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DP English Language & Literature

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## “*Meet Ralph*” Questions

**1a. How many synonyms can you find for the word puke? List at least six. (6)**

barf, spew, throw up, vomit, hurl, regurgitate

**1b. How many expressions can you find to describe the act of vomiting? List at least six. (6)**

- “forceful oral expulsion of gastric contents associated with contraction of the abdominal and chest wall musculature”
- “a highly specific physical event that results in the rapid, forceful evacuation of gastric contents in retrograde fashion from the stomach up to and out of the mouth”
- “dispense chicken bits in a staccato, retrograde fashion”
- “snork, hurl, snork, hurl, snork, nurl”
- “lean over and hurl in unison”
- “spasmodic chunk blasting”
- “toss their biscuits”

**1c. Explain the effect created by using all these different ways of saying the same thing. Quote in support of your answer. (6)**

By employing a plethora of methods to describe the act of puking, the author introduces humour. This is achieved by looking at the issue from multiple different perspectives, some-

thing that would be done to better understand a complex concept (in science for example), but the author uses it to describe puking; a very crude and uncultured activity. The author analyses this disgusting behaviour from multiple perspectives (expert opinions, personal experiences, natural point of view) and therefore labels it intriguing and quite insightful.

For instance, in page 62, paragraph 4, the author explains the different types of vomiting and gives them scientific terminology (“*physiogenic*”, “*physiologic*”), talks about the role of “*chemoreceptors*” and “*toxins*” in the “*brain*” and “*bloodstream*”. However, within this description, the author has interlaced informal vocabulary such as “*dodgy prawn*”, “*bad fishing-boat rides*”, “*little twitchy*”. This rather unnatural combination of different writing styles creates humour.

The author continuously injects jokes, slang and informal language to an otherwise academic tone. Another example of this is in page 64 paragraph 2, where the author compares different ways of saying the same thing: “*blow a gasket*” and the rupture of the “*oesophageal artery*”, “*Boerhaave’s Syndrome*” and “*Shark Tank After-Party Syndrome*”. Through this, the reader gets exposed to the fact that scientific jargon can work as (and is used here as) a euphemism for a concept that is crude in all other contexts. The contrast between the sophistication level of the topic itself (vomiting, not sophisticated) and the method used to describe it (analysis on a scientific level, highly sophisticated) that creates humour.

## **2. What is a euphemism? Why is the language on the airline ‘barf bag’ euphemistic? (2)**

A euphemism is a way of expressing a blunt or vulgar concept in a more mild and indirect way. The language on the airplane’s ‘barf bag’ is euphemistic because it opts to describe its purpose as for ‘motion discomfort and refuse’, a more elegant way of saying ‘for puking’. It essentially masks the gross details of the activity to sound more civilised.

### 3. Comment closely on the style and effect of the article's opening line. (4)

The opening line of the article works as a very effective way to attract potential readers. The first phrase "*Apart from orgasm*" is guaranteed to capture people's attention because readers of a men's magazine would probably find themes related to sex very noteworthy; people are naturally attracted to these sorts of statements. The author then proceeds to compare orgasms to the action of puking, something that readers would find quite preposterous. However, the language used ("*mental and physical faculties*", "*thoroughly*"), which is initially quite academic, indicates that the author does indeed possess a certain intellectual capacity and therefore readers are intrigued to read on and discover how these two actions could possibly have any resemblance. The author creates a big contrast in register when they use the phrase "*woofing good puke*". The style becomes informal and arguably contains more imagery than its formal counterpart—referring to such a crude concept in an otherwise formal sentence creates humour. The author already introduces multiple perspectives as a sample of how the topic is approached during the rest of the article.

### 4. Explain what is meant by 'puke is the great constant'. How is this statement emphasised or supported by the writer? (4)

By "*puke is the great constant*", the author aims to convey just under how many different circumstances people puke. Essentially, he argues that any state of being that is distressful or simply stimulating is suitable for vomiting. The author supports this by listing all the different causes of puking he has witnessed during his years as an "*Emergency Medical Technician*": he says people puke when they are "*sick*", "*dying*", "*excited*", "*having heart attacks*", "*carsick*" and many more. Through this, the author essentially labels puking as a sort of response to over-stimulation and then proceeds to call not only a symptom of illness it a form of "*self-expression*". Such a statement would be quite bizarre on its own, but

through all the examples the author gives, he manages to make it sound (almost) reasonable to the reader.

**5. In what way could puking be termed ‘a form of self-expression’? (2)**

In a way, puking could be termed as a form of self-expression because there are a multitude of ways of puking, all of which depend on the individual. Therefore, puking could be seen as a means of identification, like a fingerprint, since each person undergoes the process differently.

**6. Explain how and why the style of the section ‘don’t blow it’ differs from the style of the main article. (4)**

It is very clear that the style of the section “*Don’t blow it*” from the rest of the article. This is visible straight away due to the different text style and background colour than the rest of the article, as well as the inclusion of a picture. When it comes to content, the two are vastly different. Although they are about the same topic (vomiting), the main article is written in first person and entails trying to make sense of the concept of vomiting, while the “*Don’t blow it*” section is an informative piece that is addressed directly to the readers and lists different ways to avoid undergoing the process of vomiting. It does not contain personal opinions like the main article and its purpose is to inform in colloquial language. Another point of contrast is that the “*Don’t blow it*” section is written by a different author entirely (Shannon Davis), while the main article is written by Michael Perry.

**7. Comment on the use and effect of the phrase ‘pursuant to my vomit contemplations’. (4)**

Once again, the author uses refined language to ponder about a crude concept. The word “*pursuant*” suggests a certain level of intellect, while also conveying an eagerness/driving passion to truly discover the core nature of the issue, something that is very humorous when

the issue is vulgar (puking). Similarly, the word “*contemplations*” has very philosophical connotations and suggests deep thought and introspection about the nature of vomiting. Once again, the author creates a disconnect between the nature of the topic itself and the way that is used to describe it, and hence creates humour. However, despite all the humour, this sentence shows the reader that the author’s burning desire to find out more is very strong; he is in all seriousness interested in researching and learning more about the topic and he is genuinely curious about its inner workings.

**8. Explain why the author says, ‘though why they settled for *mouth* when *buccal cavity* was the obvious choice, I truly do not know’. (4)**

By using the phrase “*though why they settled for mouth when buccal cavity was the obvious choice, I truly do not know*”, the author is introducing satire to the article. In the section immediately preceding the phrase, the author has cited a number of scientific definitions for the action of vomiting, all of which were full of scientific nomenclature. In a way, these definitions (“*forceful oral expulsion of [...] and chest wall musculature*” and “*a highly specific physical event [...] up to and out of the mouth*”) work as euphemisms and effectively remove any taboo that might be present on their ‘unrefined’ counterpart, but are also very lengthy and convoluted. Due to this, the author decides to employ the ‘all or nothing’ route and questions why didn’t they replace other words like ‘mouth’, into ‘buccal cavity’ which is more scientifically correct. Ultimately, the author is making fun of the overcomplication that is introduced by looking at scientific definitions.

**9. Comment on his qualification of The Merck Manual as the ‘bible of hypochondriacs everywhere.’ (4)**

The Merck Manual is the world’s best-selling and oldest continuously published English medical textbook, while hypochondriacs are people who are constantly and excessively worried

about possessing a serious illness. By calling the Merck Manual the “*bible of hypochondriacs everywhere*”, the author aims to convey the extent of people who base their amateur medical self-diagnoses on texts like the Merck Manual, without having any medical background themselves. This very often leads to mistakes which can be very dangerous if people act based on their own diagnosis. The term “*bible*” adds a whole layer of worship and appreciation in order to convey the idea that hypochondriacs (quite literally) live their whole lives following books like the Merck Manual. The author uses this phrase to create subtle satire; something he doesn’t build upon but states it nonetheless. It is an example of small phrases and comments that are used throughout the article to create humour.

#### **10. Why is vomiting described as ‘the symptom for all seasons’? (2)**

The author describes vomiting as the symptom for all seasons because it is something that one can experience in a very wide range of circumstances. As opposed to other symptoms (like a runny nose) which have a certain precedence when it comes to the season (usually winter), one can exhibit vomiting at any place, any time, and for any reason. The writer emphasises this by stating the fact that there are “*close to 100 vomit triggers*”.

#### **11. Discuss, with at least four suitable examples, the effect created by the author’s mix of colloquial language and medical or technical terminology. (10)**

Throughout the essay, the author effectively alternates between colloquial language and medical terminology and thus provides multiple perspectives on the same issue.

Since the point of the article is to delve deep into the fundamentals of vomiting, the author frequently presents his statements by evaluating them from different points of view. A great example of this is paragraph 3 of page 62. In this paragraph, the author is discussing the medical definitions of vomiting and has cited a number of scientific definitions for the action of vomiting, all of which are full of scientific nomenclature. In a way, these definitions

(“*forceful oral expulsion of [...] and chest wall musculature*” and “*a highly specific physical event [...] up to and out of the mouth*”) work as euphemisms and effectively remove any taboo that might be present on their ‘unrefined’ counterpart. Then, he introduces colloquial language in the next sentence (“*Or, to put it another [...] of them*”) which in turn introduces satire towards the gastroenterologists. The next sentence also contributes to this effect (“*Though why they settled [...] do not know.*”).

In a way, the scientific accuracy that the author builds up at points in the article ultimately gets undermined by the humourous and cheesy colloquial language succeeding it. An example of this is paragraph 2 of page 64, in which the author is discussing the Mallory-Weiss Syndrome. The author begins his explanation by using formal and scientific terminology such as “*incurring*”, “*rupture of the oesophagus*” and “*oveindulgence*”, which so far has a serious and very informative tone. However, the next sentence (“*... why not remane it to the much-easier-to-pronounce The Shark Tank After-Party syndrome?*”) uses humourous, colloquial language and makes references to pop culture. This transforms the tone of this paragraph and undermines the medical discussion that took place earlier. The tone becomes not very unlike the style of stand-up comedy jokes.

The author also uses colloquial language to provide an explanation or a real-life scenario for a medical theory. This is used very effectively in page 63 paragraph 4. In this paragraph, the author is explaining psychogenic vomiting and its causes: “*Psychogenic vomiting ... is precipitated by abstract elements such as ...*”. The terminology that is used is once again informative and academic. However, the sentence that follows completely changes this tone: “*Which is why your average SARS auditor is a little twitchy*”. Using a reference to the real world, the author uses the previously established theory to explain real world occurrences, like a true scientist. The author introduces satire with this particular sentence and once again, transforms the tone of the text. This real world application of previously-

established axioms appears once again in the third-last paragraph of the article, in which the author mentions physiologic and psychogenic vomiting to explain what is happening to him while undergoing the process of vomiting (*“immediate shift from ... to psychogenic vomiting triggered by disgust.”*).

**12. What is the meaning (in context) of (p. 64): dispassionate; paediatrics; spasmodic; emetogenic; depletion; dyseptic? (6)**

**dispassionate** having a rather passive involvement in the process and without experiencing any significant emotional impacts.

**paediatrics** the branch of medical care that is involved with children, infants and adolescents.

**spasmodic** highly irregular and occurring in bursts

**emetogenic** something that is a trigger for vomiting

**depletion** the complete reduction in quantity of a certain substance

**dyseptic** an individual who is irritable due to indigestion

**13. Explain the expression ‘praying student style’ and say why it is both amusing and descriptive. (4)**

The expression ‘praying student style’ is used by the author to describe an ichthyosaur vomiting. This expression is amusing because, one, it personifies the dinosaur and gives it human-like qualities. It makes the reader really ‘feel’ what the dinosaur was feeling and relate from their own personal experiences. This expression is also very descriptive, forming a vivid image of the dinosaur’s action in the reader’s mind of a figure ‘praying’ and moving its head up and down, while its hands/flippers are resting on the ground. This image creates humour because a dinosaur is usually depicted as big and strong, while here it is depicted as weak and is doing something that is familiar to humans.



**14. What is the effect of using the Latin term ‘ad nauseum’ (final column)? (4)**

The term ‘ad nauseum’ is used to describe a process that happens so extensively and through this constant repetition ‘leads to nausea’. However, its meaning becomes much more literal when used in the context of the Italian naturalist Lazzaro Spallanzani, who experimented on constantly ingesting and egesting his own vomit. Aside from the usual connotations of the phrase ‘ad nauseum’, which are excessive repetition and routine, the term ‘nauseum’ has connotations of vomit. This additional layer of meaning that is related to the main theme of the article creates humour because it generates strong imagery in the reader’s mind of the process that the Italian naturalist underwent.

**15. What effect do the words *snoot* and *snork* have? What kind of words are they? (4)**

The words ‘snoot’ and ‘snork’ are very informal ways of saying nose and the liquid that comes out of the nose respectively. These two words have vastly different connotations from their respective scientific counterparts; one can say that they are used when talking about babies. However, in this article, the author is using these words to refer to things that happen during vomiting. This gives these descriptions a more disgusting feel than if medical terminology was used. It can be thought of as a dysphemism that the author employs to make the reader even more uncomfortable by generating very strong imagery.

**16. Explain the irony implicit in the final words of the article. (4)**

The irony of the final words is created by the contrast between the author’s physical and mental states after vomiting. In the second last paragraph, the author explains in detail the physical damages he has suffered while vomiting. He uses words like ‘bloodshot’, ‘burning’ and ‘stinging’, which have very painful connotations, and ‘nasty’, ‘snork’ and ‘hurl’, which are very gross. Thus, we can deduce that the experience was not very pleasant for him. However,

the last paragraph begs to differ. Although it starts off sounding like a clarification on the previous description (“*What I’m trying to say is...*”), it then completely opposes what was previously implied (“*I was feeling a lot better.*”). This creates irony and is a very effective way to end the article.

**17. What is the purpose of the article? Why and how does the author make the article funny? (4)**

The purpose of the article is to thoroughly analyse the process of vomiting, to better understand its implications and as a result to create humour. The author achieves this with many ways. He builds up theories with scientific accuracy and then he uses them in order to explain real-world scenarios, which largely undermines them due to the humorous and cheesy colloquial language used. Also, the author many times provides multiple points of view of the same idea or concept (‘mouth’ vs. ‘buccal cavity’ and more). Most importantly, the author describes vomiting using scientific terminology, thereby creating a disconnect between the nature of the topic itself and the way that is used to describe it, and hence creates humour.

**18. Who is likely to be the target audience? How well do you think this article works for them? (4)**

Judging from the context of the article, it is easy to deduce that it is targeted towards men, since it exists inside a men’s health magazine. Using male and female stereotypes, one can argue that women wouldn’t ever be talking about crude and uncultured activities such as vomiting, and therefore that it is clearly intended for a male audience, since men are usually the ones that are regarded as being interested about all things not elegant. The male target audience can also be deduced by the content of the article itself; the first line of the article speaks about “*orgasms*” and men would probably find themes related to sex very

noteworthy; according to stereotypes are naturally attracted to these sorts of statements. In addition to this, there are other statements such as “*introducing the only power in the universe that can bring a grown man to his knees. . .*” which have themes of masculinity and strength, something that would clearly appeal to men more than women.

### 19. Pick any paragraph of more than six lines, and analyse it in detail. (8)

Paragraph: first

The opening paragraph of the article works as a very effective way to attract potential readers. The first phrase “*Apart from orgasm*” is guaranteed to capture people’s attention because readers of a men’s magazine would probably find themes related to sex very noteworthy; people are naturally attracted to these sorts of statements. The author then proceeds to compare orgasms to the action of puking, something that readers would find quite preposterous. However, the language used (“*mental and physical faculties*”, “*thoroughly*”), which is initially quite academic, indicates that the author does indeed possess a certain intellectual capacity and therefore readers are intrigued to read on and discover how these two actions could possibly have any resemblance. The author creates a big contrast in register when they use the phrase “*woofing good puke*”. The style becomes informal and arguably contains more imagery than its formal counterpart —referring to such a crude concept in an otherwise formal sentence creates humour. The author already introduces multiple perspectives as a sample of how the topic is approached during the rest of the article.

The next sentence of the paragraph aims to prove the author’s statement by using a personal experience. This is indicated by the phrase “*case in point*”. The personal example that the author uses contains a tight mixture of sophisticated terminology (“*vigour*”, “*nasal passages*”, “*impenetrably*”) and colloquial language (“*barfed*”, “*jammed*”, “*chicken nuggets*”) which introduces humour. The author provides the reader a short sample of the frequently

alternating writing style that will prevail throughout the rest of the article, and does this very effectively by already introducing disgusting imagery. This is created using the word “*barfed*”, which gives the reader an idea of the sheer intensity of the process, as well as the phrase “*impenetrably jammed with chicken nuggets*” which is very descriptive makes the reader feel like they are experiencing it themselves. All in all, the first paragraph works as a very effective way of attracting the author’s target audience, as well as providing them with a small but impactful taste of what’s to come throughout the rest of the article.

**20. Look at the picture of the lavatory and the speech imposed upon it. What is implied here? Explain how the words and picture work together to create an effect. (4)**

The picture depicts a toilet and has the words “*Okay honey, put on your Celine Dion CD’s. I’m ready*”. It creates humour by implying meaning and letting the reader ‘fill in the blanks’. This picture has many possible meanings. First, we can deduce that the conversation is between a husband and a wife and that the husband is the one who is saying the words. Partners in a relationship that wouldn’t be married probably wouldn’t have this amount of comfort among them, and we can assume that it is a husband since this is a men’s magazine and men are usually the ones that are connected to crude activities (such as vomiting). It could be implied that the husband requires the beautiful voice of Celine Dion in order to mask the gross noise that will be produced from the vomiting. Another possibility is that the husband passionately hates Celine Dion, so much so that he can use it as emetogenic material. Aside from sheer humour, the purpose of this image is to attract readers and accompany the informative section that exists on the right by matching its humorous tone.