 ‘Politics and the English Language’ Essay Analysis Questions

Answer each of these questions in your work book or journal.

Paragraph 1. In his opening paragraph, Orwell presents an assumption about language that he obviously intends to argue against. Explain that assumption in your own words.

Paragraph 2. Here Orwell states that ‘an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely.’ How does this apply to language?

Paragraph 3. Carefully read Orwell’s five examples. Can you identify the ‘vice’ in each passage? Explain in one or two sentences.

Paragraph 4. According to Orwell, what 2 weaknesses do all of these example passages possess?

Paragraph 5. In your own words, explain a ‘dying metaphor’. Can you identify three modern examples?

Paragraph 6. What is a verbal false limb? What is wrong with using them?

Paragraph 7. What does pretentious mean? List some of the types of pretentious diction given in this paragraph. What distinguishes pretentious diction from varied, creative, erudite word choice?

Paragraph 8. Orwell gives numerous examples of words that had become meaningless in his own time. Choose two and explain why they have become meaningless. Can you think of two examples of contemporary words or phrases that have similarly lost their meaning?

Paragraph 9. Read the Ecclesiastes passage. Would we, today, say that meaning was clearly expressed? Could you make the meaning even clearer and direct?

Paragraph 10. Explain, in a short paragraph, what is wrong with the rewrite. Use examples from the paragraph to support your opinion.

Paragraph 11. In general, what aspect of modern writing does Orwell most strongly criticize in the first part of this paragraph? Later in the paragraph, he gives 6 questions a writer should ask about each sentence he or she writes. Which of these questions would help you most in your own writing? Why?

Paragraph 12. Orwell introduces the link between politics and language in this paragraph. ‘Orthodoxy,’ Orwell states, ‘seems to demand a lifeless, imitative prose.’ Why is this so?

Paragraph 13. One of Orwell’s most oft-quoted sentences opens this paragraph. What does he criticise about the language politicians use in this paragraph?

Paragraph 14. Define euphemism. Why is it such a popular technique for politicians to use? Can you find modern examples of euphemism from political speeches?

Paragraph 15. How is insincerity the ‘great enemy’ of clarity? What is the effect of the simile ‘like a cuttlefish spurting out ink’ in comparing real and declared ains?

Paragraph 16. In your own words, explain how language can corrupt thought.

Paragraphs 17. Orwell reasserts his opinion that the decline of language ‘is probably curable.’ What is not part of this proposed ‘defence of the English language’ – in other words, what is not the real problem?

Paragraph 18. Orwell gives several suggestions to help achieve this clarity of meaning. What are his six rules for good writing?

Paragraph 19. What is the purpose of all political language? What dangers are inherent in this? Do you think Orwell’s assessment is still valid today? Why or why not?