

Name _____

Date _____

An Honorable Tradition

The word "clown" is sometimes used to label a person as foolish. But being called a clown is not always an insult. The art of clowning is an old, honorable tradition. It includes not just modern-day circus clowns but court jesters, who performed for kings or emperors, and theatrical clowns, who were onstage as early as 500 years ago.

Throughout history, most cultures have had clowns. These clowns do more than just make people laugh. They are often shown as powerless fools, but sometimes clowns actually enjoy great freedom of speech. Using humor, clowns are able to question their leaders in a way ordinary people might not.

For example, in ancient China, the Emperor Shih Huang-Ti ordered the Great Wall of China to be built. During its construction, thousands of workers died due to poor working conditions. The Emperor planned to have the Great Wall painted, which would have resulted in even more lives lost. The Emperor's jester, Yu Sze, was the only person who dared to criticize this plan. He did so jokingly, but his jokes persuaded the Emperor not to paint the Great Wall. For this Yu Sze is now celebrated as a national hero in China.

Clowns remind us that humor can be one of the most effective ways to influence people. The clowns of our culture— those who make us laugh and look at life in new ways— may not represent foolishness at all, but wisdom in disguise.



1) Based on its use in paragraph 1, it can be understood that **honorable** belongs to which of the following word groups?

- A. smart, wise, intelligent
- B. helpful, beneficial, useful
- C. ancient, old-fashioned, traditional
- D. respected, admirable, praised

2) The author of this passage is most interested in

- A. presenting the history of clowns
- B. explaining why Yu Sze is a hero
- C. discussing the role clowns play in a culture
- D. making people feel better about being called a clown

- 3) In paragraph 2, the author suggests that sometimes clowns have “great freedom of speech” compared to ordinary people because clowns are
- A. not afraid of their leaders
 - B. able to use humor to make a point
 - C. scrutinized more than ordinary people
 - D. viewed as national heroes
- 4) In paragraph 3, the author writes, "The Emperor's jester, Yu Sze, was the only person who dared to criticize this plan." Like Yu Sze, which of these people also **criticizes** something?
- A. Alice, who paints a picture and enters it into a contest
 - B. Jeffrey, who wears a silly clown costume to a Halloween party
 - C. Ed, who points out the problems with the book he just read
 - D. Rolfe, who studies very hard but still gets bad grades
- 5) According to the author, Yu Sze persuaded the Chinese Emperor not to
- A. build the Great Wall
 - B. paint the Great Wall
 - C. mistreat the workers
 - D. starve the workers
- 6) In the final paragraph, the author suggests that clowns may represent “wisdom in disguise.” By this the author means that clowns
- A. are smarter than they appear
 - B. should always be respected
 - C. show up in unexpected places
 - D. dress up in costumes
- 7) According to the author, humor can be one of the most effective ways to
- A. entertain people
 - B. change people
 - C. influence people
 - D. understand people

8) How are modern-day clowns different from ancient jesters such as Yu Sze? How are they similar?

Answers and Explanations

1) D

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

honorable (*adjective*): deserving or winning honor and respect.

In paragraph 1, the author writes, “The art of clowning is an old, honorable tradition.” To understand what *honorable* means, it is helpful to study the surrounding context. In the previous sentences, the author writes, “The word ‘clown’ is sometimes used to label a person as foolish. But being called a clown is not always an insult.” This tells us that because clowning is part of an old, honorable tradition, being called a clown is not always an insult. From this we can understand that honorable means something that is not insulting or disrespected. In the rest of the passage, the author goes on to explain that clowns are not just “powerless fools,” but people who enjoy “great freedom of speech” and may “represent wisdom in disguise.” From this we can understand that the author claims the tradition of clowning should be respected, not insulted. This means that honorable belongs to the word group *respected, admirable, praised*. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

In the final paragraph, the author suggests that clowns may have “wisdom,” but he or she does not suggest that the tradition of clowning itself is necessarily wise. In paragraph 1, the author uses the word honorable to suggest that the art of clowning is respected, not that it is smart. This means that honorable does not belong to the word group *smart, wise, intelligent*. This eliminates **(A)**.

In paragraph 3, the author gives an example of a court jester who was helpful to the people of China. However, in paragraph 1, the author uses the word honorable to show that the tradition of clowning is respected and that being called a clown is not an insult. He or she does not discuss whether clowns are helpful in paragraph 1. This tells us that honorable does not belong to the word group *helpful, beneficial, useful*. This means **(B)** is incorrect.

The author tells us that “the art of clowning is an old, honorable tradition.” Since the author uses both the words “old” and “honorable” to describe clowning, honorable must mean something other than old. This tells us that honorable does not fit into the word group *ancient, old-fashioned, traditional*.

Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

2) C

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

To understand why an author wrote a passage, it is helpful to examine each paragraph. In paragraph 1, the author suggests that “being called a clown is not always an insult” because clowns belong to “an old, honorable tradition.” In paragraph 2, the author explains that “most cultures have had clowns” and that these clowns sometimes “enjoy great freedom of speech” and can “question their leaders.” In paragraph 3, the author provides the example of Yu Sze, a court jester who saved many lives in ancient China by persuading the Emperor not to have the Great Wall painted. This shows the useful role some clowns have played in history. In paragraph 4, the author suggests that clowns play an important role in our culture because they “make us laugh and look at life in new ways” and they may be a source of “wisdom.” Throughout the passage, the author rejects the idea that clowns are just fools by showing the valuable role that clowns play in a culture. From this we can understand that the author is most interested in discussing the role clowns play in a culture. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Although the author tells us in paragraph 2 that “throughout history, most cultures have had clowns,” he or she does not present the history of clowns. The passage does not tell us when clowning started or how it has changed over the years. This eliminates **(A)**.

In paragraph 3, the author explains how Yu Sze, a jester, became a national hero in order to show how clowns can play a valuable role in a culture. However, the story of Yu Sze is only one part of the passage, so the author is not most interested in explaining why Yu Sze is a hero. This means **(B)** is incorrect.

In paragraph 1, the author writes, “The word ‘clown’ is sometimes used to label a person as foolish. But being called a clown is not always an insult.” In the rest of the passage, though, the author does not focus on the feelings of people who are called a clown, but on the important role clowns play in a culture. This means he or she is not most interested in making people feel better about being called a clown. This makes **(D)** incorrect.

3) B

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In paragraph 2, the author writes, “They are often shown as powerless fools, but sometimes clowns actually enjoy great freedom of speech. Using humor, clowns are able to question their leaders in a way ordinary people might not.” This means using humor allows clowns to say things ordinary people might not say. From this, we can understand that clowns sometimes have “great freedom of speech” compared to ordinary people because clowns are able to use humor to make a point. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The passage does not provide information to support choices **(A)** and **(C)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

In paragraph 3, the author tells us that Yu Sze, a jester, “is now celebrated as a national hero in China.” However, this does not mean that clowns in general are viewed as national heroes. Also, Yu Sze is seen as a hero because of his freedom of speech. He did not have great freedom of speech because he was a hero.

This makes **(D)** incorrect.

4) C

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

criticize (*verb*): to make judgments about; to find fault with.

In paragraph 3, the author writes, “The Emperor’s jester, Yu Sze, was the only person who dared to criticize this plan.” To understand what *criticize* means, we need to study the context surrounding

this sentence. From the previous sentence, we know that “this plan” refers to the Emperor’s plan “to have the Great Wall painted, which would have resulted in even more lives lost.” Then we learn that Yu Sze criticized the plan “jokingly, but his jokes persuaded the Emperor not to paint the Great Wall.” From this we can understand that Yu Sze pointed out the problems with the Emperor’s plan, and this is what persuaded the Emperor not to paint the wall. This tells us that *criticize* means to find fault with something. If Ed points out the problems with the book he just read, then he criticizes the book. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

If Alice paints a picture and enters it into a contest, she does not find fault with anything. This eliminates **(A)**.

If Jeffrey wears a silly clown costume to a Halloween party, he does not find fault with anything. This makes **(B)** incorrect.

If Rolfe studies very hard but still gets bad grades, he does not find fault with anything. This means **(D)** is incorrect.

5) B

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

To answer this detail question correctly, we need to find where the author discusses Yu Sze and the Chinese Emperor in the passage. A good way to do this is to scan the topic sentence of each paragraph, since this sentence will likely tell us what information can be found in the rest of that paragraph. The topic sentence of paragraph 3 reads: “For example, in ancient China, the Emperor Shih Huang-Ti ordered the Great Wall of China to be built.” This lets us know that the details we are looking for can likely be found in paragraph 3.

In paragraph 3, the author writes, “The Emperor’s jester, Yu Sze, was the only person who dared to criticize this plan. He did so jokingly, but his jokes persuaded the Emperor not to paint the Great Wall.” This tells us that through his jokes, Yu Sze persuaded the Chinese Emperor not to paint the Great Wall. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

The passage does not provide information to support choices **(A)**, **(C)**, and **(D)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

6) A

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In the final paragraph, the author writes, “The clowns of our culture— those who make us laugh and look at life in new ways— may not represent foolishness at all, but wisdom in disguise.” By this the author means that although clowns may be portrayed as fools, it is smart to make people “laugh and look at life in new ways.” This tells us that when the author writes that clowns may be “wisdom in disguise,” he or she means that clowns are smarter than they appear. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

In the final paragraph, the author writes that clowns may “represent...wisdom in disguise.” However, this does not suggest that clowns should always be respected, just because they may be wise. This eliminates **(B)**.

The author does not suggest that clowns show up in unexpected places. This means **(C)** is incorrect.

Although clowns sometimes dress up in costumes, in this statement the author does not mean that what clowns wear is literally a disguise for wisdom. Instead, the author refers to how clowns are usually seen as foolish rather than wise. This makes **(D)** incorrect.

7) C

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

To answer this detail question correctly, we need to find where the author discusses what humor can do in the passage. A good way to do this is to scan the topic sentence of each paragraph, since this sentence will likely tell us what information can be found in the rest of that paragraph. The topic sentence of the final paragraph reads: “Clowns remind us that humor can be one of the most effective ways to influence people.” This lets us know that the details we are looking for can likely be found in the final paragraph.

In the final paragraph, the author writes, “Clowns remind us that humor can be one of the most effective ways to influence people.” This tells us that according to the author, humor can be one of the most effective ways to influence people. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

Although it is possible that humor can be an effective way to entertain people, change people, and understand people, the author does not say any of these things. This means choices **(A)**, **(B)**, and **(D)** are incorrect.