

Words and Behavior

Essay by Aldous Huxley



READING 6 Analyze the effect of ambiguity and subtlety in literary essays. **10A** Evaluate the merits of an argument, action, or policy by analyzing the relationships among evidence, inferences, assumptions, and claims in text. **10B** Draw conclusions about the credibility of persuasive text by examining its implicit and stated assumptions about an issue as conveyed by the specific use of language.

DID YOU KNOW?

Aldous Huxley . . .

- was one of George Orwell's teachers.
- died on the same day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Meet the Author

Aldous Huxley 1894–1963

In both his fiction and nonfiction, Aldous Huxley offered brilliant satiric commentary on political, social, and cultural trends. He is best known for his novel *Brave New World* (1932), a chilling work about a false utopia populated by mass-produced, genetically engineered people. The novel is considered a classic science fiction work of the 20th century.

Loss of Vision Aldous Huxley was born in Surrey, England, into a family of gifted intellectuals that included scientists, educators, and writers. As a student at Eton College, Huxley contracted keratitis, an eye disease that resulted in near blindness. He had intended to pursue a career in science or medicine, but he abandoned that ambition because of his illness. Learning Braille to continue his education, he studied English literature at Oxford University, where his sight showed signs of slight improvement. He was awarded an honors degree in 1916, the same year he published his first book, a collection of poetry.

Literary Rebel After working as a teacher and a journalist, Huxley concentrated on his own writing, moving away from poetry to fiction and essays. The witty skepticism of his first two novels, published in the

1920s, established his reputation and also brought him a certain popularity as a rebel. During the 1930s, Huxley's writing focused on political and cultural trends.

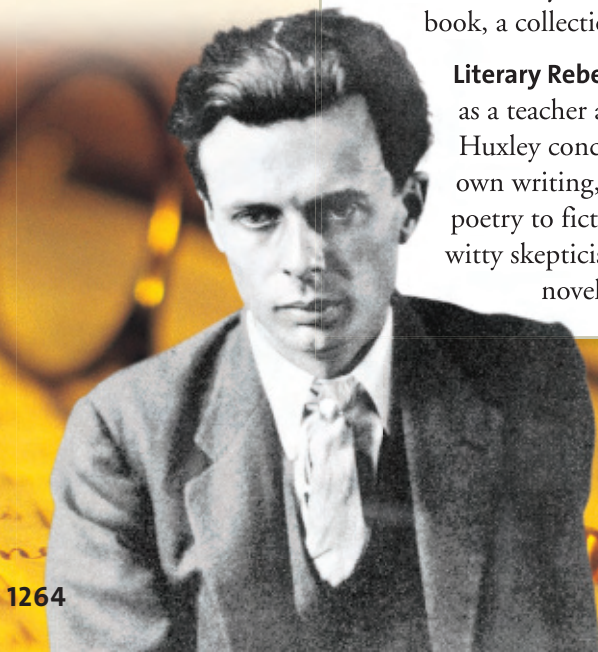
West Meets East In 1937, Huxley settled in southern California, where both the climate and new medical treatments improved his vision. About the time he emigrated, he became increasingly concerned with the lack of spiritual focus in contemporary life, noting, "For too long Europeans and Americans have believed in nothing but the values arising in a mechanized, commercialized, urbanized way of life." He began to study and write about Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christian mysticism.

Although Huxley had never intended to make the United States his permanent home, he remained there for the rest of his life, finding work in Hollywood as a screenwriter and continuing to produce novels, essays, literary criticism, and philosophical writings. Toward the end of his life, Huxley the social critic remarked, "It is a bit embarrassing to have been concerned with the human problem all one's life and find at the end that one has no more to offer by way of advice than 'Try to be a little kinder.'"



Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-1264



● ELEMENTS OF NONFICTION: DEDUCTIVE REASONING

Huxley's essay is a well-reasoned and well-supported argument that is based on deductive reasoning. When writers use **deductive reasoning**, they begin with a general principle, apply it to a specific situation, and then arrive at a logical conclusion. Here is Huxley's reasoning early in the essay:

- **General principle**—We use words to falsify facts because doing so benefits us in some way.
- **Specific situation**—war
- **Conclusion**—We create a verbal alternative to the reality of war to preserve our self-esteem.

As you read, notice how Huxley uses deductive reasoning at the beginning of the essay and toward the end.

Review: Rhetorical Devices

● READING SKILL: ANALYZE AN ARGUMENT

The cornerstone of every argument is its **claim**, the writer's position on an issue. In "Words and Behavior," Huxley's claim is the conclusion about war that he reaches via deductive reasoning. To convince readers that a claim is valid, a writer must provide **support**, which may consist of

- reasons that explain or justify an action, a belief, or a decision
- evidence in the form of facts, examples, statistics, or the views of experts

As you read, write down the reasons and evidence Huxley offers in support of his claim.

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Huxley uses the following words to develop his argument. Complete each sentence with one of the words.

WORD LIST

abstraction	euphemism	propound
balefully	iniquity	vitate
entity	intrinsically	

1. He used a(n) _____ to avoid offending his audience.
2. She _____ knew the story was fabricated.
3. Is the group an offshoot or an entirely new _____?
4. Will the senator _____ a new solution?



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

How can **WORDS** *deceive?*

In "Words and Behavior," Aldous Huxley examines how words are used to mislead people and manipulate truth. Some say there's an art to such deception, which we can see in everything from pop-up ads on our computers to speeches given by world leaders. What motivates people to use deceptive language?

QUICKWRITE Suppose that you accidentally broke an expensive and beloved item in your house. Write a note to your parents explaining what happened. Before you write, consider how your choice of words will affect their impression of your behavior. Share your note with several classmates, and discuss the specific words you used to describe the accident.



WORDS AND BEHAVIOR

Aldous Huxley

Words form the thread on which we string our experiences. Without them we should live spasmodically and intermittently. Hatred itself is not so strong that animals will not forget it, if distracted, even in the presence of the enemy. Watch a pair of cats, crouching on the brink of a fight. **Balefully** the eyes glare; from far down in the throat of each come bursts of a strange, strangled noise of defiance; as though animated by a life of their own, the tails twitch and tremble. With aimed intensity of loathing! Another moment and surely there must be an explosion. But no; all of a sudden one of the two creatures turns away, hoists a hind leg in a more than fascist salute¹ and, with the same fixed and focused attention as it had
10 given a moment before to its enemy, begins to make a lingual toilet.² Animal **A** love is as much at the mercy of distractions as animal hatred. The dumb creation lives a life made up of discrete³ and mutually irrelevant episodes. Such as it is, the consistency of human characters is due to the words upon which all human experiences are strung. We are purposeful because we can describe our feelings in rememberable words, can justify and rationalize our desires in terms of some kind of argument. Faced by an enemy we do not allow an itch to distract us from our emotions; the mere word “enemy” is enough to keep us reminded of our hatred,

balefully (bāl’fēl-ē) *adv.* in a manner that threatens evil or harm; ominously

A ANALYZE AN ARGUMENT

What contrast is Huxley drawing between humans and animals in this passage about the cats?

Analyze Visuals ►

Summarize the message of this poster.

1. **fascist** (făsh’ĭst) **salute**: a salute, used in Nazi Germany, in which the arm is rigidly extended forward, slightly above the horizontal.

2. **make a lingual toilet**: clean itself with its tongue, as cats commonly do.

3. **discrete**: separate; distinct.



TOGETHER

to convince us that we do well to be angry. Similarly the word “love” bridges for us those chasms of momentary indifference and boredom which gape from time to time between even the most ardent lovers. Feeling and desire provide us with our motive power; words give continuity to what we do and to a considerable extent determine our direction. Inappropriate and badly chosen words **viti**ate thought and lead to wrong or foolish conduct. Most ignorances are vincible,⁴ and in the greater number of cases stupidity is what the Buddha pronounced it to be, a sin. For, consciously, or subconsciously, it is with deliberation that we do not know or fail to understand—because incomprehension allows us, with a good conscience, to evade unpleasant obligations and responsibilities, because ignorance is the best excuse for going on doing what one likes, but ought not, to do. Our egotisms are incessantly fighting to preserve themselves, not only from external enemies, but also from the assaults of the other and better self with which they are so uncomfortably associated. Ignorance is egotism’s most effective defense against that Dr. Jekyll⁵ in us who desires perfection; stupidity, its subtlest stratagem. If, as so often happens, we choose to give continuity to our experience by means of words which falsify the facts, this is because the falsification is somehow to our advantage as egotists. **B**

Consider, for example, the case of war. War is enormously discreditable to those who order it to be waged and even to those who merely tolerate its existence. Furthermore, to developed sensibilities the facts of war are revolting and horrifying. To falsify these facts, and by so doing to make war seem less evil than it really is, and our own responsibility in tolerating war less heavy, is doubly to our advantage. By suppressing and distorting the truth, we protect our sensibilities and preserve our self-esteem. Now, language is, among other things, a device which men use for suppressing and distorting the truth. Finding the reality of war too unpleasant to contemplate, we create a verbal alternative to that reality, parallel with it, but in quality quite different from it. That which we contemplate thenceforward is not that to which we react emotionally and upon which we pass our moral judgments, is not war as it is in fact, but the fiction of war as it exists in our pleasantly falsifying verbiage. Our stupidity in using inappropriate language turns out, on analysis, to be the most refined cunning. **C**

The most shocking fact about war is that its victims and its instruments are individual human beings, and that these individual human beings are condemned by the monstrous conventions of politics to murder or be murdered in quarrels not their own, to inflict upon the innocent and, innocent themselves of any crime against their enemies, to suffer cruelties of every kind.

The language of strategy and politics is designed, so far as it is possible, to conceal this fact, to make it appear as though wars were not fought by individuals drilled to murder one another in cold blood and without provocation, but either by impersonal and therefore wholly non-moral and impassible forces, or else by personified **abstractions**.

vitiate (vĭsh’ē-āt’) v.
to corrupt or weaken

B DEDUCTIVE REASONING

In lines 1–35, Huxley develops his **general principle** from a series of ideas about language. Summarize the reasoning that leads to Huxley’s general principle.

C DEDUCTIVE REASONING

Huxley states his **conclusion** in lines 43–48. Explain how he uses deductive reasoning to reach this conclusion.

abstraction (ăb-străk’shən)
n. something that cannot be perceived by any of the five senses; an idea or a quality

4. **vincible** (vĭn’sə-bəl): capable of being overcome.

5. **Dr. Jekyll** (jĕk’əl): an idealistic medical researcher transformed by an experimental drug into the murderously evil Mr. Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

60 Here are a few examples of the first kind of falsification. In place of “cavalrymen” or “foot soldiers” military writers like to speak of “sabers” and “rifles.” Here is a sentence from a description of the Battle of Marengo:⁶ “According to Victor’s report, the French retreat was orderly; it is certain, at any rate, that the regiments held together, for the six thousand Austrian sabers found no opportunity to charge home.” The battle is between sabers in line and muskets in *échelon*⁷—a mere clash of ironmongery.⁸

On other occasions there is no question of anything so vulgarly material as ironmongery. The battles are between Platonic ideas,⁹ between the abstractions of physics and mathematics. Forces interact; weights are flung into scales; masses
70 are set in motion. Or else it is all a matter of geometry. Lines swing and sweep; are protracted or curved; pivot on a fixed point. **D**

Alternatively the combatants are personal, in the sense that they are personifications. There is “the enemy,” in the singular, making “his” plans, striking “his” blows. The attribution of personal characteristics to collectivities,¹⁰ to geographical expressions, to institutions, is a source, as we shall see, of endless confusions in political thought, of innumerable political mistakes and crimes. Personification in politics is an error which we make because it is to our advantage as egotists to be able to feel violently proud of our country and of ourselves as belonging to it, and to believe that all the misfortunes
80 due to our own mistakes are really the work of the Foreigner. It is easier to feel violently toward a person than toward an abstraction; hence our habit of making political personifications. In some cases military personifications are merely special instances of political personifications. A particular collectivity, the army or the warring nation, is given the name and, along with the name, the attributes of a single person, in order that we may be able to love or hate it more intensely than we could do if we thought of it as what it really is: a number of diverse individuals. In other cases personification is used for the purpose of concealing the fundamental absurdity and monstrosity of war. What is absurd and monstrous about war is that men who have no personal quarrel should be
90 trained to murder one another in cold blood. By personifying opposing armies or countries, we are able to think of war as a conflict between individuals. The same result is obtained by writing of war as though it were carried on exclusively by the generals in command and not by the private soldiers in their armies. (“*Rennenkampf* had pressed back von Schubert.”) The implication in both cases is that war is indistinguishable from a bout of fisticuffs¹¹ in a bar room. Whereas in reality it is profoundly different. A scrap between two individuals is forgivable;

D ANALYZE AN ARGUMENT

Reread lines 60–71. How do these examples of descriptive language support Huxley’s **claim**?

Language Coach

Roots and Affixes A word’s **root** may contain its core meaning. The root of *egotists* (line 78) is the Latin *ego* (“I”). An egotist is a self-centered person. Several other words come from *ego*. Identify some of these words and their **connotations** (associated feelings).

6. **Battle of Marengo:** a battle fought in 1800 in which French troops led by Napoleon Bonaparte defeated an Austrian army near the town of Marengo in northern Italy.

7. **échelon** (ěsh’ə-lŏn’): an arrangement of groups of soldiers in a steplike formation.

8. **ironmongery** (i’ərn-mŭng’gə-rē): ironware.

9. **Platonic** (plə-tŏn’ĭk) **ideas:** In the teachings of Plato, the fourth-century B.C. Greek philosopher, all things in the concrete world are actually mere copies of immaterial realities.

10. **collectivities:** groups of people.

11. **fisticuffs** (fĭs’tĭ-kŭfs’): fighting with the fists; bare-knuckle boxing.

mass murder, deliberately organized, is a monstrous **iniquity**. We still choose to use war as an instrument of policy; and to comprehend the full wickedness and absurdity of war would therefore be inconvenient. For, once we understood, we
 100 should have to make some effort to get rid of the abominable thing. Accordingly, when we talk about war, we use a language which conceals or embellishes its reality. Ignoring the facts, so far as we possibly can, we imply that battles are not fought by soldiers, but by things, principles, allegories, personified collectivities, or (at the most human) by opposing commanders, pitched against one another in single combat. For the same reason, when we have to describe the processes and the results of war, we employ a rich variety of **euphemisms**. Even the most violently patriotic and militaristic are reluctant to call a spade by its own name. To conceal their intentions even from themselves, they make use of picturesque metaphors. We find them, for example, clamoring for war planes numerous
 110 and powerful enough to go and “destroy the hornets in their nests”—in other words, to go and throw thermite,¹² high explosives and vesicants¹³ upon the inhabitants of neighboring countries before they have time to come and do the same to us. And how reassuring is the language of historians and strategists! They write admiringly of those military geniuses who know “when to strike at the enemy’s line” (a single combatant deranges the geometrical constructions of a personification); when to “turn his flank”;¹⁴ when to “execute an enveloping movement.” As though they were engineers discussing the strength of materials and the distribution of stresses, they talk of abstract **entities** called “man power” and “fire power.” They sum up the long-drawn sufferings and atrocities of trench
 120 warfare in the phrase, “a war of attrition”;¹⁵ the massacre and mangling of human beings is assimilated to the grinding of a lens.¹⁶

iniquity (ĩ-nĩk’wĩ-tē) *n.*
immorality; wickedness

euphemism
(yōō’fə-mĩz’ēm) *n.* a
weaker word or phrase
used in place of another
in order to be less
distasteful or offensive

entity (ēn’tĩ-tē) *n.*
something that has
definitive existence;
a creation

A dangerously abstract word, which figures in all discussions about war, is “force.” Those who believe in organizing collective security by means of military pacts against a possible aggressor are particularly fond of this word. “You cannot,” they say, “have international justice unless you are prepared to impose it by force.” “Peace-loving countries must unite to use force against aggressive dictatorships.” “Democratic institutions must be protected, if need be, by force.” And so on. **E**

Now, the word “force,” when used in reference to human relations, has no
 130 single, definite meaning. There is the “force” used by parents when, without resort to any kind of physical violence, they compel their children to act or refrain from acting in some particular way. There is the “force” used by attendants in an asylum when they try to prevent a maniac from hurting himself or others. There is the “force” used by the police when they control a crowd, and that other

E ANALYZE AN ARGUMENT

Reread lines 106–127.
What **evidence** does Huxley provide to support his idea that even supporters of war are uncomfortable with its reality?

12. **thermite**: a mixture of chemicals that burns very intensely, used in certain kinds of bombs.

13. **vesicants** (vēs’ĩ-kənts): chemical agents, such as mustard gas, that cause inflammation and blistering of the skin and internal tissues.

14. **“turn his flank”**: turn the right or left side of the enemy’s attack force.

15. **attrition**: a gradual process of wearing down.

16. **assimilated . . . lens**: likened to the process by which glass is ground into lenses.



Come Lad, Slip Across and Help, World War I Poster. © Topham/The Image Works.

“force” which they use in a baton charge.¹⁷ And finally there is the “force” used in war. This, of course, varies with the technological devices at the disposal of the belligerents, with the policies they are pursuing, and with the particular circumstances of the war in question. But in general it may be said that, in war, “force” connotes violence and fraud used to the limit of the combatants’ capacity.

140 Variations in quantity, if sufficiently great, produce variations in quality. The “force” that is war, particularly modern war, is very different from the “force” that is police action, and the use of the same abstract word to describe the two dissimilar processes is profoundly misleading. (Still more misleading, of course, is the explicit assimilation of a war, waged by allied League-of-Nations powers¹⁸ against an aggressor, to police action against a criminal. The first is the use of violence and fraud without limit against innocent and guilty alike; the second is the use of strictly limited violence and a minimum of fraud exclusively against the guilty.)

17. **baton charge:** the beating back of a mob by police officers wielding wooden clubs.

18. **League-of-Nations powers:** countries (including Britain) who joined the League of Nations, a former international association of nations organized after World War I with the stated purpose of promoting peace.

Reality is a succession of concrete and particular situations. When we think
150 about such situations we should use the particular and concrete words which apply
to them. If we use abstract words which apply equally well (and equally badly) to
other, quite dissimilar situations, it is certain that we shall think incorrectly. **F**

Let us take the sentences quoted above and translate the abstract word “force”
into language that will render (however inadequately) the concrete and particular
realities of contemporary warfare.

“You cannot have international justice, unless you are prepared to impose it
by force.” Translated, this becomes: “You cannot have international justice unless
you are prepared, with a view to imposing a just settlement, to drop thermite,
high explosives and vesicants upon the inhabitants of foreign cities and to have
160 thermite, high explosives and vesicants dropped in return upon the inhabitants
of your cities.” At the end of this proceeding, justice is to be imposed by the
victorious party—that is, if there is a victorious party. It should be remarked that
justice was to have been imposed by the victorious party at the end of the last war.
But, unfortunately, after four years of fighting, the temper of the victors was such
that they were quite incapable of making a just settlement. The Allies are reaping
in Nazi Germany what they sowed at Versailles.¹⁹ The victors of the next war
will have undergone intensive bombardments with thermite, high explosives and
vesicants. Will their temper be better than that of the Allies in 1918? Will they
be in a fitter state to make a just settlement? The answer, quite obviously, is: No.
170 It is psychologically all but impossible that justice should be secured by the
methods of contemporary warfare. **G**

The next two sentences may be taken together. “Peace-loving countries must
unite to use force against aggressive dictatorships. Democratic institutions must
be protected, if need be, by force.” Let us translate. “Peace-loving countries must
unite to throw thermite, high explosives and vesicants on the inhabitants of
countries ruled by aggressive dictators. They must do this, and of course abide
the consequences, in order to preserve peace and democratic institutions.” Two
questions immediately **propound** themselves. First, is it likely that peace can
be secured by a process calculated to reduce the orderly life of our complicated
180 societies to chaos? And, second, is it likely that democratic institutions will
flourish in a state of chaos? Again, the answers are pretty clearly in the negative.

By using the abstract word “force,” instead of terms which at least attempt
to describe the realities of war as it is today, the preachers of collective security
through military collaboration disguise from themselves and from others, not
only the contemporary facts, but also the probable consequences of their favorite
policy. The attempt to secure justice, peace and democracy by “force” seems
reasonable enough until we realize, first, that this noncommittal word stands,
in the circumstances of our age, for activities which can hardly fail to result in
social chaos; and second, that the consequences of social chaos are injustice,



TEKS 6

F SUBTLETY

In this paragraph, Huxley explores the **subtleties**, or fine distinctions, of language. The subtle differences Huxley points to in descriptions of “force” might appear to be unconscious choices: perhaps writers aren’t even aware that they are making choices. But Huxley’s point is that writers are not thinking *deeply* enough about the relationship between language and reality. Does this criticism seem fair to you? How might writers do a better job?

G ANALYZE AN ARGUMENT

Compare the quoted statement with Huxley’s translation in lines 156–161. How does his translation serve as **support** for his claim?

propound (prə-pound’)
v. to put forward for
consideration; propose

19. **The Allies . . . Versailles** (vər-sīl): The peace treaty ending World War I, signed at the Palace of Versailles near Paris in 1919, imposed humiliating punishments on Germany, which led to the rise of German nationalism and Nazism in the 1920s and 1930s.

190 chronic warfare and tyranny. The moment we think in concrete and particular terms of the concrete and particular process called “modern war,” we see that a policy which worked (or at least didn’t result in complete disaster) in the past has no prospect whatever of working in the immediate future. The attempt to secure justice, peace and democracy by means of a “force,” which means, at this particular moment of history, thermite, high explosives and vesicants, is about as reasonable as the attempt to put out a fire with a colorless liquid that happens to be, not water, but petrol.²⁰ **H**

What applies to the “force” that is war applies in large measure to the “force” that is revolution. It seems inherently very unlikely that social justice and social
200 peace can be secured by thermite, high explosives and vesicants. At first, it may be, the parties in a civil war would hesitate to use such instruments on their fellow-countrymen. But there can be little doubt that, if the conflict were prolonged (as it probably would be between the evenly balanced Right and Left of a highly industrialized society), the combatants would end by losing their scruples.

The alternatives confronting us seem to be plain enough. Either we invent and conscientiously employ a new technique for making revolutions and settling international disputes; or else we cling to the old technique and, using “force” (that is to say, thermite, high explosives and vesicants), destroy ourselves. Those who, for whatever motive, disguise the nature of the second alternative under
210 inappropriate language, render the world a grave disservice. They lead us into one of the temptations we find it hardest to resist—the temptation to run away from reality, to pretend that facts are not what they are. Like Shelley (but without Shelley’s acute awareness of what he was doing) we are perpetually weaving

*A shroud of talk to hide us from the sun
Of this familiar life.*²¹

We protect our minds by an elaborate system of abstractions, ambiguities, metaphors and similes from the reality we do not wish to know too clearly; we lie to ourselves, in order that we may still have the excuse of ignorance, the alibi of stupidity and incomprehension, possessing which we can continue with a good
220 conscience to commit and tolerate the most monstrous crimes: **I**

*The poor wretch who has learned his only prayers
From curses, who knows scarcely words enough
To ask a blessing from his Heavenly Father,
Becomes a fluent phraseman, absolute
And technical in victories and defeats,
And all our dainty terms for fratricide;*²²

H RHETORICAL DEVICES

What effect does Huxley create through **repetition** of the phrase “thermite, high explosives and vesicants”?



TEKS 6

I AMBIGUITY

Ambiguity is a technique writers use in which a word, phrase, or event has more than one meaning or can be interpreted in more than one way. An ambiguous statement demonstrates an inexactness of meaning in language. In what way does Huxley believe ambiguity can protect our minds from monstrous crimes? As you read the poem that follows, watch for an example of this type of ambiguity.

20. **petrol** (pět'rəl): gasoline.

21. **Shelley . . . familiar life**: The romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote these lines in his 1820 poem “Letter to Maria Gisborne.”

22. **fratricide** (frăt'ŕŕ-sīd'): the killing of one's brother or sister.



Your Talk May Kill Your Comrades (1942), Abram Games. World War II Poster. The Granger Collection, New York.

*Terms which we trundle smoothly o'er our tongues
 Like mere abstractions, empty sounds to which
 We join no meaning and attach no form!
 As if the soldier died without a wound:
 As if the fibers of this godlike frame
 Were gored without a pang: as if the wretch
 Who fell in battle, doing bloody deeds,
 Passed off to Heaven translated and not killed;
 As though he had no wife to pine for him,
 No God to judge him.²³*

The language we use about war is inappropriate, and its inappropriateness is designed to conceal a reality so odious that we do not wish to know it. The language we use about politics is also inappropriate; but here our mistake has a
 240 different purpose. Our principal aim in this case is to arouse and, having aroused, to rationalize and justify such **intrinsically** agreeable sentiments as pride and hatred, self-esteem and contempt for others. To achieve this end we speak about the facts of politics in words which more or less completely misrepresent them. . . .

The evil passions are further justified by another linguistic error—the error of speaking about certain categories of persons as though they were mere embodied abstractions. Foreigners and those who disagree with us are not thought of as men and women like ourselves and our fellow-countrymen; they are thought of as representatives and, so to say, symbols of a class. In so far as they have any personality at all, it is the personality we mistakenly attribute to their class—a
 250 personality that is, by definition, intrinsically evil. We know that the harming or killing of men and women is wrong, and we are reluctant consciously to do what we know to be wrong. But when particular men and women are thought of merely as representatives of a class, which has previously been defined as evil and personified in the shape of a devil, then the reluctance to hurt or murder disappears. Brown, Jones and Robinson are no longer thought of as Brown, Jones and Robinson, but as heretics, gentiles, Yids, niggers, barbarians, Huns, communists, capitalists, fascists, liberals²⁴—whichever the case may be. When they have been called such names and assimilated to the accursed class to which the names apply, Brown, Jones and Robinson cease to be conceived as
 260 what they really are—human persons—and become for the users of this fatally inappropriate language mere vermin or, worse, demons whom it is right and proper to destroy as thoroughly and as painfully as possible. Wherever persons are present, questions of morality arise. Rulers of nations and leaders of parties find morality embarrassing. That is why they take such pains to depersonalize

Language Coach


Homographs The noun *gore* is unrelated to the verb. The noun, from Old English *gor* (“filth”), means “blood from a wound.” The verb, from Old English *gar* (“spear”), means “stab.” How does the noun affect the connotation of *gored* (line 232)?

intrinsically
 (ín-trín'zǐ-klē) *adv.* in the manner of the true nature of a thing; inherently

23. **The poor wretch . . . judge him:** These lines are from “Fears in Solitude,” a poem that romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote during what he called “the alarm of an invasion” of Britain by French forces near the start of the Napoleonic wars.

24. **heretics . . . liberals:** terms used to disparage groups of people. *Yids* is an offensive term for Jews, and *Huns* was a derogatory term for Germans during World War I.

their opponents. All propaganda directed against an opposing group has but one aim: to substitute diabolical abstractions for concrete persons. The propagandist's purpose is to make one set of people forget that certain other sets of people are human. By robbing them of their personality, he puts them outside the pale of moral obligation. Mere symbols can have no rights—particularly when that of
270 which they are symbolical is, by definition, evil. **J**

Politics can become moral only on one condition: that its problems shall be spoken of and thought about exclusively in terms of concrete reality; that is to say, of persons. To depersonify human beings and to personify abstractions are complementary errors which lead, by an inexorable²⁵ logic, to war between nations and to idolatrous worship of the State, with consequent governmental oppression. All current political thought is a mixture, in varying proportions, between thought in terms of concrete realities and thought in terms of depersonified symbols and personified abstractions. In the democratic countries the problems of internal politics are thought about mainly in terms of concrete
280 reality; those of external politics, mainly in terms of abstractions and symbols. In dictatorial countries the proportion of concrete to abstract and symbolic thought is lower than in democratic countries. Dictators talk little of persons, much of personified abstractions, such as the Nation, the State, the Party, and much of depersonified symbols, such as Yids, Bolshies,²⁶ Capitalists. The stupidity of politicians who talk about a world of persons as though it were not a world of persons is due in the main to self-interest. In a fictitious world of symbols and personified abstractions, rulers find that they can rule more effectively, and the ruled, that they can gratify instincts which the conventions of good manners and the imperatives of morality demand that they should repress. To think correctly **K**
290 is the condition of behaving well. It is also in itself a moral act; those who would think correctly must resist considerable temptations. 

J DEDUCTIVE REASONING

In lines 237–270, Huxley applies his general principle to politics. Summarize the deductive reasoning in this passage, and describe what Huxley offers as support for his claim.

K GRAMMAR AND STYLE

To convey his ideas about this serious topic, Huxley uses **formal language**. Notice the sophisticated vocabulary and complex sentence structure in lines 286–289.

25. **inexorable** (ĭn-ĕk'ser-ə-bəl): not able to be moved or influenced; unrelenting.

26. **Bolshies**: Communists. The word is shortened from *Bolsheviks*, members of the Russian Communist faction that came to power in the 1917 revolution.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** According to Huxley, what is the main reason why people use language inappropriately when discussing war?
2. **Recall** What does Huxley find “absurd and monstrous” about war?
3. **Clarify** According to Huxley in lines 237–243, why do politicians often use inappropriate language?

Literary Analysis

4. **Examine Rhetorical Devices** Huxley uses **repetition** throughout his essay to emphasize ideas. For each example that follows, explain how the repetition enhances his argument.
 - “ignorance” and “stupidity” (lines 23–49)
 - “force” (lines 129–139)
 - “Brown, Jones and Robinson” (lines 255–262)
5. **Analyze an Argument** Review your notes on the reasons and evidence that Huxley offers in the essay. What do you consider the strongest support for his claim that inappropriate use of language allows people to deceive themselves and others about the true nature of war? Explain your answer.
6. **Draw Conclusions About Deductive Reasoning** In his statement of the premise on which he bases his deductive reasoning, Huxley says that “words give continuity to what we do.” Why might it be especially difficult for a nation’s leaders to maintain such continuity in wartime?
7. **Evaluate the Essay** In your opinion, how well reasoned and persuasive is Huxley’s argument? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.
8. **Compare Texts** Reread the war poems by Yeats, Brooke, and Sassoon starting on page 1242. Which of these poems best captures the reality of war as described by Huxley? Explain your response.

Literary Criticism

9. **Historical Context** Huxley wrote “Words and Behavior” in 1939 in reaction to developments in Nazi Germany and other European nations. In his essay, he warns against the manipulation of language—both by political leaders and by ordinary citizens—to justify war. To what extent do you think his observations are true today? Explain your answer.



READING 6 Analyze the effect of ambiguity and subtlety in literary essays. **10A** Evaluate the merits of an argument, action, or policy by analyzing the relationships among evidence, inferences, assumptions, and claims in text. **10B** Draw conclusions about the credibility of persuasive text by examining its implicit and stated assumptions about an issue as conveyed by the specific use of language.

How can **WORDS** deceive?

Think of some commonly used euphemisms. Choose one, and describe how it obscures the complexity of the real world.

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Answer the following questions based on your knowledge of the vocabulary words.

1. What kind of person is likely to stare **balefully**?
2. When factors **vitiate** a cause, what do they do?
3. What is an example of an **abstraction**?
4. What type of situation is clearly an **iniquity**?
5. What phrase is a **euphemism** for an old person?
6. What must an **entity** have?
7. If you **propound** an idea, what do you do?
8. What traits are **intrinsically** part of a person?

WORD LIST

abstraction
balefully
entity
euphemism
iniquity
intrinsically
propound
vitiate

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING

• approach • assume • environment • method • strategy

Find an example of an editorial calling for a specific policy or supporting a particular position. Then, employ Huxley's **method** of analysis by closely examining the words that are used in the editorial. With a partner, analyze the author's use of language. Use an Academic Vocabulary word in your discussion.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: USING CONTEXT CLUES TO FIND NUANCE

A word can have many shades of meaning, or **nuances**. Though the word *abstraction* generally denotes a removal from concrete reality, its **context**—the surrounding words—can express various nuances. For example, if you say a car that runs on water is a “mere *abstraction* because the technology is nonexistent,” your use of *mere* and *nonexistent technology* suggests that the idea is unrealistic.

PRACTICE Use context to determine the nuance of *abstraction* in each sentence.

1. The film's vivid imagery makes poverty in Africa more than an **abstraction**.
2. In a state of **abstraction**, Amelia put on her slippers instead of her shoes.
3. The entire gallery was filled with **abstractions** in glass, plastic, and bronze.
4. Professor Ponce spoke in **abstractions**, making him difficult to understand.
5. The **abstraction** of key ideas from the articles required a critical editor.



READING 1B Analyze textual context (within a sentence) to draw conclusions about the nuance in word meanings.

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Conventions in Writing

◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Use Appropriate Language

Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 1276. Huxley uses **formal language** that is appropriate for the seriousness of his topic and the sophistication of his argument. Here is an example from his essay:

A particular collectivity, the army or the warring nation, is given the name and, along with the name, the attributes of a single person, in order that we may be able to love or hate it more intensely than we could do if we thought of it as what it really is: a number of diverse individuals. (lines 83–87)

Notice that the passage contains key elements of formal language, including complex vocabulary and sentence structure, and a lack of contractions.

PRACTICE Rewrite the following sentences using formal language. An example sentence has been done for you.

Politicians can't always say the whole truth and nothing but the truth, especially if a war is going on.

Politicians cannot always speak with complete openness and honesty, especially during wartime.

1. When a place is getting attacked by some bad guys, the government first of all has to protect its people.
2. After the war's over, educated types can get picky about the things their leaders said.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Expand your understanding of persuasion by responding to this prompt. Then, use the **revising tips** to improve your rebuttal.

WRITING PROMPT

WRITE A REBUTTAL It's very clear in "Words and Behavior" how Huxley feels about language being manipulated to deceive. Write a **three- or four-paragraph rebuttal** to his essay in which you make the case for why language must sometimes be manipulated.

REVISING TIPS

- Clearly state your opposing claim.
- Provide a strong example to support your claim.
- Use forceful and specific language.



WRITING 16 Write persuasive texts. **ORAL AND WRITTEN CONVENTIONS 17** Understand the function of and use the conventions of academic language when speaking and writing.

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Revision



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