

The Pigeon Census

Narrator perspective reveals bureaucratic satire.

ELA.9.R.1.3 “Analyze the influence of narrator perspective on a text, explaining how the author creates irony or satire.”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the narrator’s approving comments, and circle details that show real problems are ignored. Number each underlined comment and circled detail that work together to create irony.

Department of Public Comfort

- ① On my first day as assistant director of the Department of Public Comfort, I learned that comfort has little to do with benches, shade, or working water fountains. Our director, Mr. Vale, greeted me beside the cracked front steps and handed me a folder labeled URGENT: PIGEON MORALE. He explained that citizens had complained about the birds’ gloomy expressions. I suggested repairing the steps, where an elderly visitor had just tripped. Mr. Vale nodded kindly and asked whether the visitor had seemed cheerful while falling. I admired his ability to keep the department focused on its mission.
- ② At the weekly meeting, staff members presented evidence that the town library roof leaked onto the history shelves and that the bus stop lacked a light. Mr. Vale placed both reports beneath a framed photograph of a pigeon named Marble. Then he announced the new Smile Census. Each employee would count how many pigeons appeared pleased during lunch. When the maintenance supervisor asked for money to patch the roof, Mr. Vale said budgets require courage. He proved it by approving twelve bronze bird mirrors, which, he assured us, would help pigeons practice confidence. I recorded the decision as a triumph of practical government.
- ③ By Friday, rain had soaked three books, and a student waiting at the dark bus stop had been splashed by a passing truck. Still, the mayor visited our office to congratulate Mr. Vale on the census. He praised the department for measuring happiness with numbers instead of opinions. Mr. Vale displayed a chart showing that Marble had looked “somewhat hopeful” on Tuesday. I clapped with everyone else, although Marble was asleep in the photograph. Outside, residents carried umbrellas through the library’s leaking entrance. I felt proud that our office had protected the town from the dangerous problem of unexamined pigeon feelings.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How does the narrator’s statement, “I admired his ability to keep the department focused on its mission,” create verbal irony?

2 How does the first-person narrator’s perspective influence the reader’s view of Mr. Vale’s decisions?

3 What does the passage satirize? Use two details from the passage to support your answer.

4 Why is the final sentence ironic? Explain the contrast between what the narrator says and what is happening in town.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write three sentences from the perspective of a first-person narrator who overly praises a made-up institution for ignoring a real need. Use verbal irony in the narrator’s voice. Then write a fourth sentence explaining what the irony satirizes.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline the narrator's approving comments, and circle details that show real problems are ignored. Number each underlined comment and circled detail that work together to create irony. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does the narrator's statement, "I admired his ability to keep the department focused on its mission," create verbal irony?	The narrator seems to praise Mr. Vale, but Vale ignores a dangerous broken step to focus on pigeon feelings. The false praise reveals criticism of his priorities.
2	How does the first-person narrator's perspective influence the reader's view of Mr. Vale's decisions?	The narrator uses official, approving language, but readers see evidence that the decisions are foolish. This contrast makes the department's priorities seem absurd.
3	What does the passage satirize? Use two details from the passage to support your answer.	It satirizes leaders who value useless measurements and appearances over public needs. Mr. Vale funds pigeon mirrors and a Smile Census while the library roof leaks and the bus stop has no light.
4	Why is the final sentence ironic? Explain the contrast between what the narrator says and what is happening in town.	The narrator claims the office protected the town from pigeon feelings, but residents still face a leaking library, broken steps, and an unsafe dark bus stop. The department has not solved the real problems.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Our school installed a gold-plated pencil sharpener beside the flooded science lab. As student council reporter, I praised the principal's wise decision to protect pencils from the boredom of being dull. Meanwhile, students carried microscopes through ankle-deep water. This approving voice creates irony and satirizes leaders who value fancy appearances over student safety.

Accept responses that identify the gap between the narrator's praise and the harmful or foolish reality. For Part 3, the writing should include a clear first-person approving voice, an implied criticism, and an accurate explanation of the satirical target.