



The Answers Aren't Where You Think They Are

Before you can answer a question correctly, you need to understand what it's asking you to do. You'll notice that most Reading questions aren't phrased as questions at all, but as open-ended sentences. Turn them back into "**what**" or "**why**" questions to make sure you know what they're asking.

When a question provides a line reference, the answer is very rarely contained in that exact line or set of lines. However, every answer is supported somewhere within about 10-12 lines around the given line reference or lead word. Read approximately 5 lines above and 5 lines below the reference, keeping an eye out for the part of the text that specifically addresses the question task.

Once you find a phrase, sentence, or set of lines that answers the question, underline it! The answer choice you pick needs to match the text, so use what you've found to eliminate any answers that don't match it. You're far **less likely** to fall for a trap answer if you know what the correct one needs to say first.

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Practice Passage & Questions

Questions 11–21 are based on the following passage.

This passage is adapted from Linton Weeks's "The Windshield-Pitting Mystery of 1954." © 2015 by NPR History Department.

The nationwide weirdness that was the Windshield-Pitting Mystery began in the spring of 1954. Looking back at the events today may give us a window—OK, a windshield—on the makeup and the mindset of mid-20th-century America.

The epidemic's epicenter, according to HistoryLink—an online compendium of Washington state history— was the town of Bellingham, where "tiny holes, pits, and dings ... seemingly appeared in the windshields of cars at an unprecedented rate" in late March.

"Panicked residents," the website reports, suspected "everything from cosmic rays to sand-flea eggs to fallout from H-bomb tests."

In Canton, Ohio, some 1,000 residents notified police that their windshields had been "blemished in a mysterious manner," the *Daily Mail* of Hagerstown, MD reported on April 17. And United Press in New York noted on April 20 that "new reports of mysterious windshield pittings came in today almost as fast as theories about what causes them." A Canadian scientist posited that the marks were made by the skeletons of minute marine creatures that had been propelled into the air by hydrogen bomb testing in the Pacific Ocean. In Utah, someone suggested that acid from flying bugs might be the source of the windshield-denting, but a Brigham Young University biologist disproved the theory, the *Provo Daily Herald* reported on June 27. As summer rolled on, reports of pitting decreased everywhere and the country moved on to building backyard fallout shelters.

But the question remains: What about those pitted windshields?

For guidance, we turn to Missouri State University sociologist David Rohall, who has taught courses in social movements and collective behavior for more than a decade. "Much of what happens in society is a numbers game," Rohall says. "If you have more people, any phenomenon starts to appear more common if you focus on any one event or behavior. Even something that is very infrequent may start to appear to be a trend, he says, "when you aggregate those events. There are millions of cars in Washington state but thousands

of cases of pitting. While thousands sounds like a huge phenomenon, it represents less than 1 percent of cars. If everyone is looking for and reporting it, it would appear to be a conspiracy of some sort."

Windshield-pitting, Rohall says, "may be more like crop circles in which there is physical evidence that 'something' happened but no one is certain of the cause. Of course, we have since found evidence that, in some cases, people utilize special equipment to make those crop circles. The cause of the pitting is different because it would be very difficult to capture someone creating them."

"Most people in the field no longer believe in mass hysteria as a cause of large-group behavior," Rohall says. "The idea came from Gustave Le Bon, a French theorist trying to explain the strange behavior of large groups during the French Revolution, in which average citizens began killing large numbers of people via the guillotine. What would cause them to do such a heinous thing?"

Even if the theory were true, Rohall says, "it is designed to be applied to situations of heightened emotional arousal—for example: large crowds. While the ideas about pitting may have 'caught on' among people in the region, I doubt it was an emotional contagion that drove them to act in a particular way."

"*War of the Worlds* is a wonderful example of how the media emphasizes the few 'real cases' of hysteria without recognizing that the vast majority of people knew that the radio program was fictional and did nothing," Rohall adds. "Like crop circles, we know that some of them are man-made, so might these pits. However, the media may have had people start noticing the pits that had already been there."

He likens the experience to this: "It is very common for people to believe that they have contracted an illness when they hear a doctor describe a medical problem and the symptoms associated with that problem. I suspect that most people already had these pits all along and only attributed it to the mysterious cause when they heard other people doing it. Still others may have resulted from vandalism or new cases from simple accidents—debris from the roads. Is this hysteria or simply logical thinking utilizing information from the media and their own situation—a pitted car? Some research about supposed 'hysteria' really shows that people are not hysterical at all!"

11

The central claim of the passage is that

- A) windshield pitting was a major source of concern for most drivers in 1954.
- B) windshield pitting turned out to be nothing but a prank.
- C) widespread focus on a specific event can make random occurrences seem significant.
- D) lack of consensus for an event's explanation can cause hysteria.

12

The author most likely mentions the Canadian scientist (line 22) and the Utah resident (line 26) in order to

- A) provide support for a previous statement.
- B) dispute claims made by experts.
- C) prove a theory about an occurrence.
- D) show the unprecedented nature of a phenomenon.

13

The author's statement that the "country moved on to building backyard fallout shelters" (lines 31-32) implies that Americans

- A) were aware that the threat from bombs was more imminent than that from windshield pitting.
- B) had lost interest in the windshield pitting phenomenon.
- C) needed a place to be protected from nuclear fallout.
- D) did not yet have fallout shelters in their backyards.

14

As used in line 41, "common" most nearly means

- A) tasteless.
- B) popular.
- C) frequent.
- D) inferior.

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The passage indicates that an effect of aggregating events is

- A) patterns seem to emerge more frequently.
- B) the truth about a conspiracy is easier to find.
- C) a tiny percent of the events are similar.
- D) connections between unrelated events can be reported.

16

According to the passage, what percent of cars in Washington suffered damage?

- A) About 20%
- B) Approximately 10%
- C) Between 5% and 6%
- D) Less than 1%

17

Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A) Lines 6-11 (“The epidemic’s ... March”)
- B) Lines 15-18 (“In Canton ... April 17”)
- C) Lines 44-48 (“There are ... cars”)
- D) Lines 55-57 (“The cause ... them”)

18

The author most likely mentions War of the Worlds in line 73 in order to

- A) argue some cases of mass hysteria are legitimate.
- B) prove the media was responsible for people’s reactions.
- C) point out that most people were not upset by the broadcast.
- D) criticize the media for failing to recognize the program was fictional.

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Based on the passage, the author most likely agrees that “pitting” is

- A) a coincidence based on group observations.
- B) the result of cosmic rays and nuclear fallout.
- C) an example of mass hysteria similar to the Salem Witch trials.
- D) the result of a streak of vandalism in the spring of 1954.

Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A) Lines 12–14 (“Panicked residents ... tests”)
- B) Lines 30–32 (“As summer ... shelters”)
- C) Lines 60–64 (“The idea ... guillotine”)
- D) Lines 86–89 (“I suspect ... it”)

To get the answers, be sure to join our **free SNL Live Session** on December 5, 2018 at 9 PM EST.

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