



Dr. Blosa Science

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### Comprehension story 29

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow, using your own words wherever possible.

Of all form of symbolism, language is the most highly developed, most subtle, and most complicated. It has been pointed out that human beings, by agreement, can make anything stand for anything. Now, human beings have agreed in the course of centuries of mutual dependency, to let the various noises that they can produce with their lungs, throats, tongues, teeth and lips systematically stand for specific happenings in their nervous systems. We call that system of agreements language for example, we who speak English have been so trained that when our nervous system register the presence of certain kind of animal, we may make the following noise: "There's a cat". Anyone hearing us would expect to find that by looking in the same direction, he would experience a similar event in his nervous system one that would led him to make an almost identical noise. Again, we have been so trained that when we are conscious of wanting food, we make noise "I'm hungry".

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There is, as has been said, no necessary connection between the symbol and that which is symbolized. Just as men car wear yachting costumes without ever having been near the yacht, so they can make noise, "I'm hungry", without being hungry. Furthermore, just as social rank can be symbolized by feathers in the hair, by a tattooing on the breast, by gold ornaments on the watch chain, by a thousand different

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deceives according to the culture we live in, so the fact of being hungry can be symbolized by a thousand different noises according to the culture we live in for example, faim, “*ES hunger mice*” or “*Hara ga hetta*” and so on.

However obvious these facts may appear at first glance, there are actually not obvious as they seem expect when we take special pains to think about the subject. Symbols and those symbolized are independent for each other; never the less all of us have a way of feeling as if, and sometimes acting as if, there were necessary connections. For example, there is a vague sense that we all have that foreign languages are inherently absurd. Foreigners have “funny names” for things: why can’t call things by their “right names”? This feeling exhibits itself most strongly in those American and English tourists who seem to believe that they can make the natives of any country understand English if they shout it out them loud enough. They feel, this is, that the symbol must be necessarily call to mind the things symbolized.

Anthropologists report similar attitude among primitive people. In talking with natives, they frequently come across unfamiliar word in the native language. When they interrupt the conversation to ask “Guglu? What is a Guglu! What amazingly silly people.” When an answer is insisted upon, they explain, when they can get over laughing, “Why, a gulu is GUGLU, of course!”. Very small children think in this respect the way primitive people do; often when policemen say to whimpering lost child, “All right, little girl, we will find your mother for you. Who is your mother? What’s mummy!” this leaves the police, as they say in murder mysteries, baffled.

Again, there is a little boy who is reported to have said, “Pigs are called pigs because they are such dirty animals.” Similar naiveté regarding the symbolic process is illustrated by incident in the adventures of a theatrical troupe playing melodramas to audience in the in the western ranching country. One night, a particularly tense moment

in the play, when the villain seemed to have the hero and heroine in his power, an over excited cow puncher in the audience suddenly rose from his seat and shout villain. The cow puncher of this story, however is no more ridiculous than those thousand people today, many of the adults, who write fan letters to ventriloquist's dummy, or those good hearted but impressionable people who send present to the broadcasting station when two characters in a radio serial get married, or those astonishing patriots who rushed to recruiting offices to help defend the nation when the United States was "invaded" by an army from "Mars". These, however, are only the more striking example of primitive and infantile attitudes towards symbol. They would be little point in mentioning them if we were uniformly and permanently aware of independence of symbols from things symbolized. But we are not. Most of us retain many habits of evaluation ("thinking habit") more appropriate to life in the jungle than to life in modern civilization. Moreover, all of us are capable of reverting to them, especially when we are over excited or when the subject about which we have special prejudices are mentioned. Worst of all, various people who have easy access to such instruments of public communication as the press, the radio, the lecture platform, and the pulpit actively encourage primitive and infantile attitudes towards symbols. Political and journalist charlatans, advertisers of worthless or overpriced goods, and promoters of religious bigotry stand to profit either in terms of money or power or both, if the majority of people can be kept thinking like savages or children.

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## Questions

(a) Suggest a suitable title for the passage (02marks)

(b) What did mean by the following phrases

(i) “the symbol must call to mind they things symbolized”  
(line 34 – 35) (03marks)

“good hearted but impressionable people”  
(lines 55 – 56) (03marks)

(c) In not more than 100 words summarize the instances of primitive and infantile attitudes of people towards symbols brought out in the passage.

(12marks)

(d) Explain the meaning of the following words and phrases as used in the passage, using you own words wherever possible

(i) inherently absurd (line 31) (02 marks)

(ii) anthropologist (line 36) (02marks)

(iii) whimpering (line 42) (02 marks)

(iv) Baffled (line 45) (02marks)

(v) Naiveté (line 47) (02marks)

(vi) The villain (line 51) (02 marks)

(vii) Ventriloquist’s dummy (line 55) (02marks)

(viii) Primitive and infantile (line 61) (02 marks)

(ix) Religious bigotry (line 71) (02 marks)

(x) savages (line 73) (02 marks)

(20 marks)

Spellings, Punctuation and Grammatical Expression (SPGE) (10 marks)

## Suggested answers

- (a) Suggest a suitable title for the passage (02marks)  
The symbolism and language  
The language  
The primitive and infantile attitudes of people towards symbols  
Etc.
- (b) What did mean by the following phrases
- (i) “the symbol must call to mind they things symbolized” (03marks)  
(line 34 – 35)  
Symbol must systematically stand for specific happenings in the nervous system or give specific mental picture.
- (ii) “good hearted but impressionable people” (03marks)  
(lines 55 – 56)  
Generous and caring but easily be influenced people
- (c) In not more than 100 words summarize the instances of primitive and infantile attitudes of people towards symbols brought out in the passage. (12marks)

### THE INSTANCES OF PRIMITIVE AND INFANTILE ATTITUDES OF PEOPLE TOWARDS SYMBOLS BROUGHT OUT IN THE PASSAGE

These include, the thinking that there are “right names” for things; the beliefs by tourists that they can make the natives of any country to understand English through shouting at them; the feeling that people that use unfamiliar words are silly; when children think the “Mummy” is the name of their mothers; believing that the word “pig” means dirty animals; the thinking an actors has the same personality as portrayed in a play; and promotion of prejudice by politician, advertisers and religious people.

- (d) Explain the meaning of the following words and phrases as used in the passage, using you own words wherever possible
- (i) inherently absurd (line 31) (02 marks)  
naturally unreasonable

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|--------|---|------------|
| (ii)   | anthropologist (line 36)<br>people that study human customs and beliefs     | (02marks)  |
| (iii)  | whimpering (line 42)<br>crying/sobbing                                      | (02 marks) |
| (iv)   | Baffled (line 45)<br>Puzzled/confused                                       | (02marks)  |
| (v)    | Naiveté (line 47)<br>Innocence/simplicity                                   | (02marks)  |
| (vi)   | The villain (line 51)<br>Criminal/one who opposes the hero                  | (02 marks) |
| (vii)  | Ventriloquist's dummy (line 55)<br>A good hearted but impressionable people | (02marks)  |
| (viii) | Primitive and infantile (line 61)<br>Outdated/backward and childish         | (02 marks) |
| (ix)   | Religious bigotry (line 71)<br>Spiritual intolerance/prejudice              | (02 marks) |
| (x)    | savages (line 73)<br>brutal/violent/fierce/vicious people                   | (02 marks) |
|        |   | (20 marks) |
|        | Spellings, Punctuation and Grammatical Expression (SPGE)                    | (10 marks) |

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**Thanks**

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