

# Before You Read

## A Modest Proposal by Jonathan Swift

### LITERARY FOCUS: VERBAL IRONY

You use **verbal irony** whenever you say one thing but mean something completely different. When you speak, your tone of voice signals listeners that you don't really mean what you are saying. Writers don't have the option of using a sarcastic tone of voice to convey irony. Instead, they might make so many shocking or unbelievable statements that the reader can't possibly miss the point. Swift's essay is a classic example of verbal irony taken to the extreme.

**Isn't It Ironic?** Look at the following examples of verbal irony. Then, create your own example in the space provided.

Situation	Verbal Irony (What You Say)
You trip and fall in front of a large group of people, your books and papers flying everywhere.	"Aren't I the picture of grace?" you ask as you struggle to your feet.
You have a bad case of the flu. A friend visits and asks, "How are you?"	You respond, "Never felt better!"

### READING SKILLS: RECOGNIZING PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES

"A Modest Proposal" is a type of persuasive writing called **satire**. Through satire, writers ridicule people or institutions in order to effect change. "A Modest Proposal" was written in 1729 to shock English society into an awareness of England's unjust policies toward the Irish. In it, Swift uses the types of **persuasive techniques** listed below to convince the reader that England's treatment of the Irish is heartless and immoral.

- **Logical appeals:** the use of facts or statistics to support a position.
- **Emotional appeals:** the use of words that stir up strong feelings.
- **Ethical appeals:** the use of details that will convince readers that the writer is fair and trustworthy.

**Use the Skill** As you read the selection, highlight and identify the types of persuasive appeals used by Swift. Refer to the list above as a guide.



**Literary Skills**  
Understand verbal irony.

**Reading Skills**  
Recognize persuasive techniques (logical, emotional, and ethical appeals).

# A MODEST PROPOSAL

Jonathan Swift

FOR PREVENTING THE CHILDREN OF POOR PEOPLE IN IRELAND FROM BEING A BURDEN  
TO THEIR PARENTS, AND FOR MAKING THEM BENEFICIAL TO THE PUBLIC

## BACKGROUND

In the late 1720s, Ireland suffered from several years of poor harvests. Farmers had trouble paying the rents demanded by their English landlords. Many children and adults were forced to beg or starve. Most of the money collected by the landlords was sent to England; very little was spent in Ireland on locally produced goods.

Here, Swift pretends to be an economic planner who suggests a shocking solution to the problem. Watch for the sharp contrast between Swift's direct, logical style and the outrageous proposal he describes.

## PARAPHRASE

*Melancholy*, in line 1, means "sad." Using that knowledge, paraphrase the first sentence.

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## VOCABULARY

**sustenance** (sus'tə-nəns) *n.*: food or money to support life.

It is a melancholy object to those, who walk through this great town,<sup>1</sup> or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin doors, crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags, and importuning every passenger for an alms.<sup>2</sup> These mothers, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling, to beg **sustenance** for their helpless infants, who, as they grow up either turn thieves for want<sup>3</sup> of work, or leave their dear native country to fight for the Pretender<sup>4</sup> in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbadoes.<sup>5</sup>

1. **this great town:** Dublin.
2. **importuning . . . alms:** asking passersby for a handout.
3. **want *n.*:** lack; need.
4. **the Pretender:** James Edward (1688–1766), son of England's last Catholic king, the deposed James II (1633–1701); James Edward kept trying to gain the English throne.
5. **sell . . . Barbadoes:** go to the West Indies and work as indentured servants.

I think it is agreed by all parties, that this prodigious number of children, in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and frequently of their fathers, is in the present deplorable state of the kingdom, a very great additional grievance; and therefore whoever could find out a fair, cheap, and easy method of making these children sound and useful members of the commonwealth would deserve so well of the public, as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

20 But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of professed beggars; it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the whole number of infants at a certain age, who are born of parents in effect as little able to support them, as those who demand our charity in the streets.

As to my own part, having turned my thoughts, for many years, upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of other projectors,<sup>6</sup> I have always found them grossly mistaken in their computation. It is true a child, just dropped from its dam,<sup>7</sup> may be supported by her milk, for a solar year<sup>8</sup> with little other nourishment, at most not above the  
30 value of two shillings, which the mother may certainly get, or the value in scraps, by her lawful occupation of begging, and it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for them, in such a manner, as, instead of being a charge upon their parents, or the parish, or wanting food and raiment<sup>9</sup> for the rest of their lives, they shall, on the contrary, contribute to the feeding and partly to the clothing of many thousands.

There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those voluntary abortions, and that horrid practice of women murdering their bastard children, alas! too  
40 frequent among us, sacrificing the poor innocent babes, I doubt,<sup>10</sup>

6. **projectors** *n. pl.*: speculators; schemers.

7. **dam** *n.*: mother (ordinarily used only of animals).

8. **solar year**: from the first day of spring in one year to the last day of winter in the next.

9. **raiment** (*rā'mənt*) *n.*: clothing.

10. **doubt** *v.*: suspect.

### WORD STUDY

The word *prodigious* (*prō-dij'əs*), in line 11, means "an enormous quantity."

### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 18. What does Swift say is the problem facing the nation?

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### INFER

The word *dam* (line 28) means "female parent" and is usually used to refer to a domestic animal. What attitude toward poor women does this word choice suggest?

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### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 36. At what age can children be made useful to society? Circle that information. Underline the way in which they can be of use.

ANALYZE

Re-read lines 37–42. Circle the words in line 42 that suggest that poor people are not civilized. By using these words, which type of **persuasive appeal** is Swift making?

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ANALYZE

Re-read lines 43–53. What kind of language does Swift use here to describe births and deaths of the poor? How does this language help him make his point?

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more to avoid the expense, than the shame, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman breast.

The number of souls<sup>11</sup> in Ireland being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couples whose wives are breeders, from which number I subtract thirty thousand couples, who are able to maintain their own children, although I apprehend there cannot be so many under the present distresses of the kingdom, but this being granted, there will remain an hundred and seventy thousand  
50 breeders. I again subtract fifty thousand for those women who miscarry, or whose children die by accident, or disease within the year. There only remain an hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born: The question therefore is, how this number shall be reared, and provided for, which, as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed, for we can neither employ them in handicraft,<sup>12</sup> or agriculture; we neither build houses (I mean in the country) nor cultivate land: They can very seldom pick up a livelihood by stealing until they  
60 arrive at six years old, except where they are of towardly parts,<sup>13</sup> although, I confess they learn the rudiments much earlier, during which time, they can however be properly looked upon only as probationers,<sup>14</sup> as I have been informed by a principal gentleman in the county of Cavan,<sup>15</sup> who protested to me, that he never knew above one or two instances under the age of six, even in a part of the kingdom so renowned for the quickest proficiency in that art.<sup>16</sup>

I am assured by our merchants, that a boy or girl, before twelve years old, is no saleable commodity, and even when they  
70 come to this age, they will not yield above three pounds, or three pounds and half a crown at most on the exchange, which cannot

11. **souls** *n. pl.*: people.  
12. **handicraft** *n.*: manufacturing.  
13. **of towardly parts**: exceptionally advanced or mature for their age.  
14. **probationers** *n. pl.*: apprentices.  
15. **Cavan**: inland county in Ireland that is remote from Dublin.  
16. **that art**: stealing.

turn to account<sup>17</sup> either to the parents or the kingdom, the charge of nutriment and rags having been at least four times that value.

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

I have been assured by a very knowing American<sup>18</sup> of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome  
80 food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled, and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee,<sup>19</sup> or ragout.<sup>20</sup>

I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one-fourth part to be males, which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine, and my reason is that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages; therefore one male will be sufficient to serve four  
90 females. That the remaining hundred thousand may at a year old be offered in sale to the persons of quality, and fortune, through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump, and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends, and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.

I have reckoned upon a medium, that a child just born will weigh twelve pounds, and in a solar year if tolerably nursed  
100 increaseth to twenty-eight pounds.

### PREDICT

Re-read lines 77–81. Circle the words Swift uses to describe a young, healthy child. Based on these details, what plan do you think he is about to propose to deal with Ireland's starving population?

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### IDENTIFY

The speaker provides details in support of his outrageous plan (lines 93–97). Underline those details.

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17. **turn to account:** be profitable.

18. **American:** To Swift's readers this label would suggest a barbaric person.

19. **fricassee** (frik'ə-sē') *n.*: stew with a light gravy.

20. **ragout** (ra-gōō') *n.*: highly flavored stew.



I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all cottagers,<sup>25</sup> laborers, and four-fifths of the farmers) to be about two shillings per annum,<sup>26</sup> rags included, and I believe no gentleman would repine to give ten shillings for the carcass of a good fat child, which, as I have said will make four dishes of excellent nutritive meat, when he hath  
 120 only some particular friend, or his own family to dine with him. Thus the squire will learn to be a good landlord, and grow popular among his tenants, the mother will have eight shillings net profit, and be fit for work until she produceth another child.

Those who are more thrifty (as I must confess the times require) may flay<sup>27</sup> the carcass; the skin of which, artificially<sup>28</sup> dressed, will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen.

As to our city of Dublin, shambles<sup>29</sup> may be appointed for this purpose, in the most convenient parts of it, and butchers we  
 130 may be assured will not be wanting, although I rather recommend buying the children alive, and dressing them hot from the knife, as we do roasting pigs.

A very worthy person, a true lover of his country, and whose virtues I highly esteem, was lately pleased, in discoursing on this matter, to offer a refinement upon my scheme. He said, that many gentlemen of this kingdom, having of late destroyed their deer, he conceived that the want of venison might be well supplied by the bodies of young lads and maidens, not exceeding fourteen years of age, nor under twelve, so great a number of  
 140 both sexes in every country being now ready to starve, for want of work and service:<sup>30</sup> and these to be disposed of by their parents if alive, or otherwise by their nearest relations. But with due

### ANALYZE

In discussing the economics of his proposal, what kind of appeal is the speaker making (lines 114–123)?

### DRAW CONCLUSIONS

Re-read lines 128–132, in which the speaker suggests “dressing” children “hot from the knife.” What effect do you think Swift expects this word choice to have on readers?

### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 142. What “refinement,” or modification, of the author’s plan is suggested in this paragraph? Underline the answer.

25. **cottagers** *n. pl.*: tenant farmers.

26. **per annum**: Latin for “by the year”; annually.

27. **flay** *v.*: remove the skin of.

28. **artificially** *adv.*: with great artifice; skillfully.

29. **shambles** *n.*: slaughterhouse.

30. **service** *n.*: employment as servants.





170 house, and assemblies in foreign fineries, which they never will pay for; the kingdom would not be the worse.

Some persons of a desponding spirit are in great concern about that vast number of poor people, who are aged, diseased, or maimed, and I have been desired to employ my thoughts what course may be taken, to ease the nation of so grievous an encumbrance. But I am not in the least pain upon that matter, because it is very well known, that they are every day dying, and rotting, by cold, and famine, and filth, and vermin,<sup>37</sup> as fast as can be reasonably expected. And as to the younger laborers they are now in almost as hopeful<sup>38</sup> a condition. They cannot get work, and consequently pine away for want of nourishment, to a degree, that if at any time they are accidentally hired to common labor, they have not strength to perform it, and thus the country and themselves are in a fair way<sup>39</sup> of being soon delivered from the evils to come.

I have too long **digressed**, and therefore shall return to my subject. I think the advantages by the proposal which I have made are obvious and many as well as of the highest importance.

180 For first, as I have already observed, it would greatly lessen the number of papists, with whom we are yearly overrun, being the principal breeders of the nation, as well as our most dangerous enemies, and who stay at home on purpose with a design to deliver the kingdom to the Pretender, hoping to take their advantage by the absence of so many good Protestants,<sup>40</sup> who have chosen rather to leave their country, than stay at home, and pay tithes<sup>41</sup> against their conscience, to an idolatrous Episcopal curate.

37. **vermin** *n. pl.*: pests such as lice, fleas, and bedbugs.

38. **hopeful** *adj.*: actually, hopeless. Swift is using the word with intentional irony.

39. **are in a fair way**: have a good chance.

40. **good Protestants**: that is, in Swift's view, bad Protestants, because they object to the Church of Ireland's bishops and regard them as "idolatrous."

41. **tithes** (*tīthz*) *n. pl.*: monetary gifts to the church equivalent to one tenth of each donor's income.

### WORD STUDY

The word *encumbrance* (line 176) means "a burden, a hindrance, or a weight."

### CLARIFY

Re-read lines 172–185. Why isn't the speaker concerned about the great number of other poor people in Ireland? Underline that information.

### VOCABULARY

**digressed** (*dī·grest'*) *v.*: wandered off the subject.

### IDENTIFY

The speaker lists the "advantages" of his proposal one by one. As you read lines 189–231, circle the word or phrase at the beginning of each paragraph that reveals the text's **pattern of organization**. Then, underline the "benefit" of each of the six proposals.

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## Notes

### VOCABULARY

**procure** (prō·kyoor') *v.*:  
obtain; get.

200 Secondly, the poorer tenants will have something valuable of their own, which by law may be made liable to distress,<sup>42</sup> and help to pay their landlord's rent, their corn and cattle being already seized, and money a thing unknown.

Thirdly, whereas the maintenance of an hundred thousand children, from two years old, and upwards, cannot be computed at less than ten shillings apiece per annum, the nation's stock will be thereby increased fifty thousand pounds per annum, besides the profit of a new dish, introduced to the tables of all gentlemen of fortune in the kingdom, who have any refinement in taste, and the money will circulate among ourselves, the goods being entirely of our own growth and manufacture.<sup>43</sup>

210 Fourthly, the constant breeders, besides the gain of eight shillings sterling per annum, by the sale of their children, will be rid of the charge of maintaining them after the first year.

Fifthly, this food would likewise bring great custom to taverns, where the vintners<sup>44</sup> will certainly be so prudent as to **procure** the best receipts<sup>45</sup> for dressing it to perfection, and consequently have their houses frequented by all the fine gentlemen, who justly value themselves upon their knowledge in good eating, and a skillful cook, who understands how to oblige his guests will contrive to make it as expensive as they please.

220 Sixthly, this would be a great inducement to marriage, which all wise nations have either encouraged by rewards, or enforced by laws and penalties. It would increase the care and tenderness of mothers toward their children, when they were sure of a settlement for life to the poor babes, provided in some sort by the public to their annual profit instead of expense, we should soon see an honest emulation<sup>46</sup> among the married women, which of them could bring the fattest child to the

42. **liable to distress:** that is, the money from the sale of their children may be seized by their landlords.

43. **own growth and manufacture:** homegrown, edible children, not imported ones.

44. **vintners** (vint'nərz) *n. pl.*: wine merchants.

45. **receipts** *n. pl.*: archaic for "recipes."

46. **emulation** (em'yōō-lā'shən) *n.*: competition.

market, men would become as fond of their wives, during the time of their pregnancy, as they are now of their mares in foal, their cows in calf, or sows when they are ready to farrow,<sup>47</sup> nor offer to beat or kick them (as is too frequent a practice) for fear of a miscarriage.

Many other advantages might be enumerated. For instance, the addition of some thousand carcasses in our exportation of barreled beef. The propagation of swine's flesh, and improvement in the art of making good bacon, so much wanted among us by the great destruction of pigs, too frequent at our tables, which are no way comparable in taste, or magnificence to a well-grown, fat yearling child, which roasted whole will make a considerable figure at a Lord Mayor's feast, or any other public entertainment.

240 But this, and many others I omit being studious of **brevity**.

Supposing that one thousand families in this city, would be constant customers for infants' flesh, besides others who might have it at merry meetings, particularly weddings and christenings, I compute that Dublin would take off annually about twenty thousand carcasses, and the rest of the kingdom (where probably they will be sold somewhat cheaper) the remaining eighty thousand.

I can think of no one objection, that will possibly be raised against this proposal, unless it should be urged that the number of people will be thereby much lessened in the kingdom. This I freely own, and it was indeed one principal design in offering it to the world. I desire the reader will observe, that I calculate my remedy for this one individual kingdom of Ireland, and for no other that ever was, is, or, I think, ever can be upon earth.

250 Therefore let no man talk to me of other expedients:<sup>48</sup> *Of taxing our absentees<sup>49</sup> at five shillings a pound; of using neither clothes,*

47. **farrow** (far'ō) v.: produce piglets.

48. **other expedients**: At one time or another, Swift had advocated all these measures for the relief of Ireland, but they were all ignored by the government. This section was italicized in all editions printed during Swift's lifetime to indicate that Swift made these proposals sincerely rather than ironically.

49. **absentees** n. pl.: English landowners who refused to live on their Irish property.

### VOCABULARY

**brevity** (brev'ə-tē) n.: being brief; shortness.

### INTERPRET

Explain the **irony** in the speaker's claim to "brevity" (line 240).

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### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 254. What objection does the speaker anticipate (lines 248–250)? How does he answer the objection?

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INFER

Re-read footnote 48 on page 135, which explains that Swift's essay is **ironic** except for this italicized passage. Why do you think Swift included this list of real solutions to the problems in Ireland?

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VOCABULARY

**animosities** (an'ə-mäs'ə-tēz)  
*n. pl.:* hostilities; violent hatreds or resentments.

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260 *nor household furniture, except what is of our own growth and manufacture; of utterly rejecting the materials and instruments that promote foreign luxury; of curing the expensiveness of pride, vanity, idleness, and gaming<sup>50</sup> in our women; of introducing a vein of parsimony,<sup>51</sup> prudence, and temperance; of learning to love our country, wherein we differ even from Laplanders, and the inhabitants of Topinamboo;<sup>52</sup> of quitting our **animosities**, and factions,<sup>53</sup> nor act any longer like the Jews, who were murdering one another at the very moment their city<sup>54</sup> was taken; of being a little cautious not to sell our country and consciences for nothing; of teaching landlords to have at least one degree of mercy toward their tenants. Lastly of putting a spirit of honesty, industry, and skill into our shopkeepers, who, if a resolution could now be taken*

270 *to buy only our native goods, would immediately unite to cheat and exact<sup>55</sup> upon us in the price, the measure, and the goodness, nor could ever yet be brought to make one fair proposal of just dealing, though often and earnestly invited to it.*

Therefore I repeat, let no man talk to me of these and the like expedients, till he hath at least a glimpse of hope, that there will ever be some hearty and sincere attempt to put them in practice.

280 But as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal, which as it is wholly new, so it hath something solid and real, of no expense and little trouble, full in our own power, and whereby we can incur no danger in disobliging<sup>56</sup> England. For this kind

50. **gaming** *v.* used as *n.*: gambling.

51. **parsimony** (pär'sə-mō'nē) *n.*: thriftiness; economy.

52. **Topinamboo**: Swift is referring to a region of Brazil populated by native peoples collectively called the Tupinambá. Here, Swift suggests that if Brazilian peoples and Laplanders can love their seemingly inhospitable lands, the Irish should love Ireland.

53. **factions** *n. pl.*: political groups that work against the interests of other such groups or against the main body of government.

54. **their city**: Jerusalem, which the Roman emperor Titus destroyed in A.D. 70 while Jewish factions fought one another.

55. **exact** *v.*: force payment.

56. **disobliging** *v.* used as *adj.*: offending.



IDENTIFY

In lines 293–305, the speaker offers two points for consideration. Re-read those lines, and underline the two points.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 305–311. According to the speaker, what miseries will be eliminated for poor people if his proposal is adopted? Draw a circle around that information.

ANALYZE

Re-read the closing paragraph of the essay. Underline words and phrases that show how the speaker tries to win over the reader. What type of **persuasive appeal** is the speaker making here?

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will be pleased maturely to consider two points. First, as things now stand, how they will be able to find food and raiment for a hundred thousand useless mouths and backs. And secondly, there being a round million of creatures in human figure, throughout this kingdom, whose whole subsistence<sup>58</sup> put into a common stock would leave them in debt two millions of pounds sterling, adding those who are beggars by profession to the bulk of farmers, cottagers, and laborers, with their wives and children, who are beggars in effect; I desire those politicians, who dislike my overture, and may perhaps be so bold to attempt an answer, that they will first ask the parents of these mortals, whether they would not at this day think it a great happiness to have been sold for food at a year old, in the manner I prescribe, and thereby have avoided such a perpetual scene of misfortunes, as they have since gone through, by the oppression of landlords, the impossibility of paying rent without money or trade, the want of common sustenance, with neither house nor clothes to cover them from inclemencies of weather, and the most inevitable prospect of entailing<sup>59</sup> the like, or great miseries, upon their breed forever.

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I profess in the sincerity of my heart that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children, by which, I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past childbearing.

58. **whole subsistence:** all their possessions.  
59. **entailing** *v.* used as *n.*: passing on to the next generation.

## A Modest Proposal

**Reading Skills: Recognizing Persuasive Techniques** Each of the following excerpts from “A Modest Proposal” is an example of a **persuasive technique**. In the blank provided, write the type of appeal (logical, emotional, or ethical) that is used in the excerpt. The first one has been done for you.

1. “There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent [women from] sacrificing the poor innocent babes.” (lines 37–40)

Type of appeal: \_\_\_\_\_ emotional appeal \_\_\_\_\_

2. “I profess in the sincerity of my heart that I have not the least personal interest . . . having no other motive than the public good of my country . . . I have no children, by which I can propose to get a single penny . . . and my wife past childbearing.” (closing paragraph)

Type of appeal: \_\_\_\_\_

3. “I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed. . . .” (lines 82–84)

Type of appeal: \_\_\_\_\_

Now, look back over the examples of persuasive techniques you highlighted or underlined in “A Modest Proposal.” Choose an example not listed above, and write it in the space below. Identify the type of appeal that is used.

Example: \_\_\_\_\_

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Type of appeal: \_\_\_\_\_

# Vocabulary Development

## A Modest Proposal

### VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

**DIRECTIONS:** Write vocabulary words from the Word Box in the appropriate blanks. Not all words will be used.

#### Word Box

sustenance  
glutted  
deference  
scrupulous  
censure  
expedient  
digressed  
procure  
brevity  
animosities

In "A Modest Proposal," Swift uses verbal irony to (1) \_\_\_\_\_ the way England ignores Irish poverty. Swift pretends to offer a suitable answer to the problem, but the (2) \_\_\_\_\_ he suggests is shocking. Pointing out that poor Irish people fill the streets everywhere one goes, Swift observes that they have (3) \_\_\_\_\_ the kingdom with children. Irish families who have a hard time providing their families with food are forced to beg for their (4) \_\_\_\_\_. Swift pretends to show (5) \_\_\_\_\_ for those who would profit from his plan, but his use of irony reveals his true feeling of disgust.

### WORD ORIGINS: SCIENTIFIC AND MATHEMATICAL TERMS

**DIRECTIONS:** Swift's essay is full of mathematical and scientific terminology. Study the chart on the left, which lists some common Greek and Latin roots and affixes. Use that information to match each mathematical or scientific word with its meaning.

#### Roots and Affixes

Greek, *melanos*:  
"dark; black"

Latin, *physica*:  
"natural science"

Greek, *geo-*:  
"ground; earth"

Latin, *com-*: "with"  
and *putare*: "to reckon"

Greek, *agros*:  
"field; soil; earth"

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. melancholy      a. science of farming  
\_\_\_\_\_ 2. geology      b. mathematical calculation  
\_\_\_\_\_ 3. agriculture      c. study of the earth  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4. physicist      d. characterized by dark depression  
\_\_\_\_\_ 5. computation      e. person who studies the natural sciences

#### SKILLS FOCUS

#### Vocabulary Skills

Use vocabulary in context. Understand origins of scientific and mathematical terms.





# A MODEST PROPOSAL

Jonathan Swift

FOR PREVENTING THE CHILDREN OF POOR PEOPLE IN IRELAND FROM BEING A BURDEN TO THEIR PARENTS, AND FOR MAKING THEM BENEFICIAL TO THE PUBLIC

### BACKGROUND

In the late 1720s, Ireland suffered from several years of poor harvests. Farmers had trouble paying the rents demanded by their English landlords. Many children and adults were forced to beg or starve. Most of the money collected by the landlords was sent to England; very little was spent in Ireland on locally produced goods.

Here, Swift pretends to be an economic planner who suggests a shocking solution to the problem. Watch for the sharp contrast between Swift's direct, logical style and the outrageous proposal he describes.

### PARAPHRASE

*Melancholy*, in line 1, means "sad." Using that knowledge, paraphrase the first sentence.

**Suggested response:**

**When people go out walking in this town or in this country, it is depressing to see women and their kids begging.**

### VOCABULARY

**sustenance** (suh'ten-ans) n.: food or money to support life.

It is a melancholy object to those, who walk through this great town,<sup>1</sup> or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin doors, crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags, and importing every passenger for an alm.<sup>2</sup> These mothers, instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling, to beg **sustenance** for their helpless infants, who, as they grow up either turn thieves for want<sup>3</sup> of work, or leave their dear native country to fight for the Pretender<sup>4</sup> in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbadoes.<sup>5</sup>

1. **this great town:** Dublin.
2. **importuning . . . alms:** asking passersby for a handout.
3. **want n.:** lack; need.
4. **the Pretender:** James Edward (1688–1766), son of England's last Catholic king, the deposed James II (1633–1701); James Edward kept trying to gain the English throne.
5. **sell . . . Barbadoes:** go to the West Indies and work as indentured servants.

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I think it is agreed by all parties, that this prodigious number of children, in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and frequently of their fathers, is in the present deplorable state of the kingdom, a very great additional grievance; and therefore whoever could find out a fair, cheap, and easy method of making these children sound and useful members of the commonwealth would deserve so well of the public, as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of professed beggars; it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the whole number of infants at a certain age, who are born of parents in effect as little able to support them, as those who demand our charity in the streets.

As to my own part, having turned my thoughts, for many years, upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of other projectors,<sup>6</sup> I have always found them grossly mistaken in their computation. It is true a child, just dropped from its dam,<sup>7</sup> may be supported by her milk, for a solar year<sup>8</sup> with little other nourishment, at most not above the value of two shillings, which the mother may certainly get, or the value in scraps, by her lawful occupation of begging, and it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for them, in such a manner, as, instead of being a charge upon their parents, or the parish, or wanting food and raiment<sup>9</sup> for the rest of their lives, they shall, on the contrary, contribute to the feeding and partly to the clothing of many thousands.

There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those voluntary abortions, and that horrid practice of women murdering their bastard children, alas! too frequent among us, sacrificing the poor innocent babes, I doubt,<sup>10</sup>

6. **projectors n. pl.:** speculators; schemers.
7. **dam n.:** mother (ordinarily used only of animals).
8. **solar year:** from the first day of spring in one year to the last day of winter in the next.
9. **raiment (ra'ment) n.:** clothing.
10. **doubt v.:** suspect.

### WORD STUDY

The word *prodigious* (pro-dij'ee-s), in line 11, means "an enormous quantity."

### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 18. What does Swift say is the problem facing the nation?

**There are too many starving children.**

### INFER

The word *dam* (line 28) means "female parent" and is usually used to refer to a domestic animal. What attitude toward poor women does this word choice suggest?

**It implies that poor women and their children are not much better than animals.**

### IDENTIFY

Pause at line 36. At what age can children be made useful to society? Circle that information. Underline the way in which they can be of use.

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more to avoid the expense, than the shame, which would move tears and pity in the most **savage** and **inhuman** breast.

The number of souls<sup>11</sup> in Ireland being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couples whose wives are breeders, from which number I subtract thirty thousand couples, who are able to maintain their own children, although I apprehend there cannot be so many under the present distresses of the kingdom, but this being granted, there will remain an hundred and seventy thousand breeders. I again subtract fifty thousand for those women who miscarry, or whose children die by accident, or disease within the year. There only remain an hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born: The question therefore is, how this number shall be reared, and provided for, which, as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed, for we can neither employ them in handicraft,<sup>12</sup> or agriculture; we neither build houses (I mean in the country) nor cultivate land: They can very seldom pick up a livelihood by stealing until they arrive at six years old, except where they are of towardsy parts,<sup>13</sup> although, I confess they learn the rudiments much earlier, only as probationers,<sup>14</sup> as I have been informed by a principal gentleman in the county of Cavan,<sup>15</sup> who protested to me, that he never knew above one or two instances under the age of six, even in a part of the kingdom so renowned for the quickest proficiency in that art.<sup>16</sup>

I am assured by our merchants, that a boy or girl, before twelve years old, is no saleable commodity, and even when they come to this age, they will not yield above three pounds, or three pounds and half a crown at most on the exchange, which cannot

**ANALYZE**  
Re-read lines 37–42. Circle the words in line 42 that suggest that poor people are not civilized. By using these words, which type of **persuasive appeal** is Swift making?

**The words *savage* and *inhuman* make an emotional appeal.**

**ANALYZE**  
Re-read lines 43–53. What kind of language does Swift use here to describe births and deaths of the poor? How does this language help him make his point?

**Swift uses mathematical language to describe the number of births, miscarriages, and deaths. The impersonal use of statistics exaggerates the heartlessness of government agencies.**

11. souls *n.*, *pl.*: people.  
12. handicraft *n.*: manufacturing.  
13. of towardsy parts: exceptionally advanced or mature for their age.  
14. probationers *n.*, *pl.*: apprentices.  
15. Cavan: inland county in Ireland that is remote from Dublin.  
16. that art: stealing.

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turn to account<sup>17</sup> either to the parents or the kingdom, the charge of nutriment and rags having been at least four times that value.

I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection. I have been assured by a very knowing American<sup>18</sup> of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most **delicious**, **nourishing**, and **wholesome food**, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled, and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee,<sup>19</sup> or ragout.<sup>20</sup> I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one-fourth part to be males, which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine, and my reason is that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages; therefore one male will be sufficient to serve four females. That the remaining hundred thousand may at a year old be offered in sale to the persons of quality, and fortune, through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump, and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends, and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.

I have reckoned upon a medium, that a child just born will weigh twelve pounds, and in a solar year if tolerably nursed increaseth to twenty-eight pounds.

**PREDICT**  
Re-read lines 77–81. Circle the words Swift uses to describe a young, healthy child. Based on these details, what plan do you think he is about to propose to deal with Ireland's starving population?

**It sounds like he will propose that year-old children of the poor be killed and used for food.**

**IDENTIFY**  
The speaker provides details in support of his outrageous plan (lines 93–97). Underline these details.

17. turn to account: be profitable.  
18. American: To Swift's readers this label would suggest a barbaric person.  
19. fricassee (frik-ah-see) *n.*: stew with a light gravy.  
20. ragout (ra-goot) *n.*: highly flavored stew.

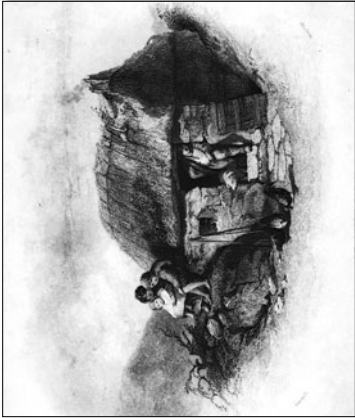
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**CLARIFY**

Re-read lines 101–103 and footnotes 21–22. Swift uses verbal irony to expose a major cause of the poverty in Ireland. Restate the sentence in your own words.

**Suggested response:**

**I admit this food will be expensive, and therefore perfect for landlords, who have already taken the parents' money and so have the most right to take their children, too.**



*An Irish cabin.*  
National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

I grant this food will be somewhat dear,<sup>21</sup> and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured<sup>22</sup> most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

Infant's flesh will be in season throughout the year, but more plentiful in March, and a little before and after, for we are told by a grave author,<sup>23</sup> an eminent French physician, that fish being a prolific diet, there are more children born in Roman Catholic countries about nine months after Lent, than at any other season, therefore reckoning a year after Lent, the markets will be more **glutted** than usual, because the number of popish<sup>24</sup> infants, is at least three to one in this kingdom, and therefore it will have one other collateral advantage by lessening the number of papists among us.

**VOCABULARY**

**glutted** (glut'ɪd) v. used as adj.: overfilled.

**IDENTIFY CAUSE & EFFECT**

Re-read lines 104–113. According to the speaker, what is a desirable effect of having a glut of infants on the market?

**It will decrease the number of Roman Catholics in Ireland.**

**21. dear adj.:** expensive.

**22. devoured v.:** made poor by charging high rents.

**23. grave author:** The French satirist François Rabelais. His work is comic, not "grave."

**24. popish adj.:** derogatory term meaning "Roman Catholic."

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**ANALYZE**

In discussing the economics of his proposal, what kind of appeal is the speaker making (lines 114–123)?

**a logical appeal**

**DRAW CONCLUSIONS**

Re-read lines 128–132, in which the speaker suggests "dressing" children, "hot," from the knife. "What effect do you think Swift expects on readers?"

**He assumes his word choice will outrage people and make them think.**

I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all cottagers,<sup>25</sup> laborers, and four-fifths of the farmers) to be about two shillings per annum,<sup>26</sup> rags included, and I believe no gentleman would repine to give ten shillings for the carcass of a good fat child, which, as I have said will make four dishes of excellent nutritive meat, when he hath only some particular friend, or his own family to dine with him. Thus the squire will learn to be a good landlord, and grow popular among his tenants, the mother will have eight shillings net profit, and be fit for work until she produceth another child.

Those who are more thrifty (as I must confess the times require) may flay<sup>27</sup> the carcass: the skin of which, artificially<sup>28</sup> dressed, will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen.

As to our city of Dublin, shambles<sup>29</sup> may be appointed for this purpose, in the most convenient parts of it, and butchers we may be assured will not be wanting, although I rather recommend buying the children alive, and dressing them hot from the knife, as we do roasting pigs.

A very worthy person, a true lover of his country, and whose virtues I highly esteem, was lately pleased, in discoursing on this matter, to offer a refinement upon my scheme. He said, that many gentlemen of this kingdom, having of late destroyed their deer, he conceived that the want of venison might be well supplied by the bodies of young lads and maidens, not exceeding fourteen years of age, nor under twelve, so great a number of both sexes in every country being now ready to starve, for want of work and service;<sup>30</sup> and these to be disposed of by their parents if alive, or otherwise by their nearest relations. But with due

**IDENTIFY**

Pause at line 142. What "refinement," or modification, of the author's plan is suggested in this paragraph? Underline the answer.

**25. cottagers n., pl.:** tenant farmers.

**26. per annum:** Latin for "by the year"; annually.

**27. flay v.:** remove the skin of.

**28. artificially adv.:** with great artifice; skillfully.

**29. shambles n.:** slaughterhouse.

**30. service n.:** employment as servants.

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**deference** to so excellent a friend, and so deserving a patriot, I cannot be altogether in his sentiments, for as to the males, my American acquaintance assured me from frequent experience, that their flesh was generally tough and lean, like that of our schoolboys, by continual exercise, and their taste disagreeable, and to fatten them would not answer the charge. Then as to the females, it would, I think with humble submission,<sup>31</sup> be a loss to the public, because they soon would become breeders themselves: And besides it is not improbable that some **scrupulous** people might be apt to **censure** such a practice (although indeed very unjustly) as a little bordering upon cruelty, which, I confess, hath always been with me the strongest objection against any project, how well soever intended.

But in order to justify my friend, he confessed that this **expedient** was put into his head by the famous Sallimanazar,<sup>32</sup> a native of the island Formosa, who came from thence to London, above twenty years ago, and in conversation told my friend, that in his country when any young person happened to be put to death, the executioner sold the carcass to persons of quality, as a prime dainty, and that, in his time, the body of a plump girl of fifteen, who was crucified for an attempt to poison the emperor, was sold to his imperial majesty's prime minister of state, and other great mandarins<sup>33</sup> of the court, in joints<sup>34</sup> from the gibbet,<sup>35</sup> at four hundred crowns. Neither indeed can I deny, that if the same use were made of several plump young girls in this town, who, without one single groat to their fortunes, cannot stir abroad without a chair,<sup>36</sup> and appear at the play-

**VOCABULARY**

- deference** (de'far-ans) *n.*: respect.
- scrupulous** (skroo'byalyas) *adj.*: extremely careful and precise in deciding what is right or wrong.
- censure** (sen'shar) *v.*: condemn; blame.
- expedient** (ek-spe'de-ant) *n.*: convenient means to an end.

**CONNECT**

- Pause at line 166, and read footnote 32. How trustworthy a source is Sallimanazar? Why do you think Swift uses his ideas as an example?
- Sallimanazar was exposed as a fraud;**
- as a source he is not trustworthy. Swift deliberately cites him to make it clear his proposal is outrageous.**

31. with humble submission: with all due respect to those who hold such opinions.  
32. Sallimanazar: George Psalmanazar (c. 1679–1763), a Frenchman who pretended to be from Formosa, an old Portuguese name for Taiwan. His writings were fraudulent.  
33. mandarins (man-da-rinz) *n. pl.*: officials. The term comes from *mandarin*, the Portuguese word describing high-ranking officials in the Chinese Empire, with which the Portuguese traded.  
34. joints *n. pl.*: large cuts of meat, including the bone.  
35. gibbet (jib'it) *n.*: gallows.  
36. chair *n.*: sedan chair; a covered seat carried by servants.

house, and assemblies in foreign fineries, which they never will pay for; the kingdom would not be the worse.

Some persons of a desponding spirit are in great concern about that vast number of poor people, who are aged, diseased, or maimed, and I have been desired to employ my thoughts what course may be taken, to ease the nation of so grievous an encumbrance. But I am not in the least pain upon that matter, because it is very well known, that they are every day dying, and rotting, by cold, and famine, and filth, and vermin,<sup>37</sup> as fast as can be reasonably expected. And as to the younger laborers they are now in almost as hopeful<sup>38</sup> a condition. They cannot get work, and consequently pine away for want of nourishment, to a degree, that if at any time they are accidentally hired to common labor, they have not strength to perform it, and thus the country and themselves are in a fair way<sup>39</sup> of being soon delivered from the evils to come.

I have too long digressed, and therefore shall return to my subject. I think the advantages by the proposal which I have made are obvious and many as well as of the highest importance.

(For first) as I have already observed, it would greatly lessen the number of papists, with whom we are yearly overrun, being the principal breeders of the nation, as well as our most dangerous enemies, and who stay at home on purpose with a design to deliver the kingdom to the Pretender, hoping to take their advantage by the absence of so many good Protestants,<sup>40</sup> who have chosen rather to leave their country, than stay at home, and pay tithes<sup>41</sup> against their conscience, to an idolatrous Episcopal curate.

**WORD STUDY**

- The word **encumbrance** (line 176) means "a burden, a hindrance, or a weight."
- CLARIFY**  
Re-read lines 172–185. Why isn't the speaker concerned about the great number of other poor people in Ireland? Underline that information.

**VOCABULARY**

- digressed** (di-grest) *v.*: wandered off the subject.
- IDENTIFY**  
The speaker lists the "advantages" of his proposal one by one. As you read lines 189–231, circle the word or phrase at the beginning of each paragraph that reveals the text's pattern of organization. Then underline the "benefit" of each of the six proposals.

37. vermin *n. pl.*: pests such as lice, fleas, and bedbugs.  
38. hopeful *adj.*: actually, hopeless. Swift is using the word with intentional irony.  
39. are in a fair way: have a good chance.  
40. good Protestants: that is, in Swift's view, bad Protestants, because they object to the Church of Ireland's bishops and regard them as "idolatrious."  
41. tithes (tī'ez) *n. pl.*: monetary gifts to the church equivalent to one tenth of each donor's income.

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Notes



Judy O'Donnell's "Home" under the bridge at Donneg, Cläre, Ireland (1849).  
The Illustrated London News Picture Library.

nor household furniture, except what is of our own growth and manufacture; of utterly rejecting the materials and instruments that promote foreign luxury; of curing the expensiveness of pride, vanity, idleness, and gaming<sup>50</sup> in our women; of introducing a vein of parsimony,<sup>51</sup> prudence, and temperance; of learning to love our country, wherein we differ even from Laplanders, and the inhabitants of Topinambooc;<sup>52</sup> of quitting our animosities, and factions,<sup>53</sup> nor act any longer like the Jews, who were murdering one another at the very moment their city<sup>54</sup> was taken; of being a little cautious not to sell our country and consciences for nothings; of teaching landlords to have at least one degree of mercy toward their tenants. Lastly of putting a spirit of honesty, industry, and skill into our shopkeepers, who, if a resolution could now be taken to buy only our native goods, would immediately unite to cheat and exact<sup>55</sup> upon us in the price, the measure, and the goodness, nor could ever yet be brought to make one fair proposal of just dealing, though often and earnestly invited to it.

Therefore I repeat, let no man talk to me of these and the like expedients, till he hath at least a glimpse of hope, that there will ever be some hearty and sincere attempt to put them in practice.

But as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal, which as it is wholly new, so it hath something solid and real, of no expense and little trouble, full in our own power, and whereby we can incur no danger in disobliging<sup>56</sup> England. For this kind

50. gaming v. used as n.: gambling.

51. parsimony (par-sə-nə-mē) n.: thriftiness; economy.

52. Topinambooc: Swift is referring to a region of Brazil populated by native peoples collectively called the Topinambá. Here, Swift suggests that if Brazilian peoples and Laplanders can love their seemingly inhospitable lands, the Irish should love Ireland.

53. factions n., pl.: political groups that work against the interests of other such groups or against the main body of government.

54. their city: Jerusalem, which the Roman emperor Titus destroyed in A.D. 70 while Jewish factions fought one another.

55. exact v.: force payment.

56. disobliging v. used as adj.: offending.

INFER

Reread footnote 48 on page 135, which explains that Swift's essay is ironic except for this italicized passage. Why do you think Swift included this list of real solutions to the problems in Ireland?

- It shows that if the government ignores reasonable proposals, then maybe it will pay attention to extreme, unreasonable ones.

VOCABULARY

animosities (an-ə-mə-sə-teez)  
n., pl.: hostilities; violent hatreds or resentments.

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of commodity will not bear exportation, the flesh being of too tender a consistence, to admit a long continuance in salt, although perhaps I could name a country,<sup>57</sup> which would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it.

After all I am not so violently bent upon my own opinion, as to reject any offer, proposed by wise men, which shall be found equally innocent, cheap, easy, and effectual. But before something of that kind shall be advanced in contradiction to my scheme, and offering a better, I desire the author, or authors

57. a country: England.

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**IDENTIFY**

In lines 293–305, the speaker offers two points for consideration. Re-read those lines, and underline the two points.

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will be pleased maturely to consider two points. First, as things now stand, how they will be able to find food and raiment for a hundred thousand useless mouths and backs. And secondly, there being a round million of creatures in human figure, throughout this kingdom, whose whole subsistence<sup>58</sup> put into a common stock would leave them in debt two millions of pounds sterling, adding those who are beggars by profession to the bulk of farmers, cottagers, and laborers, with their wives and children, who are beggars in effect; I desire those politicians, who dislike my overture, and may perhaps be so bold to attempt an answer, that they will first ask the parents of these mortals, whether they would not at this day think it a great happiness to have been sold for food at a year old, in the manner I prescribe, and thereby have avoided such a perpetual scene of misfortunes, as they have since gone through, by the oppression of landlords, the impossibility of paying rent without money or trade, the want of common sustenance, with neither house nor clothes to cover them from inclemencies of weather, and the most inevitable prospect of entailing<sup>59</sup> the like, or great miseries, upon their breed forever.

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I profess in the sincerity of my heart that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children, by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past childbearing.

**ANALYZE**

Re-read the closing paragraph of the essay. Underline words and phrases that show how the speaker tries to win over the reader. What type of persuasive appeal is the speaker making here?

**an ethical appeal**

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58. whole subsistence: all their possessions.  
59. entailing v. used as n.: passing on to the next generation.

**SKILLS PRACTICE**

**A Modest Proposal**

**Reading Skills: Recognizing Persuasive Techniques** Each of the following excerpts from “A Modest Proposal” is an example of a **persuasive technique**. In the blank provided, write the type of appeal (logical, emotional, or ethical) that is used in the excerpt. The first one has been done for you.

**Suggested responses appear below.**

1. “There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent [women from] sacrificing the poor innocent babes.” (lines 37–40)

Type of appeal: \_\_\_\_\_ emotional appeal

2. “I profess in the sincerity of my heart that I have not the least personal interest . . . having no other motive than the public good of my country . . . I have no children, by which I can propose to get a single penny . . . and my wife past childbearing.” (closing paragraph)

Type of appeal: \_\_\_\_\_ ethical appeal

3. “I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed. . . .” (lines 82–84)

Type of appeal: \_\_\_\_\_ logical appeal

Now, look back over the examples of persuasive techniques you highlighted or underlined in “A Modest Proposal.” Choose an example not listed above, and write it in the space below. Identify the type of appeal that is used.

**Example:** “the nation’s stock will be thereby increased fifty thousand pounds per annum, besides the profit of a new dish. . . .” (lines 203–205)

Type of appeal: \_\_\_\_\_ logical appeal

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## Vocabulary Development

### A Modest Proposal

#### VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

**DIRECTIONS:** Write vocabulary words from the Word Box in the appropriate blanks. Not all words will be used.

#### Word Box

sustenance  
glutted  
deference  
scrupulous  
censure  
expedient  
digressed  
procure  
brevity  
animosities

In "A Modest Proposal," Swift uses verbal irony to (1) \_\_\_\_\_ **censure** \_\_\_\_\_ the way England ignores Irish poverty. Swift pretends to offer a suitable answer to the problem, but the (2) \_\_\_\_\_ **expedient** \_\_\_\_\_ he suggests is shocking. Pointing out that poor Irish people fill the streets everywhere one goes, Swift observes that they have (3) \_\_\_\_\_ **glutted** \_\_\_\_\_ the kingdom with children. Irish families who have a hard time providing their families with food are forced to beg for their (4) \_\_\_\_\_ **sustenance** \_\_\_\_\_. Swift pretends to show (5) \_\_\_\_\_ **deference** \_\_\_\_\_ for those who would profit from his plan, but his use of irony reveals his true feeling of disgust.

#### WORD ORIGINS: SCIENTIFIC AND MATHEMATICAL TERMS

**DIRECTIONS:** Swift's essay is full of mathematical and scientific terminology. Study the chart on the left, which lists some common Greek and Latin roots and affixes. Use that information to match each mathematical or scientific word with its meaning.

Roots and Affixes	
Greek, <i>melanos</i> : "dark; black"	
Latin, <i>physica</i> : "natural science"	
Greek, <i>geo-</i> : "ground; earth"	
Latin, <i>com-</i> : "with" and <i>putare</i> : "to reckon"	
Greek, <i>agros</i> : "field; soil; earth"	

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>d</b> _____ 1. melancholy           | <b>a.</b> science of farming                      |
| <b>c</b> _____ 2. geology/ calculation | <b>b.</b> mathematical calculation                |
| <b>a</b> _____ 3. agriculture          | <b>c.</b> study of the earth                      |
| <b>e</b> _____ 4. physicist            | <b>d.</b> characterized by dark depression        |
| <b>b</b> _____ 5. computation          | <b>e.</b> person who studies the natural sciences |

#### SKILLS FOCUS

**Vocabulary**  
Use vocabulary in context. Understand the meaning of scientific and mathematical terms.

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## Before You Read

### An Essay on Man by Alexander Pope

#### LITERARY FOCUS: ANTI-THESIS

"Give me liberty, or give me death,"  
or  
"Give me liberty, or else kill me."

Which of the statements above is stronger? Which is more memorable? Of course, most people will choose the first statement, which happens to be an example of antithesis. An **antithesis** presents contrasting ideas in a grammatically balanced or parallel statement.

Alexander Pope regularly uses antithesis to express his thoughts. Look for examples of antithesis as you read the excerpt from *An Essay on Man*.

#### READING SKILLS: IDENTIFYING THE WRITER'S STANCE

You can identify a **writer's stance**—his or her views on a topic—because of things the writer either hints at or directly states. Like other writers of his time, Pope's purpose was to instruct his readers as well as entertain them. As a result, his poetry reflects his moral and social values. To express his views on human nature, education, and writing, Pope often uses the **heroic couplet** structure—two rhyming lines of iambic pentameter.

Here are some of Pope's heroic couplets:

- "Good nature and good sense must ever join; To err is human, to forgive, divine."
- "Hope springs eternal in the human breast: Man never is, but always to be blest."
- "Trust not yourself, but your defects to know, Make use of every friend—and every foe."
- "True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, As those move easiest who have learned to dance."

**Use the Skill** As you read the excerpt from *An Essay on Man*, restate the heroic couplets in your own words. Mark examples of antithesis that you find. Think about what Pope's beliefs and values reveal about him as an individual and as a representative of the age in which he lived.

**REVIEW SKILLS**  
As you read *An Essay on Man*, look for ways in which imagery helps to express Pope's views on humanity.

**WRITING SKILLS**  
Larger than life: appeals to the senses.

#### SKILLS FOCUS

**Literary Skill**  
Understand antithesis.  
**Reading**  
Identify a writer's stance.  
**Review Skills**  
Understand Imagery.

## Irony

**Irony** is a discrepancy between appearance and reality. There are three main types of irony: verbal irony, situational irony, and dramatic irony.

**DIRECTIONS:** Complete the chart with examples from the selection that illustrate each of the three types of irony. (Not all selections will include all three types of irony.)

Types of Irony	Examples from Selection
<p><b>Verbal irony:</b> a contrast between what is said and what is meant—for example, calling a bald man “Curly.”</p>	
<p><b>Situational irony:</b> a contrast between what you expect to happen and what actually happens—for example, when the birthday girl cries at her party.</p>	
<p><b>Dramatic irony:</b> a contrast between what the characters know and what the reader or audience knows—for example, when the reader knows a character will die at the end of the story but the character does not know.</p>	