

WORD ANALYSIS STRAND

1

READERS ENCOUNTER NEW WORDS ALMOST EVERY TIME THEY PICK UP A BOOK. YOU PROBABLY ARE WISHING FOR A MAGIC LIST OF WORDS YOU CAN MEMORIZE, BUT THERE IS NO SUCH LIST. NONE OF US CAN KNOW IN ADVANCE WHICH WORDS WILL APPEAR ON THE TEST. FOR THAT REASON, YOU NEED TO LEARN STRATEGIES FOR APPROACHING UNFAMILIAR WORDS. YOU WILL USE THESE SAME STRATEGIES YOUR WHOLE LIFE.

PEOPLE WITH GOOD VOCABULARIES LIKE WORDS. IT WORKS THE OTHER WAY, TOO. PEOPLE WHO LIKE WORDS BUILD GOOD VOCABULARIES. THESE PEOPLE LIKE THE SOUNDS OF WORDS, THE MEANINGS OF WORDS, EVEN STORIES ABOUT WORDS. THEY LIKE TO TEAR WORDS APART AND PUT THEM BACK TOGETHER AGAIN. OTHERS LIKE TO HUNT FOR HIDDEN MEANINGS AS WELL AS LITERAL MEANINGS. THEY FIND SIMILARITIES IN WORDS FROM OTHER LANGUAGES. THEY KNOW THE MEANINGS OF ROOTS, PREFIXES, AND SUFFIXES. THEY KNOW HOW TO GUESS THE MEANING OF WORDS FROM THE CONTEXT OF WHAT THEY ARE READING. YOU, TOO, CAN BUILD THESE SKILLS AND HAVE SOME FUN WITH WORDS. YOU CAN FIND A LITTLE ‘THRILL OF THE HUNT’ IN TRYING SOME OF THESE ACTIVITIES.

14 Word Analysis Strand

THE CAHSEE WILL TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF TWO WORD ANALYSIS STANDARDS. THEY ARE:

- WA 1.1 Identify and use the literal and figurative meanings of words and understand word derivations. [5 questions]
- WA 1.2 Distinguish between the denotative and connotative meanings of words and interpret the connotative power of words. [2 questions]

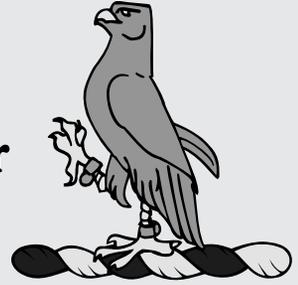
THE CAHSEE USES 7 MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS TO TEST THESE STANDARDS.

THE QUESTIONS ASK YOU TO EXPLAIN WHAT A PARTICULAR WORD OR PHRASE MEANS. IF YOU AREN'T ALREADY FAMILIAR WITH THE WORD OR PHRASE, YOU WILL NEED TO APPLY YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF WORD ORIGINS OR USE CONTEXT CLUES TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THEY MEAN. SEE HOW YOU DO ON THE FOLLOWING RELEASED QUESTION FROM A PREVIOUS ADMINISTRATION OF THE CAHSEE.

DISCOVERING MEANING

The passage “On Becoming a Falconer” and the question that follows it appeared previously on the CAHSEE. Read the passage and answer the question. Tips for finding the correct answer are provided after the question.

On Becoming a Falconer



Falconry, an ancient sport popular in the days of medieval royalty and jousting tournaments, is still practiced by dedicated enthusiasts around the world. Falconers work with predatory birds ranging from expert fliers, like the peregrine falcon, to less spectacular hawks, such as the redtail. Regardless of the species, training is the most important part of falconry. But it can be frustrating; so, you must be very patient.

The first step in training your falcon is to establish her trust in you. Initially, the falcon won't allow you near—she will “bate,” or beat her wings wildly, as you approach. But gradually you will coax her to fly to you by offering food. The proud and cautious bird will be reluctant to fly to your hand, but she will want the food there and she will move back and forth on her perch, stamping her feet. Suddenly she will

leave her perch. She may land on your hand and bate off right away, frightened by her own bravery at first. Sooner or later, however, she will return to feed, and that will be her first careful step toward accepting you.

Why do falconers love this sport? To understand falconry, you must understand the special nature of the bond that forms between the falconer and the bird. The wild behavior and skills of the falcon are treasured by the falconer. The reward in working with a trained falcon is the companionship of a creature that can choose at any time to disappear over the horizon forever. You can join the honored tradition of falconers if you have patience and respect for wild creatures.

Released CAHSEE question

What does the phrase *disappear over the horizon* mean in the following sentence?

The reward in working with a trained falcon is the companionship of creatures that can choose at any time to disappear over the horizon forever.

- A. return to the falconer
- B. abandon the falconer
- C. go behind some trees
- D. fly very high

Solution

You probably know what *disappear* means or can figure it out. This has one of those “word parts” in it (*dis*), which makes a word mean the opposite of the main word or root word. So if we know what *appear* means, then we can figure out that *disappear* means the opposite. When you look at the list of suggested answers, you can immediately eliminate option A.

You can tell from the rest of the selection that if the falcon disappears forever, it would not be a good thing for the trainer. Most importantly, you get the feeling that the word is used figuratively because the fact that the falcon may disappear “over the horizon” suggests the reward of the companionship rather than simply losing the bird. The reward in working with a trained falcon is the companionship of creatures that can choose at any time to disappear over the horizon forever.

Context clues can also help you determine the meaning of this phrase. The horizon is the apparent intersection of the earth and sky as seen by an observer—in this case a falconer who trains birds of prey. Imagining how a falcon would seem to disappear when it flew out of the trainer’s sight will help you choose the correct response, **B: abandon the falconer.** (WA 10.1.1)



This may seem like a long process for figuring out what a word means, but asking questions about words will help you meet the California English-Language Arts standards for word analysis, fluency, and systematic vocabulary development. Getting into the habit of using these strategies for figuring out unfamiliar words will increase your vocabulary and help you have a better understanding of what you read.

These standards also demand that you understand denotation and connotation. The *denotative* meaning of a word is its dictionary definition. It describes the relation between the word and the thing it names. The *connotative* meaning of a word refers to the images and feelings that you experience when you read the word.

For example, *house* and *home* have identical denotations, both describing a place of shelter. Their connotations are quite different. *House* commonly makes a reader think of a particular building where people live whereas *home* suggests warmth, comfort, and safety.

When reading informational texts such as your science textbook and the newspaper, it is essential to understand the denotation of key words. In literary texts such as poems and stories, the connotations of words can be as important as their denotations. The poem on the next page illustrates this.



WORKING WITH IMAGERY

The following Edna St. Vincent Millay poem appeared on a previous CAHSEE:

The Courage That My Mother Had

The courage that my mother had
Went with her, and is with her still:
Rock from New England quarried;
Now granite in a granite hill.

The golden brooch¹ my mother wore
She left behind for me to wear;
I have no thing I treasure more:
Yet it is something I could spare.

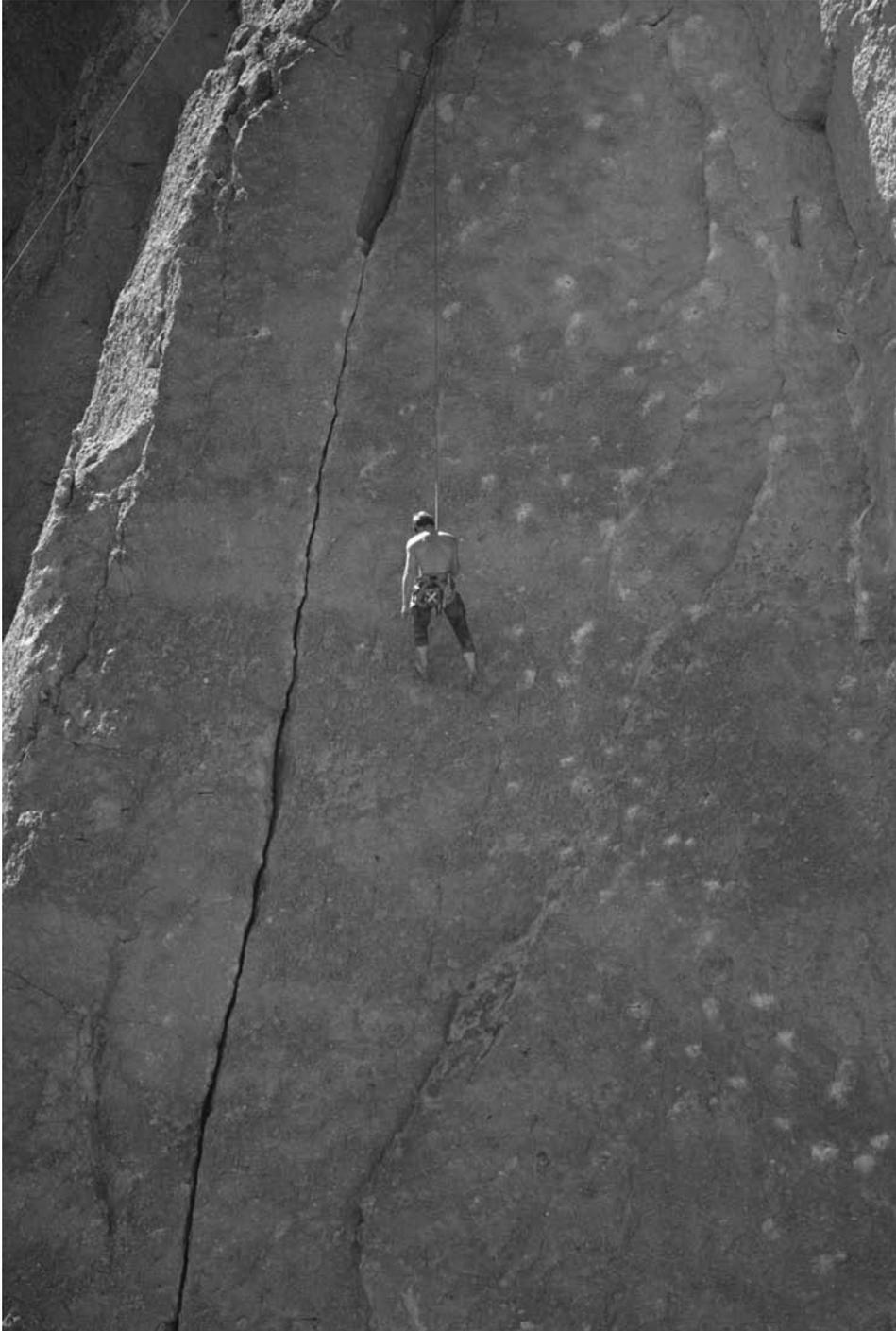
Oh, if instead she'd left to me
The thing she took into the grave!—
That courage like a rock, which she
Has no more need of, and I have.



“The Courage That My Mother Had” by Edna St. Vincent Millay, from *Collected Poems*, Harper Collins. Copyright © 1954, 1982 by Norma Millay Ellis. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Elizabeth Barnett, literary executor.

017

¹ pin



You may recall from your science class that granite is a very hard rock often used for buildings and monuments. This is the denotation of the word *granite*. To understand the poem, however, you also want to consider the connotations of *granite*. What qualities does granite possess? The poet compares her mother's courage with a rock that is durable and strong. What does this suggest about her mother? Do you know anyone who has courage like a rock?

Practice these strategies every time you read. Soon you will find that learning new words has become a habit.

VOCABULARY

The next question is based on the following informational passage about koalas called “Deadly Leaves.” The passage and question appeared previously on the CAHSEE.



Deadly Leaves

Koalas, native to the Australian wilds, initially proved difficult to keep alive in zoos. Because koalas eat nothing but the leaves of the eucalyptus tree, zoos provided them with an unlimited supply of eucalyptus leaves. One zoo even planted eucalyptus trees in a special grove to ensure that the koalas had a continual supply of fresh leaves. However, koalas kept in captivity always died within a year of their arrival at the zoo.

Eventually it was discovered that eucalyptus trees that are less than five years old sometimes generate hydrocyanic acid in their leaves. Taking in small quantities of this acid is fatal to the koala. In their

natural habitat, the koalas’ senses tell them which eucalyptus trees have dangerous leaves, and they simply move on to other trees until they find leaves that are safe to eat. But in captivity, when their keepers unknowingly were giving them leaves contaminated with acid, the koalas were left with only two options: eat the poisonous leaves or starve. Either option was fatal to the trapped koalas.

Fortunately, today’s zoos use special tests to distinguish between poisonous eucalyptus leaves and safe ones, and now koalas are eating well and thriving in zoos.

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Released CAHSEE question**What does the word *contaminated* mean in the following phrase?**

But in captivity, when their keepers unknowingly were giving them leaves contaminated with acid, the koalas were left with only two options: eat the poisonous leaves or starve.

- A. carried with
- B. polished with
- C. poisoned with
- D. grown from

Solution

This is a vocabulary question. Remember that one way to figure out what a word means is to see if there are any clues in the text—in the words, sentences, or paragraphs around the word you do not know. When given choices such as these four, you can also try out the choices in the original sentence. This is another one of those “tricks” that good test-takers use. Let’s try it.

But in captivity, when their keepers unknowingly were giving them leaves contaminated with [“carried with”; “polished with”; “poisoned with”; “grown from” with] acid, the koalas were left with only two options: eat the poisonous leaves or starve.

Does *carried with acid* make sense? How about *polished with acid*? Would anyone polish a leaf? What about *grown from with acid*? Isn’t there an unnecessary preposition in that phrase? Would someone grow leaves from acid? What’s left? Look for context clues. We know the leaves caused them to die because they were poisonous. Therefore, the correct answer is C. (WA 10.1.1)

