

8.3 The function of specific words and phrases

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 13 marks**

KEY WORDS ambiguity 歧义

Objective

Build the skills to explain **ambiguity** 歧义.

You must be able to:

- state the CED’s claim about ambiguity
- explain why different readers may read differently
- distinguish productive ambiguity from imprecision
- defend a reading of an ambiguous text

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ The claim

Ambiguity allows for different readings and understandings of a text by different readers. The CED presents it as an allowance, not a defect.

■ Different readers

5.2 said a symbol’s meaning depends partly on the reader’s experiences. Ambiguity makes room for that: the text supports more than one reading and does not choose.

■ Productive and imprecise

Ambiguity is productive when each available reading is supported by the text and the difference between them matters. It is imprecision when the text simply fails to say anything definite.

■ Defending a reading

Say which reading you are taking, show the text supports it, and acknowledge the other. Acknowledging a rival reading is 7.13’s sophistication move, and here it is nearly obligatory.

2 Practice

2.1 State the CED’s claim about ambiguity. [2]

2.2 Distinguish productive ambiguity from imprecision. [2]

2.3 An ambiguous text still needs a reading.

(a) State the three steps in defending one. [3]

(b) State which earlier skill this uses. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 The CED presents ambiguity as [1]

- **A** an allowance for different readings
- **B** a defect
- **C** an error
- **D** a rhyme scheme

3.2 Ambiguity is imprecision when the text [1]

- **A** fails to say anything definite
- **B** supports two readings
- **C** is short
- **D** is old

3.3 A poem's final image supports two readings and the poem gives no way to choose.

(a) State what to do. [1]

(b) Explain why acknowledging the other reading strengthens the essay. [2]

Solutions

2.1 it allows for different readings and understandings of a text by different readers.

2.2 productive ambiguity supports each reading and the difference matters; imprecision supports none definitely.

2.3 (a) state which reading you take; show the text supports it; acknowledge the other.
(b) 7.13's discussion of alternative interpretations.

3.1 A. an allowance.

3.2 A. nothing definite.

3.3 (a) take one reading and defend it while naming the other. (b) it shows the ambiguity was recognised rather than missed, and that the chosen reading was preferred on grounds rather than by default.