Context Clues

1. Asian grass carp, strong swimming fish with an urge to travel, grow up to 3 1/2 feet long and 70 pounds in Texas lakes and rivers. They are known for a **voracious** vegetarian appetite, eating up to three times their body weight in water plants in one day.

What is the meaning of the word **voracious**?

- A. diet
- B. small
- C. fatty
- D. large

2. American scientist Benjamin Franklin invented the glass harmonica, also known as the Franklin harmonica, in the early 1760s. It is a mechanical version of the much simpler musical glasses that were popular at that time. These were a set of glass bowls of different sizes that were arranged from smallest to largest to produce distinct **pitches**. The bowls were fine-tuned by filling them partially with water. In the Franklin model, shallow glass basins are attached to a horizontal spindle that is revolved by a crank attached to a pedal. The spindle is placed in a trough of water so that the glasses are kept wet. The shimmering, bell-like sound is produced by touching the fingers to the wet edges. This instrument was popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

What is the meaning of the word **pitches** as it is used in this passage?

- A. short, lofted shots in golf
- B. frequencies of sound waves reaching the ear (musical)
- C. the distance between adjacent threads on a screw
- D. baseball tosses

3. A security guard making his hourly rounds at the Smith Federal building in Washington, DC noticed light coming from the building's back door. He looked inside and saw a wooden box with a note taped to the outside: "Do not come any closer, this box will EXPLODE." Near the box, the guard noticed a large black flashlight. Realizing the **potential** danger of the situation, he carefully retraced his steps and called for assistance.

Which word is a synonym (has nearly the same meaning) of the word **potential**?

- A. positive
- B. unlikely
- C. unattainable
- D. possible
Math Anxiety Saps Working Memory Needed To Do Math
by Julie Steenhuysen

Worrying about how you'll perform on a math test may actually contribute to a lower test score. Feelings of dread and fear keep people away from math. The shunning of math can sap the brain's working capacity. This is what is used and needed to compute difficult math problems, said psychologist Mark Ashcroft of the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

"It turns out that math anxiety occupies a person's working memory," according to Ashcroft. Ashcroft said while easy math tasks such as addition require only a small part of a person's working memory, strenuous calculations need much more. Worrying about math takes up a large chunk of a person's working memory. This is a dire situation for the anxious student who is taking a high-stakes test.

Stress about how one does on tests like college entrance exams can make even good math students choke. "All of a sudden they start looking for the short cuts," said University of Chicago researcher Sian Beilock. Test preparation classes can help students beat this anxiety. However, they are limited to students whose families can afford them.

Ultimately, she said, "It may not be wise to rely completely on scores to figure out who will succeed." While the causes of math anxiety are unknown, Ashcroft said people who manage to overcome math anxiety have completely normal math proficiency.

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4. The word dire in paragraph 5 means

☐ A. fantastic.
☐ B. good.
☐ C. terrible.
☐ D. unknown.

5. The word strenuous in paragraph 4 means

☐ A. easy.
☐ B. tough.
☐ C. forgetful.
☐ D. stern.

6. The word shunning in paragraph 2 means

☐ A. failing.
☐ B. excitement.
☐ C. avoiding.
7. The word **choke** in paragraph 6 means

- A. study with motivation.
- B. pass with good grades.
- C. struggle with the test.
- D. strangle with the hands.

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8. Have you ever wondered who writes the Nancy Drew mysteries? Many fans of the series may be surprised to learn that there is no Carolyn Keene. Carolyn Keene is a **pseudonym** created by the series' father, Ed Stratemeyer, and it is shared by an unknown number of ghost writers. The first "Keene" was Mildred Wirt Benson, who fleshed out the outline Stratemeyer had developed for the titian-haired detective. Writing one book about every six weeks, Benson is credited with a majority of the first 30 Nancy Drew mysteries.

What is the definition of **pseudonym** as it is used in this paragraph?

- A. a female author
- B. a mystery novel
- C. a made-up name
- D. a character in a book

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9. The **conceited** actress wanted to talk only about herself. She knew she was more interesting than everyone else. She didn't want to waste time hearing other people talk about their boring lives.

What does **conceited** mean in the passage above?

- A. vain
- B. shy
- C. friendly
- D. talented

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Being a class monitor had put me in quite a **quandary**. While I had to report the students' unruly behavior to the authority, I did not want to jeopardize my friendship with my classmates. Luckily, most of my friends seemed to comprehend my problem quite well. However, there were always a few **impudent** classmates who had utter disregard for the rules. They insulted and disrespected me quite often. A particularly **boisterous** student was very hard to deal with. He would be rough and disorderly right after I had asked the class to maintain peace in the teacher's absence. While I agreed with his view that some of the **obsolete** rules of our historic school did not apply to the students today, I thought he needed to be more cooperative.

10. Which of these phrases from the passage gives a clue about the meaning of
boisterous?

A. jeopardize my friendship  
B. be more cooperative  
C. comprehend my problem  
D. rough and disorderly

11. Read this sentence from this passage.

While I agreed with his view that some of the obsolete rules of our historic school did not apply to the students today, I thought he needed to be more cooperative.

What does obsolete mean in this context?

A. significant  
B. intricate  
C. outdated  
D. prejudiced

12. Which word would best replace impudent in the passage?

A. insolent  
B. delirious  
C. besieged  
D. academic

13. What does quandary most likely mean?

A. fortitude  
B. distortion  
C. predicament  
D. runt

14. Nature uses air, water and land again and again. This is called recycling. Energy in the form of sunlight provides the power for nature to recycle.

What does recycling mean in the passage above?

A. naturally occurring  
B. energetic  
C. returning  
D. using again
15. The launch of the High Energy Solar Imager has been delayed indefinitely because of ongoing concerns about the satellite's launch vehicle—a Pegasus rocket. A NASA spokesperson said that the launch will still happen, but NASA is not sure when.

What is the meaning of the word indefinitely in the selection above?

- A. for an uncertain amount of time
- B. forever
- C. for the last time
- D. again

16. As used in the paragraph above, interned means

- A. dictated.
- B. clamored.
- C. affirmed.
- D. imprisoned.

17. The paragraph states that "Celan" is an anagram of "Ancel." What is the definition of anagram?

- A. rearrangement of letters
- B. pseudonym of a poet
- C. Romanian version of a word
- D. the renaming of self

18. Which word from the paragraph helps the reader understand the meaning of the word recuperated?

- A. wandered
- B. healing
- C. escape
- D. erased
The term *gag rules* refers to a number of rules adopted by the U.S. House of Representatives from 1836 to 1844. The rules were supposed to eliminate all petitions asking for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. The rules were supported by southern congressmen and by many northern representatives who thought the antislavery petitions were *inflammatory* and could prove damaging to the continued union of the states.

The former president of the United States, John Quincy Adams, was a member of the House from Massachusetts and led the long fight to abolish the gag rules. He argued that the refusal of Congress to consider certain petitions was unconstitutional. At the beginning of each session, when the House adopted its rules of procedure, Adams moved to *strike* out the offending gag rule. Finally, on December 3, 1844, he was successful, and the gag rule was abolished.

19. What is the meaning of the word *inflammatory* as it is used in the passage?

- A. likely to stir up anger or violence
- B. stupid; not smart
- C. intended to bring about peace
- D. lighting a flame

20. Which definition for the word *strike* is used in the passage?

- A. a pitched baseball that is missed
- B. to remove
- C. to cause a match to light through friction
- D. to hit with a hand or tool

The scientific word for a pimple or a zit is *acne*. There are many myths that surround acne. The biggest one of all is that popping a pimple is the best way to *eliminate* it. In fact, this is wrong. Ask any *dermatologist*. They are doctors who focus on skin health. They will tell you that popping a pimple is the worst thing you can do to get rid of it. Popping a pimple actually allows more germs to get under the skin. This can actually make the pimple bigger. Also, popping a pimple could leave you with a scar. And that lasts longer than any pimple.

21. Ask any *dermatologist*.

What type of context clue is used to help you define the word dermatologist?

- A. antonym
- B. example
- C. synonym
- D. explanation

22. The biggest one of all is that popping a pimple is the best way to *eliminate* it.

What type of context clue is used to help you define the word eliminate?
23. The cowbird is the bird that bird-lovers hate. The male, with its chocolate hood and glossy green-black plumage, is rather handsome, even if its "song" offends the human ear.

What is the meaning of the word plumage in the selection above?

- A. green-black leaves
- B. the covering of feathers on a bird
- C. a nest
- D. noisy songs

24. Mammals share three common characteristics. Mammals have hair for fur. Also, unlike reptiles, mammals are warm-blooded, which means that their body temperatures do not change to match the temperature of their surroundings. Finally, in the early part of their lives, mammals feed off of milk that their mothers produce.

What type of context clue is used to help you define the word characteristics?

- A. synonym
- B. antonym
- C. example
- D. explanation

25. Snowmobiles are causing problems in some of our national parks. Particulate matter, emitted by engines of vehicles, is a cause of haze and smog.

In the passage above, what is the meaning of the words particulate matter?

- A. haze
- B. smog
- C. particular
- D. soot

26. When people who come to the U. S. from foreign countries want to become citizens, they must go through a process called naturalization. The process requires them to file an application, take a naturalization test, and appear in court.

In the passage above, what does the word naturalization mean?

- A. a test that foreigners must take before entering the U.S.
27. Calling the rules violations committed by the Alabama football program "some of the worst ever," the NCAA Committee on Infractions, or rule violations, recently lowered the boom on the football program. Among other restrictions, Alabama will not be allowed to play in a post-season bowl game for the next two years.

What type of context clue helps you to understand the phrase lowered the boom?

A. analogy
B. cause and effect
C. definition
D. antonym

28. Although scientists cannot see them because they are shrouded in ice and darkness, oceans underneath the crusty exteriors of several of Jupiter's moons could possess the raw materials necessary to feed hordes of creatures.

What is the meaning of the word shrouded in the sentence above?

A. very cold
B. blocked from sight
C. flying in space
D. submerged in water

29. Marcus took his turn at the front of the line.

In which sentence is the meaning of turn closest to its meaning in the passage above?

A. The meat will turn rancid if you leave it out.
B. You must wait your turn to buy your popcorn.
C. Water will turn to ice if it gets very cold.
D. The boy will turn twelve next month.

30. In a ceremony witnessed by a gallery of kings, queens, dukes, and counts, Crown Prince Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands married Argentine economist, Maxima Zorreguieta. Amsterdam's Mayor Cohen warned the new Princess of the Netherlands that she will be "living in a glass house." He encouraged the couple to find a way to protect their private lives.

What is the meaning of the phrase "living in a glass house?"

A. living a very private life
31. The riverboat Columbia Queen takes passengers on an almost-1,000-mile journey along the route taken by explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark in the early 1800s. Along the way, the boat makes stops where passengers can disembark and see wildlife and artifacts onshore.

What is the meaning of disembark as it is used in this paragraph?

A. to buy a ticket  
B. to take photographs  
C. to go ashore from a ship  
D. to meet new people

32. When Punxsutawney Phil, the celebrated weather-predicting groundhog, comes out of his underground home this February 2 to predict whether there will be six more weeks of winter weather, onlookers will expect an additional prediction from him. They want him to predict the winner of this year's Super Bowl. The State College-based AccuWeather Inc. believes that science trumps superstition; however, the employees there are also making their predictions on the weather and the Super Bowl.

In this passage, the word trumps means

A. relies on.  
B. agrees with.  
C. disproves of.  
D. ranks higher than.

33. After eight years together, Andre Agassi and Brad Gilbert have decided to end one of the most successful player and coach relationships in tennis history. With Gilbert as his coach beginning in March, 1994, Agassi won six Grand Slam titles, a gold medal at the 1996 Olympics, and held the No. 1 ranking in the world at the end of 1999. Agassi is the only man to have won all four Grand Slam titles as well as an Olympic gold medal.

"Brad is clearly the greatest coach of all time," Agassi said in a joint statement. "I have been lucky to have him as my guiding force during the past eight years of my career. More importantly, I am lucky that I have been able to call him friend for eight years and that our friendship remains intact."

Which definition for intact is correct?

A. in contact  
B. not well-thought-of  
C. whole; not broken or missing pieces  
D. very public
34. Experts are sharply divided over whether the economy will rebound strongly in the second half of the year or languish in a slow-growth mode.

What does the word languish mean?

○ A. to become strong
○ B. to rebound
○ C. to expand
○ D. to grow weak

35. Based on its context in the paragraph above, what is the meaning of cryptic?

○ A. acidic
○ B. conforming
○ C. puzzling
○ D. hesitant

36. With his feature-length Straight Out of Brooklyn, Matty Rich stepped forward as the youngest of the new wave of African-American filmmakers. He proved wrong the local naysayers who didn't think a poor kid of seventeen could make a movie.

What is the meaning of the word naysayers in the selection above?

○ A. someone who helps you along the way
○ B. someone with an aggressively positive attitude
○ C. someone who stops you from doing what you want
○ D. someone with an aggressively negative attitude

37. If you grew up with Abraham Lincoln, you would have seen great changes take place between the time Lincoln was a boy in Kentucky and the time he was president in Washington, D.C. Important changes took place in transportation and communication. When Lincoln was a boy, there were no trains. Mail that had to be delivered across long distances was carried by horse. It took a long time for a message to travel by stagecoach. By the time Lincoln was a grown man, people communicated using the telegraph, which was like an early version of the phone. It allowed messages to be sent very quickly.

37. What type of context clue is used to help you define the word stagecoach?
38. "By the time Lincoln was a grown man, people communicated using the **telegraph**, which was like an early version of the phone."

What type of context clue is used to help you define the word **telegraph**?

- A. antonym
- B. synonym
- C. example
- D. explanation

39. The United States economy seems well on the road to recovery after one of the worst recessions on record. Consumers show surprising **resilience** as they continue to buy household goods, automobiles, and new homes.

**Resilience** refers to

- A. an increase in wages.
- B. wanting more than you already have.
- C. having a positive attitude.
- D. the ability to recover from misfortune.
Answers

1. D
2. B
3. D
4. C
5. B
6. C
7. C
8. C
9. A
10. D
11. C
12. A
13. C
14. D
15. A
16. D
17. A
18. B
19. A
20. B
21. D
22. D
23. B
24. C
25. D
26. C
27. B
28. B
29. B
30. B
31. C
32. D
33. C
34. D
35. C
36. D
37. D
38. C
39. D
Explanations

1. An example of the grass carp's appetite is provided in the phrase "eating up to three times their body weight in water plants in one day." This shows it has a large, or voracious, appetite.

2. The context provides cause and effect information. Playing the glass harmonica, a musical instrument, produces musical sounds.

3. The words EXPLODE, DANGER, DO NOT COME ANY CLOSER, indicate that it is very possible the situation will become dangerous. Possible and potential are synonyms.

4. The writer is setting up a situation for an anxious person taking a math test. Based upon the article, indicating that math tests cause anxiety in most students, the reader can assume that the reaction is a negative one. If the situation is negative, it must mean that "dire" has a negative meaning, much like "terrible."

5. If you follow the course of paragraph four, there is a comparison being made. The comparison is between "easy" math tasks and "strenuous" calculations. If one is easy, then it's safe to say that the other is hard. "Tough" means the same thing as "strenuous."

6. Most people who fear and are anxious about math tend to avoid it. You can therefore tell from the context that "shunning" means "avoiding."

7. If you follow the course of the sixth paragraph (and how it fits into the scheme of the essay), you'll notice that it talks about how students who don't like math react to math tests. It alludes to the fact that even good students fail math tests when they panic. In this case, the anxiety makes the students struggle with the test. Even good students are intimidated by math tests and sometimes "choke" or struggle.

8. Look at the context clues. The paragraph says, "Carolyn Keene is a pseudonym created by the series' father, Ed Stratemeyer, and it is shared by an unknown number of ghost writers." This tells the reader that Carolyn Keene is an example of a pseudonym, that a pseudonym is created, and that a pseudonym can be shared by ghost writers. A pseudonym is "a made-up name."

9. The passage says that the actress thinks she is better than everyone else. That makes her vain, which can mean the same as conceited.

10. The passage shows that one particular student is rough and disorderly. He also seems loud when the narrator wants to maintain peace. These details give the reader the idea that the word boisterous means "rough and disorderly."

11. The passage states that some rules of the historic school do not apply to modern-day students. This helps the reader understand that obsolete means "outdated."
12. The passage shows that the "impudent" students insult the narrator. "Insolent" also means "rude or disrespectful." The passage gives a clue that impudent is the same thing as "insolent."

13. The narrator is caught between reporting the students to the authority and maintaining friendship with his or her classmates. The narrator is in a quandary or a "predicament." Both words mean "unpleasantly difficult situation."

14. You know that one meaning for the word cycle is "to repeat." The prefix "re-" means to do something again.

15. If something is indefinite it is not definite.

16. The passage shows that Celan escaped after he was interned. The word "escaped" suggests that Celan was imprisoned in the labor camp for 18 months.

17. "Ancel" is a rearrangement of the letters in the word "Celan." Thus, anagram means "rearrangement of letters."

18. The paragraph shows that Celan never recuperated or recovered from the experiences in the Nazi labor camps. The last sentence of the paragraph gives a hint that "healing" is needed to recuperate.

19. The meaning of inflammatory is restated in the phrase "could prove damaging to the continued union of the states."

20. John Quincy Adams thought the gag rules were unconstitutional. This belief caused him to want to remove the rules.

21. In the sentence following the use of the word dermatologist, it describes that it is a doctor who focuses on skin health. This explains what kind of doctor a dermatologist is.

22. Later in the passage it mentions that popping a zit is actually the worst way to get rid of it. That is a different way of saying eliminate. By saying the same thing in a different way, the passage uses synonyms to teach new words.

23. We know that the word "plumage" must have something to do with the bird's looks, as the writer says that the "glossy green-black plumage is rather handsome." The word "handsome" is used to describe appearances. "The covering of feathers on a bird" is the only answer choice that addresses the physical appearance of the bird.

24. In the passage, it gives 3 types of traits or characteristics that mammals share. By giving examples, the passage helps you to understand what the word characteristics means.

25. Soot is the only answer choice that fits here. Haze and smog do not cause haze and smog. Particular is an adjective that has nothing to do with haze and smog.

26. The passage tells you that people must go through a naturalization process to become citizens.

27. "Lowered the boom" means to "bring a heavy punishment down upon someone or something." The NCAA "lowered the boom" as a result of Alabama's committing serious rules violations.
28. Sometimes you can figure out the meanings of words by understanding their relationship to the meaning of the sentence. For example, from this passage we learn that "scientists cannot see [Jupiter's moons] because they are shrouded in ice." "Shrouded" is the **cause** in this cause/effect relationship. If the scientists can't see the moons, it's probably because the moons are covered up by something or "blocked from sight." The answer choice "submerged in water" would not make sense, however, because the sentence says that the moons are "shrouded in ice."

29. The correct answer uses the word "turn" as a noun. The word "turn" is also used as a noun in the example sentence.

30. The context presents an analogy. The life of a prince and princess is a very public life. It is like being on display in a glass house.

31. Passengers on a ship must go ashore to see things on the shore. The keyword is onshore. To get a good look at something onshore, the passengers would have to leave the ship.

32. The context shows the relationship between the groundhog prediction, which is superstition, and the AccuWeather prediction, which is based on science. You can guess that the State College-based AccuWeather Inc. believes that science ranks higher than superstition.

33. Agassi considers himself lucky that he and Gilbert have been friends for eight years. He considers himself lucky to still be friends with Gilbert and that their friendship is whole.

34. We know that the word "languish" must mean the opposite of "rebound strongly," seeing as experts are divided as to which event will happen. Words like "or," "either," "nor," or "but" set up contrasts (opposites) in sentences. Look for those clue words. Then, think about what words or ideas are being contrasted. If you know the meaning of one word or idea, like "rebound strongly," you can figure out what an unknown word means just by thinking of a meaning opposite to the word you do know.

35. The narrator states that he or she is "baffled" or puzzled by Arianna's behavior. Her cryptic behavior is hard to understand and therefore puzzling.

36. The description following the word "naysayers" can provide a clue as to what "naysayers" are. If a group of people thinks that an underprivileged kid of seventeen CANNOT make a movie, they are probably very negative people. They probably aren't positive and aren't going to be helpful. There are no clues, however, that suggest that these people, although negative, would try to stop an underprivileged kid of seventeen from making a movie.

37. A stagecoach is a type of covered wagon that is pulled by horses. The sentence before the one where the word "stagecoach" is used mentions mail being carried by horses. It explains what the word "stagecoach" means before the word is given.

38. After the word telegraph is used, the sentence says that it is like an early version of the telephone. This explains what a telegraph is like to help you understand the word.

39. Even though the economy has been down, people have shown that they are able to recover fast and continue to make purchases.

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