



James S. Rickards High School Summer Reading

Attention: Parents and Students!
Rising 12th Graders

WHO: ALL James S. Rickards High School Students

WHAT: The following information outlines the assignments we have given to our students for the 2025 James S. Rickards School-Wide Summer Reading Program. While specific courses such as Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) may have additional summer assignments that will need to be completed before the beginning of the 2025-2026 school year, we want to develop a program that encourages a culture of reading and an expectation of academic dedication for all students. Therefore, we ask you to read the attached information and participate in our summer reading activity. The assignment composed for this year focuses on having students fine-tune their reading skills by answering text-based questions on grade-level, themed texts. Students are expected to complete each assignment by themselves, only using the power of their brains. If a student is caught plagiarizing, they will receive a 0%.

- Students are to use the active reading skills/strategies they have learned throughout the year to navigate the text.
- Students are to answer each text-based question based on their reading.

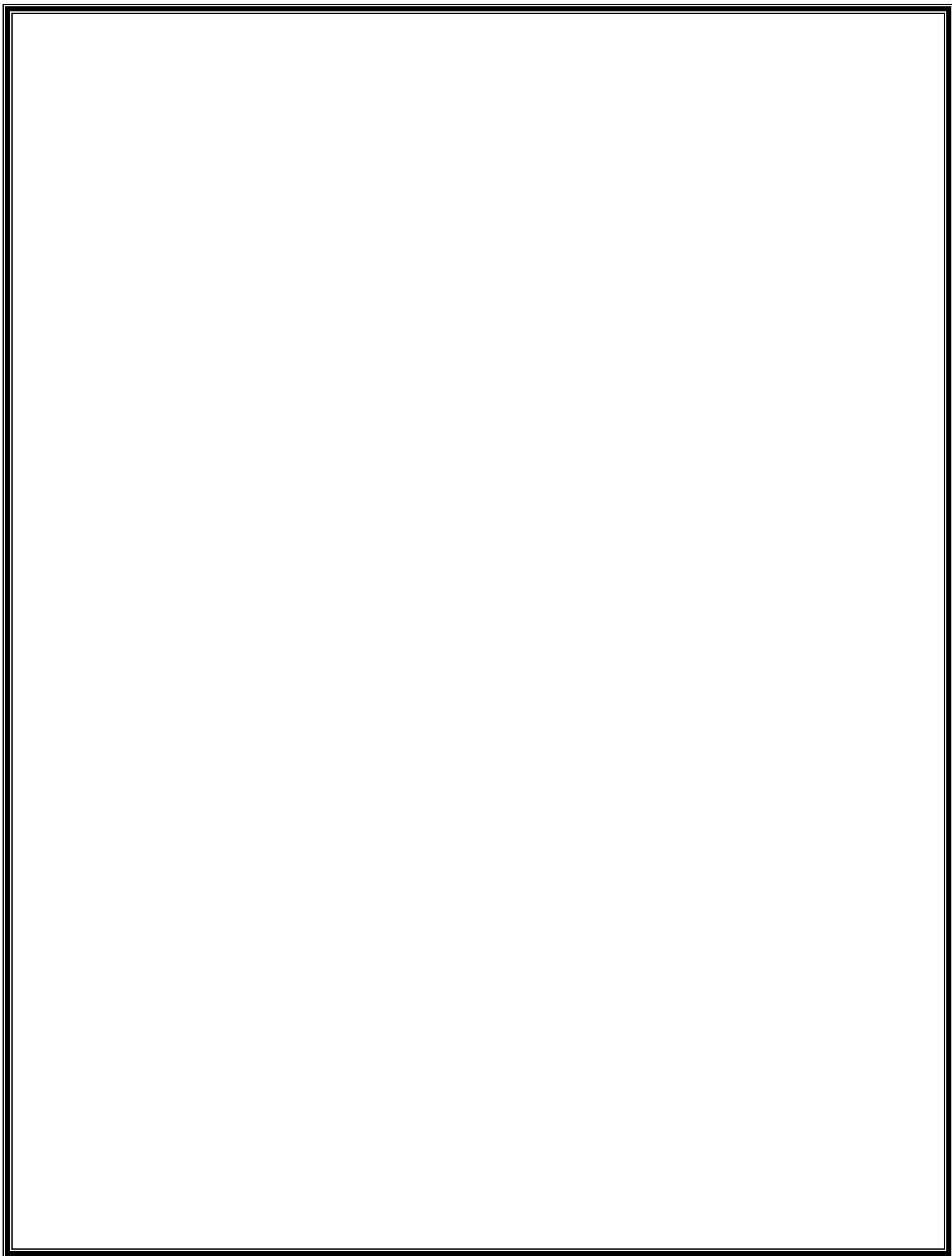
Students can use PDF Candy (found in ClassLink) to annotate, highlight the text or correct answers, and insert text boxes to complete responses.

If that option is not viable, students can create a new Word document that includes the answers for each text. Be sure to include the title of the text and then proceed with typing your answers to ensure proper labeling and therefore, grading.

WHEN: While the expectation is that students will select the best choice to each question, write original answers to the short responses and submit them as a course requirement by the end of the first week of school following our return, we also want to encourage parents and groups of students to use the text and suggested novel readings as a point of discussion with each other so that we can all share in the experience of these texts. Activities centered upon the reading skills within these texts will take place within the first few weeks of Language Arts instruction in the fall.

This assignment is DUE FRIDAY, AUGUST 22, 2025 to your ELA teacher.

CONTACT INFO: If you have any questions regarding our JSRHS Summer Reading Program, please feel free to contact Mrs. G. Cooper, JSRHS ELA Department Chair (cooperg2@leonschools.net)



On Listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance

As you read, monitor your comprehension by:

- Using context clues to make predictions about the boldface vocabulary words.
- Making connections to personal experiences, ideas in other texts, and society. You may use the following sentence frames:
 - **To make connections to personal experiences:**
 - How does this relate to my life?
 - What were my thoughts and feelings when I read this?
 - **To make connections to ideas in other texts:**
 - How is this similar to other texts I have read?
 - How is this different from other texts I have read?
 - **To make connections to society:**
 - How does this relate to issues in society?
 - How is this similar to or different from things that happen in the real world?

Read

Breathe deep even if it means you wrinkle
your nose from the fake-lemon **antiseptic**

of the mopped floors and wiped-down
doorknobs. The freshly soaped necks

and armpits. Your teacher means well,
even if he **butchers** your name like

he has a bloody sausage casing stuck
between his teeth, handprints

on his white, sloppy apron. And when
everyone turns around to check out

your face, no need to flush red and warm.
Just picture all the eyes as if your classroom

is one big scallop with its dozens of icy blues
and you will remember that winter your family

took you to the China Sea and you sank
your face in it to gaze at baby clams and sea stars

the size of your **outstretched** hand. And when
all those necks start to **crane**, try not to forget

someone once **lathered** their bodies, once patted them
dry with a fluffy towel after a bath, set out their clothes

for the first day of school. Think of their pencil cases
from third grade, full of sharp pencils, a pink pearl eraser.

Think of their handheld pencil sharpener and its tiny blade.

On Listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance **Reading Quiz**

Instructions for Students

Read the questions carefully and select the best answer.

Question 1

The following passage (lines 5–9) adds to the development of the text **mainly** by showing .

... Your teacher means well,
even if he butchers your name like

he has a bloody sausage casing stuck
between his teeth, handprints

on his white, sloppy apron ...

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. that the speaker is frightened of her teacher's cruelty and viciousness
- ☐ B. the significant impact of the teacher's mistake through the use of visceral, violent imagery
- ☐ C. the way that words can often be more hurtful than intended
- ☐ D. that the teacher's lesson on butchering is not going well

Question 2

Which of the following statements **most closely** summarizes a theme of the poem?

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. Being a teacher is one of the most challenging and underappreciated professions in America.

- ☐ B. Children are often cruel to one another, and it's important for them to learn the values of right and wrong without adults intervening.
- ☐ C. Because the educational system in the United States is so focused on assimilation, most students from diverse backgrounds feel like they have to give up their identities to fit in.
- ☐ D. Even though one may have positive intentions, a lack of sensitivity to cultural differences can lead to painful incidents for those whose identities lie outside of the majority.

Question 3

Which of these inferences is **best** supported by the passage below (lines 17–22)?

And when
all those necks start to crane, try not to forget

someone once lathered their bodies, once patted them
dry with a fluffy towel after a bath, set out their clothes

for the first day of school. Think of their pencil cases
from third grade, full of sharp pencils, a pink pearl eraser.

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. The speaker is able to ease her discomfort by remembering that the students around her were once little kids who needed somebody else to take care of them.
- ☐ B. The speaker finds it interesting to think about what the lives of her classmates must be like.
- ☐ C. The speaker wishes she were a young child again.
- ☐ D. The speaker is fascinated by the fact that her classmates had parents who bathed them and set out their clothes because this is so different from the traditions in her own culture.

Question 4

Which passage from the text **most strongly** supports the correct answer to the previous question?

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. "And when all those necks start to crane"
- ☐ B. "try not to forget / someone once lathered their bodies, once patted them / dry with a fluffy towel after a bath"
- ☐ C. "Think of their pencil cases / from third grade"
- ☐ D. "full of sharp pencils, a pink pearl eraser."

Question 5

Arrange the following lines as they appear in the text.

"Just picture all eyes as if your classroom/ is one big scallop with its dozens of icy blues"	"Breathe deep even if it means you wrinkle/ your nose from the fake-lemon antiseptic"
"Think of their handheld pencil sharpener and its tiny blade."	"even if he butchers your name like/he has a bloody sausage casing stuck/between his teeth,"

First	Second	Third	Fourth

Written Response:

On Listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance

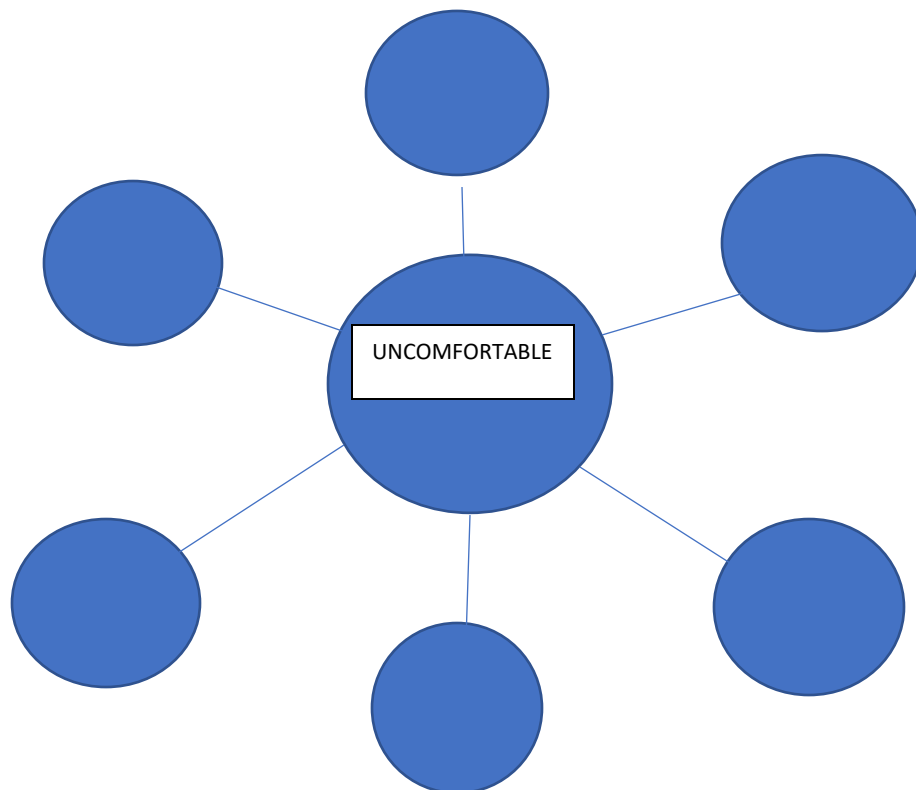
Prompt

POETRY

Sometimes writing in the second person makes describing painful situations easier because it takes the focus off the speaker. The second person can also be used to give comfort, advice, or instruction to others. Using “On Listening to Your Teacher Take Attendance” as a guide, write a poem in the second person about a real or imagined uncomfortable situation in which the speaker describes personal memories, thoughts, or actions that help alleviate the discomfort. Be sure to maintain the second-person voice and use figurative language throughout your poem.

Graphic Organizer

Directions: Use the concept Web to identify figurative language that you can use in your poem to describe an uncomfortable experience.



The Color of an Awkward Conversation

As you read, monitor your comprehension by:

- Using context clues to make predictions about the boldface vocabulary words.
- Monitoring your comprehension by stopping periodically to check your understanding. If necessary, make adjustments such as
 - re-reading passages that you found confusing
 - using background knowledge to make inferences about anything that is not directly stated
 - asking questions about unfamiliar terms and references and looking up information as needed
 - annotating to summarize or paraphrase important information

Read

I was annoyed the first time an African American man called me “sister.” It was in a Brooklyn store, and I had recently arrived from Nigeria, a country where, thanks to the mosquitoes that kept British colonizers from settling, my skin color did not determine my identity, did not limit my dreams or my confidence. And so, although I grew up reading books about the **baffling** places where black people were treated badly for being black, race remained an exotic abstraction: It was Kunta Kinte.

Until that day in Brooklyn. To be called “sister” was to be black, and blackness was the very bottom of America's pecking order. I did not want to be black.

In college I babysat for a Jewish family, and once I went to pick up first-grader Stephen from his play date's home. The lovely house had an American flag hanging from a colonnade. The mother of Stephen's play date greeted me warmly. Stephen hugged me and went to look for his shoes. His play date ran down the stairs and stopped halfway. “She's black,” he said to his mother and stared silently at me before going back upstairs. I laughed stupidly, perhaps to deflate the tension, but I was angry.

I was angry that this child did not merely think that black was different but had been taught that black was not a good thing. I was angry that his behavior left Stephen bewildered, and for a long time I half-

expected something **similar** to happen in other homes that displayed American flags.

“That kid's mother is so ignorant,” one friend said. “Ignorant” suggested that an **affluent**, educated American living in a Philadelphia suburb in 1999 did not realize that black people are human beings. “It was just a kid being a kid. It wasn't racist,” another said. “Racist” suggested it was no big deal, since neither the child nor his mother had burned a cross in my yard. I called the first friend a Diminisher and the second a Denier and came to discover that both represented how mainstream America talks about blackness.

Diminishers have a subtle intellectual superiority and depend on the word “ignorant.” They believe that black people still encounter unpleasantness related to blackness but in **benign** forms and from unhappy people or crazy people or people with good intentions that are bungled in execution. Diminishers think that people can be “ignorant” but not “racist” because these people have black friends, supported the civil rights movements or had abolitionist forebears.

Deniers believe that black people stopped encountering unpleasantness related to their blackness when Martin Luther King Jr. died. They are “colorblind” and use expressions like “white, black or purple, we're all the same” — as though race were a biological rather than a social identity. Incidents that black people attribute to blackness are really about other factors, such as having too many children or driving too fast, but if deniers are compelled to accept that an incident was indeed about blackness, they launch into stories of Irish or Native American oppression, as though to deny the legitimacy of one story by generalizing about others. Deniers use “racist” as one would use “dinosaur,” to refer to a phenomenon that no longer exists.

Although the way that blackness **manifests** itself in America has changed since 1965, the way that it is talked about has not. I have a great and complicated affection for this country — America is like my distant uncle who does not always remember my name but occasionally gives me pocket money — and what I admire most is its ability to create enduring myths. The myth of blackness is this: “Once upon a time, black towns were destroyed, black Americans were massacred and barred from voting, etc. All this happened because of racists. Today, these things no longer happen, and therefore racists no longer exist.”

The word “racist” should be banned. It is like a sweater wrung completely out of shape; it has lost its usefulness. It makes honest debate impossible, whether

about small realities such as little boys who won't say hello to black babysitters or large realities such as who is more likely to get the death penalty. In place of "racist," descriptive, albeit unwieldy, expressions might be used, such as "incidents that negatively affect black people, which, although possibly complicated by class and other factors, would not have occurred if the affected people were not black." Perhaps qualifiers would be added: "These incidents do not implicate all non-black people."

There are many stories like mine of Africans discovering blackness in America; of people who are consequently amused, resentful or puzzled by Americans being afraid of them or assuming they play sports or reacting to their intelligence with surprise. Still, what is most striking to me are the strange ways in which blackness is talked about. Ten years after first being called a "sister," I think of Don Cheadle as a talented brother, but I have never stopped being aware of the relative privilege of having had those West African mosquitoes.

The Color of an Awkward Conversation: Reading Quiz

Instructions for Student

Read the question carefully and select the best answer.

Question 1

The following passage (paragraph 1) **mainly** shows that .

I was annoyed the first time an African American man called me “sister.” It was in a Brooklyn store, and I had recently arrived from Nigeria, a country where, thanks to the mosquitoes that kept British colonizers from settling, my skin color did not determine my identity, did not limit my dreams or my confidence. And so, although I grew up reading books about the baffling places where black people were treated badly for being black, race remained an exotic abstraction: It was Kunta Kinte.

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. the writer experienced little racial prejudice before she moved to America
- ☐ B. Nigeria's climate kept the British people from living in the African country
- ☐ C. the writer experienced prejudice in Great Britain
- ☐ D. there is no prejudice in Nigeria

Question 2

Which of these inferences about the writer is **best** supported by the following passage (paragraph 2)?

Until that day in Brooklyn. To be called “sister” was to be black, and blackness was the very bottom of America's pecking order. I did not want to be black.

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. The writer would not have moved to America if she had known racism existed in the country.
- ☐ B. The writer was offended by the racist remark of being called “sister.”
- ☐ C. The writer had a general understanding of American culture before she moved there.
- ☐ D. The writer had assumed that Brooklyn was a place without racist tendencies.

Question 3

What is **most closely** the meaning of the word manifest as it appears in the passage below (paragraphs 7–8)?

Deniers use “racist” as one would use “dinosaur,” to refer to a phenomenon that no longer exists.

Although the way that blackness manifests itself in America has changed since 1965, the way that it is talked about has not. I have a great and complicated affection for this country — America is like my distant uncle who does not always remember my name but occasionally gives me pocket money — and what I admire most is its ability to create enduring myths.

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. verb | an illness revealing itself through symptoms
- ☐ B. verb | to show or present a quality or feeling
- ☐ C. verb | a spirit or a ghost appearing
- ☐ D. noun | a document that reveals the cargo and passengers of a ship

Question 4

How does the author **most closely** define "Diminishers" in the passage below (paragraphs 5–6)?

"That kid's mother is so ignorant," one friend said. "Ignorant" suggested that an affluent, educated American living in a Philadelphia suburb in 1999 did not realize that black people are human beings. "It was just a kid being a kid. It wasn't racist," another said. "Racist" suggested it was no big deal, since neither the child nor his mother had burned a cross in my yard. I called the first friend a Diminisher and the second a Denier and came to discover that both represented how mainstream America talks about blackness.

Diminishers have a subtle intellectual superiority and depend on the word "ignorant." They believe that black people still encounter unpleasantness related to blackness but in benign forms and from unhappy people or crazy people or people with good intentions that are bungled in execution. Diminishers think that people can be "ignorant" but not "racist" because these people have black friends, supported the civil rights movements or had abolitionist forebears.

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. They usually call an incident racist when it is warranted.
- ☐ B. They wrongly see racist incidents as almost never being about race.
- ☐ C. They are the only Americans with whom the writer will be friends.
- ☐ D. They are right to see racist incidents as almost never truly being about race.

Question 5

With which statement about people she labels "Deniers" would the author **most likely** agree?

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. They are most likely to express a racist idea.
- ☐ B. Their belief that race is simply about the color of one's skin, and not one's social identity, is faulty.
- ☐ C. They are trying to take race out of American politics.
- ☐ D. They are correct in believing that race is simply about skin color and has little to do with social identity.

Question 6

Which of these passages **most strongly** supports the correct answer to the previous question?

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. "Deniers believe that black people stopped encountering unpleasantness related to their blackness when Martin Luther King Jr. died."
- ☐ B. "Diminishers have a subtle intellectual superiority and depend on the word 'ignorant.' "
- ☐ C. "Deniers use 'racist' as one would use 'dinosaur,' to refer to a phenomenon that no longer exists."
- ☐ D. "They are 'colorblind' and use expressions like 'white, black or purple, we're all the same' — as though race were a biological rather than a social identity."

Question 7

With which statement about the term "racist" would the author **most likely** agree?

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. It no longer works and should be substituted for more specific phrases that acknowledge the complexities of racism and its harsh realities.
- ☐ B. It no longer functions properly because people have lost touch with its actual definition.
- ☐ C. It should no longer be used because racism doesn't really exist in America, and so more complex phrases should be employed.
- ☐ D. It is one of the most hurtful words in the English language.

Question 8

Which of these passages **most strongly** supports the correct answer to the previous question?

Answer choices for the above question

- ☐ A. "Still, what is most striking to me are the strange ways in which blackness is talked about."
- ☐ B. "The word 'racist' should be banned. It is like a sweater wrung completely out of shape; it has lost its usefulness."
- ☐ C. "In place of 'racist,' descriptive, albeit unwieldy, expressions might be used, such as 'incidents that negatively affect black people, which, although possibly complicated by class and other factors, would not have occurred if the affected people were not black.' "
- ☐ D. "Ten years after first being called a 'sister,' I think of Don Cheadle as a talented brother, but I have never stopped being aware of the relative privilege of having had those West African mosquitoes."

Question 9

Match the vocabulary word to its corresponding definition.

Baffling	Affluent	Similar	Manifests
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Definition	Word
resembling	
Difficult to understand	
Shows or presents a quality or feeling	
Having wealth	

Question 10

Arrange the following portions of the essay in linear order:

The writer argues that some people categorically deny the existence of racism and others diminish the causes and effects of it.
The writer notes that being called “sister” was a first moment of racial awareness in America.
The writer suggests that people should more specifically describe racist incidents rather than just using the word <i>racist</i> .
The writer argues that, unlike in Nigeria, America is a place where being black is an enormous shaping factor in a black person’s life.
The writer explains that she was called “sister” by an African American.

First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth

Written Response:
The Color of an Awkward Conversation

Expository

Answer in two complete paragraphs.

In this essay, Adichie uses a memory from her past in order to relate a broader message concerning race. Analyze Adichie's use of figurative language and evaluate the text structure she uses to convey her message. For example, what purpose do the allusions in the text serve? How does her use of text structure help the reader to understand her perspective?