

• Advanced Critical Reading - Salt

Salt is a mineral that consists mostly of sodium chloride (NaCl). It is an essential nutrient for animals, yet it is toxic to most plants. In her novel *Tongue*, author Kyung Ran Jo recounts this legend about salt: “A long time ago, a princess told the king, ‘I love you as much as I love salt.’ Believing it to be an insult, the king banished his daughter from his kingdom. But after a long time, the king realized the value of salt and the depth of his daughter’s love for him.”

Saltiness is one of the basic tastes perceived by the tongue, making it an esteemed and ubiquitous food flavoring. It also “retains vegetables’ vivid colors when parboiling, removes astringency from salad greens, freezes ice cream, quickly cools boiling water, maintains the freshness of cut flowers, removes stains on clothing, alleviates pain in your neck, is an ingredient in soap,” according to Jo. Darlene McFarlane in her article “15 Household Uses for Table Salt” recommends testing an egg’s freshness by placing it in a cup of salt water. An egg that floats is not fresh. Ants will not venture onto a salt-covered surface, according to McFarlane, so she suggests sprinkling it on windowsills and in doorways to repel them from your residence.

Salt’s historical distinction lies not so much in its taste or any of its aforementioned amazing talents, however, as in its suitability as a preservative. Salt has been used as a food preservative for centuries. One of the oldest documented saltworks is the Xiechi Lake near Yuncheng in Shanxi, China. Salt was harvested from its surface as early as 6000 B.C. Salt, along with salted birds and salt fish, was unearthed with funereal offerings in ancient Egyptian tombs from the third millennium B.C. Less than half a century later, Egypt instituted exportation of salt fish to the Phoenicians, who in turn traded Egyptian salt fish with their commercial partners throughout North Africa, engendering the establishment of wide-ranging trade associations throughout the Mediterranean region. Similarly, in the first millennium B.C., Celtic people exchanged salted meat for wine and other luxury goods from ancient Greece and Rome. The wide expanse of the Celtic salt trade is exemplified by the shared Celtic, Greek, and Egyptian root word for salt, *hal*, which is iterated in the names of saltworks throughout the region: Halle and Schwäbisch Hall in Germany, Halych in Ukraine, and Galicia in Spain.

Throughout history, salt has been deemed a precious commodity. In fact, the word “salary” is derived from the Middle English *salaire*, from the Latin *salarium*, which means a payment made in salt (*sal*) or for salt, from *salarius* which means “pertaining to salt.” Many historians agree that the Latin word *salarium* is related to salt and soldiers, but stress that the original association is unclear. Some surmise that soldiers were remunerated in salt. Some postulate that the word soldier itself is derived from the word for salt. Even today, a hard-working employee might be said to be “worth his salt” or might be commended for “soldiering on.”

Questions

1. The author's primary purpose is to
 - A) relate the history of salt.
 - B) describe the value of salt.
 - C) enumerate the myriad uses of salt.
 - D) discuss the areas where salt was traded.
 - E) explain the etymology of the word "salt."

2. In line 21, *engendering* most closely means
 - A) causing.
 - B) encountering.
 - C) requiring.
 - D) restricting.
 - E) stopping.

3. The function of the passage's final sentence is to
 - A) summarize the main uses of salt discussed in the passage.
 - B) explain the etymological roots of several city names.
 - C) repeat the fact that Roman soldiers were paid in salt.
 - D) illustrate the modern uses of salt.
 - E) emphasize the value of salt.

Answers and Explanations

1. The correct answer is **B**.

- A) Incorrect. While the author discusses the *history* of salt in the first, third, and fourth paragraphs, and focuses on the *history* of salt in lines 14-23, the *history* of salt is **not** the main thrust of the passage. The author's main purpose is to show the *value* of salt, and she does so by enumerating its many uses, both now and throughout history, as she does in lines 7-16, and in underlining its *value* by showing what a desired commodity it has been through history. The author shows that salt has historically been a desired commodity in lines 17-27. She underlines its *value* by showing that many languages share the same root word for salt in lines 23-26 which suggests a long history of salt trade. She then underlines her point by showing that even today's language retains the idea that salt is *valuable*, in the final sentence.
- B) Correct. In every paragraph, the author discusses the *value* of salt. In line 5 of the first paragraph, the phrase "... the king realized the *value* of salt and the depth of his daughter's love for him" mentions the *value* of salt. In lines 6 and 7 of the second paragraph, the sentence "Saltiness is one of the basic tastes perceived by the tongue, making it an esteemed and ubiquitous food flavoring" introduces the paragraph with the idea of salt's *value* by stating that salt is "esteemed," which means valuable. Line 14 introduces the third paragraph with the phrase "Salt's historical distinction lies not so much in its taste..." showing the distinctiveness, or *value* of salt. And line 27 introduces the fourth paragraph with the sentence "Throughout history, salt has been deemed a precious commodity," which also underlines the *value* of salt.
- C) Incorrect. While the author does enumerate many uses for salt in lines 7-14 and 15-16, she does so in order to illustrate the ways in which salt is *valuable*.
- D) Incorrect. While the author does discuss the salt trade in lines 19-25, she does so in order to illustrate the *value* of salt. For example, in lines 22-23, the author discusses the salt trade with the phrase, "in the first millennium B.C., Celtic people exchanged salted meat for wine and other luxury goods from ancient Greece and Rome" in order to show that salt was traded for other *valuable* items.
- E) Incorrect. While the author does discuss the etymology of various words associated with the root words of salt in lines 25-34, she does so in order to illustrate the *value* of salt. For example, in lines 27-29, the author writes "In fact, the word 'salary' is derived from the Middle English *salair*, from the Latin *salarium*, which means a payment made in salt (*sal*) or for salt, from *salarius* which means 'pertaining to salt'" in order to underline the *value* of salt.

2. The correct answer is **A**.

- A) Correct. The salt trade *caused* wide-ranging trade associations throughout the Mediterranean region
- B) Incorrect. The phrase "engendering the establishment of wide-ranging trade associations throughout the Mediterranean region" seems to rule out the possibility that *engendering* would mean *encountering*. It is unlikely that the beginning of the salt trade would have randomly encountered the beginning of wide-ranging trade in the area. It is more likely that there would have been a *cause-effect* relationship between the two situations. The following discussion of the shared root words for salt, "The wide expanse of the Celtic salt trade is exemplified by the shared Celtic, Greek, and Egyptian root word for salt, *hal*,

which is iterated in the names of saltworks throughout the region: Halle and Schwäbisch Hall in Germany, Halych in Ukraine, and Galicia in Spain” seems to seal the notion that the salt trade caused increased regional trade.

- C) Incorrect. While it is true that the beginning of the salt trade *caused* the increase in trade in the region, it seems unlikely that the beginning of the salt trade *required* increased trade. The section stating that “Egypt instituted exportation of salt fish to the Phoenicians, who in turn traded Egyptian salt fish with their commercial partners throughout North Africa, engendering the establishment of wide-ranging trade associations throughout the Mediterranean region. Similarly, in the first millennium B.C., Celtic people exchanged salted meat for wine and other luxury goods from ancient Greece and Rome” shows that increased trade was a mutually advantageous development, but probably **not** a *requirement*.
- D) Incorrect. It is unlikely that the word *engendering* would mean *restricting*. The statement that “Egypt instituted exportation of salt fish to the Phoenicians, who in turn traded Egyptian salt fish with their commercial partners throughout North Africa, engendering the establishment of wide-ranging trade associations throughout the Mediterranean region. Similarly, in the first millennium B.C., Celtic people exchanged salted meat for wine and other luxury goods from ancient Greece and Rome” indicates that trade was *increased*, **not** *restricted*.
- E) Incorrect. It is unlikely that the word *engendering* would mean *stopping*. The statement that “Egypt instituted exportation of salt fish to the Phoenicians, who in turn traded Egyptian salt fish with their commercial partners throughout North Africa, engendering the establishment of wide-ranging trade associations throughout the Mediterranean region. Similarly, in the first millennium B.C., Celtic people exchanged salted meat for wine and other luxury goods from ancient Greece and Rome” indicates that trade was *increased*, **not** *stopped*.

3. The correct answer is **E**.

- A) Incorrect. While the passage does discuss the many uses of salt, including a section in the final paragraph, “Some surmise that soldiers were remunerated in salt,” which postulates one use of salt, the final sentences does **not** *summarize* these uses as much as it shows that the *value* of salt is shown even in today’s idiom.
- B) Incorrect. While the final paragraph does discuss etymology, as in lines 27-30 which state, “In fact, the word ‘salary’ is derived from the Middle English *salair*, from the Latin *salarium*, which means a payment made in salt (*sal*) or for salt, from *salarius* which means ‘pertaining to salt,’” the section relating to city names is located in lines 25-26 which include the phrase “...root word for salt, *hal*, which is iterated in the names of saltworks throughout the region: Halle and Schwäbisch Hall in Germany, Halych in Ukraine, and Galicia in Spain,” and the final sentence is unrelated to city names; rather, it shows that the *value* of salt is shown even in today’s language.
- C) Incorrect. Lines 31-32 state, “Some surmise that soldiers were remunerated in salt. Some postulate that the word soldier itself is derived from the word for salt,” however it is by no means certain that soldiers were paid in salt or that the word soldier itself is derived from the word for salt. These are hypotheses, **not** facts. The final sentence shows that even today’s language reflects the *value* of salt, but it does **not** say that Roman soldiers were paid in salt.
- D) Incorrect. The final sentence does not discuss the modern uses of salt. It discusses the modern use of language regarding salt. The final sentence, “Even today, a hard-working

employee might be said to be ‘worth his salt’ or might be commended for ‘soldiering on’” does not mention the uses of salt.

- E) Correct. The phrase “a hard-working employee might be said to be ‘worth his salt’” means that the employee is as valuable as salt, pointing out the *value* of salt.