Figurative Language, Connotation, and Tone

Name: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____ / 10

Quick Review

Words carry both a DENOTATION (their dictionary meaning) and a CONNOTATION (the feeling they suggest). Figurative language — similes, metaphors, personification — shapes that feeling, and together those choices create the TONE of a passage (how the writer seems to feel about what is happening).

PART 1 — READ

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Saturday at the Workshop

The first Saturday Cyrus spent in his aunt's repair workshop, he understood why his cousins called it "the cave." The shop sat at the back of a narrow building on Madison Street, and the front window had been painted over so long ago that the paint had started to bubble like skin in the sun. Inside, half-finished radios and gutted toasters slumped on every shelf, their wires drooping like the antennae of tired insects. The single overhead lamp coughed weakly when his aunt flipped the switch.

Aunt Naomi, however, moved through the cave the way a librarian moves through a familiar stack. She did not hunt for tools — she greeted them. "Hello, beautiful," she murmured to a soldering iron older than Cyrus's mother. "Be patient with me, friend," she said to a stubborn screw. Cyrus tried not to laugh, because his aunt was perfectly serious and because, under his shyness, he had already decided that he liked her. She did not treat the broken machines as junk. She treated them as patients in a quiet hospital, each waiting its turn.

By noon, Cyrus had handed her seven tools and broken two of them. The second time something snapped in his hands, his face went hot, and the silence in the cave felt larger than the cave itself. Aunt Naomi did not look up from the radio she was opening. "That spring was tired anyway," she said, in the same warm voice she had used for the screw. "We'll send it on. Pass me the small green-handled one." Cyrus passed her the small green-handled screwdriver. The shame in his chest, which had been swelling like a balloon, let out a small, careful breath. He understood, then, that the cave was not a cave at all. It was a place where broken things were spoken to gently — and that, for one afternoon, included him.

PART 2 — PRACTICE

Use the passage to answer each question. Pay attention to how the writer's word choices shape feeling and tone.

1. Read this line: "The paint had started to bubble like skin in the sun." This figure of speech is MOST LIKELY used to —

A. compare the paint to a healthy, well-cared-for surface.

B. give the shop a worn, slightly uncomfortable feeling from the very first paragraph.

C. warn the reader that the shop is dangerous and someone will be hurt.

D. show that the shop is very modern and recently painted.

2. What does the phrase "the single overhead lamp coughed weakly when his aunt flipped the switch" do to the shop?

A. It makes the shop sound bright, fresh, and well-lit.

B. It uses personification to give the lamp a human weakness, making the shop feel tired and old.

C. It explains exactly how the lamp's electrical wiring works.

D. It hints that the lamp is broken and Aunt Naomi cannot fix anything.

3. Look at the description of the broken machines: "slumped on every shelf, their wires drooping like the antennae of tired insects." Which feeling do these words MOST suggest?

A. danger and threat

B. humor and silliness

C. exhaustion and quiet sadness

D. anger and frustration

4. Read this line: "She treated them as patients in a quiet hospital, each waiting its turn." This comparison MOST CLEARLY shows that Aunt Naomi —

A. sees her job as fast, money-making work like a factory line.

B. is dramatic and makes ordinary tasks feel like emergencies.

C. treats every broken machine with patience and care, as a healer would.

D. is sad that the machines cannot speak back to her.

5. What is the OVERALL TONE of the passage?

A. bitter and angry, as though the writer dislikes the workshop

B. warm and a little tender, as though the writer admires the workshop and its keeper

C. fearful and tense, as though something bad is about to happen

D. cold and businesslike, as though the writer is reporting facts

6. When the narrator says Aunt Naomi did not "hunt for tools — she greeted them," the writer's word choice MOST STRONGLY suggests that she sees her tools as —

A. enemies that she must defeat in order to fix anything.

B. objects so unimportant that any one could replace another.

C. old friends, deserving of recognition and respect.

D. decorations she keeps mostly for show.

7. Read this line: "The shame in his chest, which had been swelling like a balloon, let out a small, careful breath." What does this figurative language mainly do?

A. It compares shame to a hard rock that cannot move.

B. It compares shame to a balloon to show that the feeling grew and then quietly eased — without disappearing all at once.

C. It proves that Cyrus is about to start crying loudly in the shop.

D. It explains scientifically how lungs work when a person is embarrassed.

8. Aunt Naomi's words to Cyrus after he breaks the second tool — "That spring was tired anyway. We'll send it on." — use language that MOST CLOSELY matches the way she has been talking to —

A. the broken machines themselves, throughout paragraph 2.

B. her customers when they bring in a bill to pay.

C. Cyrus's mother on a phone call.

D. her cousins who first called the shop "the cave."

9. Find ONE example of figurative language (simile, metaphor, or personification) in the passage. Quote it, name the type, and explain in one sentence what FEELING it creates.

_____

_____

10. Cyrus says the cave is "a place where broken things were spoken to gently — and that, for one afternoon, included him." Explain what this last line tells us about TONE and Cyrus's feelings. Use one earlier detail from the passage to support your answer.

_____

_____

Answer Keys

1	A	**B**	C	D	6	A	B	**C**	D
2	A	**B**	C	D	7	A	**B**	C	D
3	A	B	**C**	D	8	**A**	B	C	D
4	A	B	**C**	D	9	See below			
5	A	**B**	C	D	10	See below			

Explanations

1. B	"Bubble like skin in the sun" pulls in heat, age, and a faint queasiness — a tone-setter for a tired space. A is the opposite (healthy); C overreads tone as warning; D contradicts "so long ago" right in the sentence.
2. B	"Coughed weakly" gives the lamp a human, frail action — classic personification, perfect for a tired space. A is the opposite of the line's feeling; C is a literal misreading — "coughed" is not a wiring term; D reads a future plot the text does not support (Aunt Naomi clearly DOES fix things).
3. C	"Slumped," "drooping," and "tired" all share an exhaustion connotation — they color the broken items as worn out, not threatening. A is too sharp; B misses the heaviness; D adds an emotion the words do not carry.
4. C	"Patients in a quiet hospital" carries care, healing, and order — that is the connotation, not speed or drama. A is the opposite (a quiet hospital ≠ a factory); B mistakes "hospital" for "emergency room"; D reads loneliness into a calm, working scene.
5. B	Words like "greeted them," "Hello, beautiful," "warm voice," and "spoken to gently" stack a tender, admiring tone. A reverses the feeling; C reads warning into a calm story; D ignores all the affectionate word choices.
6. C	"Greeted" carries the connotation of meeting a familiar person — friend, not stranger. A is the opposite ("hunt" is rejected by the line); B contradicts the warmth; D misses that she actually USES them.
7. B	The balloon image shows growth (swelling) AND partial release (a small careful breath) — the figure does both halves at once. A is wrong (a rock does not swell); C is louder than the line, which describes a SMALL, CAREFUL breath; D is a literal misreading.
8. A	"Tired," "send it on," gentle voice — exactly the register she uses with the soldering iron ("Hello, beautiful") and the stubborn screw ("Be patient with me, friend"). B, C, and D each name conversations that never appear in the text.
9.	**Answer:** Strong answers quote a clear figure AND name the type AND name the feeling. Examples: simile — "bubble like skin in the sun" creates a worn, slightly uncomfortable feeling; personification — "the single overhead lamp coughed weakly" creates a tired, frail feeling; simile — "swelling like a balloon" creates a sense of growing pressure that can ease; metaphor — "patients in a quiet hospital" creates a feeling of careful healing; personification — "greeted them" and "Hello, beautiful" make tools feel like friends. NOT acceptable: a non-figurative line ("Cyrus was twelve"); a quote with the wrong type label; a quote without a feeling named. Pick a line that compares two unlike things OR gives a human action to a non-human thing — then ask what feeling those words pile up.

10.	**Answer:** Strong answers connect the gentle TONE of the whole passage (warm word choices like "Hello, beautiful," "warm voice," "patients in a quiet hospital") to Cyrus's realization that the kindness Aunt Naomi offers her tools is being offered to HIM after he breaks the second one. The phrase "included him" shows that he feels comforted, not scolded — supported by his aunt's exact line "That spring was tired anyway. We'll send it on." Acceptable variations: any answer that names the warm/tender tone AND quotes ONE earlier moment showing how Aunt Naomi speaks to broken things. NOT acceptable: answers that say the tone is sad or scary (it isn't); answers without any earlier detail; answers that only describe Cyrus's age or his cousins. Tone = how the writing FEELS. Quote one warm-voice moment earlier in the passage and connect it to why Cyrus feels included.

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