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.

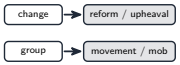
■ Worked example

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

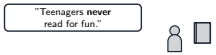
2.1 Identify a loaded word that could replace each neutral word: (a) "change"; (b) "group". [2]



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]

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.

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]

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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