

COMMON CORE

RI 1 Cite evidence to support inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. **RI 2** Determine central ideas of a text and analyze their development. **RI 3** Analyze a complex sequence of events and explain how specific events interact and develop over the course of the text. **RI 4** Analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of key terms over the course of a text. **RI 5** Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition, including whether the structure makes points clear and engaging. **L 5a** Interpret figures of speech in context.

DID YOU KNOW?

George Orwell . . .

- wrote his first poem when he was about five years old.
- never legally changed his name from Eric Blair to George Orwell.
- coined the terms “newspeak” and “Big Brother.”

Shooting an Elephant

Essay by George Orwell

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML12-1250A

Meet the Author

George Orwell 1903–1950

Throughout his short life, George Orwell sympathized with the underdog and spoke out against social and political injustice. He is perhaps best known for his novel *1984*, which focused on the appalling possibilities of life in a totalitarian state.

An Uneasy Conscience Orwell was born in the Indian province of Bengal, where his father served in the Indian civil service. In 1922, Orwell joined the Indian Imperial Police and left for Burma, which at the time was ruled by Britain. When he discovered firsthand the oppression of British rule, however, he grew increasingly disenchanted with imperialist policies.

Voluntary Poverty and War In 1927, at the age of 25, Orwell resigned from the Imperial Police and decided to embark on a career as a writer. Turning his back on his middle-class upbringing, he moved to London and lived the destitute existence of the poor and downtrodden. Working as a dishwasher and a day laborer, he tramped through the countryside with the homeless.

In 1928, he moved to Paris, where he continued to eke out a meager existence and wrote newspaper articles on unemployment, poverty, and social inequality. Out of these experiences came his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, published in 1933.

In 1936, Orwell left England to fight with the antifascist forces in Spain’s civil war. His experiences during the war helped solidify his political outlook, and he became a committed socialist (he rejected communism as it was practiced in the Soviet Union). The war also provided him with the material for his book *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), in which he articulated his conviction that totalitarianism was an imminent danger to Europe’s future.

The Conscience of His Generation

During World War II, Orwell became increasingly cynical about the way in which both the Allied forces and the Axis powers used propaganda. Near the end of World War II, he completed the first of his famous novels, *Animal Farm* (1945), a satiric fable about the dangers of dictatorships. The book established Orwell’s literary reputation worldwide. In 1949, Orwell completed *1984* while battling tuberculosis. He died a year later at the peak of his career. In an obituary, author V. S. Pritchett called Orwell “the wintry conscience of his generation,” a reference to Orwell’s unrelenting—if at times somewhat despairing—campaign for honesty and intellectual freedom.

Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-1250B

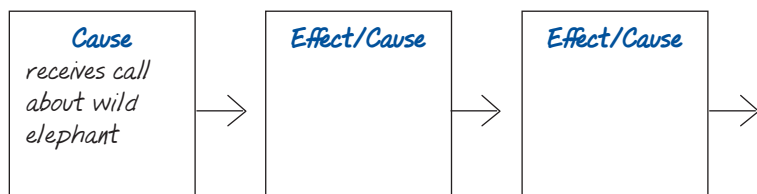


● TEXT ANALYSIS: REFLECTIVE ESSAY

In a reflective essay, the writer makes a connection between a personal observation and a universal idea, such as love, honor, or freedom. In “Shooting an Elephant,” Orwell reflects on a specific incident from his time as a young police officer in British-ruled Burma during the 1920s. Paradoxically, readers find Orwell—one of the 20th-century’s most eloquent opponents of tyranny—as a representative of a sometimes-harsh colonial power. As you read, note the ambiguity of Orwell’s situation, especially apparent in the tension between his role in the incident described and his role as the author.

● READING SKILL: ANALYZE CAUSE-AND-EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS

The unfortunate climax of “Shooting an Elephant” develops from a series of related actions. In a **cause-and-effect relationship**, an event or action directly results in another event or action. Note that an effect can become the cause of a subsequent effect. As you read, use a chart like the one shown to trace the chain of cause-and-effect relationships that structures the essay.



▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Use the context of each sentence to help you determine the meaning of the boldface words.

1. Many natives resented British **imperialism**.
2. We are not a **cowed** people; we can still fight.
3. New rulers may **supplant** the old with little resistance.
4. The **prostrate** subjects cringed before their harsh king.
5. The **despotic** king rules with an iron fist.
6. The ancient town is a confusing **labyrinth** of streets.
7. Her costume was so **garish** that it hurt my eyes.
8. Is forgetfulness a sign of **senility** in older people?



Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

How important is it to “SAVE FACE”?

George Orwell once said, “An autobiography is only to be trusted when it reveals something disgraceful.” Most people have done things that they’ve regretted or about which they’ve later felt ashamed. Character flaws are difficult to admit, and people often go to great lengths—even compromising their values—to protect their reputation.

QUICKWRITE Recall a time or incident when you had to “save face.” Try to remember why you reacted to the situation as you did. Write a short description of what happened, how you “saved face,” and what you might do differently today in a similar situation.



Shooting an Elephant

George Orwell

BACKGROUND Orwell's essay is set in Burma, a Southeast Asian country now known as Myanmar. In a series of wars in the 19th century, the British gained control of Burma and made it a province of British India. The Burmese resented British rule, under which they endured poverty and a lack of political and religious freedom. Like many of his fellow British officers, Orwell was inexperienced in police work when he arrived in Burma at age 19.

In Moulmein, in Lower Burma,¹ I was hated by large numbers of people—the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was subdivisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice² over her dress. As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football³ field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the
10 end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. The young Buddhist priests were the worst of all. There were several thousands of them in the town and none of them seemed to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans. **A**

Analyze Visuals ►

Draw as many conclusions as you can about this photograph.

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Summarize the experiences Orwell describes in lines 1–14. What effect did these experiences have on him?

1. **Moulmein** (mōōl-mān'), **in Lower Burma**: the main city of British-controlled Burma, now the independent Asian nation of Myanmar. Moulmein is now usually called Mawlamyine.
2. **betel** (bēt'l) **juice**: the saliva created when chewing a mixture of betel palm nuts, betel palm leaves, and lime.
3. **football**: soccer.



All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that **imperialism** was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up⁴ my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically—and secretly, of course—I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like
 20 that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters. The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the gray, **cowed** faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos—all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. But I could get nothing into perspective. I was young and ill-educated and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. I did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to **supplant** it. All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible.
 30 With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj⁵ as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, *in saecula saeculorum*,⁶ upon the will of **prostrate** peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty. **B**

One day something happened which in a roundabout way was enlightening. It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism—the real motives for which **despotic** governments act. Early one morning the subinspector at a police station
 40 other end of the town rang me up on the phone and said that an elephant was ravaging the bazaar. Would I please come and do something about it? I did not know what I could do, but I wanted to see what was happening and I got on to a pony and started out. I took my rifle, an old .44 Winchester and much too small to kill an elephant, but I thought the noise might be useful *in terrorem*.⁷ Various Burmans stopped me on the way and told me about the elephant's doings. It was not, of course, a wild elephant, but a tame one which had gone “must.”⁸ It had been chained up as tame elephants always are when their attack of “must” is due, but on the previous night it had broken its chain and escaped. Its mahout,⁹ the only person who could manage it when it was in that state, had set out in pursuit,
 50 but had taken the wrong direction and was now twelve hours' journey away, and in the morning the elephant had suddenly reappeared in the town. The Burmese population had no weapons and were quite helpless against it. It had already

imperialism

(ĩm-pĩr'ē-ə-lĩz'əm) *n.* the policy of forming and maintaining an empire, especially in the quest for raw materials and more markets

cowed (koud) *adj.* made timid and submissive through fear or awe
cow *v.*

supplant (sə-plānt') *v.* to take the place of

prostrate (prɔs'trāt') *adj.* completely submissive

B REFLECTIVE ESSAY

What **internal conflict** does Orwell describe in lines 15–35?

despotic (dĩ-spɔt'ĩk) *adj.* ruling absolutely without allowing any dissent; tyrannical

4. **chucked up**: threw off; gave up.

5. **British Raj**: India and adjoining areas (such as Burma) controlled by Britain in the 19th and early 20th centuries. *Raj* is the word for “kingdom” or “rule” in Hindi, a chief language of India.

6. *in saecula saeculorum* (ĩn sɛk'yə-lə sɛk-yə-lɔr'əm) *Latin*: forever and ever.

7. *in terrorem* (ĩn tɛr-rɔr'əm) *Latin*: for terror.

8. **gone “must”**: had an attack of must, a dangerous frenzy that periodically seizes male elephants.

9. **mahout** (mə-hout'): an elephant keeper.



George Orwell at the police training school in Burma, 1922.

destroyed somebody's bamboo hut, killed a cow and raided some fruit-stalls and devoured the stock; also it had met the municipal rubbish van, and, when the driver jumped out and took to his heels, had turned the van over and inflicted violences upon it.

The Burmese subinspector and some Indian constables¹⁰ were waiting for me in the quarter where the elephant had been seen. It was a very poor quarter, a **labyrinth** of squalid bamboo huts, thatched with palm-leaf, winding all over a steep hillside. I remember that it was a cloudy stuffy morning at the beginning of the rains. We began questioning the people as to where the elephant had gone, and, as usual, failed to get any definite information. That is invariably the case in the East; a story always sounds clear enough at a distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes. Some of the people said that the elephant had gone in one direction, some said that he had gone in another, some professed not even to have heard of any elephant. I had almost made up my mind that the whole story was a pack of lies, when we heard yells a little distance away. There was a loud, scandalized cry of "Go away, child! Go away this instant!" and an old woman with a switch in her hand came round the corner of a hut, violently shooing away a crowd of naked children. Some more women followed, clicking their tongues and exclaiming; evidently there was something there that the children ought not to have seen. I rounded the hut and saw a man's dead body sprawling in the mud. He was an Indian, a black Dravidian coolie,¹¹ almost naked, and he could not have been dead many minutes. The people said that the

labyrinth (ləb'ə-rĭnth') *n.*
an intricate structure of winding passages; a maze

Language Coach

Commonly Confused

Words Some words that sound or look similar are easy to confuse. Don't confuse *scandalized* and *scandalous*. One means "greatly offended" and the other means "causing a scandal (great offense)." Which is the meaning of *scandalized* in line 68?

10. **constables**: police officers.

11. **Dravidian** (drə-vĭd'ē-ən) **coolie**: a dark-skinned menial laborer from the south of India.

elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back and ground him into the earth. This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony. (Never tell me, by the way, that the dead look peaceful. Most of the corpses I have seen looked devilish.) The friction of the great beast's foot had stripped the skin from his back as neatly as one skins a rabbit. As soon as I saw the dead man I sent an orderly¹² to a friend's house nearby to borrow an elephant rifle. I had already sent back the pony, not wanting it to go mad with fright and throw me if it smelled the elephant. **C**

The orderly came back in a few minutes with a rifle and five cartridges, and meanwhile some Burmans had arrived and told us that the elephant was in the paddy fields¹³ below, only a few hundred yards away. As I started forward practically the whole population of the quarter flocked out of the houses and followed me. They had seen the rifle and were all shouting excitedly that I was going to shoot the elephant. They had not shown much interest in the elephant when he was merely ravaging their homes, but it was different now that he was going to be shot. It was a bit of fun to them, as it would be to an English crowd; besides, they wanted the meat. It made me vaguely uneasy. I had no intention of shooting the elephant—I had merely sent for the rifle to defend myself if necessary—and it is always unnerving to have a crowd following you. I marched down the hill, looking and feeling a fool, with the rifle over my shoulder and an ever-growing army of people jostling at my heels. At the bottom, when you got away from the huts, there was a metalled road and beyond that a miry waste of paddy fields a thousand yards across, not yet ploughed but soggy from the first rains and dotted with coarse grass. The elephant was standing eighty yards from the road, his left side towards us. He took not the slightest notice of the crowd's approach. He was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and stuffing them into his mouth. **D**

I had halted on the road. As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him. It is a serious matter to shoot a working elephant—it is comparable to destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery—and obviously one ought not to do it if it can possibly be avoided. And at that distance, peacefully eating, the elephant looked no more dangerous than a cow. I thought then and I think now that his attack of “must” was already passing off; in which case he would merely wander harmlessly about until the mahout came back and caught him. Moreover, I did not in the least want to shoot him. I decided that I would watch him for a little while to make sure that he did not turn savage again, and then go home.

But at that moment I glanced round at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow

C CAUSE

What causes the narrator to send the orderly for an elephant gun?

COMMON CORE RI 1

D AMBIGUITY

In this passage, Orwell hints at the uncertainty, or **ambiguity**, of the threat posed by the elephant. On the surface, the elephant is plainly quite peaceful at this point in the narrative. However, other details complicate the picture. As you finish reading the story, think about the following questions: Does Orwell ever really know that the elephant is a continuing threat? What replaces the threat of the elephant in the story?

12. **orderly**: a military aid.

13. **paddy fields**: rice fields.

faces above the **garish** clothes—faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they would watch a conjurer¹⁴ about to perform a trick. They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib.¹⁵ For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the “natives,” and so in every crisis he has got to do what the “natives” expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing—no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at. **E**

But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him. At that age I was not squeamish about killing animals, but I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to. (Somehow it always seems worse to kill a *large* animal.) Besides, there was the beast's owner to be considered. Alive, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds; dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks—five pounds, possibly. But I had got to act quickly. I turned to some experienced-looking Burmans who had been there when we arrived, and asked them how the elephant had been behaving. They all said the same thing: he took no notice of you if you left him alone, but he might charge if you went too close to him.

It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to within, say, twenty-five yards of the elephant and test his behavior. If he charged I could shoot, if he took no notice of me it would be safe to leave him until the mahout came back. But also I knew that I was going to do no such thing. I was a poor shot with a rifle and the ground was soft mud into which one would sink at every step. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a toad under a steam-roller. But even then I was not thinking particularly of my own skin, only of the watchful yellow faces behind. For at that moment, with the crowd watching me, I was not afraid in the ordinary sense,

garish (gâr'ĭsh) *adj.* too bright or showy; gaudy; glaring

COMMON CORE RI 4

Language Coach

Key Terms Each time an author repeats a key term, readers get a deeper understanding of that term's meaning in context. What are the technical meanings of the terms *natives* and *sahib* in lines 130–136? How does Orwell's explanation refine the meanings of these terms?

COMMON CORE L 5a

E PARADOX

A **paradox** is a statement or situation that appears to lead to a contradiction but, in fact, reveals some element of truth. Characters can say or do things that seem contradictory but, because of ambiguous or complex circumstances, may in fact express a deeper truth. What is paradoxical about Orwell's situation at this point?

14. **conjurer** (kŏn'jĕr-ər): magician.

15. **sahib** (să'ĭb): a title of respect formerly used by native Indians to address a European gentleman.

as I would have been if I had been alone. A white man mustn't be frightened in front of "natives"; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do. There was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine¹⁶ and lay down on the road to get a better aim. **F**

The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theater curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats. They were
170 going to have their bit of fun after all. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one should shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought, therefore, as the elephant was sideways on, to have aimed straight at his ear-hole; actually I aimed several inches in front of this, thinking the brain would be further forward.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick—one never does when a shot goes home—but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He
180 looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful

F CAUSE AND EFFECT

What ultimately causes the narrator to shoot the elephant?



16. **magazine:** the compartment from which cartridges are fed into the rifle's firing chamber.



impact of the bullet had paralyzed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time—it might have been five seconds, I dare say—he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous **senility** seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs
190 collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upwards like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open—I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I
200 thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.

In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away. I heard later that
210 it took him half an hour to die. Burmans were arriving with dahs¹⁷ and baskets even before I left, and I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon.

Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the elephant. The owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing. Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad dog, if its owner fails to control it. Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie, because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee¹⁸ coolie. And afterwards I was very glad
220 that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.  

senility (sĕ-nĭl'ĭ-tē) *n.* the mental deterioration that sometimes comes with old age

Language Coach

Fixed Expressions The expression *have got to* can be used instead of *have to* for emphasis (*I have got to study!*). How would the narrator's feelings in line 204 seem different if he had said *had to* instead of *had got to*?

G REFLECTIVE ESSAY
What does the shooting of the elephant symbolize for Orwell?

17. **dahs:** large knives.

18. **Coringhee:** coming from a port in southeastern India.