In *A Modest Proposal*, Swift vents his mounting aggravation at the ineptitude of Ireland's hypocrisy of the wealthy, the tyranny of the English, and the squalor and degradation in which he people living. While *A Modest Proposal* bemoans the bleak situation of an Ireland almost totally exploitation, it also expresses Swift's utter disgust at the Irish people's seeming inability to mobilize on their own behalf. Without excusing any party, the essay shows that not only the English but also the Irish themselves—and not only the Irish politicians but also the masses—are responsible for the nation's lamentable state. His compassion for the misery of the Irish people is a severe one, and he includes a critique of their incompetence in dealing with their own problems.

Political pamphleteering was a fashionable pastime in Swift's day, which saw vast numbers of tracts and essays advancing political opinions and proposing remedies for Ireland's economic and social ills. Swift's tract parodies the style and method of these, and the grim irony of his own solution reveals his personal despair at the failure of all this paper journalism to achieve any actual progress. His piece protests the utter inefficacy of Irish political leadership, and it also attacks the orientation of so many contemporary reformers toward economic utilitarianism. While Swift himself was an astute economic thinker, he often expressed contempt for the application of supposedly scientific management ideas to humanitarian concerns. The main rhetorical challenge of this biting ironic essay is capturing the attention of an audience whose indifference has been well tested. Swift makes his point negatively, stringing together an appalling set of morally untenable positions in order to cast blame and aspersions far and wide. The essay progresses through a series of surprises that first shocks the reader and then causes her to think critically not only about policies, but also about motivations and values.

NOW READ pages 617 – 625 “A Modest Proposal”

1. What sort of persona does Swift create for the "author" (person writing the pamphlet) of “A Modest Proposal”?

2. What problem does the narrator call attention to in the first paragraph of "A Modest Proposal"?
   (A) his own inability to find work
   (B) his wife's inability to bear children
   (C) female beggars accompanied by children
   (D) the country's ongoing war with Spain
   (E) the growth of great towns and the decline of small villages

3. According to the narrator of “A Modest Proposal,” at what age is a child best suited to serve as the solution to the problem he identifies? (A) one year, (B) three years, (C) six years, (D) nine years, (E) twelve years

4. In paragraph five, before providing the details of his proposal, the narrator identifies “another great advantage” of the scheme. What is that advantage?
   (A) providing fresh ingredients for meat pies
   (B) increasing the number of Protestants in the country
   (C) freeing mothers from the burden of caring for their children
   (D) preventing voluntary abortions
   (E) maintaining small class sizes in public schools

5. After identifying the details of his proposal, the narrator points out "one other collateral advantage." What is that advantage?
   (A) reducing noise pollution in the vicinity of playgrounds
   (B) lessening the number of papists (i.e., Catholics)
   (C) freeing fathers from the burden of caring for their children
   (D) improving the diets of adults
   (E) maintaining small class sizes in public schools

6. According to the narrator, a gentleman should be prepared to pay how much for "the carcass of a good fat child"?
   (A) twelve pence, (B) ten shillings, (C) one pound, (D) two guineas, (E) one or two farthings

7. Following a lengthy "digression" (involving testimony from an "American acquaintance"), the narrator enumerates several more advantages to his proposal. Which one of the following is *not* one of the advantages that he describes?
   (A) increasing the care and tenderness of mothers toward their children
   (B) bringing “great custom” to taverns
   (C) serving as a great inducement to marriage
   (D) relieving “constant breeders” of the expense of raising their children beyond a certain age
   (E) encouraging young children to mind their manners and obey their parents

8. What is the one objection that the narrator thinks might "possibly be raised against this proposal"?
   (A) It will reduce the number of people in the kingdom
   (B) It is morally repugnant
   (C) It is a criminal activity
   (D) It will reduce the country's dependence on lamb and other meat products
   (E) It will deprive landlords of some much-needed income

9. Toward the end of the essay, the narrator rejects alternative solutions. Which one of the following is *not* one of the "other expedients" that he considers and immediately rejects?
   (A) taxing absentee landlords at five shillings a pound
   (B) requiring shopkeepers to buy only goods that have been made in Ireland
   (C) putting children to work at a young age
   (D) quitting animosities and factions, and learning to love “our country”
   (E) teaching landlords to have at least one degree of mercy toward their tenants
10. Because "the flesh [is] of too tender a consistence to admit a long continuance in salt," where will the meat of infants not be consumed? (A) in the taverns, (B) in the mansions of wealthy landlords, (C) in England, (D) in the rural parts of Ireland (E) in Dublin

11. In the final sentence of the essay, Swift attempts to demonstrate his sincerity and lack of self-interest by making which one of the following observations? (A) His youngest child is nine years old, and his wife is beyond child-bearing age, (B) He is a citizen of England, (C) He has no children, and his wife is dead, (D) He has made so much money from *Gulliver's Travels* that any income his proposal might generate would be insignificant, (E) He is a devout Roman Catholic.

12. The author's style is characterized by his …? I. Technical claim II. Ironic tone III. Elaborate syntax
   (a.) I only (b.) II only (c.) I and II only (d.) II and III only (e.) I, II and III

13. In paragraph 6, with the phrase “except where they are of towardly parts,” the speaker…?
   I. Refuse a contrasting argument in order to strengthen his position
   II. Qualifies a previous generalization about the Irish children
   III. Offers an exception to the terms of the proposal
   (a.) I only (b.) II only (c.) I and III only (d.) II and III only (e.) I, II, and III

14. In paragraph 6, the speaker makes which of the following appeals?
   I. Substantive
   II. Authoritative
   III. Motivational
   (a.) I only (b.) II only (c.) I and II only (d.) II and III only (e.) I, II, and III

15. The speaker appeals to each of the following EXCEPT …?
   (a.) Pity (b.) Reason (c.) Economy (d.) Avarice (e.) Pragmatism

16. Paragraph 15 presents appeals to each of the following EXCEPT…?
   (a.) Gentility (b.) Patriotism (c.) Economy (d.) Utility (e.) Indulgence

17. The speaker admits which of the following as the strongest objection to any proposal?
   (a.) That it would be regarded as cruel. (b.) That it would promote avarice. (c.) That it would reduce population
   (d.) That it would violate the law. (e.) That it would encourage exploitation

18. The speaker uses each of the following argument in support of his proposal EXCEPT…?
   (a.) It would prevent voluntary abortion (b.) It would ease the burden of parents too poor to feed their children
   (c.) It would decrease the incidence of domestic violence (d.) It would stimulate the Ireland’s economy with a new and profitable export
   (e.) It would provide greater culinary variety for the genteel

19. Which of the following are offered as advantage of the proposal?
   I. It would lessen the number of Papist
   II. It would increase the number of marriages
   III. It would decrease the number of suicides
   (a.) I only (b.) II only (c.) I and II only (d.) I and III only (e.) II and III only

20. The tone of Swift’s speaker might best be described as…?
   (a.) Reasoned and confident (b.) Ironic and absurd (c.) Condescending and indifferent (d.) Arrogant and illogical
   (e.) Diffident and objective

21. Which of the following is most effective in assuaging possible feeling of disgust in the reader?
   a. The technical aspect of the facts and figures   b. The speaker’s avoidance of the grotesque
   c. The blunt candor of the proposal   d. The ironic nature of the proposal   e. The rational analysis supporting the proposal

22. Swift evidently wishes to have effected which of the following among members of his contemporary audience?
   (a.) They will be convinced of the soundness of the proposal (b.) They will be willing to absolve the speaker of selfish motives.
   (c.) They will be willing to adopt a modified version of his proposal. (d.) They will feel that some of their own selfish motives are exposed. (e.) They will view the proposal as an opportunity for personal gain.