

Word Meaning in Nonfiction: Figurative, Connotative, Technical

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: _____ / 10



Quick Review

In nonfiction, a writer may use a word for its **TECHNICAL** meaning (a precise field term), its **CONNOTATIVE** meaning (the feeling around it), or **FIGURATIVELY** (a comparison, not literal). Decide which kind of meaning the author intends by looking at the sentence and the words around it.

PART 1 — READ

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

How a Vaccine Trains the Immune System

The human body is a kind of fortress. Most of the time, its walls — skin, mucus, stomach acid — keep invaders out. When a virus does slip past those walls, a second line of defense, called the adaptive immune system, takes over. The adaptive system is slow at first, because it has to figure out what the invader looks like before it can attack. During those early days, the virus is often able to multiply quickly. A vaccine speeds the body up by teaching it what to look for **BEFORE** a real infection ever begins.

A vaccine carries a harmless version of part of a virus — sometimes a single protein, sometimes a weakened whole virus, sometimes a piece of genetic code that tells your own cells to build the protein on their own. The immune system inspects this introduction carefully, then builds two important tools: antibodies, which are proteins shaped to grab a specific virus, and memory cells, which remember the recipe in case the same virus shows up again. If the real virus arrives later, the body recognizes it almost immediately. The response is so fast that, in many cases, a person never gets sick at all.

Scientists describe this process with the word "primed." A primed pump is one that is ready to deliver water the moment it is needed. A primed immune system is ready to fight the moment the right virus appears. The word is not a guess — it has a precise meaning in immunology. It is also a careful choice. "Primed" does not promise that no one will ever get sick. It promises only that the body will not be starting from zero. Like a soldier who has trained but never fought, a primed immune system is prepared, not invincible. That distinction is what makes vaccines a tool of public health rather than a miracle.

PART 2 — PRACTICE

Use the passage to answer each question.



1. Read this sentence from paragraph 1: "The human body is a kind of fortress." The word "fortress" is used —
 - A. literally, to mean a stone military building.
 - B. figuratively, to compare the body to something built to keep invaders out.
 - C. as a technical term used by immunologists.
 - D. to suggest that the body is empty inside.
2. In paragraph 1, what does the phrase "adaptive immune system" suggest about its TECHNICAL meaning?
 - A. An immune system that changes to match each new invader it meets.
 - B. An immune system that adjusts to weather changes.
 - C. An immune system that adapts television shows for the body.
 - D. Any defense found anywhere in the human body.
3. Read this sentence: "During those early days, the virus is often able to multiply quickly." Which phrase is used in a TECHNICAL way?
 - A. "early days"
 - B. "multiply quickly"
 - C. "virus"
 - D. "often able"
4. Read this sentence: "The immune system inspects this introduction carefully." What does "inspects" suggest about HOW the immune system behaves?
 - A. It eats the introduction immediately.
 - B. It examines the introduction closely, the way a careful person would.
 - C. It ignores the introduction at first.
 - D. It rejects every protein it encounters.
5. What does the word "primed" mean as it is used in paragraph 3?
 - A. Painted with a first coat to prepare a surface.
 - B. The most important number in a list.
 - C. Made ready to act the moment it is needed.
 - D. Cooked until just before it is done.
6. Read this sentence: "Like a soldier who has trained but never fought, a primed immune system is prepared, not invincible." The author uses this comparison MAINLY to —
 - A. argue that vaccines turn people into soldiers.
 - B. make a precise distinction between being ready and being unbeatable.
 - C. suggest that doctors should wear uniforms.
 - D. describe how soldiers behave in real combat.



7. Read this phrase: "a tool of public health rather than a miracle." The word "miracle" carries which connotation in this sentence?

- A. A precise technical term in medicine.
- B. Something wonderful, unexplainable, and guaranteed.
- C. A type of laboratory equipment.
- D. A neutral synonym for "medicine."

8. Which word in paragraph 2 is used in the MOST TECHNICAL sense?

- A. "important"
- B. "shows up"
- C. "antibodies"
- D. "later"

9. Reread this sentence from paragraph 1: "A vaccine speeds the body up by teaching it what to look for BEFORE a real infection ever begins." Explain how the word "teaching" works in this sentence. Is it literal, figurative, or technical? Why?

10. In paragraph 1 the author writes that the body's walls are "skin, mucus, stomach acid." Explain why the word "walls" is being used figuratively here, and explain what TECHNICAL idea the figure is helping the reader understand.



Answer Keys

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| Explanations | |
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| 1. B | The body is not literally a building — the comparison highlights its protective barriers. A misreads a figurative comparison as literal. C is wrong because "fortress" is not a medical term. D invents a meaning the sentence does not carry. |
| 2. A | "Adaptive" here means changing in response to a specific invader — the technical sense developed throughout the paragraph. B and C use everyday meanings of "adapt" wrongly. D is too broad and includes the skin/mucus defenses the passage separates from adaptive immunity. |
| 3. C | "Virus" is a precise biological term naming a specific kind of infectious particle. "Early days" is an everyday expression for the first phase. "Multiply quickly" uses ordinary English; only "virus" carries the technical meaning. |
| 4. B | "Inspect" connotes careful examination — exactly the author's purpose. A names a different action (consumption). C is the opposite of inspecting. D adds rejection the sentence does not state. |
| 5. C | Paragraph 3 defines "primed" by comparing it to a pump ready to deliver water and an immune system ready to fight. A is the painting sense — wrong here. B confuses "primed" with "prime number." D invents a cooking sense. |
| 6. B | The comparison defines a careful difference: prepared ≠ invincible. A reads a metaphor as a real claim. C and D invent unrelated points. |
| 7. B | "Miracle" connotes a wonderful, guaranteed result with no explanation needed — and the author sets it AGAINST "tool" to say vaccines are not that. A misreads the word. C invents a meaning. D ignores the strong feeling the word carries. |
| 8. C | "Antibodies" is a precise biology term naming specific proteins. "Important," "shows up," and "later" are everyday words a writer in any field would use. |
| 9. | Answer: Strong answer: "Teaching" is figurative. A vaccine does not give a classroom lesson, but the comparison to teaching captures what the vaccine does: it introduces the body to the virus so the body learns the shape and stores the memory. The figure makes a complex biological process easier to picture. Acceptable variations: answers that call the word "figurative" AND explain the comparison (teacher to body, vaccine to lesson) score full credit. NOT acceptable: answers that call it "literal" without explanation; answers that call it "technical" (it is not a precise biology term); answers that name the type but never explain WHY. A 2-point answer names the figure type (figurative/metaphor) AND explains what comparison it sets up. |



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| 10. | <p>Answer: Strong answer: "Walls" is figurative — skin, mucus, and stomach acid are not actual walls but barriers that keep invaders out. The technical idea is the body's INNATE or FIRST-LINE physical defenses (sometimes called barrier defenses), which block pathogens before the adaptive system has to act. The figure helps the reader picture a fortress with a wall before learning about the more complicated adaptive system behind it. Acceptable variations: answers that name the figurative use AND describe the first-line/physical-barrier idea. NOT acceptable: answers that say walls are literal stone walls; answers that name the figure but never link it to barriers; answers that confuse barriers with antibodies (a paragraph-2 concept). Answer must do TWO things: identify "walls" as figurative AND name what real biology idea the figure stands for.</p> |
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