

While reading the assigned selection, answer the following questions on your own paper.

1. Before you read any of this make sure you understand the definition of satire.
2. Considering this was written more than two centuries ago, there are striking similarities to modern society. What details in the first paragraph relate to contemporary social issues?
3. What does Swift claim as his purpose in writing this essay?
4. Paragraph that begins “the number of souls in Ireland “Up to this point, what words seem particularly derogatory, and why? What do you think Swift’s purpose is in selecting these words?
5. Same paragraph - How are these remarks about stealing ironic? Are these ideas reflected in modern stereotypes?
6. Paragraph that begins “I am assured by our merchants...” -- What methods of satire are used in this passage about the market value of children?
7. Paragraph that begins “I have been assured by a very knowing...” -- What does this comment reveal about attitudes of the time? How is it ironic?
8. Paragraph that begins “I do humbly offer it...” -- What does Swift propose to do with the children? (FYI—Many readers took Swift literally and accused him of promoting cannibalism.)
9. Paragraph that begins “I grant this food will be...” -- How does Swift play on the meaning of devoured?
10. Paragraph that begins “Infant’s flesh will be...” – According to the speaker, what is another positive outcome of this proposal?

FYI – Note Swift’s allusion to Lent. Prolific refers to the alleged capacity of fish to enhance fertility. Catholics observed Lenten practices that would abstain from meat and eat more fish.

11. Paragraph that begins “I have already computed...” – How do the mathematical and statistical references enhance the irony of the essay?
12. Paragraph that begins “A very worthy person...” and deep into the paragraph – What is your reaction to this comment? How do comments like this seem to further Swift’s purpose?
13. Paragraph that begins “Some persons of a ...” – What is the effect of the word *reasonably* in this passage?

FYI – Notice how the irony is emphasized with emotionally loaded words such as filth and vermin.

14. Paragraph that begins “Secondly ...” – What similar class structures have existed or now exist?

FYI – During this period, England treated Ireland like a colony, plundering for resources and exploiting the Irish when the time came to sell the goods made from the resources. It would be important that Ireland circulate money within its own borders and grow and manufacture its own goods to build an independent economy.

15. Paragraph that begins “I can think of no one objection...” – Are the other “expedients” listed here constructive suggestions? Why does Swift use them?

FYI – This passage reveals some biases of the eighteenth century. Note the cynical references to Laplanders and Brazilians (regarded by the eighteenth century British as barbarians) and Jews.

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16. Paragraph that begins “But as for myself...” – What clues tell readers Swift’s true feelings? What are those feelings?
17. From the information in the essay, describe the cycle of poverty in Ireland at this time.
18. What is the purpose behind Swift’s concluding paragraph?

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