DISTANCE LEARNING PACKET

8TH GRADE

ELA
Denotation and Connotation

Getting the Idea

**Denotation** is a word's dictionary definition, or what it literally means. **Connotation** is the emotional weight a word carries, or the set of associations implied by the word. Read the sentences below.

Roxanne has always been thrifty. When she wants something, she holds out until it goes on sale.

Now suppose we substitute the word *cheap* in this sentence. Do you look at Roxanne a little differently now? Both words have the same denotation. They describe people who do not spend money easily. However, *thrifty* has the added meaning of someone who manages money wisely. The word *cheap* connotes stinginess. Describing Roxanne as cheap presents her in a negative light. In fact, words are said to have neutral, positive, and negative connotations. The words below all have the denotation of "large in size," but think about their associated meanings as you read these sentences.

- The **big** mansion had been turned into a museum.
- The **grand** mansion had been turned into a museum.
- The **oversized** mansion had been turned into a museum.

The word *big* is neutral. It has neither positive nor negative connotations. The word *grand* is positive. It connotes a sense of magnificence. The word *oversized* is negative. It connotes excess. Knowing words that have similar denotations but different connotations will give you a deeper understanding of each of those words. When you choose a word in your writing, be conscious of the emotional weight it carries. If you use the word *oversized*, for instance, make sure that you mean to convey something negative. Perhaps *grand* is a better choice for the context.
The chart below contains some more examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A word whose denotation is...</th>
<th>might be a word with a positive connotation, such as...</th>
<th>or it might be a word with a negative connotation, such as...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eager to succeed</td>
<td>ambitious, determined, motivated</td>
<td>pushy, ruthless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wanting to know</td>
<td>curious, inquisitive</td>
<td>nosy, prying, meddlesome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certain of success</td>
<td>self-assured, secure, confident</td>
<td>arrogant, cocky, smug</td>
</tr>
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Authors choose their words carefully, and these words can influence your reaction to their texts and even your point of view. Think about the denotation and connotation of words when you read and write.

**Thinking It Through**

Read the following paragraph, and then answer the question that follows.

Beryl Markham (1902-1986) was a pioneer in the field of aviation. One of her most well-known feats was a flight, by herself, across the North Atlantic Sea; some might think, however, that this was a reckless stunt. Nevertheless, she was also an accomplished writer. She was the author of *West with the Night*, among other books.

Which words create BOTH a positive and a negative image of Markham?

Think about the meanings of the words and their associations.
Coached Example

Read the passage and answer the questions.

Carolyn opened her eyes and took a deep breath. Suddenly, she sat straight up in bed, her face beaming. There was no mistaking the odor. Her mother was baking her incredibly wonderful, ever-delectable, super-duperly scrumptious banana nut bread. Carolyn threw back the covers and slid her feet into her fluffy purple slippers. If she hurried, she could grab the first slice while it was still warm. She found her mom in the kitchen, reading a magazine. Carolyn ran up and wrapped her arms around her mother’s shoulders. “Thank you!” Her mom smiled and took a sip of her coffee. “It’s just a little treat to thank you for babysitting your brother this week.”

1. Which of the following BEST describes the image created by the word beaming?
   A. Carolyn is satisfied.
   B. Carolyn is full of joy.
   C. Carolyn is surprised.
   D. Carolyn is very hungry.

   The word beaming is associated with the brightness of the sun.

2. Which word should the author use in place of odor to create the MOST positive connotation?
   A. smell
   B. whiff
   C. stench
   D. aroma

   Choose the word that best indicates that the odor of the banana bread is pleasant.
Lesson Practice

Use the Reading Guide to help you understand the passage.

The Everglades—Are They Forever?

A kind of ecosystem found only in the United States, Florida's Everglades are teeming with life. Covering about four thousand square miles of freshwater marsh, rivers, and swamps, the Everglades stretch endlessly in tall, lush grass. Growing more than six feet tall and with razor-sharp edges, the grass camouflages much of the area's abundant wildlife.

In all, roughly 850 species of animals and over 900 kinds of plants call the Florida Everglades home. Alligators slide in a leisurely way through the swamps. Graceful birds soar through the air. Tiny frogs leap from lily pad to lily pad, croaking loudly in unified harmony.

"The Everglades is an area unique both for its location and for its diversity," says Sidney Goldstein, a scientist who's been studying the area. "From a scientific standpoint, it's one of the most amazing places I've ever been."

Sadly, that place is now in jeopardy. After years of abuse—like rampant pollution—the Everglades, and all its natural life, have begun, slowly, to die. The area's snake population illustrates this trend. Over recent years, both poisonous and nonpoisonous snake populations have declined drastically.

While people now appreciate the Everglades, early settlers thought the area was worthless. They certainly treated it that way. Unaware or unconcerned about the area's delicate balance, they immediately set out to dry some of the area's marshes. In the 1920s, engineers from the U.S. government forced much of the Everglades' water into one straight path. Then, they built dikes and canals to control flooding and direct the area's water to choice locations. Ironically, those efforts would have the opposite effect: they would deprive the Everglades of its water—in some places, entirely.

Without its natural water supply—in its natural swamps and marshes—the Everglades began to shrink. Without water to survive, the area's plant and animal populations have started to shrink as well. Certain kinds of alligators, sparrows, and wading birds—like pelicans—have already vanished. The question now is, "Can the Everglades be saved?"
Most Floridians are prepared to fight to save their Everglades. And they've come up with all kinds of original solutions. Some have suggested raising roads and creating overpasses so water can flow, undisturbed, beneath them. Others have suggested removing the area's canals and cracking down on polluters. One group, the Everglades Foundation, has taken on one particularly big polluter: the sugarcane industry. The fertilizers sugarcane growers use contain phosphorus, a chemical that runs off into water and eventually kills native plants. The foundation is determined to get the sugar growers to cut back production so the plants in the Everglades can survive.

So far, the Everglades Foundation has succeeded. After collecting 2.5 million signatures, the foundation persuaded Florida voters to pass a law requiring polluters to pay for the damage they cause in the Everglades. Instead of paying, one sugar company sold back fifty thousand acres to the state so that the land could be restored to the Everglades.

Now, in that area, water runs naturally again. And the Everglades' plants and animals have reason to return. With luck, these efforts are just a start.
Answer the following questions.

1. Which replacement for the word *reeling* in paragraph 1 carries a negative connotation?
   A. crowded
   B. abundant
   C. abounding
   D. full

2. The author uses the word *leisurely* in paragraph 2 to suggest that the alligators are
   A. lazy.
   B. deliberate.
   C. relaxed.
   D. sluggish.

3. What feeling do you get from the word *harmony* in paragraph 2?
   A. The croaking is a little annoying.
   B. The frogs croak day and night.
   C. The frogs make beautiful music.
   D. The croaking can barely be heard.

4. To create the MOST positive connotation, the author should replace the word *appreciate* in paragraph 5 with
   A. value.
   B. regard.
   C. respect.
   D. treasure.

5. Explain the difference between being *unaware* and *unconcerned*. Which one has the MORE negative connotation? Use examples from the passage in your response.
This passage contains mistakes. Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

**Life in the Mountains**

(1) The Appalachian region of the United States stretches through several states, from the northeast to the central/southern region. (2) There are no exact boundaries, but the area covers approximately two hundred thousand square miles. (3) This beautiful area of land embodies a culture all its own, and it stands as a uniquely American entity. (4) The Appalachian mountains largely isolate people in some areas of the region from other parts of society. (5) They are also of great importance to the people and their way of life.

(6) Many of the people in the area trace their roots to the wave of European immigrants who settled in the mountains in the 1700s. (7) They were mostly from Scotland, Germany, and England. (8) In the centuries that followed, immigrants from other countries joined them. (9) They came to Appalachia looking for land, freedom, and opportunities. (10) They discovered a lush landscape rich in natural resources. (11) The area had an abundance of coal that provided jobs for many settlers. (12) Unfortunately, strip mining turned out being environmentally disastrous. (13) If they had only considered their prospects, they might not have worked for the mining companies.

(14) Many things about the region have changed. (15) But the people of Appalachia retain their own traditions, music, dialect, and foods. (16) For many, the Appalachian region is the embodiment of home, the American way of life, and an ideal for the way life should be.
1. Which of these sentences is conditional?
   A. "Many things about the region have changed."
   B. "If they had only considered their prospects, they might not have worked for the mining companies."
   C. "There are no exact boundaries, but the area covers approximately two hundred thousand square miles."
   D. "This beautiful area of land embodies a culture all its own, and it stands as a uniquely American entity."

2. Read this sentence from the passage.
   The Appalachian mountains largely isolate people in some areas of the region from other parts of society.
   Which word in this sentence needs to be capitalized?
   A. mountains
   B. people
   C. region
   D. society

3. What is the MOST LIKELY meaning of the word retain in sentence 15?
   A. preserve
   B. reject
   C. forget
   D. share

4. In sentence 16, the root word of embodiment is
   A. em
   B. ment
   C. body
   D. bod

5. The author uses the word lush in sentence 10 to help you visualize an area that is
   A. covered with fresh snow.
   B. surrounded by black cliffs.
   C. in the heart of the desert.
   D. filled with trees and flowers.
6. On the lines below, write sentence 12 correctly.
This passage contains mistakes. Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

(1) Our school needs to offer more language classes. (2) Presently, students can only choose between French and Spanish. (3) While these are interesting and valuable languages, so are German, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Hebrew, and other languages from around the world. (4) Our school has students that come from many different cultures and backgrounds. (5) Why should they not have the opportunity to learn languages other than French and Spanish? (6) Offering a wide variety of foreign language classes will encourage students to learn not only more about their own backgrounds, but also about others.

(7) Learned foreign languages is not only important to us as students now. (8) It can enhance the quality of our lives in the future. (9) Many jobs require that their employees speak more than one language. (10) Even if it's not a requirement, it is certainly an advantage. (11) Being multilingual may help one find a rewarding job. (12) In addition, travel is enjoyed by millions of people around the world. (13) We can get from the United States to Europe or Africa in hours. (14) If technology keeps developing the way it has, there's a good chance that we'll be traveling even faster twenty years from now. (15) Think how much easier it will be to visit other countries if we speak their languages. (16) The people are likely to be more receptive to us when they see that we want to truly communicate with them. (17) Foreign languages enrich our lives if we are willing to embrace them.
7. Which is the BEST way to revise sentence 12?
   A. In addition, millions of people traveling around enjoy the world.
   B. In addition, travel is by millions of people enjoyed around the world.
   C. In addition, travel around the world is enjoyed by millions of people.
   D. In addition, millions of people around the world enjoy traveling.

9. Which is the correct way to write sentence 7?
   A. Learn foreign languages is not only important to us as students now.
   B. Learning foreign languages is not only important to us as students now.
   C. To learn foreign languages is not only important to us as students now.
   D. Learns foreign languages is not only important to us as students now.

8. Read this sentence from the passage.
   If technology keeps developing the way it has there's a good chance that we'll be traveling even faster twenty years from now.
   Which punctuation mark does this sentence need?
   A. an ellipsis mark after developing
   B. a dash after technology
   C. a comma after has
   D. a comma after faster

10. Read this sentence from the passage.
    Being multilingual may help one find a rewarding job.
    As used in the sentence, what does the word multilingual mean?
    A. speaking many languages
    B. speaking two languages
    C. speaking only one language
    D. bad at learning languages
11. Read this sentence from the passage.

    Foreign languages enrich our lives if we are willing to embrace them.

In this sentence, the word enrich suggests that foreign languages
A. can make us rich in the future.
B. add meaning to our lives.
C. make our lives easier.
D. make us smarter.

12. What is the meaning of the word receptive in sentence 16? How does context help you figure it out?
When you analyze a text, you interpret what you have read and state your opinions and conclusions about the content. To support your analysis, it’s important to cite **textual evidence** that indicates why your interpretation is reasonable and accurate. Textual evidence consists of facts, details, and examples that you cite or quote directly from the text to support your opinions and conclusions. Read the paragraph below.

The driving force behind transportation has always been the desire to make life easier and more profitable. Throughout history, inventive minds have wrestled with the challenge of moving people and goods faster and more comfortably in order to boost a society’s trading and selling power. Meeting this challenge has led to the development of larger and faster ships that were first powered by wind pushing sails, then by steam, and finally by oil. On land, wagons led to trains that were first powered by coal and steam and then by diesel fuel. At last, in search of speed, people invented airplanes, which now have technology that has made every part of the planet reachable within hours.

When you analyze this paragraph, you might infer that new technology in transportation is developed to allow people to go farther and faster. To support this claim, you could refer to details in the second sentence. You could also cite the detail about development in ship power and, in the last sentence, the statement that airplane travel has made it possible to travel long distances in hours.

When citing textual evidence, be sure to select details that strongly support your analysis or inference. You may want to quote the text exactly by stating “According to the text” or “The author says” and then citing the text in quotation marks. Then explain how the textual evidence supports your analysis. For example:
Technological advances in transportation have resulted from the need to go farther and faster. The author claims that this need for speed is nothing new. According to the text, the desire for faster travel spurred the development of ships “that were first powered by wind pushing sails, then by steam, and finally by oil.” Airplanes greatly sped up travel and, as a result, “made every part of the planet reachable within hours.”

The reader supported the response stated in the first sentence of the above paragraph with textual evidence from the quoted paragraph near the top of this page. This evidence illustrates the purpose behind technological advances in transportation.

Thinking It Through

Read the following paragraph, and then answer the question that follows.

In the twentieth century, the airplane made it possible for people and goods to be transported worldwide in a short period of time. While air travel remains the fastest way to travel long distances, airports and airplanes are now overcrowded and less comfortable. A new version of an old vehicle may provide an alternative: high-speed trains called maglevs. Germany and Japan are developing maglevs that use electromagnets to propel the train along a guideway instead of on steel tracks. The trains themselves have no engines and so are quiet as they speed along. The magnetic field raises the train as it travels so that it floats on air above the guideway. The trains can travel up to 310 miles per hour, which is twice as fast as a conventional train and compares to a passenger jet that can fly at about 565 miles per hour. A maglev train could go from Paris, France, to Rome, Italy, in a little more than two hours. Maglevs may be the future of transportation for those who no longer find air travel convenient.

Circle the sentence that BEST supports the argument that maglevs could be an alternative to air travel. Which details support the claim that maglevs improve upon older technology?

Which facts illustrate how maglevs are different from conventional trains?

Write an objective summary of the paragraph in your own words and share it with a partner.
The First Working Submarine

The first practical idea for an underwater craft was proposed in 1578. British mathematician William Bourne wrote about a craft covered with waterproof leather and propelled with oars. But it was Cornelius Drebbel who actually built the world's first known working submarine in the 1620s. The vessel was probably based on a rowboat with tall sides and decking installed over the top to join the sides. Drebbel's craft was similar to Bourne's proposal. It was covered completely with greased leather for waterproofing and was powered by four oars protruding through leather-sealed holes in the sides. There was also a waterproof hatch near the center. Tubes held above the surface of the water by flotation devices supplied air to the occupants. Under the oarsmen's seats, Drebbel installed large pigskin bladders connected to pipes that extended outside the vessel. Ropes tied the bladders closed until the occupants were ready to submerge. When the ropes were untied, the bladders filled to submerge the vessel ten to fifteen feet. To surface, the crew compressed the bladders to force the water out.

1. Which sentence BEST summarizes the text?

A. Both William Bourne and Cornelius Drebble were important inventors.
B. Bladders helped to submerge and surface the first working submarine.
C. Cornelius Drebble built the first working submarine.
D. A rowboat was used as the basis for building the first submarine.

2. Which detail from the passage supports the claim that Drebbe's submarine included ideas proposed by Bourne?

A. "The vessel was probably based on a rowboat with tall sides and decking installed over the top..."
B. "It was covered completely with greased leather for waterproofing..."
C. "There was also a waterproof hatch near the center."
D. "Under the oarsmen's seats, Drebble installed large pigskin bladders..."
Smartphones and Their Capabilities

The first smartphones developed when electronics companies began to combine and improve upon the capabilities of two already existing devices, the cell phone and the personal digital assistant (PDA). The IBM Simon is recognized as the first smartphone. It was designed in 1992 and was released to the public two years later. This mobile phone had many features of a PDA, including a calendar, an address book, a calculator, e-mail, simple games, and the ability to send and receive facsimiles. Over the next decade or so, other companies released similar devices. As technology developed, electronics companies included additional features such as a digital camera, text messaging, and video games on their devices in an effort to gain market share.

Early smartphones required the user to interact with the device by using a stylus, keypad, or small keyboard. That changed when the original Apple iPhone was released in 2007. The iPhone was the first widely used smartphone to employ touchscreen technology. Touchscreen technology allowed a larger screen area because a keypad was no longer necessary. This type of user interface soon appeared for nearly all of the most popular smartphones. Although Apple dominated the early smartphone market, competitors such as Samsung released touchscreen devices that greatly reduced Apple’s market share.

Since 2007, technology related to the physical components of smartphones as well as to their operating systems and the networks on which they function has developed greatly. Today’s smartphones combine the communication capabilities of the cell phone and the PDA, including voice calling, texting, and e-mail. They also serve many other functions. They usually include a digital camera that takes photos and records videos, and they can store these media along with digital music. Smartphones also allow users to download video games. These additional functions for personal entertainment are important to many people. The smartphone has become so advanced that many see it as a miniature computer.
Through access to the Internet as well as by use of third-party software applications (apps), the capabilities of today’s smartphones as small computers for personal and business use have expanded tremendously. Smartphone users can browse the Internet for most information that is accessible through a personal computer. Internet access also allows smartphone users to chat via instant messaging services. Users can interact through various social media services. Also, some traditional uses for personal computers, such as viewing and editing documents, can be performed on many smartphones.

Already there are apps for a variety of functions that would have been unthinkable to perform on a smartphone when the IBM Simon appeared. These include GPS navigation capability as well as control of many remote programmable devices such as home electronics and appliances. A smartphone user can set up apps to receive electronic newsfeeds and stay abreast of current events. Apps also allow smartphone users to listen to radio stations or view television programs or videos. Personal banking, including scanning of checks for deposit, can be done through smartphone apps. Also, credit card readers can be attached to smartphones so that vendors or service providers can accept customer payments through a smartphone app. Some smartphones can even display an image to be scanned from the screen as a method of payment for purchases such as concert or movie tickets.

These are just some of the constantly developing uses for today’s smartphones. As the operating systems of these devices and the communications networks on which they function improve further, the capabilities of smartphones may be as unlimited as the imaginations of the developers of apps.
Answer the following questions.

1. Which sentence BEST summarizes paragraph 2?
   A. Apple's iPhone was the first smartphone to use touchscreen technology.
   B. Apple dominated the smartphone market when it introduced the iPhone.
   C. Early versions of smartphones required a stylus, keypad, or keyboard.
   D. The smartphone market became highly competitive with the introduction of touchscreen technology.

3. What text evidence supports the claim that smartphones are important to people for personal entertainment?
   A. "Touchscreen technology allowed a larger screen area because a keypad was no longer necessary."
   B. "Personal banking, including scanning of checks for deposit, can be done through smartphone apps."
   C. "They usually include a digital camera that takes photos and records videos, and they can store these media along with digital music."
   D. "Today's smartphones combine the communication capabilities of the cell phone and the PDA, including voice calling, texting, and e-mail."

4. Which claim does the information in the passage BEST support?
   A. The market for smartphones will peak and begin to decline.
   B. Smartphones will keep changing and become more valued.
   C. Smartphones are limited in the types of functions they can provide.
   D. New devices will replace smartphones.

5. Explain why the functions of today's smartphones would have been unthinkable for the first smartphone in the 1990s. Cite two examples from the passage as evidence.
Use the Reading Guide to help you understand the passage.

**Reading Guide**

Why does the author say a dictionary is like a history book?

What is the author's main claim in this passage? How does the author support the claim?

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**English: A Living Language**

by Greta Anderson

Do you know of a good history book? Try the dictionary! Hidden in English language is the history of the island where it was born: England. The language also hints at the many groups of people English-speakers have mingled with over the years and the evolution of American English. In most dictionaries, you can find clues about the history of England by discovering how words found their way into the English language. In the word entries, abbreviations such as OE (Old English), Gk (Greek), and Sp (Spanish) tell from what language each word came.

**England—Where It All Began**

For centuries (from 43 to 410 CE, to be exact), Rome reigned over England and its inhabitants, the Celts. The Romans built some roads, towns, and army camps in England, but their Latin language had little impact on the vocabulary of the Celtic people they ruled.

With the eventual departure of the Romans, Germanic tribes from Europe ventured across the North Sea in search of land and riches. After years of fierce skirmishing, the newcomers pushed the Celts north and west, to Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, leaving England to become the new home of the Germanic tribes, known as the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes. The memory of the Celts remains, however, in a few words, such as shamrock, plaid, and gull, and it lingers in many place names, including the Thames River, Dover, and York.

The languages of the conquering Germanic tribes gave us most of our basic words today. For example, a, and, the, is, have, go, see, get, to, for, and of are all Anglo-Saxon words. In fact, most of our monosyllabic words have German roots: man, stink, breathe, work, and ground are just a few. While modern English retains much of the Anglo-Saxon language, its written language, consisting of runes, or pictures, did not endure.

In the following centuries, Christian missionaries arrived on the island, bringing the Latin language and writing system to England once again. The Anglo-Saxons eventually adopted the alphabet used by the missionaries. This was the Roman alphabet, the same alphabet we use today.
In 1066, the Normans sailed across the English Channel from France to claim England as theirs. William the Conqueror and the rest of the Norman people spoke French, which at the time was very similar to Latin. The Normans made their conquest of England complete by forcing anyone who interacted with them (mostly royals and wealthy landowners) to use the French language. Words related to governance, such as parliament, attorney, and jail, come from the language of the Normans. The Normans also brought their eating habits with them, along with related words such as beef, poultry, and bacon.

While the Norman rulers set about governing England, the ordinary French soldiers began to assimilate and look for wives. The women they married continued to speak the language we call Old English, while men continued to speak their native French. Gradually, the languages combined to create what is known as Middle English, a mix of words from French and old English.

Technology influenced the English language when, in the mid-1400s, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in Germany. Several years later, William Caxton introduced the press to England. Broader access to the printed word helped smooth over some of the irregularities in English, including variations in spelling.

**American English—A Blend of Languages**

Shortly after the arrival of the printing press came the Age of Exploration, during which Europeans came in contact with the Americas. While the English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Dutch all tried to control parts of the “New World,” England ultimately dominated most of colonial North America. English became the talk of the land, although the language was enriched over time by many other languages and cultures.

Upon first arriving in North America, the Europeans found many Native American tribes already living on the huge continent. Many of their words, such as chocolate, tomato, and potato, and place names such as Massachusetts and Arkansas, became part of the English vocabulary.

Spanish influences can be heard in words such as buffalo, ranch, barbecue, California, and Texas. America’s melting pot has led to a complex language stew. The English language contains hundreds of thousands of words, and it’s still growing. As it grows, it adds new chapters to the rich history of the language.
Answer the following questions.

6. What claim does the author make in the first paragraph?
   A. You should read a good history book to learn more about England.
   B. Words provide clues about the history of England and its language.
   C. The English discovered many new words by mingling.
   D. We are unsure of how many words found their way into English.

7. What claim about English does the author make in the fourth paragraph?
   A. English is heavily influenced by the early Celts.
   B. Germanic tribes pushed the Celts north and west, to Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.
   C. Modern English retains much of the Anglo-Saxon language, including its written language.
   D. The languages of the conquering Germanic tribes gave us most of our basic words today.

8. What evidence does the author provide to support the claim in the fourth paragraph?
   A. English has many words based on the Celtic language, including shamrock, plaid, and gull.
   B. Germanic tribes from Europe ventured across the North Sea in search of land and riches.
   C. Many basic words in English, such as a, and, the, is, have, go, see, get, to, for, and of, are Anglo-Saxon words.
   D. The Germanic tribes pushed the Celts north and west, to Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.
9. What claim can you make based on the evidence in the sixth paragraph of the passage?

A. The Norman Conquest had a strong influence on the history of the English language.
B. English had a strong influence on the history of the Norman language.
C. The Norman Conquest made England a French-speaking country for a period of time.
D. The Normans were forced to speak Old English after the Norman Conquest.

10. Read the following sentence from the passage.

*English became the talk of the land, although the language was enriched over time by many other languages and cultures.*

What evidence best supports this claim?

A. While the English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Dutch all tried to control parts of the “New World,” England ultimately dominated most of colonial America.
B. Upon first arriving in North America, the Europeans found many Native American tribes already living on the huge continent.
C. Spanish influences can be heard in words such as *buffalo, ranch, barbecue, California,* and *Texas.*
D. The English language contains hundreds of thousands of words, and it’s still growing.

11. What claim does the author make about the influence of technology on the English language and what evidence supports the claim?
Main Idea and Supporting Details

Getting the Idea

The **main idea** is the central message a writer is trying to communicate with a text. The main idea may be directly stated or implied. To figure out the main idea of a passage, first read it all the way through. Then, ask yourself what the passage is mostly about. For example, the main idea of a magazine article might be: *Regular exercise has many health benefits.* Authors develop main ideas with **supporting details.** These include examples, reasons, facts, and descriptions. These details back up the main idea and are presented in the supporting paragraphs that follow the introduction.

Each supporting paragraph contributes to the main idea of the passage. The writer uses these paragraphs to explain the main idea expressed in the first paragraph. Each paragraph has its own central idea, usually expressed in a **topic sentence.** The topic sentence is usually near the beginning of a paragraph, though it may also fall at the end. For example, this is a supporting paragraph in a magazine article on exercise.

> Research indicates that exercise may prevent certain diseases or reduce their symptoms. For example, people who exercise regularly lower their risk of developing heart problems. Arthritis sufferers can reduce their joint damage and pain. Exercise may help people with asthma have fewer attacks and decrease their need for medication.

The first sentence of this paragraph is the topic sentence. It clearly states the main idea of the paragraph, which is that exercise can prevent or lessen disease. The author supports it by providing specific examples of the benefits of exercise: lowered risk of heart disease, less pain for arthritis sufferers, fewer attacks for asthma sufferers.
Sometimes main ideas are not directly stated in a paragraph. For example, read this paragraph.

First, the walls may need to be primed before painting. The floor areas must be covered with a tarp or plastic to protect them from spills and paint splatter. In addition, wall borders must be taped as necessary, particularly when using different colors in one room. The painter should also wear protective clothing and ventilate the room.

This paragraph does not have a topic sentence. However, based on the supporting details in the paragraph, the implied topic sentence might be something like this: Painting requires a great deal of preparation.

Some texts may have more than one main idea. For example, an author may decide to write an article in which she describes the benefits of exercise. In that same article, she may also discuss the importance of a healthy diet.

**Thinking It Through**

Read the following paragraph, and then answer the question that follows.

The ancient Romans and Greeks used puppets for entertainment. They did not necessarily look like the puppets we might see today. Some were held on strings, but some were moved with sticks. The rulers of the Ottoman Empire had a favorite puppet with a strange name: Karagiozis. In medieval Europe, puppets were used in plays. Puppets were also popular in Asia. The Japanese called them Bunraku; actors appeared on stage with the puppets, actually controlling them with their hands. In Russia, puppets were so important that a State Central Puppet Theater was started for their performances.

Write a topic sentence for this paragraph.

Think about what the supporting details in the paragraph are mainly about.
Coached Example

Read the passage and answer the questions.

excerpted and adapted from

The Declaration of Independence

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. —That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed, —That whenever any Form of Government begins to destroy these rights, it is the further Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on solid principles and organizing its powers in a way that will be most likely to ensure their Safety and Happiness. Caution, indeed, will dictate that long-established Governments should not be changed for small, temporary causes; and accordingly all experience has shown that mankind is more likely to suffer under such evils than to live more correctly and abolish the government with which they have grown too comfortable.

1. What is the main idea of the passage?
   A. All men are created equal and have certain rights.
   B. People have a right to abolish a government that is abusive and violates their rights.
   C. Most people will tolerate injustices as long as they are not excessive.
   D. Governments should not be abolished for minor or passing issues.

   Do not focus on supporting details.
   Think of what the passage as a whole is mainly about.

2. Which of the following ideas is a supporting detail in the passage?
   A. Some people may not be satisfied with their government.
   B. Established governments should not be replaced by small, temporary ones.
   C. People have the right to elect their leaders.
   D. People may become too comfortable with their government.

   Choose the sentence most directly connected to the main idea.
Lesson Practice

Use the Reading Guide to help you understand the passage.

**Mae C. Jemison: A True Space Pioneer**

Space exploration has fascinated people throughout the world for decades. Many children grow up dreaming of becoming astronauts one day. However, only an elite and small group of individuals have ever realized that dream. One of these individuals is Mae C. Jemison. Through hard work and determination, rising above a humble background, she became the first African American woman to travel into space.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has had many milestones since its establishment in 1958. At first, NASA only admitted white men into their astronaut program. Then, in 1967, Robert H. Lawrence, Jr., became the first African American member of NASA, although he passed away before making it to space. In 1983, Sally Ride was the first American woman in space. Then, in 1987, Jemison became the first African American woman to be selected for the astronaut training program. On September 12, 1992, she launched into space and into history.

Jemison was born in Decatur, Alabama, on October 17, 1956, but was raised in Chicago, Illinois, from the age of three. Her mother was an elementary school teacher and her father was a carpenter and a roofer. One could say that Jemison’s journey to her impressive achievements began in kindergarten, when she realized that she wanted to be a scientist. From that day forward, she devoted herself wholeheartedly to science.

After graduating from high school in 1973, she was accepted to Stanford, one of the most prestigious universities in the country. She graduated in 1977 with a degree in chemical engineering and a Bachelor of Arts degree in African and Afro-American Studies. Jemison was then accepted into Cornell University, another prominent school, where she earned a medical degree in 1981.

Although college and medical school demand an enormous amount of time and work from students, Jemison made time for important activities outside of school. She visited Kenya and Cuba and studied there. She also worked at a Cambodian refugee
camp in Thailand. In 1979, she organized a citywide health and law fair in New York. Jemison also found time to pursue interests not related to school. She was a trained dancer and performed in stage productions.

After medical school, Jemison worked as a General Practitioner in California. Then, she joined the Peace Corps, acting as the Area Peace Corps Medical Officer for West Africa for two and a half years. Her varied duties included supervising the medical staff, teaching, developing a teaching curriculum for medical students, and implementing the guidelines she invented. In the early 1980s, she worked on preventing the spread of hepatitis in Africa.

When she returned to the United States in 1985, Jemison decided to fulfill a lifelong dream. She applied to the astronaut program. It took two years, but in 1987, Jemison was one of fifteen selected from a field of approximately two thousand applicants. After training for a year, she officially became an astronaut. Her first position was as a representative at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida. In 1992, she was chosen to be one of the astronauts on the space shuttle Endeavour. She was responsible for conducting science experiments on the shuttle. On September 12, 1992, the Endeavour lifted off, carrying Jemison and six other astronauts. They spent eight days in space, completing 127 orbits of Earth.

Jemison proved that the sky is literally the limit when one has intelligence, ambition, and dedication to one's work. Since retiring from NASA, she continues to add to her long list of professional and personal accomplishments. She is the founder of the Jemison Group, which supports technological research and innovation. One of the Jemison Group's projects is an international youth space camp. She is also a TV host, for the Discovery Channel's World of Wonders program. Her life continues to be about encouraging others to follow their dreams.
Answer the following questions.

1. Which sentence in paragraph 1 BEST states the main idea of the passage?
   A. “One of these individuals is Mae C. Jemison.”
   B. “Space exploration has fascinated people throughout the world for decades.”
   C. “However, only an elite and small group of individuals have ever realized that dream.”
   D. “Through hard work and determination, rising above a humble background, she became the first African American woman to travel into space.”

2. What is a supporting detail in paragraph 2?
   A. Sally Ride’s becoming the first American woman in space
   B. Robert Lawrence’s death
   C. the reasons for establishing NASA
   D. NASA’s acceptance of white men into the space program

3. What is the implied main idea of paragraph 4?
   A. Astronauts are required to have medical degrees.
   B. It is not easy to be accepted into Stanford or Cornell.
   C. Jemison was an excellent student.
   D. Jemison attended high school.

4. Which supporting detail BEST shows that it is not easy to become an astronaut?
   A. Jemison’s first position was at the Kennedy Space Center.
   B. Science mission specialists conduct experiments aboard space shuttles.
   C. In 1986, Sally Ride became the first American woman in space.
   D. Only fifteen applicants out of two thousand were chosen for the astronaut program in 1987.

5. Which is the topic sentence in paragraph 5, and how does the author support it? Use examples from the passage in your response.