GP June Intensive Revision

**Comprehension Learning Skills 3 – Interpreting Facts and Inferring Meanings**

Students need to be sensitive to the writer’s use of linking words, introductory words, language style (such as figurative, emotive words), as well as the feelings, attitudes and moods conveyed. These will be discussed under the writer’s style, attitude and tone.

**(a) The style**

The style of the writer refers to both what is expressed and at is implied. Generally, the longer and more complex the sentence is, the more formal the style.

* **Figurative language**
1. **Simile** – a thing or person is compared to another which has a shared quality. Example: *Hitler was as sly as a wily fox when he subdued his enemies.*
2. **Metaphor** – a thing or a person is referred to as the thing to which it is being compared.

For example:

Scientists are often unable to determine which chemical or combination of chemicals within a plant is responsible for relieving pain or stimulating blood flow or creating a feeling of increased well-being. Trying to find the part of a plant that has a specific effect can be like **disassembling a radio** to search for the part that makes the sound.

1. **Metonymy** – an object or person is referred to by the name of something that is closely related to it.

Example: The whole city (means people in the city) was addicted to the bottle

(means liquor)

1. **Personification** – inanimate objects and abstract ideas are personified, ie treated like human beings.

 Example: *Wisdom goes with the humble and she will teach them how to live a*

 *good life.*

1. **Hyperbole** – an extreme exaggeration to highlight a point.

 Example: If I could move mountains but have no love, I am nothing

1. **Irony** – (a) the real meaning is the opposite of what the words literally mean, or (b) a result that is completely different, opposite or contradictory to the aim.

*Expectation differs from outcome – 1) identify the expectation 2)show how the outcome differs from it*

For example:

The scientific age has cut down on the amount of time a man or woman may spend on actual physical labour at work but it has increased considerably the mental effort that modern occupation requires.

1. **Contradiction** – two contradictory or completely opposing states of affairs which cannot be both true.

Example: You cannot claim that you are sick when you are healthy enough to go ice-skating.

1. **Paradox** – similar to a contradiction except that both states of affairs are true.

Example: He who wants to be the leader of the group must first be the servant.

Paradox of thrift – saving helps the economy to grow as saving provides fund for investment for the economy to grow but saving also reduces consumption and this will reduce economic activities that promote growth.

1. **Oxymoron** – a phrase with two words of opposite or contradictory meanings placed next to each other.

Example: It was an open secret that Stalin and Hitler had made a pact.

1. **Rhetorical question** – a question which does not require an answer and is intended to convey a point.

Example: Does Hitler, who has killed millions of people, deserve to be called a saint?

* **Emotive language**

This refers to the use of words which are intended to arouse the emotions of the readers so that they will agree with the writer.

For example:

To begin on a personal note, I shall be, as the saying goes, pushing on to my 76th year next February. So far the pushing has been for me not much of an uphill task but I know that from now on the pushing will get harder each year.

However, the question arises: When does a man or woman become really old? If you go by the conventional cut-off-date for employment, it is between 55 and 60, an arbitrary figure for which nobody has been able to offer even a remotely plausible explanation.

* **Word emphasis**

This could be in the form of italics, inverted commas or capital letters. Sometimes the purpose is to draw attention to the word; at other times it s to convey the opposite meaning.

* **Quotations**

Quotations can be used to great effect, either to support or refute a position.

**(b) The attitude – reflect your stand**

The writer’s attitude is found in both the denotation and the connotation of the language used. Denotation refers to the words, sentences and overall structure of the writings. More telling, however, is the connotation in the choice of words used which may be of positive, negative or neutral. This reflects the hidden attribute of the writers. The correct interpretation of a word or phrase will depend on the historical context and culturally shared experience.

Positive attitude – supportive, approval, engaging, motivation

Negative attitude – disapproval, discouraging, disrespectful, skeptical, cynical, doubtful

**(c) The tone – reflect your expression**

The tone refers to how attitude is conveyed in the passage. Is the tone sarcastic, light, serious or admiring? This will clearly reveal the writer’s real feelings about an issue.

Tone – humorous, sarcastic, engaging, subtle, firm, serious, polite,

Illustration 1

Ah, youth. Has there ever been a word more conflictingly loaded? It resonates with infinite potential – and loss. Youth is our future, and our past. It is everything that is good as well as bad about the world. The young are our own children, yet they are also the little-understood enemy. They are super-predators and they are lost lambs. They are the problem – and the solution. They will, for better or worse, **inherit the earth.**

1. What does the phrase ‘for better or worse’ (line 5) suggest? {2}
* Inherit the earth (I.5)
* good as well as bad about the world (I.3)
* children, enemy, super-predators, lost lambs, problem, solution (II. 3-5)

Illustration 2

Steve Pavlina writes in ‘The Courage To Live Conscious’…

Courage is so many things, and yet only one. In being a sort of endurance of the soul and hence, the willingness to bear unflinchingly what the heavens send, courage becomes the ladder on which all other virtue mount. Without courage, we can deem ourselves to, perhaps, have the perfect sensibility of the measure of danger the mental willingness to incur it, or vice versa. It is in the end, as Helen Keller once put, what makes life a daring adventure, or nothing. Keller’s conviction is not without reason. Her life struggle as a blind and deaf woman in a time when technology was far less advanced and society far less inclusive, drove her to become the epitome of that free spirit she herself describe – to keep one’s face towards change and develop strength undefeatable. Yet courage could be the very thing we now lack.

The absence of moral courage - our conscience and the imperative to act in accordance with it – manifests itself so often. Vanity asks the question: is it popular? Conscience asks the question: is it right? We heed Vanity’s whispers as we mute the call to speak up for the less fortune even though we are told that there is nothing so potent as an act of courage performed at the right moment on behalf of the weak. This is the horror of our human condition.

**1a. Explain what the author means by courage becomes the ladder on which all other virtue mount’ as it used in the passage. [2]**

* Just as a ladder is needed for someone to get to a higher level, (1)
* So courage is needed for someone to become a better person/ so courage is the foundation/ prerequisite/ steeping stone upon which other good values develop. (1)

Ans: The writer means that we need to have courage to develop other virtues as we need to be brave to exercise these values and behaviours.

**1b. Explain, in your own as far as possible, how the reference to Helen Keller in Paragraph 1 substantiates the above metaphor [2]**

* With courage, she was able to:

Keep her face towards change

Develop strength undefeatable (how she uses her courage to develop her strengths)

**2a.What is the ‘human condition’ (line 17) that the author is referring to? [1+1]**

* Mute the call to speak up for the less fortunate
* Even though we know that there is nothing so potent as an act of courage performed at the right moment of behalf of the weak.

**2b. Explain why the author used the word ‘horror’ to describe this condition. [1]**

1. The writer wishes to highlight the seriousness/ to emphasize the severity of the situation (1/2)
2. The writer wants to emphasize his disgust (1/2)
3. He wants to express his disapproval/ that this unacceptable (1/2)

Ans: He wants to show his stand about the weakness in our human flaws or behaviours.