

Word Probs and Brain Tasers (for Ages 11 to Super Duper Old)

1. What if sometimes the painting just paints itself, overnight? What if this happened to a nice enough fellow in one of the outlying towns? Wakes up and the shit's hit the fan, been sprayed, in fact, upon the kitchen wall in the most fab mosaic you could conjure? What then? (Solve, then multiply the fractional equivalents.)

2. Suppose this fellow heard a palindromic statement about a man, a plan and some massive earth-moving project in Central America? Suppose he repeated the statement to his infant daughter, who stared at him, still unaware that she was a distinct biological organism. Who will tell her the truth, and will she learn it in time? (Provide your answer on a separate sheet of paper, if you must.)

3. Art is long and life is frequently longer, and more disappointing. (Calculate the distances needed to support or deny this statement.)

4. "If you could say it in words, there would be no reason to paint," explained Edward Hopper. (Paint a word picture, or better yet, write a paint picture, to elaborate.)

5. Yes, true, sooner or later we must come to an end. But first we must come to a start. Come on, or off. Doesn't matter. A mess is a mess. Sometimes a cigar is just a metaphor, or symbol, for female sexuality, but not often. The limits of my language mean the limits of my world. That's Wittgenstein. The rim of the knowable is rimmable. That's not Wittgenstein. (Don't solve. Just mull it over.)

6. Acrylic, both systemic and casual. False glass. Fussed glass. Beads and tiles and, perhaps, beaded tiles. The canvas itself. Such are the "morphemes" of the pictorial utterance, yes? (Answer this trick question with two or three trick answers.)

7. *So, my guy says it's really a real estate question, really. When lets disappear, don't sublets disappear as well? Could be a real apostrophe.* (Pretend to be this speaker's presumed interlocutor's "guy." What would this "guy" say? Draw a geometric shape that conforms to this individual's Weltanschauung. Submit the drawing to a contest. When informed you've won first prize tell the foundation or institution or group or wealthy eccentric giving the award that you only entered as a joke/gesture and that you think the prize and the people bestowing it represent everything wrong with contemporary culture. Regret this in later years. Wonder what might have happened, "career-wise." Shrug. Smile uneasily. Glance away. Mutter something about being "a crazy kid.")

8. One thing that drew people to the project was the palimpsestic nature of the work, or else the anti-palimpsestic nature of the work. There were arguments on this score. Some agreed to disagree. Others agreed to despise each other. There were at least three layers to contemplate: the title of the piece, the words formed on the canvas or linen or whatever got “stretched,” and the ghost words beneath. But it’s more complicated than that. There are more layers. There is the question of art and the question of history. These questions don’t just sit around waiting for you, in your smug, glib, entitled bubble, to throw them shaming looks. They’re on the move, my friends! Serpentine! (Graph the strategic retreat of these questions.)

9. Bonus Question: If a picture is worth a thousand words, how much is a picture with words worth? A thousand? More than a thousand? Much, much more than a thousand? A thousand what, anyway? (Solve for fair market price. Solve for undervalued price. Solve for inflated price. Now forget the figures. Fuck the numbers. Look at the words. Fuck the words. Walk away. Dance barefoot in a rain-soaked garden. Connect to social media. Grab a rifle and a bottle of rum and go out looking for your city’s “best burger.” Are you done? Don’t be an idiot. Come back. Look at the words again. Don’t read them. Don’t you dare read them. Just look. Don’t try to understand. Keep looking. Obliterate yourself with looking. Okay, now you can read the words. Read them and weep. Really weep. It’s alright, it’s safe here. And you have every right after what they...yes, I know. Words can’t even describe it. Yes, that’s it. It’s okay. You can’t spell catharsis without the letters “a,” “r” and “t,” and without those letters you can’t spell “art.” You dig? It’s all fine. Let it all out. It’s going to be fine and it’s going to be Fein. You’re doing great. Believe me when I tell you that you’re doing great. In fact, you’re almost there. Now solve the double bonus problem below. And don’t forget to show all of your work. If you don’t show all of your work, we’ll never know if you ever really knew or not. Imagine that. Or, better yet, picture it.

--Sam Lipsyte