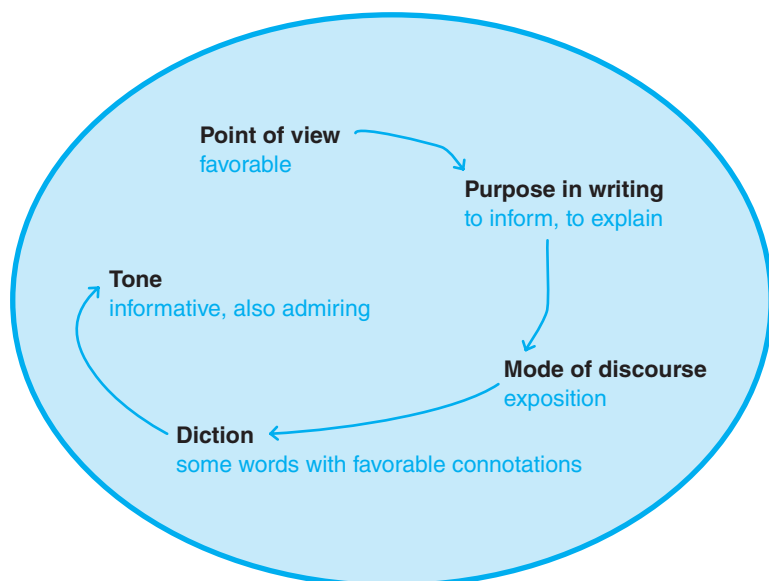
■ POINT OF VIEW

The phrase *point of view* refers to the writer's attitude toward or position on a subject—his or her **stance**. One's point of view, especially with regard to controversial matters, can be favorable, unfavorable, neutral, or ambivalent. This point of view leads to certain choices the writer makes, to the other important elements in writing, for example, mode of discourse, word choice (diction) and the connotations of these words, and **tone** (the subject of this chapter).

Let us illustrate these connections with a passage by Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson, in which he discusses the Incas' contributions to the world's food supply. (Wilson is the author of "The Power of Story," which was a practice exercise in Chapter 5.) As you read it, pay careful attention to the circled connotative words.

From the mostly unwritten archives of native peoples has come **a wealth of information** about wild and semicultivated crops. It is a remarkable fact that with a single exception, the macadamia nut of Australia, every one of the fruits and nuts used in western countries was grown first by indigenous peoples. The Incas were **arguably the all-time champions** in creating a **reservoir of diverse crops**. Without the benefit of wheels, money, iron, or written script, these Andean people evolved a **sophisticated agriculture** based on almost as many plant species as used by all the farmers of Europe and Asia combined. Their **abounding crops**, tilled on the cool upland slopes and plateaus, proved especially suited for temperate climates. From the Incas have come lima beans, peppers, potatoes, and tomatoes. But many other species and strains, including a hundred varieties of potatoes, are still confined to the Andes. The Spanish conquerors learned to use a few of the potatoes, but they missed many other representatives of a **vast array** of cultivated tuberous vegetables, including some that are more productive and savory than the favored crops. The names are likely to be unfamiliar: achira, ahupa, arracacha, maca, mashua, mauka, oca, ulloco, and yacon. One, maca, is on the verge of extinction, limited to 10 hectares in the highest plateau region of Peru and Bolivia. Its swollen roots, resembling brown radishes and rich in sugar and starch, have a sweet, tangy flavor and are considered a delicacy by the handful of people still privileged to consume them.

Edward O. Wilson, *The Diversity of Life*



Now study this diagram. Begin at the top left with “point of view.” Then follow the arrows clockwise from element to element to see how everything ties together.

Now write a one-sentence summary of the passage.

Except for macadamia nuts, all of the fruits and nuts that the Western nations consume were all originally grown by the Incas, the indigenous people of the Andes Mountains.

Practice Exercise 1

Read this paragraph by philosopher and ethicist Sissela Bok, which comes from her classic study of lies and lying. As you read it, circle the connotative words. Then fill in the diagram that follows it.

Those who learn that they have been lied to in an important matter—say, the identity of their parents, the affection of their spouse, or the integrity of their government—are resentful, disappointed, and suspicious. They feel wronged; they are wary of new overtures. And they look back on their past beliefs and actions in the new light of the discovered lies. They see that they were manipulated, that the deceit made them unable to make choices for themselves according to the most adequate information available, unable to act as they would have wanted to act had they known all along.

Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choices in Public and Private Life*

Point of View: unfavorable

Purpose in Writing: to show the negative effects on those who have been lied to

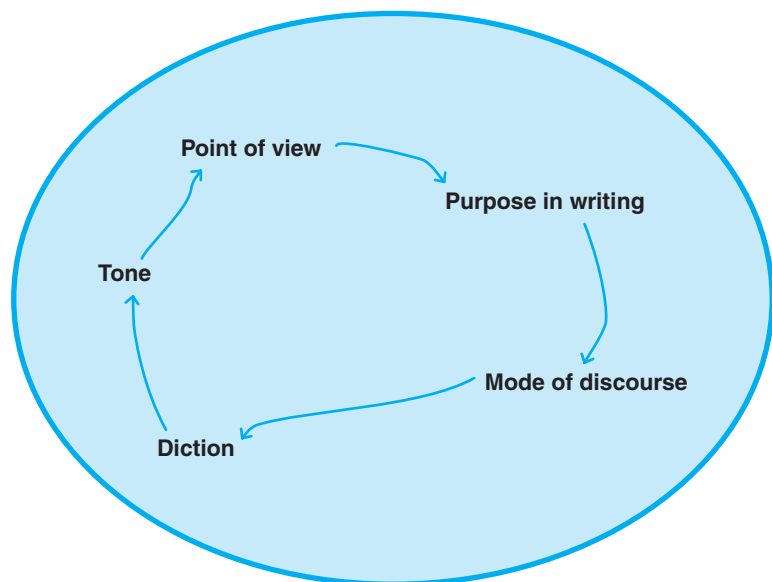
Mode of Discourse: expository, persuasive (secondary)

Tone: informative

Word Choice: words with negative connotations

Connotative Words to Circle

“resentful, disappointed, and suspicious,” “wronged,” “wary,” “manipulated,” “deceit,” “unable to make choices for themselves”



Critical Thinking Exercise

Look again at the paragraph by Sissela Bok. Explain the reason that she includes three examples (separated by dashes) in the first sentence. What implication is she making about lies and about types of lies? What would be another example of a lie that Bok would most likely find objectionable?

■ AN OVERVIEW OF TONE

As you see from these two examples, tone is the feeling or emotional quality a piece of writing conveys to the reader. In conversation, a speaker's tone is readily apparent from gestures, tone of voice, vocal pitch (the voice's rise and fall), facial expression, and body language, even without hearing the actual words spoken.

Imagine this encounter that takes place at a party. A young man introduces himself to an attractive woman. She replies, "I'm Charlotte Milan," which she pronounces MY - lun. He then asks, "What kind of name is Milan?" except that he pronounces it "mee - LAHN" like the Italian city. She corrects him: "It's Serbian, and it's pronounced MY - lun." The young man responds, "*Whatever.*" Charlotte mutters to herself, "Jerk!" and moves away.

Can you hear the tone in the man's "*whatever*"? It's arrogant, rude, and dismissive. A recent survey of Americans revealed that the word "*whatever*," used this way, is considered the rudest word in the English language. But note: It's not the word that's rude; it's the tone in which it's uttered.

But tone in reading is hard to perceive because when we read, the visual and vocal cues are absent; all we have are the black words on the white page (or computer screen). Determining tone goes beyond a literal comprehension of the ideas. You have to infer it from the connotative values of the words, from the details included, and, of course, from the writer's point of view or attitude, as you saw in the preceding section. Identifying tone requires you to duplicate the "sound" or rhythm of the sentences as the writer intended you to hear them. Richard Altick defines tone as "the total emotional and intellectual effect of a piece of writing." It's a complicated undertaking but one well worth mastering.

Tone can run the gamut of human feelings or moods, reflecting the complex beings we humans are. This section will illustrate a few of the many possibilities. The following box lists some of the more common and easy-to-recognize tones. A second group of more difficult ones is taken up later. Check an unabridged dictionary if you are unsure of any of these words' meanings. Sometimes students have difficulty articulating the tone of a passage because they lack the vocabulary to express the emotion it embodies.

I have grouped them into clusters of similar tones that reflect gradations in meaning. Thus, the first one is typically mild; the second one, stronger; and so on. For example, in the second cluster below, “approving” is more neutral than its more positive cousin “admiring,” while “laudatory” is even more strongly admiring. Further, I have grouped them roughly according to whether they are neutral, positive, or negative. Of course, context determines these characteristics. Note, for example, that one can be critical in a positive way but criticism can tip over into a negative tone if it’s harsh or vindictive.

Common Varieties of Tone

Neutral

Informative, impartial, instructive

Generally Positive

Approving, admiring, laudatory
 Sincere, honest, candid
 Serious, somber, grave
 Philosophical, reflective, pensive
 Eager, fervent, passionate, zealous
 Questioning, skeptical
 Amusing, funny, humorous
 Sorrowful, mournful, lamenting
 Nostalgic, wistful, melancholy
 Critical, analytical, judicious

Generally Negative

Critical, fault-finding, disparaging
 Complaining, aggrieved, whining
 Harsh, mean-spirited, nasty
 Provocative, shrill, rabble-rousing, inflammatory
 Sentimental, gushy, maudlin, mawkish

Space limitations make it impossible for us to examine each of these tones; for now it is sufficient just to know that they exist and that you will encounter them in all the reading you do. Many students often think that good nonfiction writing should be objective. This supposition is far from the truth. In fact, outside of textbooks and purely factual news

articles, all writing has a tone or an emotional stance, and as you will see below, even textbook writers sometimes inject tone into their prose. If all writers strived for objectivity (assuming that it were both possible and desirable), what we read would be dry and lifeless and very boring. Thus, the advanced college reader must be alert to these subtle nuances. Recognizing and appreciating tone has a lot to do with enhancing our pleasure in reading.

Tone in Textbooks

The textbooks that you read in your academic courses illustrate academic discourse—writing that conveys factual information. Its tone corresponds to that purpose and is typically characterized by an unemotional, straightforward, and objective tone. In this light, reading academic discourse is different from reading newspapers, popular magazines, novels, or other leisure reading. Nor are textbooks forums for controversy or for stirring our emotions. However, textbook material, particularly the material in the explanatory sidebars, *may* convey an identifiable tone. Economics texts are known for being rather dry, but in this passage, the authors adopt a particular tone toward the subject—ticket scalping. Before you read the passage, ask yourself these questions:

- What does the term “scalping” mean? In what situations does scalping usually occur? Does the word have a positive or a negative connotation?
- Is scalping undesirable, unethical, perhaps even illegal?
- If you needed a ticket to, say, a sold-out concert to be performed by your favorite group, would you pay a scalper’s price? Why or why not? How much above the ticket price would you be willing to pay?
- The title of this sidebar from a leading economics textbook is “Ticket Scalping: A Bum Rap!” What does the subtitle tell you about the writers’ point of view?

Ticket Scalping: A Bum Rap!

Ticket prices for athletic events and musical concerts are usually set far in advance of the events. Sometimes the original ticket price is too low to be the equilibrium price. Lines form at the ticket window, and a severe shortage of tickets occurs at the printed price. What happens next? Buyers who are willing to pay more than the original price bid up the equilibrium price in resale ticket markets. The price rockets upward.

Tickets sometimes get resold for much greater amounts than the original price—market transactions known as “scalping.” For example, an original buyer may resell a \$75 ticket to a concert for \$200, \$250, or more. Reporters sometimes denounce scalpers for “ripping off” buyers by charging “exorbitant” prices.

But is scalping really a rip-off? We must first recognize that such ticket resales are voluntary transactions. If both buyer and seller did not expect to gain from the exchange, it would not occur! The seller must value the \$200

more than seeing the event, and the buyer must value seeing the event at \$200 or more. So there are no losers or victims here: Both buyer and seller benefit from the transaction. The scalping market simply redistributes assets (game or concert tickets) from those who would rather have the money (the other things money can buy) to those who would rather have the tickets.

Does scalping impose losses or injury on the sponsors of the event? If the sponsors are injured, it is because they initially priced tickets below the equilibrium level. Perhaps they did this to create a long waiting line and the attendant news media publicity. Alternatively, they may have had a genuine desire to keep tickets affordable for lower-income, ardent fans. In either case, the event sponsors suffer an opportunity cost in the form of less ticket revenue than they might have otherwise received. But such losses are self-inflicted and separate and distinct from the fact that some tickets are later resold at a higher price.

So is ticket scalping undesirable? Not on economic grounds! It is an entirely voluntary activity that benefits both sellers and buyers.

Campbell R. McConnell and Stanley L. Brue, "Ticket Scalping: A Bum Rap!"
Economics: Principles, Problems, and Policies

Now answer these questions:

1. What is the connotation of the word "scalping" and what is its origin? "Scalping" has a negative connotation; it probably stems from a barbaric form of torture.
2. What is McConnell and Brue's point of view toward scalping? They have no objections to the practice.
3. In the second paragraph, why do the authors put quotation marks around "ripping off" and "exorbitant"? These words describe scalping in a negative way, but the quotation marks tell us that the writers don't share this opinion.
4. Locate and identify the *two* primary reasons that the writers think that scalping has been given a bum rap. The transaction is voluntary; both parties benefit.
5. How would you describe the tone of the passage? informative, but also positive and favorable; economically, the system makes sense.

Tone in Nonfiction Prose

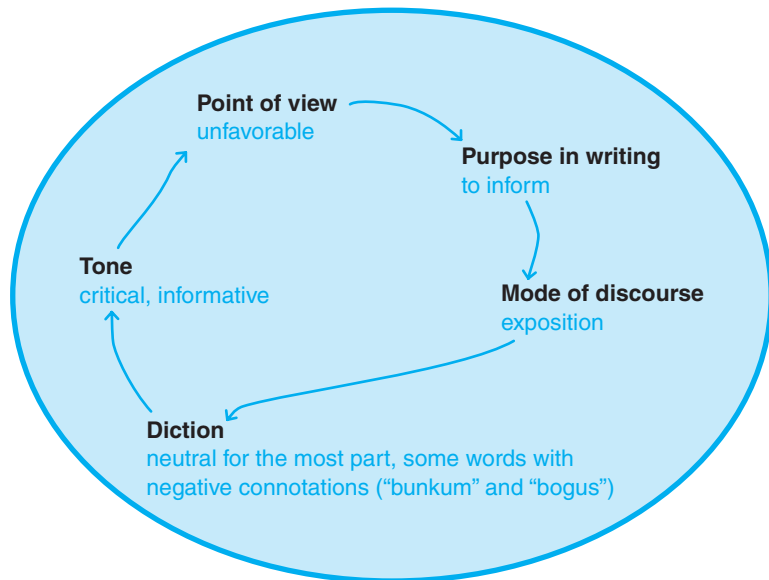
Because the majority of the readings in this text are from nonfiction prose, we will take up tone in that genre first. In this section, we will examine tone in five nonfiction passages, moving from straightforward prose to more complex examples. The first excerpt is from a magazine article about cloning written by a nonfiction writer. As you read it, be

sure to look up any unfamiliar vocabulary, and after doing so, circle the connotative words. After you read it, fill in the diagram that follows.

The notion that cloning might help conserve endangered species has been bandied around for years. Very little such bandying, though, is done by professional conservationists or conservation biologists. One lion biologist gave me a pointed response to the idea: “Bunkum.” He and many others who study imperiled species and beleaguered ecosystems view cloning as irrelevant to their main concerns. Worse, it might be a costly distraction—diverting money, diverting energy, allowing the public to feel some bogus reassurance that all mistakes and choices are reversible and that any lost species can be re-created using biological engineering. The reality is that when a species becomes endangered its troubles are generally twofold: not enough habitat and, as the population drops, not enough diversity left in its shrunken gene pool. What can cloning contribute toward easing those troubles? As for habitat, nothing. As for genetic diversity, little or nothing—except under very particular circumstances. Cloning is copying, and you don’t increase diversity by making copies.

David Quammen, “Clone Your Troubles Away: Dreaming at the Frontiers of Animal Husbandry,” *Harper’s Magazine*

Now study the diagram below, beginning at the top again with “point of view” and going clockwise.



To determine the tone, study the elements in this analysis, remembering to read clockwise starting from the top.

In your own words, explain Quammen’s objections to cloning. Why do conservationists and conservation biologists think that cloning is “bunkum”? Cloning, which means only copying, would be of no help in helping threatened species

survive because it can’t create habitat nor can it help preserve genetic diversity.

In this excerpt from her best-selling memoir, Elizabeth Gilbert recounts a new romantic entanglement with a man named David, the first man she dated after she and her husband had gone through a messy, acrimonious divorce.

But, oh, we had such a great time together during those early months when he was still my romantic hero and I was still his living dream. It was excitement and compatibility like I’d never imagined. We invented our own language. We went on day trips and road trips. We hiked to the top of things, swam to the bottom of other things, planned the journeys across the world we would take together. We had more fun waiting in line together at the Department of Motor Vehicles than most couples have on their honeymoons. We gave each other the same nickname, so there would be no separation between us. We made goals, vows, promises and dinner together. He read books to me, and he *did my laundry*. (The first time that happened, I called Susan to report the marvel in astonishment, like I’d just seen a camel using a pay phone. I said, “A *man* just did *my* laundry! And he even hand-washed my delicates!” And she repeated: “Oh my God, baby, you are in so much trouble.”)

Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*

How would you describe Gilbert’s tone in this paragraph? When you examine the details and the romantic activities she and David engaged in, the tone is optimistic and passionate. There is a sense of wonder in what she feels.

A Special Case: Sentimentality

In the earlier list of tones at the beginning of the chapter, the final item is “sentimental,” followed by its linguistic cousins—“gushy,” “maudlin,” and “mawkish.” Because sentimentality is common in nonfiction prose (almost always badly written), each variation merits a little discussion. *Sentimentality* is an umbrella word describing a tone that appeals to one’s tender emotions. My dictionary defines *gushy* as showing excessive displays of sentiment or enthusiasm. A *maudlin* tone is embarrassingly or tearfully sentimental, and *mawkishness* is even stronger—referring to sentimentality so overdone that it is objectionable, almost sickening.

Sentimentality can be genuine or fake, depending on the writer’s motive and care in writing. And it can be both effective and affective,

meaning that it can appeal to our tender and compassionate instincts and win us over. Many readers enjoy reading about those who have overcome serious obstacles, found true love, or conquered grave illnesses. Such stories ennoble us, give us hope, and inspire us to muddle through our daily lives and to cope with our fears and our shortcomings. The immense popularity of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books is a testimony to this observation.

What can go wrong with the sentimental point of view? It's the fake kind that we need to be alert to. If the writer deliberately plays to our heartstrings with counterfeit emotions and empty clichés, the effect is offensive or ludicrous. We see through the fakery. Richard D. Altick and Andrea A. Lunsford in their excellent textbook *Preface to Critical Reading* explain that writers may lapse into sentimentality because most of the important things in life—love, loss, the innocence of childhood, old age and death, for example—have already been written about, making it difficult to say anything new about them. Here is a passage that embodies the sentimental tone. It comes from the Online Writing Laboratory at Georgia Perimeter College.

Jim and Mary Smith had looked forward to the trip for months. They were returning to a city they had fallen in love with during the five years it was their home over a decade ago. So many memories were rooted in those years when they lived near Washington D.C. They had bought their first house while they lived in a nearby suburb. Their two sons had begun school during those years, and Jim and Mary had established many close friendships. Above all, they had become caught up in the excitement of living in the nation's capital, with its continual political intrigue and constant awareness of international affairs. Indeed, they were more than eager to return, see friends, and visit the beautiful city they loved.

Writing like this is hollow; it sounds fake and affected. It is characterized by phony sentiment and meaningless clichés. Of course, there is nothing wrong with a couple looking forward to a trip to a city where they once lived. It's the sappy tone and the manner of expression that offends here. For fun, you might try rewriting this passage by eliminating the sentimental and empty clichés and adding concrete details in their place.

Practice Exercise 2

This is the first of two practice exercises in determining tone in nonfiction writing. In this one, you are given multiple-choice answers. Here are some passages for you to practice with. As before, pay careful attention to word choice (especially to connotation) and to the manner of expression. Underline key words and phrases. Determine how point of view, mode of

discourse, and diction point to the writer's tone. Then decide which of the four choices best represents the writer's tone.

A.

I'm as sick of work as the next guy, but I'm still practical enough to recognize the need for it. Without work, where would all the new breed of millionaires that I read about in *Time Magazine* get their dry cleaning done? Who would fix their cars? Who would strip for them when they unload their trophy wives for the evening and go out for a night on the town? Us, the ununited workers of the world. I get the newspaper and dig through the classifieds.

It's the same old crap. "CAREER OPPORTUNITY!!!" screams an ad for a \$6.25 an hour warehouse clerk. They mention that they drug test. Who are they kidding? They're discouraging their target market. Who but a crack head would want an opportunity like that? Opportunity, my ass. Why is it so difficult for the people who write these ads to present their jobs in a realistic and readable fashion? Why am I always looking at classifieds that say "FUN EXCITING PLACE TO WORK" and show up to see a bunch of desk jockeys a blink away from quitting, or suicide.

Iain Levison, *A Working Stiff's Manifesto: A Memoir*

Levison's tone is

1. arrogant, egotistical.
2. humorously scornful.
3. serious, stern.
4. critical, fault-finding.

B. The author is a chef and restaurant owner in New York City.

People who order their meat well-done perform a valuable service for those of us in the business who are cost-conscious: they pay for the privilege of eating our garbage. In many kitchens, there's a time-honored practice called "save for well-done." When one of the cooks finds a particularly unlovely piece of steak—tough, riddled with nerve and connective tissue, off the hip end of the loin, and maybe a little stinky from age—he'll dangle it in the air and say, "Hey, Chef, whaddya want me to do with *this*?" Now, the chef has three options. He can tell the cook to throw the offending item into the trash, but that means a total loss, and in the restaurant business every item of cut, fabricated, or prepared food should earn at least three times the amount it originally cost if the chef is to make his correct food-cost percentage. Or he can decide to serve that steak to "the family"—that is, the floor staff—though that, economically, is the same as throwing it out. But no. What he's going to do is repeat the mantra of cost-conscious chefs everywhere: "Save for well-done." The way he figures it, the philistine who orders his food well-done is not likely to notice the difference between food and flotsam.

Anthony Bourdain, "Don't Eat before Reading This," *The New Yorker*

Bourdain's tone is

- ①. honest, candid, frank.
2. critical, fault-finding, disparaging.
3. philosophical, reflective.
4. approving, admiring, laudatory.

C. This poem was originally published on a website devoted to Mother's Day poems (www.poemsforfree.com/mothersdaypoems.html).

Happiness is like a sunny day:
 All one's bitterness is drowned in light.
 Praise be the light, though it must pass away,
 Perhaps because compassion needs the night.
 Yet when one feels like swallowing barbed wire,
 More or less does nothing for the pain.
 Old memories return as if on fire,
 Tormenting one with unforgiving shame.
 How can I, who love you, come inside,
 Each wound to bind up with an ointment rare,
 Restoring the once effervescent bride 'Neath misery no happiness can spare?
 So shall I sing to you of all life's beauty,
 Doing through the night my daytime duty.
 A song of love may not bring back your noon,
 Yet in your darkness, let me be your moon.

Nicholas Gordon, "Happiness Is like a Sunny Day"

The tone of the poem is

1. philosophical, reflective, pensive.
2. sincere, honest, candid.
3. nostalgic, melancholy.
- ④. sentimental, maudlin.

D. Abraham Lincoln's "Farewell at Springfield" was delivered to a vast audience of his fellow citizens on February 11, 1861, as he was leaving for Washington to assume the duties of president. Keep in mind as you read it that Lincoln's primary goal was to preserve the Union.

My friends—No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe

everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young man to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.

Apart from his obviously strong religious tone, which of the following best describes Lincoln's tone?

1. nostalgic, almost melancholy and dejected.
2. eloquent, yet modest and unassuming.
3. sorrowful, mournful, lamenting.
4. irritable, complaining, aggrieved.

Practice Exercise 3

In this second practice exercise, follow the directions from the first exercise. For these passages you will be asked to explain the tone in your own words.

- A. This first excerpt is from an interview with Richard P. Feynmann, a renowned physicist.

Tyrannosaurus in the Window

We had the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* at home and even when I was a small boy [my father] used to sit me on his lap and read to me from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and we would read, say, about dinosaurs and maybe it would be talking about the brontosaurus or something, or the tyrannosaurus rex, and it would say something like, "This thing is twenty-five feet high and the head is six feet across," you see, and so he'd stop all this and say, "Let's see what that means. That would mean that if he stood in our front yard he would be high enough to put his head through the window but not quite because the head is a little bit too wide and it would break the window as it came by."

Everything we'd read would be translated as best we could into some reality and so I learned to do that—everything that I read I try to figure out what it really means, what it's really saying by translating and so (LAUGHS) I used to read the *Encyclopaedia* when I was a boy but with translation, you see, so it was very exciting and interesting to think there were animals of such magnitude—I wasn't frightened that there would be one coming in my window as a consequence of this, I don't think, but I thought that it was very, very interesting, that they all died out and at that time nobody knew why.

Richard P. Feynmann, *The Pleasure of Finding Things Out*

How would you describe Feynmann's tone in this interview excerpt?

eager, fervent, excited about learning

- B. In this excerpt, Jocko Weyland, a lifelong skateboarder from Southern California, describes how skateboarders locate and infiltrate abandoned swimming pools. (“Dogtowners” come from “Dogtown,” a nickname for Venice and Santa Monica.)

The Dogtowners had a mission at the midpoint of the decade. Along with skaters at the L pool in the inland empire east of Los Angeles, in the San Fernando Valley and everywhere else in Southern California, they began a wholesale invasion of private pools, an act of mass trespassing and athletic civil disobedience. It was a full-scale, inherently criminal assault. As long-time editor of *Thrasher* magazine Jake Phelps put it, “It was the ultimate buccaneering sport . . . we’re in your backyard, we’re grinding your pool, you’re not here.” Pools were everywhere, and their owners weren’t always home, and skaters were addicted to skating pools, so the obvious happened. Aside from a few tile rides in the sixties, this was an unprecedented new frontier to be explored. The pool invasion was unstoppable, and it pushed skating forward to an irrevocable break with its surfing and freestyle past.

Though some pools were at abandoned houses, most were on private occupied land and needed to be infiltrated. There were many inventive methods of doing this. Stacy Peralta drove the alleys of Beverly Hills with Jay Adams on the roof of his car, looking over fences into potential backyards. Alva hired a chauffeur to drive him around and search. The ones who could get into the city hall of records or hired planes to fly them over likely territory. Other schemes included asking a female accomplice to pose as the wife in a couple interested in buying a house that had a pool, or using a fake sheriff badge to impersonate an undercover officer. Some went legitimate as pool maintenance men to gain access. Pools were drained during the night while a family slept in the house and were skated the next day. Pools might be skateable for months, days or less than an hour before the police came and the skaters were forced to run for it. . . .

Jocko Weyland, *The Answer Is Never: A Skateboarder’s History of the World*

How would you describe Weyland’s tone? What feeling does he convey?

elation, a feeling of exhilaration and irreverence

- C. The writer is describing a storm that hit Cimarron County in the Panhandle of Oklahoma during the 1930s.

A June storm is always troublesome, carrying the currents of systems confused by the cold of late spring and the heat of early summer. The most severe hailstorms on the High Plains are in May and June. When two systems struggled—humid east, dry west—it usually meant friction, strong wind, and clattering. A glance at the sky and here it was, the roll of the squall line. Dee Lucas ordered her children to the root cellar. The hail fell fast, pounding hard, the big ice stones bouncing when they hit, though some exploded on impact. It got louder. The hail balls were as big as grapefruits. They smashed north-facing windows. It sounded like a

stampede of horses over the field. When Dee Lucas emerged from the cellar, she saw that the wheat field was flattened, covered with ice balls. Hail sometimes fell bigger: in Kansas a storm dropped ice that measured six inches in diameter, big enough to knock a person cold or cause a concussion. Anything above a marble in size could be ruinous, breaking windows, cracking or denting cars and houses. C.C. Lucas looked out: the damage stretched all the way to his eighty acres of wheat as well. Nothing was spared; all the grain lay squashed on the ground. Nearby, on land that was supposed to get Fred Folkers through next year, the hail hit just as hard—a thrashing that covered the fields in white. His fruit trees still stood, but the buds were stripped. The grain crop was lost—a year’s work gone in five minutes. Dee Lucas tried to hold back tears; her eyes clouded and they came quick, in a torrent. C.C. Lucas started to cry as well. Sure they were next year people—you had to be to make your peace with the Panhandle—but that didn’t make it easier. Anybody who lived in No Man’s Land for long knew about nature’s capricious power. It was abusive, a beater, a snarling son of a bitch, and then it would forgive and give something back. When the two adults fell to their knees in a field of hail and wept in front of the children, it was something the young ones had never seen, and it scared them.

Timothy Egan, *The Worst Hard Time*

Explain Egan’s dominant tone in this description of a destructive hailstorm from the point of view of the landowners. raw fear

D. Roger Angell has written about movies, baseball, and literature for *The New Yorker* since 1944.

Tracking shot, please, of a twelve-year-old boy running north on Lexington Avenue as a 1933 twilight begins to fall. He is sprinting for home, on Ninety-third Street, and guilt makes him fly. He must be there in time to get a little homework under his belt before his old man arrives from the office, and in time to assume the bored, everyday look of a kid just back from his school’s afternoon rec program, instead of from “King Kong” at the RKO 86th Street, where he has really been. Panting, he lets himself in the front door, checks out the mail for a *Popular Mechanics*, checks out the dog, grabs a banana, falls on his bed, opens a math book, and gives himself over to thoughts of Robert Armstrong, Bruce Cabot, Fay Wray (Fay Wray!), jungle drums, aerial machine-gun fire, and the remembered velvety dark of a movie theatre in the afternoon. The thought *Lucky again* crosses his mind, and in time he may actually find a pencil and begin to write down fractions. The boy (he is me) went on being lucky. No one at home or at school ever twigged to his stolen movie afternoons, and for the rest of that school year, as in the year before, he made it down to the Eighty-sixth Street casbah a couple of times a week, where there were five theatres to choose from, each offering a double feature to deepen his budget of guilt and joy, make critical inroads on his allowance, and hook him, once and for good, on the movies. What I saw on

those stolen afternoons (and, on the up and up, sometimes on weekends) was a cross-section of early-thirties Hollywood, which was just then coming into high gear.

Roger Angell, "Movie Struck," *The New Yorker*

In describing his stolen afternoons at the movies, what is the dominant tone of the passage? nostalgia

Tone and Mood in Fiction

In literature, tone is conveyed not only by the writer's manner of expression but also by the thoughts and actions of the characters, by their relation to the other characters and to their environment, by figurative language, and by descriptions of the environment—both physical and psychological—of the characters. Further, unlike nonfiction, literature conveys **mood**—the atmosphere or emotional state that all these things evoke. Let us examine two examples. The first returns us to the example of flash fiction that you read in Chapter 3, "Town Life" by J. Robert Lennon (see page 99). How would you characterize the mood and tone of this selection? It is ordinary, unemotional, and conversational. The narrator reinforces these elements by showing how the townspeople tried hard to treat the actress as they would any other citizen. He accomplishes this by choosing a few homely details about shopping club memberships, coffee punch cards, home improvement loans, and property lines.

Let's look at one more example, this one set in a more contemporary fictional American high school. In Jeffrey Eugenides' three-generational novel about a hermaphrodite who grows up in a Greek-American family, the 12-year-old narrator, Callie, lives in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, a wealthy suburb near Detroit, where many executives in the automobile industry live. Callie has been sent to a girls' school called the Baker & Inglis School for Girls. In this excerpt, Callie is describing a group of girls—a clique—whom she refers to as the Charm Bracelets.

The Charm Bracelets: they were the rulers of my new school. They'd been going to Baker & Inglis since kindergarten. Since pre-kindergarten! They lived near the water and had grown up, like all Grosse Pointers, pretending that our shallow lake was no lake at all but actually the ocean. The Atlantic Ocean. Yes, that was the secret wish of the Charm Bracelets and their parents, to be not Midwesterners but Easterners, to affect their dress and lockjaw speech, to summer in Martha's Vineyard, to say "back East" instead of "out East," as though their time in Michigan represented only a brief sojourn away from home.

What can I say about my well-bred, small-nosed, trust-funded schoolmates? Descended from hardworking, thrifty industrialists (there were two

girls in my class who had the same last names as American car makers), did they show aptitudes for math or science? Did they display mechanical ingenuity? Or a commitment to the Protestant work ethic? In a word: no. There is no evidence against genetic determinism more persuasive than the children of the rich. The Charm Bracelets didn't study. They never raised their hands in class. They sat in the back, slumping, and went home each day carrying the prop of a notebook. (But maybe the Charm Bracelets understood more about life than I did. From an early age they knew what little value the world placed in books, and so didn't waste their time with them. Whereas I, even now, persist in believing that these black marks on white paper bear the greatest significance, that if I keep writing I might be able to catch the rainbow of consciousness in a jar. The only trust fund I have is this story, and unlike a prudent Wasp, I'm dipping into principal, spending it all . . .)

Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex*

Probably all of us can identify with Callie's feelings about the Charm Bracelets. All high schools have such groups, the "rulers" of the school. How would you characterize Callie's tone in this passage? She is clearly scornful and resentful of their social standing, their shallowness, their arrogance, their refusal to study, the fact that they know that they don't need to study. Even at a young age, she is aware of her own role in life—her need to write, to accomplish something. So we might say that her tone toward the end of the passage is one of resignation to her fate. The tone is complicated and not easily reduced to a single feeling.

Practice Exercise 4

Here are four passages taken from contemporary fiction. Read them carefully and then answer the question or questions that follow.

- A. The narrator in this novel, Amir, has returned to Afghanistan to search for his half-brother's son. This scene occurs just after his arrival in his home country.

I stepped outside. Stood in the silver tarnish of a half-moon and glanced up to a sky riddled with stars. Crickets chirped in the shuttered darkness and a wind wafted through the trees. The ground was cool under my bare feet and suddenly, for the first time since we had crossed the border, I felt like I was back. After all these years, I was home again, standing on the soil of my ancestors. This was the soil on which my great-grandfather had married his third wife a year before dying in the cholera epidemic that hit Kabul in 1915. She'd borne him what his first two wives had failed to, a son at last. It was on this soil that my grandfather had gone on a hunting trip with King Nadir Shah and shot a deer. My mother had died on this soil. And on this soil, I had fought for my father's love.

Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*

**Online
Learning
Center**

Hosseini is a master storyteller. If you are not acquainted with his books, go to www.amazon.com and read reviews of *The Kite Runner* and of his most recent book, also set in Afghanistan, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Explain what Amir is feeling as he surveys the landscape of his native Afghanistan and ponders his family.

Amir's thoughts suggest a welter of emotions—
pride, a sense of family history and his place in it, and
a sense of reverence for his native land.

- B. In this passage from one of America's finest fiction writers, Wallace Stegner, the narrator focuses on Bruce Mason, one son of the main characters, who is driving home to Wyoming after finishing his first year studying law in Minnesota.

When Bruce drove west in June, after the frenzy of examinations and the rush to clear out his room, settle his bills, pack the Ford, have a last round of beers with the Law Commons boys, he drove directly from rainy spring into deep summer, from prison into freedom. That day was the first bright warm day in two weeks, and the year was over, he was loose. He watched the sun drink steam from the cornfields, heard the meadowlarks along the fences, the blackbirds in the spring sloughs. Even the smell of hot oil from the motor could not entirely blot out the lush smell of growth.

It was the end of his first year away from home, and he was going back. Ahead of him was the long road, the continental sprawling hugeness of America, the fields and farmhouses, the towns. Northfield, Faribault, Owatonna, Albert Lea, and then west on Highway 16—Blue Earth, Jackson, Luverne, and the junction of Big Sioux and Missouri. Then Sioux City, Yankton, Bridgewater, Mitchell, Chamberlain, Rapid City, the Badlands and the Black Hills breaking the monotonous loveliness of the Dakota plain. Then the ranges and the echoing names: Spearfish, Deadwood, Sundance, the Wyoming that was Ucross and Sheridan and Buffalo and Greybull and Cody, the Yellowstone of dudes and sagebrushers, the Idaho that was the Mormon towns along the Snake: St. Anthony, Rexburg, Sugar City, Blackfoot, Pocatello, and the Utah of Cache Valley and Sardine Canyon and the barricade of the Wasatch guarding the dead salt flats and the lake.

The names flowed in his head like a song, like the words of an old man telling a story, and his mind looked ahead over the long road, the great rivers and the interminable plains, over the Black Hills and the lovely loom of the Big Horns and the Absaroka Range white against the west from Cody.

It was a grand country, a country to lift the blood, and he was going home across its wind-kissed miles with the sun on him and the cornfields steaming under the first summer heat and the first bugs immolating themselves against his windshield.

But going home where? he said. Where do I belong in this? . . .

Wallace Stegner, *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*

1. What is the predominant mood of the passage? How does Bruce react to the “sprawling hugeness of America” that he muses about as he drives? Why does Stegner list so many place names? The mood is a combination of reverence, awe, and nostalgia for the country. Even though the names of the towns that he lists in his musings might not mean much to readers, this piling up of details is meant to evoke grandness, the openness of the American landscape, and above all, the emotional connection these place names have for Bruce.
2. Consider again the last paragraph and explain the tone the narrator conveys. _____

2. The tone is one of exhilaration and freedom—mixed with an intense love of country, but the last paragraph also suggests confusion about his place in this world.

Note: The settings in these two passages by Hosseini and Stegner are thousands of miles apart, but they evoke the same emotions, and so make a nice pair for students to examine side by side.

- C. This excerpt is from a novel by Irish writer William Trevor. The title character, Felicia, is a young Irish girl who has become pregnant by a man she barely knows after a one-night stand. She makes her way to England to search for him. Day after day, she wanders the streets of the town where she thinks he might work. In this passage, the narrator describes the various types of homeless who inhabit a particular part of town.

She wanders on eventually, resting sometimes on a pavement seat, moving again when it becomes too cold. At a stall beneath a bridge where taxi drivers stand about she buys a sausage roll that is reduced to fourpence because it’s stale. The air is dank with mist.

Already, hours ago, the homeless of this town have found their night-time resting places—in doorways, and underground passages left open in error, in abandoned vehicles, in the derelict gardens of demolished houses. As maggots make their way into cracks in masonry, so the people of the streets have crept into one-night homes in graveyards and on building sites, in alleyways and courtyards, making walls of dustbins pulled close together, and roofs of whatever lies near by. Some have crawled up scaffolding to find a corner beneath the tarpaulin that protects an untiled expanse. Others have settled down in cardboard cartons that once contained dishwashers or refrigerators.

Hidden away, the people of the streets drift into sleep induced by alcohol or agitated by despair, into dreams that carry them back to the lives that once were theirs. They lie with their begging notices still beside them, with enough left of a bottle to ease the waking moment, with pavement cigarette butts to hand. *Homeless and hungry* is their pasteboard plea, scrawled without thought, one copying another: only money matters. All ages lie out in the places that have been found, men and women, children. The family rejects have ceased to weep into their make-do pillows; those brought low by their foolishness or by untimely greed plead silently for sleep. A one-time clergyman no longer dwells on his disgrace, but dreams instead that it never happened. Rejected husbands, abandoned wives, victims of chance, have passed beyond bitterness, and devote

their energies to keeping warm. The deranged are lulled by voices that often in the night persuade them to rise and walk on, which obediently they do, knowing they must. Men who have failed lie on their own and dream of a reality they dare not contemplate by day: great hotels and deferential waiters, the power they once possessed, the limbs of secretaries. Women who were beautiful in their day are beautiful again. There is no arrogance among the people of the streets, no insistent pride in their sleeping features, no lingering telltale of a past's corruption. They have passed the stage of desperation, and on their downward path some among the women have sold themselves: faces chapped, fingernails ingrained, they are beyond that now. Men, in threes and fours, have offered the three-card trick on these same streets. Beards unkempt, hair matted, skin darkened with filth, they would not now attract the wagers of their passing trade. In their dreams there is occasionally the fantasy that they may be cured, that they may be loved, that all voices and visions will cease, that tomorrow they will discover the strength to resist oblivion. Others remain homeless by choice and for their own particular reasons would not return to a more settled life. The streets, they feel, are where they now belong.

William Trevor, *Felicia's Journey*

1. What is the dominant mood of the passage? The mood is depressing and desperate.
2. What is the narrator's apparent point of view with regard to the homeless? The point of view is unapologetic yet sympathetic. He accords the homeless people described a degree of humanity and compassion, reminding the reader that these people once led ordinary lives.
3. How do the dreams of the homeless contrast with the realities of daylight? One of the most moving parts of this excerpt is the contrast between their past lives and their present circumstances. Some of the homeless engage in fantasy, either dreaming that their past lives were other than what they clearly were or dreaming that everything will change one day for the better. We know it won't happen, but the dreams do humanize them.

Tone and Mood in Poetry

A thorough discussion of how to analyze and to appreciate poetry is outside the scope of this book. Still, your ability to identify figures of speech, connotative language, and emotional tone can be put into practice with poetry just as easily as it can with fiction or nonfiction prose. Consider this poem by Irish poet Seamus Heaney in which he describes the annual summertime ritual of blackberry picking. At least that's the subject of the first half of the poem; the second part, however, beginning with line 18, shifts mood and tone. Read the poem carefully—perhaps two or three times—and see if you can identify the contrasting tonal elements. Poetic language is compressed, carefully chosen, and evocative, as Heaney demonstrates well in this poem.

Late August, given heavy rain and sun
For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.

At first, just one, a glossy purple clot
 Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.
 5 You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet
 Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it
 Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for
 Picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger
 Sent us out with milk cans, pea tins, jam-pots
 10 Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.
 Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills
 We trekked and picked until the cans were full
 Until the tinkling bottom had been covered
 With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned
 15 Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered
 With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's.
 We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.
 But when the bath was filled we found a fur,
 A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.
 20 The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush
 The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.
 I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair
 That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.
 Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not.

Seamus Heaney, "Blackberry-Picking"

The first half of the poem celebrates the childhood pleasures of picking blackberries. Heaney compresses the experience in a series of well-chosen, highly connotative details: "a glossy purple clot," "red, green, hard as a knot," "thickened wine," "summer's blood." These phrases suggest the sensual, nearly intoxicating pleasure of picking both the unripe green berries as well as the ripe ones. The tone is one of eagerness and exhilaration—the coming again of a treasured childhood ritual. But in line 18 the tone changes. Anyone who has ever picked blackberries knows that they are highly perishable. Left for a day or so, they begin to rot. Heaney compresses the details of this eventuality with these phrases: "rat-grey fungus," "the juice was stinking," "the fruit fermented," and "smelt of rot." But Heaney isn't just talking about spoiled blackberries. The meaning of the poem is deeper than that: It suggests disappointment and loss, the first inkling that childhood pleasures don't last. It's a lovely poem, filled with the twin emotions of pleasure and heartache.

Practice Exercise 5

Here is another poem for you to analyze. This one is by Mark Doty, winner of the 2008 National Book Award for poetry. A little over an hour south of San Francisco, Pescadero is a small rural town on the San Mateo County coast,

and home to Harley Farms, whose owner makes goat cheese, the likely setting for this poem. Raised to be around humans, these goats are friendly and inquisitive little creatures. Goats also have an unusual way of apprehending the world around them: they use their upper lip to explore things, and you can get a sense of that characteristic in this poem.

The little goats like my mouth and fingers,
and one stands up against the wire fence, and taps on the fence board
a hoof made blacker by the dirt of the field,
pushes her mouth forward to my mouth,
so that I can see the smallish squared seeds of her teeth,
and the bristle-whiskers,
and then she kisses me, though I know it doesn't mean "kiss,"
then leans her head way back, arcing her spine, goat yoga,
all pleasure and greeting and then good-natured indifference: she loves me,
she likes me a lot, she takes interest in me, she doesn't know me at all
or need to, having thus acknowledged me. Though I am all happiness,
since I have been welcomed by the field's small envoy, and the splayed hoof,
fragrant with soil, has rested on the fence board beside my hand.

Mark Doty, "Pescadero," *The New Yorker*

How would you describe the tone and mood Doty achieves in this poem?

The mood of Doty's poem is one of happiness and the simple pleasure in the little goat's affection and curiosity. The tone reflects this mood—a happy encounter between human and animal.

■ TONE CONTINUED: MORE DIFFICULT VARIETIES

In this section of the chapter you will be introduced to a group of more complex, sophisticated, and challenging tones. These are often, though not exclusively, associated with persuasive prose.

- wit
- irony
- sarcasm
- cynicism
- satire, ridicule, mockery

Do not worry if you find it hard to recognize and to distinguish among these more difficult varieties of tone. Many students are bewildered when they encounter this section of the book, because either they are unfamiliar with the vocabulary or because they are accustomed to

thinking that print material is most always (or should be) serious and informative. Quite the contrary, as you will see! Study all of the examples carefully, and if you are uncertain, ask your instructor to explain in further detail.

Wit is amusing and playful; the others are more difficult to sort out and warrant detailed study. In the following section, we will examine and illustrate them one by one.

Wit

A **witty** tone reveals the writer's mental keenness and sense of playfulness and an ability to recognize the comic elements of a situation or condition. Unlike sarcasm, with its obvious mean streak, wit relies on a humorous, brief, and clever use of words and a pointed perception in describing human frailty and folly. Notice that some of these witticisms demonstrate a clever turn of phrase or a play on words. Here is a compendium of witty sayings by American writer and humorist Mark Twain (1835–1910):

- Get your facts first and then you can distort them as much as you wish.
- Don't go around saying the world owes you a living. The world owes you nothing. It was here first.
- Sometimes I wonder whether the world is run by smart people who are putting us on or by imbeciles who really mean it.
- I didn't attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it.
- In the first place, God made idiots. That was for practice. Then he made school boards.
- Man is the only animal that blushes—or needs to.

Here are more examples from other wits (A wit is a person who is known for clever, pithy, often humorous remarks.):

- American writer William Faulkner writing about fellow American writer Ernest Hemingway: "He has never been known to use a word that might send a reader to the dictionary."¹
- Comedian Groucho Marx: "I've had a perfectly wonderful evening. But this wasn't it."
- Irish playwright Oscar Wilde: "Some cause happiness wherever they go; others whenever they go."

¹One of Ernest Hemingway's best known short stories, "Hills Like White Elephants," appears in Part 6.

- Socrates: “By all means, marry. If you get a good wife, you’ll become happy; if you get a bad one, you’ll become a philosopher.”
- Mae West, a famous American actress of the 1930s and 1940s, a “blonde bombshell” type known for her risqué remarks: “I was as pure as the driven snow—but I drifted.”
- Movie director and actor Woody Allen: “It’s not that I’m afraid to die—I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”
- Winston Churchill, describing Clement Attlee, who defeated him for Prime Minister of England in 1945: “A modest little person, with much to be modest about.”
- Note that witticisms often involve a clever turn of phrase, as you can see in this observation by comedian Henny Youngman: What’s the use of happiness? It can’t buy you money.”
- Ambrose Bierce, nineteenth-century American writer: “War is God’s way of teaching Americans about geography.”

Online Learning Center

A compendium of witticisms—widely circulated on the Internet—appears on the website accompanying the book. See www.mhhe.com/spears and scroll down to the material for Chapter 7.

Irony

Before we look at irony in reading material, let’s first consider some examples of irony in the real world: Foreign visitors to the U.S. often marvel that a lot of Americans store junk in their garages but leave their cars in the driveway. Why is this practice ironic? Because *it’s the opposite of what one would expect*. A garage is for storing cars, not junk. It’s ironic to leave something worth a lot of money in the driveway and to store stuff that’s most likely not worth as much in the garage.

Critical Thinking Exercise

Why do so many Americans do this? What characteristics does this common practice suggest about American culture?

A second example: In October 2010 President Obama received the Nobel Peace Prize. Under ordinary circumstances, this would be a cause for great joy and recognition. But critics pointed out the irony: Just nine days earlier Obama had announced that he was sending 30,000 more troops to fight the war in Afghanistan.

A final example of irony in the real world: There has been a great deal of controversy over fees paid to public speakers. Former senator and presidential

candidate John Edwards was widely criticized for collecting \$55,000 for giving a 2007 lecture at University of California, Davis. The topic? Ironically, the growing gap between rich and poor in the United States. Michael Moore, a firebrand outspoken liberal writer who often rails against the excesses of American capitalism and American corporations, was disinvited from giving a speech at George Mason University in 2004 after it was revealed that he would be paid \$35,000. One might point to the hypocrisy in these two speakers' enormous fees, but irony is also strongly evident.

Irony serves many masters. An ironic tone occurs when a writer deliberately says the opposite of what he or she really means or points to the opposite of what one would typically expect to occur. This unexpected contrast results in a curious heightening of intensity about the real subject. Irony can be used to poke fun at human weaknesses and inconsistencies or, more seriously, to criticize, to encourage reform, or to cast doubt on someone's motives. The alert reader will see through the pretense and recognize that the words mean something different from their literal meaning.

Let's begin with some simple examples.

Irony is at the heart of many jokes. In this example, Page Smith uses irony to illustrate memory failure in older people. An old man and his wife are sitting on their front porch:

Wife: "I certainly would appreciate a vanilla ice cream cone."

Husband: "I'll hobble right down to the drugstore and get you one, dear."

Wife: "Now, remember, I want vanilla. You always get chocolate. Write it down. Vanilla."

Husband: "I can certainly remember vanilla. The store is only two blocks away."

Husband comes back with a hamburger and hands it to his wife. She looks at it disgustedly. "I knew you'd forget the mustard," she says.

Page Smith, "Coming of Age: Jokes about Old Age," *San Francisco Chronicle*

Although the Airport Hilton was long ago demolished when San Francisco International Airport expanded, this excerpt from a newspaper article is such a good example of irony that it's worth reprinting.

It finally happened. The waiting is over. It's here now.

The new off-ramp has opened at San Francisco International Airport.

For years we drove into the airport from the Bayshore Freeway on the old off-ramp. The old off-ramp was a concrete cloverleaf that arched over the freeway and deposited the motorist just past the Airport Hilton Hotel.

Ah, but the new off-ramp! The new off-ramp is a concrete cloverleaf that arches over the freeway and deposits the motorist just past the Airport Hilton Hotel.

Steve Rubenstein, *San Francisco Chronicle*

Rubenstein uses irony to good advantage here. The short sentences at the beginning create an atmosphere of expectation and suspense. Further, he uses the same words to describe both the new and the old off-ramp. We would expect something as costly as a new off-ramp to be more efficient, more convenient, somehow different from the one it replaced. Rubenstein's use of irony allows him to leave his main point unstated: This project was a huge waste of taxpayer money. The irony leads the reader to recognize the ridiculousness of the situation.

Irony often is present in cartoons, as well. Study this *New Yorker* cartoon drawn by Harry Bliss. Then see if you can identify the irony underlying the situation depicted.



© Harry Bliss/The New Yorker Collection/
www.cartoonbank.com

Explain the irony. The Grim Reaper, the traditional personification of death, has a complicated set of locks in his presumably urban apartment. The irony is that we wouldn't expect the Grim Reaper to be afraid of crime.

Let us examine two examples of literary irony. The first is a fable by British writer W. Somerset Maugham. Its title is "Death Speaks."

Death speaks:

¹There was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, Master, just now when I was in the market-place I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me. ²She looked at me and made a threatening gesture; now, lend me your horse and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. ³I will go to Samarra and there Death will not find me. ⁴The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. ⁵Then the merchant went down to the market-place and he saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said, Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning? ⁶That was not a threatening gesture, I said, it was only a start of surprise. ⁷I was astonished to see him in Bagdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.

W. Somerset Maugham, "Death Speaks," *Sheppey*

**Online
Learning
Center**

An inference exercise on Maugham's fable is available at www.mhhe.com/spears. See the material for Chapter 7. The exercise represents a good review of the inference-making process.

Explain the irony in the fable. _____

Ironically, in trying to escape Death, the servant

sealed his own fate.

The second example is an excerpt from an article called "How to Write about Africa." The writer is Binyavanga Wainaina, a founding editor of the Kenyan literary magazine *Kwani?* Keep the title in mind as you read the passage.

Always use the word 'Africa' or 'Darkness' or 'Safari' in your title. Subtitles may include the words 'Zanzibar', 'Masai', 'Zulu', 'Zambezi', 'Congo', 'Nile', 'Big', 'Sky', 'Shadow', 'Drum', 'Sun', or 'Bygone'. Also useful are words such as 'Guerrillas', 'Timeless', 'Primordial', and 'Tribal'. Note that 'People' means Africans who are not black, while 'The People' means Africans.

Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these. If you must include an African, make sure you get one in Masai or Zulu or Dogon dress.

In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving. Or it is hot and steamy with very short people who eat primates. Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book. The continent is full of deserts, jungles, highlands, savannahs and many other things, but your reader doesn't

care about all that, so keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular.

Make sure you show how Africans have music and rhythm deep in their souls, and eat things no other humans eat. Do not mention rice and beef and wheat; monkey-brain is an African's cuisine of choice, along with goat, snake, worms and grubs and all manner of game meat. Make sure you show that you are able to eat such food without flinching, and describe how you learn to enjoy it—because you care.

Taboo subjects: ordinary domestic scenes, love between Africans (unless a death is involved), references to African writers or intellectuals, mention of school-going children who are not suffering from yaws or Ebola fever or female genital mutilation.

Binyavanga Wainaina, "How to Write about Africa," *Granta* 92, *The View from Africa*

Critical Thinking Exercise

Binyavanga Wainaina presents a strong criticism of the way the media covers Africa. To what extent is his criticism fair? For the next few weeks, as you come across articles in the newspaper or in magazines, on television news or in online material, evaluate the coverage. To what extent, if any, does it bear out Wainaina's criticism, or does it seem unfair and unduly exaggerated?

Explain why this passage is an example of irony. How would you describe his tone concerning the way most writers treat the subject of Africa? Wainaina's advice is exactly the opposite of the way he would like writers to describe his native

continent. The tone is critical, suggesting that writers have emphasized only Africa's problems or described its

many countries only one-dimensionally.

Online Learning Center

Wikipedia, the online collaborative information website, offers a comprehensive discussion of irony and its various types (situational irony, verbal irony, cosmic irony, and so forth) with lots of examples. The address is <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony>

A Note on Hyperbole

Before continuing, let us pause to look at a common element in writing whose tone is sarcastic, cynical, or satirical—hyperbole. Pronounced hī-pūr'-bə-lē, **hyperbole** is a figure of speech that uses deliberate exaggeration for effect. Here are two examples. In his memoir about growing up in Des Moines, Iowa, American writer and humorist Bill Bryson here describes the grandmother of his childhood friend, Jed:

She was more than a thousand years old and weighed thirty-seven pounds, which included sixteen pounds of makeup. (*The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*)

The second example requires some background explanation: Bicyclist Lance Armstrong won the grueling Tour de France seven times in a row. After winning the race in 2005, he announced his retirement from racing, but he returned in 2009, this time finishing third. Writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, sportswriter Jason Gay said this about Armstrong:

Moving over to Monaco, where tennis stars like to stash their moola: the Tour de France began Saturday, with a twisty time trial in the gilded streets of the famed tax haven and steroidal yacht capital.

This year's Tour marks the return of Lance Armstrong, who began racing bikes in the late 17th century and is once again atop his carbon fiber steed after a failed attempt at retirement. ("Trials and Other Drama from the Tour de France," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 2009)

Write the phrase from the excerpt that represents hyperbole. hyperbole:

"who began racing bikes in the late 17th century"

Sarcasm

Sarcasm derives from the Latin words for "flesh-cutting," and this etymology will help you remember its purpose. Sarcasm is a form of wit that taunts or ridicules the subject. Although we sometimes find it hard to discern the line between irony and sarcasm, I think the best way to separate the two is to consider the writer's intent. Sarcasm may involve irony, but it also is intended to sneer at and to mock the target. If a passage suggests a personal, heavy-handed insult, the tone is more likely sarcastic than ironic. Here are three examples of sarcasm.

- From a theater review by critic Terry Teachout: "The problem with Frank Wildhorn musicals is that they contain Frank Wildhorn songs." (Terry Teachout, "Turner, in Her Usual Role," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 20, 2011.)
- This excerpt is from a review of the 2011 movie, "The Green Hornet": "'The Green Hornet' was directed by Michel Gondry, and stars Seth Rogen, who also concocted the screenplay, with his writing partner, Evan Goldberg. Rogen says that he has been obsessed with comic books and superheroes for years. Well, I'm sorry to put it this way, but 'The Green Hornet' is what you get when someone who dropped out of high school to do standup comedy, then spent a decade in movies and television, conceives a Hollywood 'passion project.' Seth Rogen is talented and likable, but he's blinkered by pop culture. . . ." (David Denby, "Man Up," *The New Yorker*)

Critical Thinking Exercise

It wasn't just *The New Yorker* that panned "The Green Hornet." The movie received nearly universal negative reviews. (For example, the "Tomatometer" at www.rottentomatoes.com gave it only a 45 percent rating.) Yet in the first two weeks or so after its release, it was number one nationally at the box office. How do you account for this discrepancy?

- It was the habit of Winston Churchill, prime minister of England during World War II, to drink a quart of brandy every day. One evening a woman at a dinner party told Churchill that he was drunk. Churchill replied: "And you, madam, are ugly. But tomorrow I shall be sober."

Remember, too, that even experienced readers sometimes have difficulty distinguishing between irony and sarcasm; further, a passage might even blend the two together. The first example comes from a television critic, Tim Goodman, who is writing about network and cable coverage of the devastating earthquake and tsunami that hit northern Japan in March 2011. Goodman begins by accusing two media groups: the reporters and television anchors for "bungling the basics" and producers and executives in charge of reporters and anchors for having "fallen woefully short of leadership." Then Goodman writes this:

How is it possible that on Monday evening (Tuesday in Japan), with the earthquake, tsunami and worries about radiation poisoning engulfing Japan, a CNN reporter can ask this question: "How scary has this been for you?"

Let's see, my daughter was ripped from my arms in the tsunami, I almost died, I lost my home, my belongings, family, friends. There are constant aftershocks, new tsunami warnings and apparently we're about to have a nuclear meltdown. I don't know, dumbass, how scary does that sound to you?

Tim Goodman, "Analysis: TV Cable Coverage of Japan Crisis Is Lacking," www.hollywoodreporter.com. March 15, 2011.

Does Goodman's diatribe involve irony or sarcasm, or a combination of both? Explain. There seems to be only sarcasm here to describe the callous way that the CNN reporter

went about asking tsunami victims what they had experienced.

Cynicism

My generation, which came of age during the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam War, often identifies those two pivotal eras as the source of the **cynicism** that infects modern attitudes. But the younger generation has its own reasons to be cynical—with the recent corporate accounting scandals, a Congress that is often dysfunctional, and two unpopular wars—just to cite some examples. The *Random House College Dictionary* definitions of *cynical* are helpful:

- Distrusting or disparaging the motives or sincerity of others
- Sneeringly distrustful, contemptuous, or pessimistic

A cynic detects falseness in others and recognizes impure motives. Politicians are sometimes described as cynical because they underestimate the intelligence of the voting public. The cynical tone is sneering, just as sarcasm is, but it is on a deeper level and comes from a different motive: Cynicism suggests a questioning and distrusting of people's stated motives or virtues. It may or may not involve irony. Here are three examples, all of which have in common the twin elements of distrust and exposing foolishness:

- Voltaire, the eighteenth-century writer and philosopher said, "The first clergyman was the first rascal who met the first fool."
- L. Ron Hubbard, founder of the religion Scientology: "The best way to get rich in this country is to start a religion."

This example from Anthony Lane's *New Yorker* review of the 2006 movie *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, starring Johnny Depp, mixes irony, sarcasm, and cynicism:

- This is the second part of a trilogy, Disney having decided that there were dense thematic issues, not to mention narrative niceties, that could not be constrained within a single *Pirates* film; any financial consideration is, of course, entirely secondary.

Satire

Satire refers to a type of writing (and to other artistic forms of expression, as well) that seeks to expose folly or wickedness, to hold human behavior up to ridicule, and to show the reader that certain actions or behavior would be more desirable. Satire typically relies on exaggeration and imitation of real literary forms. If you are a fan of "South Park," "The Daily Show," or "The Colbert Report" on Comedy Central, you are already familiar with the genre. Muriel Spark, twentieth-century British novelist was once quoted as saying: "Satire is far more important, it has a more lasting effect, than a straight portrayal of what is wrong. I think that a lot of the world's problems should be ridiculed, but ridiculed properly rather than, well, wailed over." (Quoted in Hal Hager, "About Muriel Spark," *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*)

Besides the above-mentioned television programs, The Onion, an online humor and satire site (www.theonion.com), is a good source of contemporary satire. Here, for example, is a recent article from the website that satirizes the state of affairs in the U.S. Congress. It was published in 2011, but given Congress's general ineffectiveness in the last ten years or so, it could have been published at any time:

WASHINGTON—Exhausted but satisfied leaders from both parties came together Tuesday night to announce that Congress had successfully completed

12 solid hours of nonstop gridlocking, once again going above and beyond to needlessly prevent the nation from moving forward.

In a marathon session that lawmakers proudly called “one of [their] least productive ever,” each of the 535 members of the House and Senate gridlocked deep into the night to ensure that no bipartisan compromise could be reached, no laws intended to aid the American people could be passed, and no sense of national unity or progress could possibly be achieved.

“There is nothing more satisfying than knowing you’ve just put in a full day of bringing our nation’s legislative branch to a complete standstill,” said House Speaker John Boehner, who like the vast majority of his colleagues worked without break throughout the day and night fostering political disharmony and rejecting the passage of crucial legislation. “We got a lot of good, quality gridlocking done today. We gridlocked efficiently, we gridlocked passionately, and we gridlocked as best we could for the American people. Now we go home, rest up, and get ready for another full day of gridlocking tomorrow.”

“It’s a great feeling,” Boehner added. “Today, everyone realized what it is we’re here to do, and that’s put a wrench right into the machinery of democracy.”

According to Capitol sources, the impassioned gridlocking session was one of the most demanding in recent memory, requiring each and every member of Congress to work in total cooperation to frustrate one another’s political agendas, and even requiring a number of dedicated lawmakers to stall as many as seven different bills at once.

Legislative leaders said they were enormously pleased with the sustained intensity of gridlocking Tuesday, especially considering the fact that, as early as last week, a number of laws under consideration were thought to have stood a decent chance of being passed.

“I wasn’t sure at first if I would have the stamina to not advance a single item on my docket, but my constituents expect me to get in there, roll up my sleeves, and grind things to a halt, so that’s exactly what I did,” said Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV), who claimed to have gridlocked straight through his lunch hour, despite protestations from concerned aides. “I think a lot of people out there may not realize just how much gridlocking we do here in Congress. They think we just sit around passing bills and turning the wheels of progress all day. Well, let me tell you, nothing could be further from the truth. We got some great gridlockers here, in both parties, many of whom have been thwarting our democracy for decades.”

“This place is like a perfectly un-oiled machine,” Manchin added. “We don’t rest until absolutely nothing has been accomplished.”

According to Boehner, Thursday’s “spectacular display of inaction” was nearly derailed when Sens. John McCain (R-AZ) and Bill Nelson (D-FL) briefly attempted to pass crucial and long-delayed campaign finance reform, but key committee members acted quickly to weigh the bill down with needless riders before shuttling it off toward a certain death on the floor.

At another point, congressional sources reported, the rate of gridlocking was so intense that the passage of a resolution honoring Southern Sudan's recent independence as well as a bill mandating improved FAA safety regulations were blocked simultaneously in an astonishing 51-second period of time.

While pleased with their failure to do anything even close to what they were elected to do, the men and women of the United States Congress announced after Tuesday's session that it wasn't praise or recognition they sought, but merely the knowledge that they had done everything in their power to confirm every American's worst suspicions about the country's legislative system.

"My reward is the feeling I get when I arrive home at the end of the day, look my family in the eyes, and say, 'We didn't do it,'" a smiling Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) said. "That's what really matters to me. Obviously we're not always going to agree on everything in Congress. But something that every single one of us, to a person, can agree on is that when there is important gridlocking to be done, then it's time to set aside the hopes and dreams of the American people and focus on what really matters: our own blind self-interest."

In response to the 112th Congress's solid showing of utter nothingness, President Obama issued a brief statement in recognition of the day's gridlocking.

"Congress truly lived up to its reputation today," read the president's statement. "This is exactly the kind of performance we have come to expect from our leaders in the House and Senate, and I for one am confident that we'll be seeing much, much more of it in the future."

"Congress Gets In 12 Solid Hours Of Gridlocking Before Calling It A Day: Legislators Proudly Call Gridlocking Session A 'Team Effort'" (www.theonion.com, May 4, 2011.) Reprinted with permission of THE ONION. Copyright © 2011, by ONION, INC.

Look again at the description of the characteristics of satire at the beginning of this section and then explain in your words how this spoof is an example of this literary genre. This piece uses irony—this behavior is exactly what Congress should not be doing. It also uses sarcasm, stating that members of Congress are proud of their gridlocking activities. But satire goes beyond mere irony and sarcasm. Its aim is to hold a practice up to ridicule—exaggerating the situation and implying that this situation needs to change. Perhaps ask students to bring in other examples of satire for class discussion.

Practice Exercise 6

I have provided suggested explanations for these questions on tone. Opinions, of course, may vary. Students have a great deal of difficulty with these more sophisticated types of tone, so it's worthwhile to go over each example carefully and help them see how tone derives not just from connotative words, but also from the situation described and the style.

Read the following passages. Then, keeping in mind the writer's purpose and intent, decide which of the following tones is most accurately reflected in each excerpt: witty, ironic, sarcastic, cynical, satirical. If hyperbole is present, indicate that as well.

- A. Gloria Steinem, American feminist: "A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle."

The tone of this statement is Wit. Explain. This famous saying involves both a clever turn of phrase and a clever observation. It is short, pithy, and humorous.

- B. Ilka Chase was a famous actress in the movies and on stage in the 1930s and 1940s. When she published her 1942 autobiography, *Past Imperfect*, she encountered an actor at a party. (Legend has it that the actor was Humphrey Bogart.) When the actor congratulated Chase, he said, "I thought your book was wonderful. I can't tell you how much I enjoyed it. By the way, who wrote it for you?" Chase responded, "I'm so glad you like it. By the way, who read it to you?"

The tone of this selection is Sarcastic. Explain the reason for your answer. The tone is mean-spirited and intended to insult.

- C. From a review of *Bolt of Fate* by Tom Tucker, a biography of Benjamin Franklin: ". . . a new book argues that the legend on which Franklin's reputation rests is dubious. There was no kite, no key, no bolt, no knuckle, no charge. He let people believe he had been places he never went, done things he never did, and seen things that never happened. No wonder he's been called the father of American journalism." (Adam Gopnik, "American Electric: Did Franklin Fly the Kite?" *The New Yorker*)

The tone of this excerpt is Cynical.

Explain your answer. see answer in margin

- D. Buster Posey, catcher for the San Francisco Giants, won the Rookie of the Year award for 2010, the year in which his team won the World Series. Scott Ostler, a San Francisco sportswriter, writing about Posey, begins like this: "Count your blessings." Then follows a list of things sports fans should be thankful for, including this item: "Most exciting young player. Buster Posey. Buster Ballgame's not perfect, though. As a kid he would sneak out behind the barn to chew gum."

The tone of this item is Ironic.

Explain why you chose your answer. Most boys go behind the barn to smoke or to

drink beer. Ostler is gently making fun of Posey's apple-cheeked, innocent looks.

- E. "The Kim Basinger movie *I Dreamed of Africa* bombed at the box office last weekend. It wasn't supposed to be that way. It was originally expected to bomb way back in September." (Tom King, "Waiting for Their Closeups," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 12, 2000)

The tone of this selection is Ironic. Why did you choose this answer? see answer in margin

- F. In 2011 Jack LaLanne died at the age of 97. LaLanne was probably the original fitness guru—he wrote books, sold nutritional products, and championed fitness way before it became a national activity. Here is one excerpt from his obituary, provided by LaLanne's nephew, Thomas, about his uncle's death: "It's kind of a shock. I didn't think

C. Gopnik is casting doubt on the motives and actions of journalists, though the effect is more humorous than nasty.

E. Movie studios don't usually know that their movies are going to bomb. King is saying the opposite here: This studio knew that *I Dreamed of Africa* was a bad movie, so the statement is the opposite of what one usually expects.

Jack was ever going to die. He would tell people, ‘I can’t die. It’ll ruin my image.’”

The tone in this excerpt is Wit.

Why did you choose your answer? Again, this witticism is pithy, perceptive, and humorous—all characteristics of an effective witticism.

- G. This excerpt is by a British physician, Theodore Dalrymple, a pseudonym of Anthony Daniels. It is from a recent article on obesity.

The connection between the fragmentation of the family and obesity is easy to understand. Of course, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the two phenomena—in human affairs there never is such a close fit—but there is nevertheless a strong and comprehensible correspondence.

For much of the population, family meals are a ritual of the past: Thirty-six percent of British children never eat a meal at a table with another member of their family or household (we have now passed the milestone long desired by radical social reformers, more children being born illegitimate than legitimate). In the homes of the poor, the unemployed and the single parents that I used to visit as a doctor, I would find no evidence of cooking ever having been done there. Fatty take-away meals and ready-prepared foods heated in the microwave were the diet, together with almost constant snacks. There was not even a table to eat at: an absence that was not the consequence of raw poverty, since the flat-screen television would have been large enough, turned horizontal, to serve as a dining table.

Theodore Dalrymple, “Our Big Problem,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 1–2, 2010.

The tone of the passage is Cynical.

Explain your thinking. see answer in margin

- H. This excerpt is by travel and fiction writer Paul Theroux from his book about returning to Africa after an absence of many years. (Theroux had served in the Peace Corps during the 1960s).

Traveling south of Egypt, I would be entering Sudan. I did not have a Sudanese visa, and for Americans such visas were hard to come by. The reason was understandable. On the pretext that Sudan was making anti-American bombs (and, some people felt, in order to correct the negative image created by his involvement in a sex scandal, to look decisive and presidential even if it meant risking lives and flattening foreign real estate), President Clinton ordered air strikes against Sudan. He succeeded in destroying a pharmaceutical plant outside Khartoum in August 1998. This bomb crater would be on my itinerary, for after the bombs were dropped no one in the United States took much interest.

G. Dalrymple also relies on hyperbole (the reference to the lack of a dining table and the fact that the flat panel TV could be used for this purpose). He decries the values of families like these, who place their entertainment above their children’s nutrition.

H. Theroux's distrust of the U.S. government is obvious: We have a double standard concerning weapons and our treatment of "little countries."

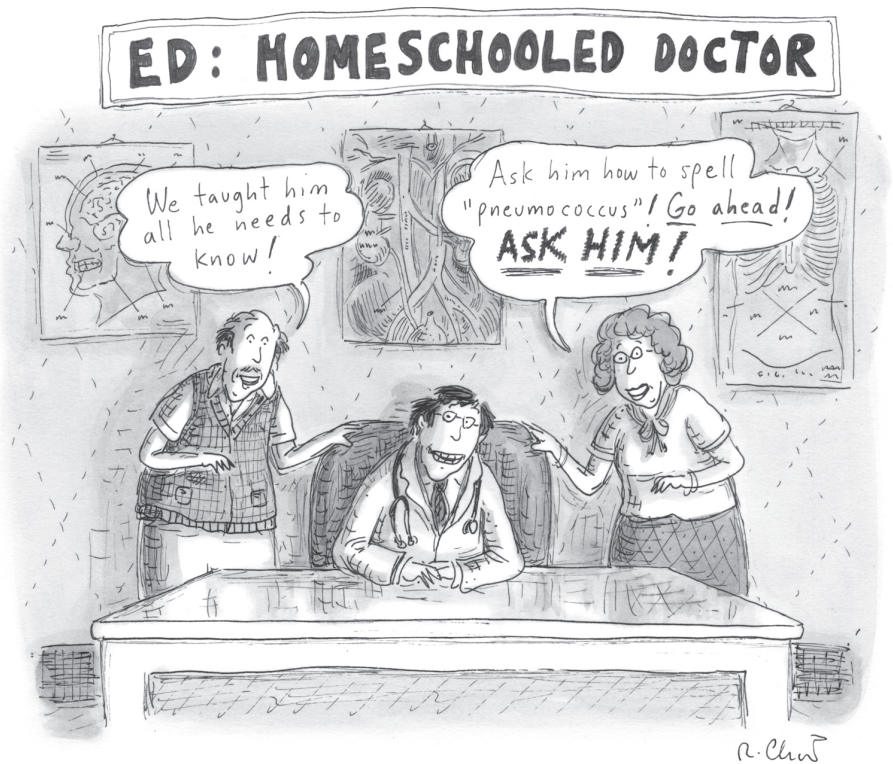
Though we become hysterical at the thought that someone might bomb us, bombs that we explode elsewhere, in little countries far away, are just theater, of small consequence, another public performance of our White House, the event factory.

Paul Theroux, *Dark Star Safari*

Theroux's tone in this passage is Cynical.

Explain the reason for your answer. see answer in margin.

- I. This cartoon is by Roz Chast and was published in *The New Yorker*.



© Roz Chast/The New Yorker Collection/www.cartoonbank.com

The tone of the cartoon is Satirical.

Explain the thinking behind your answer. Chast ridicules home schooling by

showing an extreme case, in other words, using hyperbole. She mocks the idea of a home-schooled doctor, whose parents, in any case, are clueless about the type of education a physician needs. Knowing how to spell "pneumococcus" (a bacteria associated with pneumonia and meningitis) is irrelevant. The point is to be able to identify its presence and to treat the diseases it causes.

■ ALLUSION

An allusion is a pointed and meaningful reference to something outside the text that helps illuminate the subject. The allusion may be from any field, but these are the most common:

- The Bible or other religious texts
- History
- Literature
- Greek, Roman, or other mythology
- Popular culture, including movies, songs, works of art, fashion, the media, and so forth

Indeed, although allusions can come from any discipline, generally they come from works or events that educated readers would be familiar with. The reader who does not grasp the connection between the allusion and the subject misses out not only on the literal meaning but on the deeper connotative meaning as well. The ability to recognize allusions takes years to develop, but it is attainable through wide reading and exposure to our cultural traditions. In the meantime, ask your instructor to explain unfamiliar allusions or use reference books or websites. A good unabridged dictionary or websites like www.ask.com and www.wikipedia.com will most likely offer explanations of allusions you encounter in your reading.

Let's begin with this passage by mystery writer James Lee Burke. The lead character is Dave Robicheaux, homicide detective in New Iberia, Louisiana. Here he describes a local Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting that he is attending:

I attended the Friday noon meeting of an AA bunch known as the Insanity Group. The meeting was held in a dilapidated house in a poor section of town, and was supposedly a nonsmoking one. But people lit up in both the front and back doorways and flooded the house's interior with amounts of smoke that few bars contain. The people in the Insanity Group had paid hard dues—in jails, detox units, car wrecks, and the kind of beer-glass brawls that quickly turn homicidal. Few of the men shaved more than once every five or six days. Many of the women, most of whom were tattooed, considered themselves fortunate to have a job in a car wash. Anybody there whose life didn't trail clouds of chaos possessed the spiritual eminence of St. Francis of Assisi.

James Lee Burke, *Crusader's Cross*

The allusion to St. Francis of Assisi in the last sentence refers to the thirteenth-century founder of the Franciscan order of monks and, for

Catholics, the patron saint of nature and ecology. St. Francis was revered for his life of simplicity and poverty (he is often depicted with birds sitting on his head and shoulders). The allusion means that these AA members led chaotic lives. If their lives weren't chaotic, they would be as saintly as St. Francis was. Here are some further questions pertaining to this passage:

First, identify the metaphor in the passage and explain its meaning.

Metaphor: "clouds of chaos"; the phrase describes the constant chaos that encircled these AA members lives.

Now identify the mood of the passage. **The mood is grim and depressing; these people**

are really down on their luck.

Practice Exercise 7

B. The original Potemkin village was constructed during Catherine the Great's reign over Russia in the eighteenth century. Upon learning of her wish to tour the countryside, Grigori Potemkin, her lover and an army officer, designed elaborate fake villages that the Czarina could observe from her carriage. These façades would hide the reality of grinding poverty of Russia's peasant villages. The American Heritage Dictionary defines a "Potemkin village" as "something that appears elaborate and impressive but in actual fact lacks substance." As splendid as the trees along the Sacramento River are, they are not nearly as impressive as they used to be, and they merely obscure the realities of modern agriculture just behind them.

Identify the allusion in these short selections. Then explain its meaning.

- A. The narrator is a student working in the library at Indiana University in Bloomington:

So I was feeling blue, the weather going from bad to worse . . . and the books in the library cart growing progressively heavier (I felt like a bibliographic Sisyphus, the task unending, each shelved volume replaced by another, and yet another).

T. C. Boyle, *The Inner Circle*

Allusion. Because he had lied, Sisyphus was condemned by the gods for eternity to roll a huge stone to the top of the hill, whereupon it would roll back to the bottom.

- B. This excerpt, from a newspaper article by environmental writer Glen Martin, describes the Sacramento River in California's Glenn County.

The water is green and swift, and cottonwoods and willows crowd the shore. The sky is a piercing blue, and the air crisp as a winesap apple. Alarmed beavers slap their tails at the approach of the boat, and wood ducks and great blue herons rise from backside eddies.

It's easy to imagine you're in another time, when the trees were a lush, almost impenetrable forest that extended for miles beyond this river's banks.

But this is not the Sacramento River of 1870. Magnificent as they are, the trees are merely a thin buffer strip, a kind of Potemkin village, obscuring the huge

agricultural complex that lies beyond. Just past the levees are thousands of acres of orchards and rice fields.

Glen Martin, "Wetlands, Birds and Salmon Returning to the Sacramento," *San Francisco Chronicle*

see answer on previous page margin

C. Ulysses (the Roman name for Odysseus, the Greek king of Ithaca) is the hero of Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*. The allusion is to the ten years that it took Ulysses to return home after the Trojan War. Circe, a goddess who figures prominently in *The Odyssey*, turned her enemies into animals. In the case of Ulysses and his men, Circe gave them a feast of food laced with a magic potion that turned them into swine. Later she helped Ulysses return home to Ithaca. She suggested two different routes for his return, one of them the "Wandering Rocks," which destroyed ships by smashing them to bits. Ulysses chose a different route, which took him through the equally dangerous Scylla and Charybdis. Sullivan's allusions underscore the hazards of road trips: they frequently take a long time and they can involve danger.

C.

Interstate driving is akin to driving in a dream, a dream where you get the feeling that you recognize everything but you don't really, a dream world full of sometimes magical scenery—like these classically wondrous mountains that support the vast blue sky we are driving beneath at this late-morning moment—that is punctuated with oddities, sometimes secretly dangerous, which makes our trip home across Montana, much less the entire country, a little like Ulysses' trip home to Ithaca. And just as Circe suggested Ulysses avoid the Wandering Rocks, those navigational hazards, so she might have frowned on stopping for toxic-waste-site golf. So as we enter the Deer Lodge Valley for interstate-side golf playing, let us look carefully at these hills that are alternately like sun-painted actors in scenic postcards and like a gigantic partially eaten sandwich.

Robert Sullivan, *Cross Country*

see answer in margin

D. This excerpt is a persuasive piece that was published on the website of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Pennsylvania. The focus is on the teaching of the doctrine called "intelligent design," which conservatives have promoted as a subject they want taught alongside evolution in American high school biology classes. Many conservatives consider evolution to be a theory, not scientific fact.

Harrisburg, PA—The American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and attorneys with Pepper Hamilton LLP filed a federal lawsuit today on behalf of 11 parents who say that presenting "intelligent design" in public school science classrooms violates their religious liberty by promoting particular religious beliefs to their children under the guise of science education.

"Teaching students about religion's role in world history and culture is proper, but disguising a particular religious belief as science is not," said ACLU of Pennsylvania Legal Director Witold Walczak, "Intelligent design is a Trojan Horse for bringing religious creationism back into public school science classes."

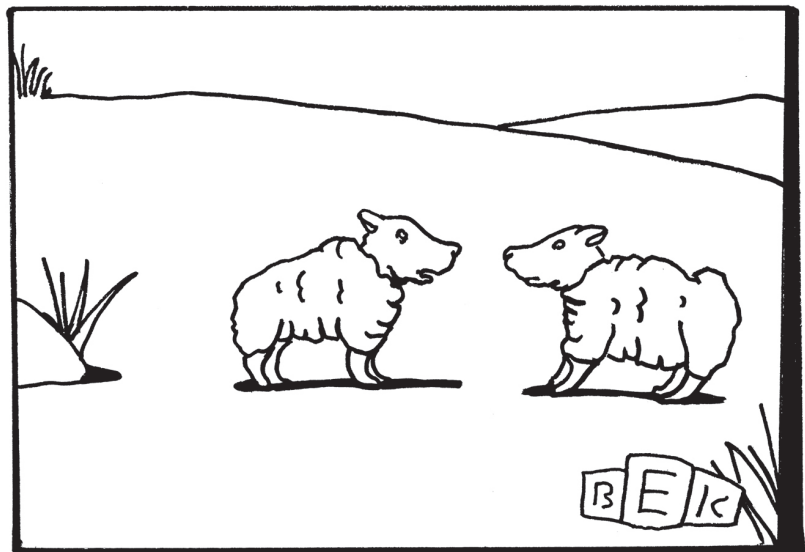
D. Like C above, this passage includes another allusion from Greek mythology. The reference is to a huge horse that the Greeks constructed to win the Trojan War. The Greeks left by ship, and the Trojans, thinking that they had won, brought the horse back to the city as a trophy. During the night, 30 Greek soldiers who had been hiding inside the horse, sneaked out, opened the gates for the rest of the Greek army, and destroyed Troy. Thus, the phrase Trojan Horse refers to a subversive device planted among enemy forces designed to destroy them. In this case, "Intelligent Design" (here described as a phony science) is compared to a Trojan Horse, meaning a way to sneak Creationism into our school's science curricula. (The term also has a computer application, referring to a type of virus that infects and ruins hard drives.)

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United Executive Director, added, "Public schools are not Sunday schools, and we must resist any efforts to make them so. There is an evolving attack under way on sound science education, and the school board's action in Dover is part of that misguided crusade. 'Intelligent design' has about as much to do with science as reality television has to do with reality."

"Pennsylvania Parents File First-Ever Challenge to 'Intelligent Design' Instruction in Public Schools," *ACLU of Pennsylvania Online* (www.aclu.org/news/2004/intelligent-design.html).

see answer in margin

E.



*"My self-esteem was so low I just followed her
around everywhere she would go."*

© Bruce Eric Kaplan/*The New Yorker* Collection/www.cartoonbank.com

This cartoon alludes to the children's nursery song, "Mary Had a Little Lamb," which is not mentioned directly, only implied. The cartoonist examines the story in a humorous way, referring to the psychological cause and effect. The lamb follows Mary "everywhere she would go" because he had low self-esteem and couldn't do anything on his own.

■ CHAPTER EXERCISES

Selection 1

¹Human beings find the most ingenious ways to protect their privacy, even under conditions of near-constant physical proximity to others. ²In many cultures, even minimal control over physical access can be hard to come by in the midst of communal and family life. ³Some villages have huts with walls so thin that sounds can easily be heard through them; others have no walls at all separating couples, or families. ⁴Many ways are then devised to create privacy. ⁵Villagers may set up private abodes outside the village to which they go for days or even months when they want to be alone or with just one or two others. ⁶Many cultures have developed strict rules of etiquette, along with means of dissimulation and hypocrisy that allow certain private matters to remain unknown or go unobserved. ⁷In such ways, it is possible to exercise some control over one's openness to others even in the midst of communal life or crowds.

⁸An arresting example of how such control can be maintained is provided by the Tuareg men of North Africa who wear blue veils and long robes of indigo cotton, so that little of them shows except their hands, their feet, and the area around their eyes. ⁹The veil is worn at home as well as outside, even when eating or smoking. ¹⁰Some wear it even when asleep. ¹¹It is raised to cover the face most completely in the presence of highly placed persons or family members granted special respect, such as in-laws. ¹²One observer noted that the veil protects ceremonial reserve and allows a "symbolic withdrawal from a threatening situation."

¹³The veil, though providing neither isolation nor anonymity, bestows facelessness and the idiom of privacy upon its wearer and allows him to stand somewhat aloof from the perils of social interaction while remaining a part of it.

Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation*

A. Vocabulary

For each italicized word from the selection, write the dictionary definition most appropriate for the context.

1. the most *ingenious* ways [sentence 1]: _____
2. near-constant physical *proximity* [1]: _____
3. means of *dissimulation* [6]: _____
4. the veil *bestows* facelessness [13]: _____

B. Structure and Meaning

1. The main idea of the paragraph is that
 - (a) privacy is a universal concern.
 - (b) loss of personal privacy may have serious emotional consequences.
 - (c) clothing can sometimes establish one's privacy.
 - (d) human beings have devised ingenious ways to protect their privacy.

2. The reader can infer that maintaining privacy is
 - (a) more difficult in economically developed nations.
 - (b) impossible to achieve or maintain in communal societies or in large families.
 - (c) more important to cultures in North Africa than it is to Americans or Europeans.
 - (d) a special problem in cultures where people live in close proximity.
3. Paraphrase sentence 13. _____

4. The author's tone can best be described as
 - (a) philosophical, reflective.
 - (b) admiring, laudatory.
 - (c) informative, instructive.
 - (d) ironic, amusing.
5. Write a summary of the passage. Try not to exceed 50 words.

Answers for Selection 1

A. Vocabulary

1. clever, imaginative
2. closeness
3. disguise, concealment
4. confers, presents

B. Content, Structure, and Tone

1. d
2. d
3. Though the veil does not allow its wearer to have either complete isolation or complete anonymity, it does provide a way to hide the face and allows some participation in social activities without being a wholly active participant.
4. c
5. In many cultures whose inhabitants live in close proximity, people must adopt ways to protect their privacy. For example, some people go to private houses outside the village or more ingeniously they wear long robes and veils, which provide some measure of isolation without cutting themselves off from social contact. (50 words)

Selection 2

The chimpanzee who is the subject of this passage, Cholmondeley—or Chumley as he was known to his friends—was being donated to the London Zoo. The author had promised the owner to take the chimp back to England on his way home from Africa.

¹He arrived in the back of a small van, seated sedately in a huge crate. ²When the doors of his crate were opened and Chumley stepped out with all the ease and self-confidence of a film star, I was considerably shaken; standing on his bow legs in a normal slouching chimp position, he came up to my waist, and if he had straightened up his head would have been on a level with my chest. ³He had huge arms and must have measured at least twice my size round his hairy chest. ⁴Owing to bad tooth growth, both sides of his face were swollen out of all proportion, and this gave him a weird pugilistic look. ⁵His eyes were small, deep-set, and intelligent; the top of his head was nearly bald, owing, I discovered later, to his habit of sitting and rubbing the palms of his hands backward across his head, an exercise which seemed to afford him much pleasure and which he persisted in until the top of his skull was quite devoid of hair. ⁶This was no young chimp such as I had expected, but a veteran about eight or nine years old, fully mature, strong as a powerful man, and, to judge by his expression, with considerable experience of life. ⁷Although he was not exactly a nice chimp to look at (I had seen handsomer), he certainly had a terrific personality; it hit you as soon as you set eyes on him. ⁸His little eyes looked at you with great intelligence, and there seemed to be a glitter of ironic laughter in their depths that made one feel uncomfortable.

⁹He stood on the ground and surveyed his surroundings with a shrewd glance, and then he turned to me and held out one of his soft, pink-palmed hands to be shaken, with exactly that bored expression that one sees on the faces of professional hand-shakers. ¹⁰Round his neck was a thick chain, and its length drooped over the tailboard of the lorry and disappeared into the depths of his crate. ¹¹With an animal of less personality than Chumley, this would have been a sign of his subjugation, of his captivity. ¹²But Chumley wore the chain with the superb air of a Lord Mayor; after shaking my hand so professionally, he turned and proceeded to pull the chain, which measured some fifteen feet, out of his crate. ¹³He gathered it up carefully into loops, hung it over one hand, and proceeded to walk into the hut as if he owned it. ¹⁴Thus, in the first few minutes of arrival, Chumley had made us feel inferior; he had moved in, not, we felt, because we wanted him to, but because he did. ¹⁵I almost felt I ought to apologize for the mess on the table.

Gerald Durrell, *The Overloaded Ark*

A. Vocabulary

For each italicized word from the selection, write the dictionary definition most appropriate for the context.

1. *sedately* [sentence 1]:
 - (a) calmly, in a dignified manner.
 - (b) nervously, apprehensively.
 - (c) arrogantly, haughtily.
 - (d) uncomfortably, awkwardly.
2. *pugilistic* [4]: Having the appearance of a
 - (a) military officer.
 - (b) movie star.
 - (c) fighter.
 - (d) vicious animal.
3. *ironic* [8]: In this context,
 - (a) cynical, distrustful.
 - (b) satirical, ridiculing.
 - (c) sarcastic, suggesting a superior attitude.
 - (d) nasty, cruel.
4. *subjugation* [11]:
 - (a) boredom, indifference.
 - (b) defeat, enslavement.
 - (c) cooperative spirit.
 - (d) subjectivity, introspective nature.

B. Content, Structure, and Tone

Complete the following questions.

1. The dominant impression of Chumley that Durrell wants to convey is his
 - (a) weird appearance.
 - (b) large size.
 - (c) maturity.
 - (d) superior attitude.
2. The passage contains three metaphors that describe Chumley's behavior. Identify each in the space provided.

Sentence 2: "with all the ease and self-confidence of a film star" _____

Sentence 9: "with exactly that bored expression that one sees on the faces of professional handshakers" _____

Sentence 12: "Chumley wore the chain with the superb air of a Lord Mayor" _____
3. These three figures of speech, taken together, suggest that Chumley was accustomed to being the center of attention, being treated like a celebrity.
4. Which of the following is an accurate inference?
 - (a) Durrell had never seen a chimp before.

- (b) Chumley was embarrassed by the chains used to tether him to his crate.
 - (c) Chumley insisted on having his surroundings be clean and orderly.
 - (d) Durrell had expected Chumley to be an ordinary chimp.
5. The tone of the passage can best be described as
- (a) ironic, wry, and amused.
 - (b) sarcastic, ridiculing.
 - (c) serious, earnest.
 - (d) sentimental, maudlin.

Selection 3

This passage comes from a chapter on the American government's mistreatment of various Indian tribes during the nineteenth century.

The most famous removal of Indians, of course, was the removal of the Cherokee from Georgia westward to Indian Territory in 1838 and 1839. There are many accounts of the forced march that came to be known as the Trail of Tears—of the Cherokee's previous peaceableness and prosperity on their lands in Georgia; of the Georgia settlers' hatred of Indians and desire for those lands; of the mercilessness of President Andrew Jackson; of Supreme Court Justice John Marshall's ruling that the removal was illegal; of Jackson's response: "He has made his law. Now let him enforce it"; of the opposition of people as diverse as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Davy Crockett to the removal; of the U.S. soldiers' roundup of the Georgia Cherokee; of the Cherokee's suffering in the stockades and along the trail; of the death of more than four thousand Cherokee, about a third of the population of the tribe, before the removal was through. The Cherokee had their own written language, with an alphabet devised by the Cherokee leader Sequoyah during the 1820s. But their success at following the ways of the whites proved no defense. As would happen again elsewhere, building houses and farms only gave the Indians more to lose when government policy changed.

Ian Frazier, *On the Rez*

A. Content and Structure

1. A good title for this paragraph would be
 - (a) "A Sad Day in American History"
 - (b) "A History of the Cherokee Indians"
 - (c) "Forced Removals in American History"
 - (d) "The Cherokee and the Trail of Tears"
2. Which *two* of these reasons does Frazier offer to explain why the Cherokee were forcibly removed from Georgia?
 - (a) The Supreme Court refused to hear the Cherokees' case against removal.
 - (b) The Cherokee had waged war against the Georgia settlers.
 - (c) The Georgia settlers hated the Cherokee.
 - (d) There was little public support for the Cherokee.

- (e) The Cherokee had broken numerous treaties with the Georgia settlers.
 (f) The Georgia settlers wanted the Cherokees' lands.
3. With regard to the Cherokee's experiences along the Trail of Tears, what seems to be Frazier's central concern? The Cherokees' mistreatment and suffering at the hands of the U.S. government
-
4. Check any of the following assertions that are true, based on Frazier's discussion.
- (a) _____ The Cherokee were singled out for retribution because they tried to emulate whites.
 (b) _____ The Cherokee brought much of their misfortune upon themselves.
 (c) _____ The U.S. government refused to intervene after Justice Marshall issued his ruling.
 (d) _____ The Cherokee were unusual among Indian tribes in that they had a written language.
5. Does Frazier's discussion represent primarily fact or primarily opinion?
-

B. Language and Tone Analysis

1. What is the likely origin of the phrase "Trail of Tears"?
- (a) It is most likely an Anglo or white term.
 (b) It is most likely a Cherokee term.
 (c) There is no way to tell its origin.
2. Consider these words from the passage: "forced," "peaceableness," "prosperity," "mercilessness." As Frazier uses them in the passage, are they primarily denotative or connotative? connotative
-
3. Frazier's point of view toward the Cherokee can be described as
- (a) completely neutral, neither favorable nor unfavorable.
 (b) ironic, cynical.
 (c) favorable, admiring.
 (d) critical, fault-finding.
4. Frazier's tone and word choice can best be described as
- (a) highly charged, inflammatory.
 (b) informative, instructive.
 (c) cynical, scornful.
 (d) ironic, wry.
5. When President Jackson responded to Supreme Court Justice Marshall's ruling, saying, "He has made his law. Now let him enforce it," we can interpret Jackson's tone as being
- (a) honest, candid.
 (b) defiant, insolent.
 (c) complaining, aggrieved.
 (d) nostalgic, wistful.

C. Paraphrase and Summary

1. Paraphrase the last two sentences. Though the Cherokee's had adopted white customs of building houses and establishing farms, this proved no help, and because of these practices, they lost even more when the government refused to safeguard them.
2. Next, write a summary of the passage. Try not to exceed 50 words. The Trail of Tears refers to the forced removal of Cherokee Indians from Georgia to Indian Territory, resulting in loss of life and suffering. Though the Cherokee had an alphabet and had established houses and farms they couldn't defend themselves against the Georgia settlers, who hated them and coveted their property. (51 words)

PRACTICE ESSAY



“Making the Grade”

Kurt Wiesenfeld

Each week Newsweek publishes a column titled “My Turn,” in which people in various professions express personal viewpoints. “Making the Grade” is one such article. This particular column was written by Kurt Wiesenfeld, a professor of physics since 1997 at Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. Wiesenfeld has a B.S. from MIT and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. The column caused much discussion among college students and teachers after its publication in the June 17, 1996, issue.

Preview Questions

1. Are you familiar with the term “grade inflation”? In your experience, does a final grade of “A” mean superior achievement in a course?
 2. What do you consider an average grade? A “B”? A “C”? Examine your thinking.
 3. If grade inflation exists in American colleges and universities today, what might be some reasons to account for it?
- 1 It was a rookie error. After 10 years I should have known better, but I went to my office the day after final grades were posted. There was a tentative knock on the door. “Professor Wiesenfeld? I took your Physics 2121 class? I flunked it? I wonder if there’s anything I can do to improve my grade?” I thought: “Why are you asking me? Isn’t it too late to worry about it? Do you dislike making declarative statements?”

- 2 After the student gave his tale of woe and left, the phone rang. “I got a D in your class. Is there any way you can change it to ‘Incomplete?’” Then the e-mail assault began: “I’m shy about coming in to talk to you, but I’m not shy about asking for a better grade. Anyway, it’s worth a try.” The next day I had three messages from students asking *me* to call *them*. I didn’t.
- 3 Time was, when you received a grade, that was it. You might groan and moan, but you accepted it as the outcome of your efforts or lack thereof (and, yes, sometimes a tough grader). In the last few years, however, some students have developed a disgruntled-consumer approach. If they don’t like their grade, they go to the “return” counter to trade it in for something better.
- 4 What alarms me is their indifference toward grades as an indication of personal effort and performance. Many, when pressed about why they think they deserve a better grade, admit they don’t deserve one but would like one anyway. Having been raised on gold stars for effort and smiley faces for self-esteem, they’ve learned they can get by without hard work and real talent if they can talk the professor into giving them a break. This attitude is beyond cynicism. There’s a weird innocence to the assumption that one expects (even deserves) a better grade simply by begging for it. With that outlook, I guess I shouldn’t be as flabbergasted as I was that 12 students asked me to change their grades *after* the final grades were posted.
- 5 That’s 10 percent of my class who let three months of midterms, quizzes and lab reports slide until long past remedy. My graduate student calls it hyperrational thinking: if effort and intelligence don’t matter, why should deadlines? What matters is getting a better grade through an unearned bonus, the academic equivalent of a freebie T-shirt or toaster giveaway. Rewards are disconnected from the quality of one’s work. An act and its consequences are unrelated, random events.
- 6 Their arguments for wheedling better grades often ignore academic performance. Perhaps they feel it’s not relevant. “If my grade isn’t raised to a D I’ll lose my scholarship.” “If you don’t give me a C, I’ll flunk out.” One sincerely overwrought student pleaded, “If I don’t pass, my life is over.” This is tough stuff to deal with. Apparently, I’m responsible for someone’s losing a scholarship, flunking out or deciding whether life has meaning. Perhaps these students see me as a commodities broker with something they want—a grade. Though intrinsically worthless, grades, if properly manipulated, can be traded for what has value: a degree, which means a job, which means money. The one thing college actually offers—a chance to learn—is considered irrelevant, even less than worthless, because of the long hours and hard work required.
- 7 In a society saturated with surface values, love of knowledge for its own sake does sound eccentric. The benefits of fame and wealth are more obvious. So is it right to blame students for reflecting the superficial values saturating our society?
- 8 Yes, of course it’s right. These guys had better take themselves seriously now, because our country will be forced to take them seriously later, when the stakes are much higher. They must recognize that their

attitude is not only self-destructive, but socially destructive. The erosion of quality control—giving appropriate grades for actual accomplishments—is a major concern in my department. One colleague noted that a physics major could obtain a degree without ever answering a written exam question completely. How? By pulling in enough partial credit and extra credit. And by getting breaks on grades.

- 9 But what happens once she or he graduates and gets a job? That's when the misfortunes of eroding academic standards multiply. We lament that school children get "kicked upstairs" until they graduate from high school despite being illiterate and mathematically inept, but we seem unconcerned with college graduates whose less blatant deficiencies are far more harmful if their accreditation exceeds their qualifications.
- 10 Most of my students are science and engineering majors. If they're good at getting partial credit but not at getting the answer right, then the new bridge breaks or the new drug doesn't work. One finds examples here in Atlanta. Last year a light tower in the Olympic Stadium collapsed, killing a worker. It collapsed because an engineer miscalculated how much weight it could hold. A new 12-story dormitory could develop dangerous cracks due to a foundation that's uneven by more than six inches. The error resulted from incorrect information being fed into a computer. I drive past that dorm daily on my way to work, wondering if a foundation crushed under kilotons of weight is repairable or if this structure will have to be demolished. Two 10,000-pound steel beams at the new natatorium collapsed in March, crashing into the student athletic complex. (Should we give partial credit since no one was hurt?) Those are real-world consequences of errors and lack of expertise.
- 11 But the lesson is lost on the grade-grouching 10 percent. Say that you won't (not can't, but won't) change the grade they deserve to what they want, and they're frequently bewildered or angry. They don't think it's fair that they're judged according to their performance, not their desires or "potential." They don't think it's fair that they should jeopardize their scholarships or be in danger of flunking out simply because they could not or did not do their work. But it's more than fair; it's necessary to help preserve a minimum standard of quality that our society needs to maintain safety and integrity. I don't know if the 13th-hour students will learn that lesson, but I've learned mine. From now on, after final grades are posted, I'll lie low until the next quarter starts.

A. *Comprehension*

Choose the answer that best completes each statement. Do not refer to the selection while doing this exercise.

1. Wiesenfeld states that some college students do not consider grades a measure of their
 - (a) mastery of the subject.
 - (b) personal performance and effort.

- (c) ability to organize their time wisely.
 (d) performance in relation to other students' performance in the class.
2. Some students try to get high grades by
 (a) cheating.
 (b) cramming at the last minute.
 (c) begging and pleading.
 (d) threatening the instructor.
3. The students described in the article receive low grades because they
 (a) don't attend class.
 (b) are unprepared academically for the course work.
 (c) work too many hours, which interferes with their studies.
 (d) let an entire semester's work slide without doing anything.
4. The idea that students deserve high grades without working for them reflects
 (a) parental pressure for them to succeed.
 (b) the superficial values of the larger society.
 (c) the importance of getting into a good graduate school.
 (d) grade inflation.
5. One particularly serious consequence of undeserved grades in science and engineering courses is that
 (a) educational standards in other disciplines are also weakened.
 (b) unsafely designed buildings and structures can result in loss of lives.
 (c) graduates expect similar undeserved rewards when they enter the working world.
 (d) professors feel as if they are under siege.

B. Vocabulary

For each italicized word from the selection, write the dictionary definition most appropriate for the context. You may refer to the selection to answer the questions in this section and in all the remaining sections.

1. the e-mail *assault* [paragraph 2]: attack, offensive
2. a *disgruntled*-consumer approach [3]: discontented
3. *hyperrational* thinking [5]: The prefix *hyper-* means excessive
4. *wheeling* better grades [6]: using flattery or cajolery
5. sincerely *overwrought* student [6]: highly agitated
6. *intrinsicly* worthless [6]: essentially
7. illiterate and mathematically *inept* [9]: incompetent

8. less *blatant* deficiencies [9]: offensively conspicuous
9. *eroding* academic standards [9]: deteriorating, wearing down
10. maintain safety and *integrity* [11]: state of being complete and sound
-

C. Inferences

On the basis of the evidence in the paragraph, mark these statements as follows: PA (probably accurate), PI (probably inaccurate), or NP (not in the passage).

- PA Many students equate good grades with high salaries rather than with knowledge acquired.
- NP It is not only science and engineering students who plead for higher grades; liberal arts students do so as well.
- PI Parental pressure and the large financial investment college entails may account for some students begging for grades they do not deserve.
- NP The engineers who designed the defective bridge and the Olympic Stadium light tower probably received higher grades than they should have in their college engineering courses.
- PI Giving partial or extra credit on examinations or projects may have damaging long-term consequences.
- PI Professors should understand that today's students are under tremendous pressure and grade more leniently.

D. Structure and Meaning

Complete the following questions.

- What mode of discourse is represented in this article? persuasion
 - From the information in paragraph 1, explain the "rookie error" that Wiesenfeld made. The "rookie error" was returning to his office after he posted final grades.
 - Write a main-idea sentence in your own words for paragraph 4.
Because they don't equate grades with personal effort and performance, many students want good grades whether or not they deserve them or have done the work.
-

4. How would you characterize the tone of paragraph 1, with regard to Wiesenfeld's attitude toward the student quoted? Tone: sarcastic;

Now characterize the tone of the entire article. tone in the entire article: critical, fault-finding

E. Questions for Discussion and Analysis

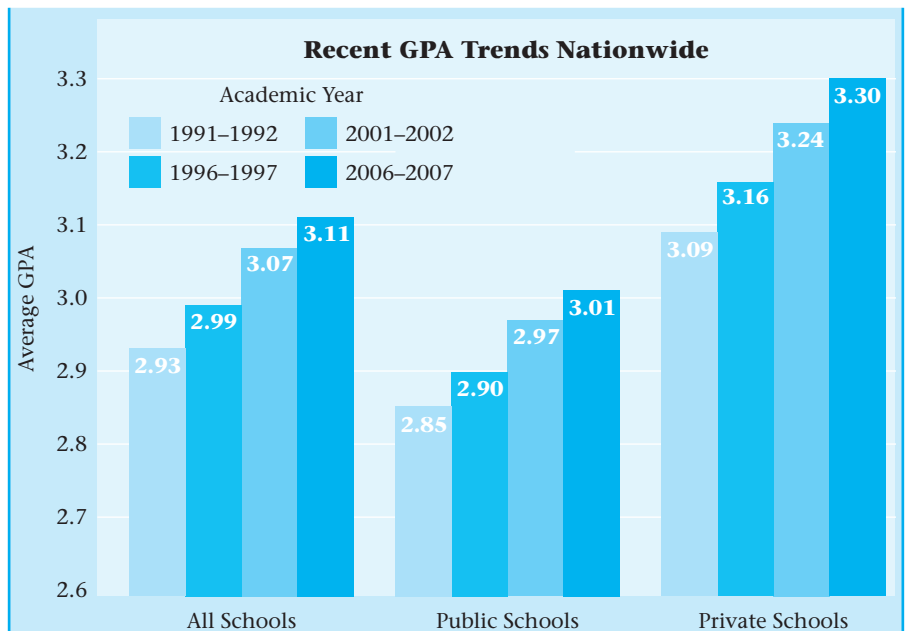
1. Do you see any contradiction in Wiesenfeld's explanation of what grades mean to many students today and what they should mean? (See paragraphs 3 and 4, in particular the writer's phrase "their indifference toward grades.")
2. Is Wiesenfeld accurate in his criticism of today's students and their attitude about grades? Do you detect any bias? Does he avoid generalizing about his students and, if so, how?
3. From your experience as a student and your observation of your fellow students' attitudes toward grades, comment on his most significant points.

ON THE WEB

According to recent reports, MGM Resorts International wants to destroy the brand-new Harmon Building, a condo and hotel complex that is part of the \$9 billion CityCenter project on the Las Vegas Strip. Completed two years ago, the building has so many design and construction flaws that MGM wants to implode it. There is an ongoing controversy about exactly who is responsible for the building's problems, which are apparently so severe that engineers say it would collapse in a big earthquake. Do some research into the Harmon Building and find out more about why this building is doomed. Was it incompetence, shoddy materials, lack of oversight, cost-cutting measures, or perhaps a combination of all of them that caused this situation?

Critical Thinking Exercise

Study this chart on national GPA trends. The data was compiled from grading data from over 70 colleges and universities around the country by Stuart Rojstaczer, formerly a professor of geophysics at Duke University and now a writer on education issues. Study these figures. What conclusions can you draw from the three sets of figures? Which type of college shows the most obvious grade inflation? What are some reasons that might account for this phenomenon?



Source: "Grade Inflation at American Colleges and Universities." Reprinted by permission of Stuart Rojstaczer. <http://GradeInflation.com>

The figure above shows the average undergraduate GPAs for American colleges and universities from 1991–2006 based on data from: Alabama, Appalachian State, Auburn, Brown, Bucknell, Carleton, Central Florida, Central Michigan, Centre, Colorado, Colorado State, Columbia, Cornell, CSU-Fullerton, CSU-Sacramento, CSU-San Bernardino, Dartmouth, Duke, Elon, Florida, Furman, Georgia Tech, Georgetown, Georgia, Hampden-Sydney, Harvard, Harvey Mudd, Hope, Houston, Indiana, Kansas, Kent State, Kenyon, Knox, Messiah, Michigan, Middlebury, Nebraska-Kearney, North Carolina State, North Carolina-Asheville, North Carolina-Chapel Hill, North Carolina-Greensboro, Northern Iowa, Northern Michigan, Ohio State, Penn State, Pomona, Princeton, Purdue, Roanoke, Rutgers, Southern Illinois, Texas, Texas A&M, Texas State, UC-Berkeley, UC-Irvine, UCLA, UC-Santa Barbara, Utah, UW-Oshkosh, Virginia, Washington State, Washington-Seattle, Western Washington, Wheaton (IL), William & Mary, Winthrop, Wisconsin-La Crosse, and Wisconsin-Madison. Note that inclusion in the average does not imply that an institution has significant inflation. Institutions comprising this average were chosen strictly because they have either published their data or have made it otherwise available.

The entire report, including data on the GPAs for each institution, is available online at "National Trends in Grade Inflation,

American Colleges and Universities.” In the report there is another chart showing community college grading patterns. Interestingly, Rojstaczer has found that community colleges have been largely immune from grade inflation. Why do you think this is?

PRACTICE SHORT STORY

Paul Theroux, “Eulogies for Mr. Concannon”

American writer Paul Theroux has written such well-received travel books as *The Great Railway Bazaar*, *The Old Patagonia Express*, and *Dark Star Safari*, as well as fictional works, notably *Mosquito Coast*. This story is an example of “flash fiction,” a genre to which you were introduced in Chapter 3. This little story was originally published as one of “22 Stories” in *Harpers*.

I did not know Dennis Concannon. I was invited to his funeral by a friend of his son’s who needed a ride. As it was a rainy day and I had nothing else to do, I stayed for the service, sitting in the back. The whole business was nondenominational, according to Mr. C’s wishes. The turnout was very large—the church was filled. A reading of his favorite poem, by Robert Frost, with the memorable line, “That withered hag.” Several sentimental songs. Then the eulogies.

One man got up and said, “I never met anyone else like Dennis. I worked for him for almost twenty-five years, and in all that time he didn’t even buy me a cup of coffee.” He went on—people laughed.

A woman: “I used to tremble whenever I was called to his office. I never knew whether he was going to make a pass at me or fire me.”

Another man: “The salesmen put in their expense reports that they’d had their cars washed. ‘Salesmen have to have clean cars.’ But Dennis said, ‘This was the fourteenth of last month. I compared the car washes to the weather report. It was raining that day. I’m not paying.’”

Someone else: “His partner, George Kelly, would be sitting next to him at some of the meetings. One would talk. Then the other, but saying the same thing. It was terrible. We called it ‘Dennis in Stereo.’”

There were more speakers, with equally unpleasant stories of this man. At the end of the funeral I knew Dennis Concannon as a mean, unreasonable, bullying bastard who had gotten rich by exploiting and intimidating these people, the attendees at his funeral—not mourners but people who were having the last word.

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

1. Why did the narrator attend Dennis Concannon’s funeral? Is his stated reason plausible?

2. What is the traditional function of a funeral? of funeral eulogies?
3. Explain the way Mr. Concannon's funeral proceeded. Before the eulogies, is there any hint that this funeral will be unusual?
4. Why did so many people attend Concannon's funeral if they disliked him so much?
5. What personality traits emerge from the various examples of eulogies that the narrator cites? Does the narrator's assessment at the end appear to be reliable and accurate?
6. The narrator states that attendees weren't mourners but rather people who wanted to have the last word. Why did they have to wait till Concannon's funeral to speak up?
7. In what way does this example of flash fiction represent a short story? What are its components?

PRACTICE POEM

Alexandra Teague, "Adjectives of Order"

Alexandra Teague is the author of *Mortal Geography*, a collection of poetry which was awarded the 2009 Lexi Rudnitsky Prize and the 2011 California Book Award. Formerly a Stegner Fellow in poetry at Stanford University, Teague has had her poetry published in *The Paris Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Best American Poetry 2009*, among other journals. She taught English at City College of San Francisco and is now currently assistant professor of poetry at the University of Idaho. "Adjectives of Order" was first published in 2007 on *Slate's* website. You can hear Teague read the poem at this address: <http://www.slate.com/id/2167799/>

That summer, she had a student who was obsessed
 with the order of adjectives. A soldier in the South
 Vietnamese army, he had been taken prisoner when
 Saigon fell. He wanted to know why the order
 5 could not be altered. The sweltering city streets shook
 with rockets and helicopters. The city sweltering
 streets. On the dusty brown field of the chalkboard,
 she wrote: *The mother took warm homemade bread*
from the oven. City is essential to streets as homemade
 10 *is essential to bread.* He copied this down, but
 he wanted to know if his brothers were *lost* before
older, if he worked security at a twenty-story modern
 downtown bank or downtown twenty-story modern.
 When he first arrived, he did not know enough English
 15 to order a sandwich. He asked her to explain each part

of *Lovely big rectangular old red English Catholic leather Bible*. Evaluation before size. Age before color. Nationality before religion. Time before length. Adding *and*, one could determine if two adjectives were equal.
 20 After Saigon fell, he had survived nine long years of torture. Nine *and* long. He knew no other way to say this.

Questions for Discussion and Analysis

1. Who is the subject of the poem? What facts are revealed about him?
2. Explain the significance of the title, "Adjectives of Order." What can you deduce about the rules for adjectives from the rules cited in lines 17–19?
3. Why do you suppose that the student is "obsessed" with these rules? Clearly, he is struggling to learn English, and the rules are important. But are they important in another way, apart from grammar?
4. What are the two themes in the poem? Explain how time functions in the poem.
5. What is the tone of the poem? the mood? How are they achieved?
6. If literature helps us make sense of the world, of our experience, in what way do the rules about placement of adjectives accomplish this for the Vietnamese student?
7. Comment on the last two lines. The rules of English suggest that "nine" and "long" aren't coordinate, meaning that they aren't equal nor can they be separated by "and." Yet Teague deliberately pairs them this way in line 21. Why?