

Level A - Form 1 - Reading: Words in Context

Sample Question

Read the sentences. Then choose the best answer to the question.

Peter ordered a salad and a glass of juice. The waiter asked him what kind of dressing to put on the salad.

The word *dressing* as it is used here means

- A a mixture used for stuffing
- B the act of putting on clothes
- C a sauce that is added to a dish
- D something put on a wound

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Read this poem about a lonely house at night. Then do Numbers 1 through 5.

House Fear

Always—I tell you this they learned—
Always at night when they returned
To the lonely house from far away
To the lamps unlighted and fire gone gray,
5 They learned to rattle the lock and key
To give whatever might chance to be
Warning and time to be off in flight;
And preferring the out- to the in- door night,
They learned to leave the house-door wide
10 Until they had lit the lamp inside.

—Robert Frost

- Lines 6–7 in the poem talk about giving “warning and time to be off in flight.” As used in the poem, the word *flight* means almost the same as
 - escape
 - journey
 - pasttime
 - travel
- Line 3 of the poem refers to a “lonely house.” Which word has almost the same meaning as the word *lonely* as it is used in this line?
 - sad
 - empty
 - friendless
 - lost
- Line 5 uses the phrase “rattle the lock and key.” As used in this line, the word *rattle* has almost the same meaning as
 - alarm
 - frighten
 - jangle
 - tremble
- In line 6 of the poem, the word *chance* has almost the same meaning as the word
 - break
 - happen
 - luck
 - risk
- The phrase “fire gone gray” in line 4 has almost the same meaning as
 - ashes
 - bonfire
 - flames
 - not yet lighted

Here is an interview with Harry Houdini, America’s most famous magician. Read the interview. Then do Numbers 6 through 10.

Reporter: Is Houdini your real name?

Houdini: When I emigrated to the United States from Hungary, my name was Erik Seisz. When I was a circus performer, a magician at the circus fascinated me. I would stay watching him perform for so long that my family would
5 come looking for me. Once, the magician accidentally exposed how one of his tricks was done. I realized that I could reproduce these performances myself. That was when I selected the stage name “Houdini,” a variation on the name of the famous French magician Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin. I added the final *i* to make myself seem cultured, in the manner of an Italian.

10 **Reporter:** You have become known around the world for your sensational acts. You have amazed crowds by releasing yourself from ropes, handcuffs, submerged trunks, and other confinements. How did this happen?

Houdini: I met Martin Beck, a producer who persuaded me to specialize in escapes. My wife, Wilhelmina Rahner, took the name Beatrice Houdini and
15 became my assistant during performances. However, we couldn’t get contracts in the United States, so we traveled to Europe. I found some success there, and after just a year I was named one of the world’s leading performers.

Reporter: Would you describe some of the acts that made you famous?

Houdini: In a typical act, I was shackled with chains and placed in a trunk that
20 was locked, roped, weighted, and submerged underwater from a boat. I would escape and then swim to the boat. In another feat, I was suspended seventy-five feet above ground, where I freed himself from a straitjacket. My escape abilities stemmed partly from my physical strength and partly from my skill at manipulating locks.

25 **Reporter:** What did you do after you retired from performing?

Houdini: From 1916 to 1923, I produced motion pictures that displayed my feats. I have written about magic, too.

Reporter: After your mother died, people said that you tried to contact her through mediums. Were you successful?

30 **Houdini:** No, I wasn’t. I was disgusted to discover that many of the mediums used magician’s tricks to dupe the public. But I don’t think making contact with the dead is impossible. In fact, my wife and I plan to continue our search for an honest spiritualist after one of us dies. We have devised a secret ten-word code to use as a test.

6. Line 7 says that the stage name Houdini was a variation on the name of a famous French magician. What does the word *variation* mean?
- F insult to
 - G illegal use of
 - H English spelling of
 - J slightly different form of
7. Line 9 says that Houdini hoped his stage name would make him “seem cultured, in the manner of an Italian.” Which of these means the **opposite** of the word *cultured*?
- A happy
 - B crude
 - C grouchy
 - D intelligent
8. In the lines after line 19, Houdini describes one of his typical acts. Which of these means the **opposite** of the word *typical*?
- F worst
 - G rare
 - H best-known
 - J most comfortable
9. In line 31, Houdini talks about mediums who try to dupe the public. What does the word *dupe* mean?
- A fool
 - B serve
 - C live apart from
 - D perform in front of
10. In lines 33 and 34, Houdini says that he and his wife “have devised a secret ten-word code.” What does the word *devised* mean?
- F broke
 - G learned
 - H invented
 - J revealed

In this story, a young woman has reached a turning point in her life. Read the story. Then do Numbers 11 through 15.

The Talk with Dad

Mirella looked apprehensively at her watch. Eight-thirty. It was getting late—almost too late to talk to Dad, who dozed in front of the TV as he had every night for twenty years. No, she thought, she wouldn't procrastinate yet another night. Upstairs in her room, she twirled her dark curls around her finger again and again. She tried hard to ignore the knot that had formed in her stomach. Her father was a strident man, but she didn't want to hurt him. Certainly, she remembered things he'd said or done, and more regrettably, those he'd failed to do. But he was her father, and she had stayed with him, gladly taken care of him, and kept him company since Mother's death. Yet, in her father's eyes she was, at best, a tolerable replacement, walking in the shadow of her mother. She was never as smart, never as pretty, never as good a cook or housekeeper. In return for her loss, her father felt entitled to exploit Mirella, to use up her life. If she allowed him, he would take all of it, for as long as he would live. It was the unwritten family rule, discussed by no one but understood by all. Mirella's father had her firmly in his grip, as much with the familiar, dark scowl, that even now reduced her to a quaking child, as with his incessant demands on her.

As she looked around her room, she thought of Mother over and over again. The embroidered, lace-trimmed pillow on her bed, the ragged, mustard-colored bear, the porcelain ballerina. All of these things were daily reminders of the woman she would never see again. Yet the very sight of these things gave her a stinging feeling in her chest. She longed for the days when she could burst into Mother's room, unannounced, and sit at the foot of her bed. Mother would usually be folding clothes, putting them away, or straightening the figurines on the dresser, the one that had belonged to Grandma. Mirella wondered what Mother would think of Daniel. She was sure that she would approve.

Yet Mirella knew that to marry Daniel and live with him was, to her father, the ultimate act of treason. She would never abandon her father, but she could no more imagine a life without Daniel than she could cease to breathe. Mirella could hear her father's footsteps below, then a shift in the TV's drone. With all the courage she could muster, Mirella opened the door, took a deep breath, and marched down the stairs, already feeling like a bride.

11. In the first line of this passage, Mirella looks “apprehensively at her watch.” Which of these means the **opposite** of *apprehensively*?
- A secretly
 - B slowly
 - C joyfully
 - D angrily
12. In line 3, Mirella decides “she wouldn’t procrastinate yet another night.” What does the word *procrastinate* mean?
- F to go to bed
 - G to put something off
 - H to give up something you love
 - J to allow someone to get away with something
13. In line 6, the narrator calls Mirella’s father “a strident man.” What does the word *strident* mean?
- A lonely
 - B unusual
 - C polite but unloving
 - D harsh and demanding
14. In line 10, Mirella says that her father thinks of her as “a tolerable replacement” for her mother. What does the word *tolerable* mean?
- F delightful
 - G bearable
 - H temporary
 - J new
15. In line 27, Mirella says that she “would never abandon her father.” Which word is the **opposite** of *abandon*?
- A leave
 - B hurt
 - C yell at
 - D stay with

For Numbers 16 through 20, find the word that best completes the sentence.

16. Mr. Ramirez will not tolerate a _____ employee. Which of these words refers to a lazy employee?
- F shoddy
 - G shiftless
 - H shortcoming
 - J scrupulous
17. Early American leaders struggled to unify the country's _____ subcultures. Which of these words means that the subcultures were not similar to one another?
- A disparaging
 - B differentiate
 - C disparate
 - D desperate
18. The company _____ its fiftieth year in business. Which of these words means that the company celebrated its anniversary?
- F commemorated
 - G deliberated
 - H ignored
 - J consolidated
19. The judge dismissed the argument as _____. Which of these words means that the argument was unimportant?
- A irritable
 - B irregular
 - C irrelevant
 - D irrepressible
20. Ben hoped to _____ his neighbors to let him borrow their car. Which of these words means that Ben wanted to convince his neighbors?
- F dissuade
 - G discern
 - H permit
 - J persuade