

Study Guide

Field 202: Academic Literacy Skills Test (ALST)

Sample Selected-Response Questions

Competency 0001
Reading

Read the passage below; then answer the eight questions that follow.

Joshua Cooper Ramo
from *The Age of the Unthinkable: Why the New World Disorder Constantly Surprises Us and What We Can Do About It*

1 Gertrude Stein was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, on February 3, 1874. Her father, Daniel, was a German Jewish immigrant who had made a fortune in the American railway boom of the nineteenth century but held, somewhere, the idea and hope of the kind of polish a feeling for European life might give his children. When Gertrude was a girl, he moved the family briefly back across the Atlantic before finally settling in Oakland, California, where Gertrude spent her teen years. It was a well-rounded, prosperous, comfortable beginning, one intended to produce a well-rounded, prosperous life with all the usual accoutrements of family, stability, and friends. In fact, however, it produced a woman who was to become one of the most important aesthetic arbiters of her day. Stein caught a taste for Europe early and realized quickly that she would never be at home in the United States. "America is my birthplace," she later observed, "but Paris is my home town." It wasn't only that the puritanical traditions of American life chafed against her modern sensibility and bohemian habits; it was also that Europe was where she was most likely to see what interested her most: a collision between old and new.

2 Stein returned to Europe in her twenties, settled in Paris, and quickly became a sort of den mother to the most successful artists and writers and dancers of her age. They were, she recognized, moving right along the fault line that riveted her, the one that separated the classical European way of life, with its balls, carriages, and Victorian sensibilities, from what she spotted around her: the dances of Nijinsky, the sentences of Joyce, the paintings of Braque. This new world obsessed her. She loved the speed of its trains, the way the Renault factories in Croissy worked around the clock, the hustle of immigrants on the Paris streets. Almost like a collector of great art, she began to collect great talent: Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Pablo Picasso, and a dozen other great names of the revolution that became known as modernism. What made Stein so successful in this endeavor wasn't only her ambition or her intellect or the strength of her own talent (which was debatable). It was that her way of thinking and seeing, her curiosity about the collision of old and new, was perfectly tuned for a moment when Europe was, cataclysmically, struggling with that collision. She was a woman alive to the great theme of her day, the at once violent, at once beautiful movement from one way of living to another.

3 If there was a single moment when she felt a sense of the harmony between her instincts and her environment most clearly, it might have been on a Paris street in the sixth arrondissement one night shortly after the start of World War I. Stein and Picasso were walking home from a dinner, when a

French military convoy rolled past them. But this convoy was different. It *looked* different: the sides of the trucks and the cabs had been splashed unevenly with different colors of paint. The two of them froze. Stein wrote later, "I very well remember being with Picasso on the Boulevard Raspail when the first camouflaged truck passed. It was at night, we had heard of camouflage but we had not yet seen it and Picasso amazed looked at it and then cried out, yes it is we who made it, that is Cubism!"¹

4 This is quite a scene—the saturnine Stein, forty years old, and the diminutive thirty-three-year-old Spanish genius, exulting together in a fresh aesthetic surprise of the Great War. That war became for Stein the defining moment of her sense of aesthetics and history. For her, 1914 marked a pivot between radically different sensibilities. It wasn't simply that the war destroyed so many lives; it was also that it destroyed an older idea of order. "You are, all of you, a lost generation," Stein told Hemingway when he showed up in Paris after the war. It was that same confused geography she had in mind when marking out the way the war had been fought, the way it looked, and the landscape it left behind. "The composition of this war," Stein wrote, "was not a composition in which there was one man in the center surrounded by many others but a composition that had neither a beginning nor an end, a composition in which one corner was as important as another corner, in fact the composition of Cubism."

5 What Stein was sensing, marked out on those trucks or the paintings on the walls of her apartment, was, for its age, very much like what we are feeling now, a violent change in the way the world appears to work. In her case, the world really *looked* different. (If you've ever stared at a great Cubist painting, you know that the movement proposed a radically different way of seeing.) But there are important similarities between her historical moment and ours: a sense of new complexities, fresh interactions, and a speed that bedraggles old language and confuses old ideas. Statesmen of World War I lamented afterward that if only the negotiations in the days before the first mobilization had *not* been conducted by telegraph, the war might have been avoided. The problem, they said, was that none of the kings or foreign ministers of Europe had accustomed themselves to the speed of information, to the quantity of it that became available when telegraphs replaced letters. And in their confusion, they felt they had to act and decide at the (then-blistering) speed of a telegraph machine. It destroyed their judgment.

6 Every important historical moment is marked by these sorts of shifts to new models of living, which expand in velocity and complexity well past what the current ways of thinking can handle. Our moment is no exception. And usually the source of the greatest historical disasters is that so few people at the time either recognize or understand the shift. Artists, with their tuned instincts for the new, often do.

¹**Cubism:** visual art style of the early twentieth century in which images were generally fractured into geometric facets

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1. In Paragraph 1, the repetition of the phrase "well-rounded, prosperous" emphasizes
- A. the sophistication of Stein's family
 - B. the predictability of the life Stein rejected
 - C. the flowering of Stein's creative powers
 - D. the contempt for convention Stein embodied

Answer

Correct Response: B. This item requires examinees to analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. In Paragraph 1, the author's repetition of the phrase "well-rounded, prosperous" focuses attention on the stable, orderly world that Stein left behind when she decided to pursue her fascination with the "collision between old and new" models of living in Europe.

2. In Paragraph 2, the author develops the idea that "Europe was where [Stein] was most likely to see what interested her most" primarily by
- A. contrasting "the classical European way of life" with "the dances of Nijinsky, the sentences of Joyce, the paintings of Braque"
 - B. describing Paris in terms of "the speed of its trains" and "the hustle of immigrants"
 - C. stating that Stein "began to collect great talent: Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Pablo Picasso"
 - D. identifying Stein as "a woman alive to the great theme of her day"

Answer

Correct Response: A. This item requires examinees to determine the central ideas of a text and analyze their development. What most interested Stein was the "collision between old and new" models of living. By juxtaposing the "balls, carriages, and Victorian sensibilities" of old Europe with the cultural innovation of modernist artists and writers such as Nijinsky, Joyce, and Braque, the author develops the idea that Europe was the epicenter of this collision.

3. The sentence below appears in Paragraph 2:

It was that her way of thinking and seeing, her curiosity about the collision of old and new, was perfectly tuned for a moment when Europe was, cataclysmically, struggling with that collision.

Which phrase is closest in meaning to the word "cataclysmically" as it is used in the sentence above?

- A. with furious upheaval
- B. with unrelenting violence
- C. with reckless abandon
- D. with shocking suddenness

Answer

Correct Response: A. This item requires examinees to interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text. As it is used in this sentence, the word cataclysmically refers to the cultural upheaval resulting from the clash between a traditional way of life and the new sensibilities that found expression in the work of modernist writers and artists.

4. The author's assertion in Paragraph 3 that the encounter with a military convoy was the moment Stein "felt a sense of the harmony between her instincts and her environment most clearly" is best supported by which excerpt from the passage?

- A. It *looked* different: the sides of the trucks and the cabs had been splotched unevenly with different colors of paint.

- B. The two of them froze. Stein wrote later, "I very well remember being with Picasso on the Boulevard Raspail when the first camouflaged truck passed."
- C. "It was at night, we had heard of camouflage but we had not yet seen it and Picasso amazed looked at it and then cried out, yes it is we who made it, that is Cubism!"
- D. This is quite a scene—the saturnine Stein, forty years old, and the diminutive thirty-three-year-old Spanish genius, exulting together in a fresh aesthetic surprise of the Great War.

Answer

Correct Response: C. This item requires examinees to determine the central ideas of a text and analyze their development. World War I was the defining event of Stein's historical moment. When she recognized Cubism—a cultural expression that epitomized modernism—in the instruments of the war, Stein had reason to feel "a sense of the harmony between her instincts and her environment."

5. The sentence below appears in Paragraph 4:

"You are, all of you, a lost generation," Stein told Hemingway when he showed up in Paris after the war.

The quotation in this sentence is most closely connected with which idea in Paragraph 4?

- A. the emergence of an aesthetic associated with World War I
- B. the convergence of expatriates in postwar Paris
- C. the staggering casualties among young men during World War I
- D. the complete rupture of the prewar social order

Answer

Correct Response: D. This item requires examinees to analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text relate to each other and the whole. The author uses Stein's famous declaration that Hemingway's was "a lost generation" to underscore the idea, also expressed in Paragraph 4, that World War I had forced asunder the social order that had defined the prewar period. In Stein's view, the rupture left Hemingway and other people his age adrift.

6. The sentence below appears in Paragraph 4:

"The composition of this war," Stein wrote, "was not a composition in which there was one man in the center surrounded by many others but a composition that had neither a beginning nor an end, a composition in which one corner was as important as another corner, in fact the composition of Cubism."

In this sentence, Stein's comparison of World War I and Cubism conveys

- A. the political realignment and upheaval caused by the war
- B. the change in European cultural values as a result of the war
- C. the impact that the war had on artists and writers
- D. the effect that this war had on class structures

Answer

Correct Response: B. This item requires examinees to interpret words or phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative meanings. By comparing World War I and Cubism in this sentence, Stein emphasizes the absence of traditional notions of order that characterized the war. Much as Cubism stripped order and perspective from visual art, the comparison suggests, the war changed and perhaps undermined the traditional values of European society.

7. The discussion of Gertrude Stein and her experiences before and during World War I in Paragraphs 2 through 4 develops the passage's central idea by

- A. suggesting that artists are the creators of sweeping social change
- B. demonstrating how artistic movements take shape around universal themes
- C. illustrating how artists are able to perceive social transformations as they unfold
- D. establishing a link between artistic movements and advances in technology

Answer

Correct Response: C. This item requires examinees to analyze how and why individuals and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. In Paragraphs 2 through 4, the author describes Stein's witnessing of the tumultuous birth of modernism; her perception of a connection between modernism and World War I; and her use of modernism as a lens to understand the disruption of traditional social orders. This discussion introduces the author's central idea, that artists such as Stein have a unique capacity for recognizing social transformation as they are happening.

8. Which of the following is the best analysis of how the discussion in Paragraph 5 of the telegraph's impact on World War I relates to the rest of the passage?

- A. The suggestion that "the war might have been avoided" if "negotiations ... had *not* been conducted by telegraph" underscores the pointless destruction of the era.
- B. The reference to "the speed of information" and "the quantity of it that became available" with the telegraph connects the modernist era to the present.
- C. The reference to acting "at the (then-blistering) speed of a telegraph machine" connects the conduct of the war to the writing and art of the modernists.
- D. The suggestion that the telegraph "destroyed their judgment" develops a critique of the ignorance and belligerence of political elites.

Answer

Correct Response: B. This item requires examinees to analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text relate to each other and the whole. By emphasizing "the speed of information" and "the quantity of it that became available" with the advance of the telegraph, the author creates a parallel between the modernist era and the present-day age of information. This parallel underscores the passage's central point about moments of historic social transformation.
