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ENGLISH USAGE

Themes of Short RC Type Question



Main Idea Questions

In these questions short paragraphs are given. What you are supposed to do is to find out the theme of the given paragraph.

1. To begin with, read the first two lines of the paragraph very carefully.
2. Try to form an opinion as to what the paragraph is going to talk about.
3. Read the paragraph. You don't need to comprehend everything in the paragraph but the parts with key words like 'but', 'yet', 'still', 'in spite of', etc.
4. Read the closing lines of the paragraph very carefully.
5. Now see whether the opinion you had formed initially tallies with the paragraph or not.

Generally, the opening and the closing lines of paragraph give a very good view of the theme of the passage.

Example



We are constantly told that information technology will take us to a gleaming, gigabyte-infested other world called Cyberspace. Baloney! The Industrial Revolution didn't take us to Motor space; it brought motors into our lives. The Information Revolution will do the same, introducing new tools, which we will use to serve our ancient human needs. This new movement is not about multimedia, virtual reality or even the mighty World Wide Web. It is about an emerging information marketplace in which computers and their users everywhere will buy sell and freely exchange information and "information work".

The theme of the paragraph is:

- (1) Man always wants to satisfy his primitive needs.
- (2) Going into the Motor space was always a far – fetched dream
- (3) The Information Revolution will be an exchange not of virtual reality but of information.
- (4) The Industrial Revolution was not as good as we expected the Information Revolution to be.



Toolkit

Let us try to solve the question: The opening lines of the paragraph indicate that it is going to talk something about 'information technology'. When we read on, we find that it is talking about the fact that information technology will not usher in a new era but will lead to increase in exchange of information. The same idea occurs in (3).

Next Sentence Questions

Over the past few years 'what comes after' questions have been repeated in the CAT examination. A question of this type may be worded in several ways as under:

1. Which of the following statements will most likely begin the paragraph immediately following the passage?
2. Which of the following statements would most logically conclude the passage?
3. Which of the following is most likely to be a continuation of the passage?
4. Which of the following statements will most likely complete the passage?

However, since the only thing most certain about the CAT examination is its uncertainty, the next time students could get questions of the following type:

Previous Sentence Questions

1. Which of the following statements will most likely begin the paragraph?
2. Which of the following statements would most logically conclude the paragraph immediately preceding the passage?

Intervening Sentence Questions

1. Which of the following statements would most logically fit the parenthesis?
2. Which of the following is most likely to fill the blank space in the passage?
3. Which of the following statements will most likely complete the passage?

For answering these questions not only do we have to get a grasp of the passage, but more particularly, we have to study carefully the statements immediately preceding/succeeding the passage. Let us have a look at an example of each type.

Main Idea Question

'A pattern of black minority ethnic settlement characterized by residential concentration, segregation and deprivation is now well established in Britain. Although this distinctive geography is largely a product of post-war migration, black settlers have a long history in Britain; small clusters of Africans and Indians emerged in port areas such as London, Liverpool and Cardiff as early as the 1800s. These settlements were, however, extremely localised so the day-to-day experience of most people living in Britain at that time was a white one. The Victorians nevertheless held some clearly developed images of 'race', colour and ethnic difference, which were rooted in colonial relations with South Asian and West Indian countries. The largely negative stereotypes associated with 'uncivilized peoples' in far-off lands were to prove powerful constituents of 19th-century racist ideologies, which have survived, albeit in a modified form, into the late 20th century.'

- Q.** According to you what is the theme of the passage.
- (1) "Racism" was more rooted in south Asian and west Indian countries.
 - (2) Britain's experience as colonizing nation, led to negative racial stereotypes in the 19th century, which brought about racism of 20th century.
 - (3) Victorian era had a clearly developed image of 'race', colour and ethnic difference.
 - (4) None of these

If we study the paragraph carefully, we find that the focus of the passage is 'racism in Britain'. So option (1) can't be the answer. Again, both the opening and the concluding sentences talk of the present period. So (3) can't be the answer. Since this passage is about ethnic minorities in UK and also since the passage states that these 'were rooted in colonial relations', (2) forms the answer.

Next Sentence Question

In descending the social scale in any modern industrial community, the primary fact—the conspicuous leisure of the master of the household—disappears at a relatively high point. The head of the middle-class household has been reduced by economic circumstances to turn his hand to gaining a livelihood by occupations which often partake largely of the character of industry, as in the case of ordinary business man of today. But the derivative fact—the vicarious leisure and consumption rendered by the wife, and the auxiliary vicarious performance of leisure by menials—remains in vogue as conventionality which the demands of reputability will not suffer to be slighted. It is by no means an uncommon spectacle to find a man applying himself to work with the utmost assiduity, in order that his wife may in due form render for him that degree of vicarious leisure which the common sense of the time demands.

Q. Find the theme of the passage:

- (1) The heads of the household and their wives in any social scale engage themselves in unproductive skills and tastes.
- (2) The middle and lower – class wives are manifesting the prestige and position for the good names of the household and its master.
- (3) Vicarious leisure enjoyed by the master and their wives is due to the number of their liveried servants.
- (4) Lower class wives are assisting their masters in fulfilling their duties towards their industrial heads and business mans.

Q. What according to you would succeed the passage?

- (1) These in no pretence of leisure on the part of the head of the household.
- (2) The leisure rendered by the wife invariably occurs disguised under some form of work or household duties or social amenities.
- (3) In ascending the social scale, the head of the household and their wives also render vicarious leisure.
- (4) None of the above.

Let's scrutinize the options for the theme based question:

- (1) Heads of the household are not engaged in 'unproductive skills and tastes'. Besides, usage of the phrase "in any social scale" renders this answer option incorrect, hence ruled out.
- (2) ✓ This is the right answer as it sums up the idea of this passage (clue is provided by the statement – "But the derivative fact — slighted")
Options (3) and (4) are irrelevant according to the passage and have to be ruled out.
Hence, (2) is the answer.

Coming to the 'next statement' type question, as this passage (including the last sentence) discusses the leisure rendered by the services of the middle and lower class wives, the subsequent passage would provide an explanation of how this leisure is facilitated by the wives. Hence, (2) is the answer.

Intervening Sentence Questions

When I go out of the house for a walk, uncertain as yet whether I will bend my steps, and submit myself to my instinct to decide for me, I find, strange and whimsical as it may seem, that I finally and inevitably settle southwest, toward some particular wood or meadow or deserted pasture or hill in that direction. My needle is slow to settle, — varies a few degrees, and does not always point due southwest, it is true, and it has good authority for this variation, but it always settles between west and south–southwest. The future lies that way to me, and the earth seems more unexhausted and richer on that side. I turn round and round irresolute sometimes for a quarter of an hour, until I decide, for the thousandth time, that I will walk into the southwest or west. () Thither no business leads me. It is hard for me to believe that I shall find fair landscapes or sufficient wildness and freedom behind the eastern horizon. I am not excited by the prospect of a walk thither; but I believe that the forest which I see in the western horizon stretches uninterruptedly toward the setting sun, and there are no towns, nor cities in it of enough consequence to disturb me. Let me live where I will, on this side is the city, on that the wilderness, and ever I am leaving the city more and more, and withdrawing into the wildness. I should not lay so much stress on this fact, if I did not believe that something like this is the prevailing tendency of my countrymen. I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe. And that way the nation is moving, and I may say that mankind progress from east to west.

Q. Find the theme of the paragraph:

- (1) We go eastward to realize history and we go westward into the future.
- (2) We go eastward to explore fair landscapes and we go westward to exploit the forests.
- (3) Author wants to settle in west and south–west as he feels at home here.
- (4) The author is apprehensive on which direction he should choose for morning walk.

Q. According to you, what statement would logically fit in the parenthesis?

- (1) My needle is not pointing towards east.
- (2) For there is serenity and tranquility in west.
- (3) Eastward I go only by force; but west ward I go free.
- (4) None of these.

The last sentence of the paragraph gives the clue for the theme of the passage – “the nation is moving and that mankind progress from east to west”. The author in this passage metaphorically draws a comparison between east and west. He symbolizes east as the past and the west as the future (the statements: ‘it is hard for.....east to west’ provides the clue). Hence, (1) is the answer.

Coming to the intervening statement question, the statement subsequent to the parenthesis reflects the author’s thought on east and west, which implies that (3) would coherently fit in the parenthesis. (1) is not logical as can be sensed from this sentence – “My needle is slow to settle . . . and does not always point due southwest” Option (2) is a conclusion, which will not be cogent with the author’s thought on west as indicated in the latter part of the passage. Hence, (3) is the answer.

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