6.5 Word choice, comparisons, and syntax

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 17 marks**

KEY WORDS loaded language • connotation • absolute • superlative • accusation • complacency

Objective

Build the skills to analyze **loaded language** : word choices that carry judgment, and how writers use them to accuse, praise or persuade.

You must be able to:

- identify loaded words and their connotations
- explain how diction shows a writer's judgment
- analyze loaded language in a speech

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

■ Loaded language

neutral	loaded (negative)	loaded (positive)
tax	burden, grab	investment
change	upheaval	reform
group	gang, mob	movement
firm	stubborn	principled

Loaded words carry a judgment as well as a meaning. They are not wrong to use, but readers should notice them, and writers should use them on purpose.

■ Superlatives and absolutes

Words such as "no", "never", "every", "most shocking" make a claim as strong as possible. They create force, but they also invite readers to look for exceptions.

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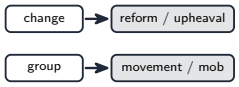
■ **Worked example**

Task: analyze "There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States." (Douglass, 1852)

Answer: Douglass uses an absolute comparison ("not a nation on the earth") and loaded words ("guilty," "shocking and bloody") to put the United States, which praised itself as free, below every other nation. The harsh diction shocks a holiday audience out of complacency.

2 Practice

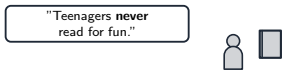
2.1 Identify a loaded word that could replace each neutral word: (a) "change"; (b) "group". [2]



2.2 Explain the difference between "The council wasted 2*million*"*and*"*Thecouncilspent*2 million". [3]



2.3 Explain one risk of using absolute words such as "never" and "every" in an argument. [3]



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3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Read the passage.

> "There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour."

Frederick Douglass, speech in Rochester, New York, 5 July 1852

(a) Identify two loaded words in the passage. [1]

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1 There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking
  and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.
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Douglass, 1852

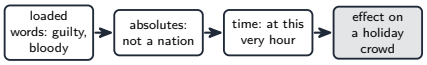
(b) Explain the effect of "not a nation on the earth". [1]

(c) Explain the effect of the final phrase "at this very hour". [1]

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3.2 Use the Douglass passage in Question 3.1. He spoke at a celebration of the Fourth of July.

Write one paragraph that analyzes how Douglass's loaded diction and absolute claims challenge his audience. Begin with a thesis sentence. [6]



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Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

(a) a loaded word, for example reform, upheaval, revolution; (b) a loaded word, for example mob, gang, movement, crowd

2.2

“spent” is neutral and only reports the action; “wasted” adds a negative judgment that the money was badly used; so the first sentence asks the reader to share the writer’s criticism before any evidence is given

2.3

absolute claims are easy to disprove with one exception; critical readers will look for that exception; so the writer may lose credibility, while a qualified word such as “rarely” or “most” is harder to attack

3.1

(a) two of: guilty, shocking, bloody

(b) the absolute comparison puts the United States below every other nation, a shock to a proud audience

(c) it makes the guilt present and urgent: slavery is happening now, not in the past

3.2

thesis: a defensible thesis about how loaded diction and absolutes challenge the audience

evidence: quotes or describes the loaded words “guilty”, “shocking and bloody”; quotes or describes “not a nation on the earth” or “at this very hour”

commentary: explains how the legal and violent words turn national pride into an accusation; explains how the absolute comparison and time phrase deny the audience any comfort

sophistication: explains the occasion with insight, for example the irony of a freedom holiday, or the risk of angering supporters and why he takes it

model: “Douglass uses the language of a courtroom and a battlefield to put his audience’s nation on trial. The word ‘guilty’ makes the United States a defendant, and ‘shocking and bloody’ names slavery as violence, not as a regional custom. The absolute comparison, ‘not a nation on the earth,’ places the country that called itself the home of liberty at the bottom of the world. Finally, ‘at this very hour’ removes the escape of history: the crime is happening while they celebrate. On a holiday of national pride, the harsh diction is a risk, but it makes comfortable listeners feel what the enslaved could not escape.”

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