Name _____ Date _____

Tone and Diction in a Graduation Speech

Directions: Read the graduation speech, then answer questions about the speaker's tone and about what particular words and phrases mean in context.

Commencement Remarks: In Praise of an Ordinary Class

Good evening to the families, teachers, custodians and fellow graduates who have filled this gymnasium tonight. I would like to begin this evening with a confession. Ours has been an ordinary class. We did not win a state championship, and no one in our grade invented a famous app or appeared on the evening news. The closest we came to fame was the afternoon the robotics club's robot rolled into the principal's office and, despite three remote controls and a great deal of shouting, refused to leave.

For a long while, that word bothered me more than I wanted to admit. Ordinary sounded like a polite way of saying forgettable, the sort of word a yearbook uses when it has run out of compliments. All through the fall, I kept hoping that something dramatic would happen to us before graduation, something worthy of a headline in the local paper.

Then, this spring, I started paying closer attention to the people around me. Every morning, Ms. Alvarez unlocked the library twenty minutes early for anyone who needed a quiet table. Every afternoon, a sophomore named Jonah stayed after practice to stack the chairs that no one else wanted to stack. Mr. Okafor, who drives the late bus, waited an extra five minutes every evening so the debate team would not have to walk home in the dark. The custodians repainted every faded line in the student parking lot over a single weekend, so that nobody would have to guess where the spaces were. When a pipe burst in the gym in March, half of our class showed up on a Saturday with mops and buckets, and nobody posted a single photo about it.

None of that made headlines, but all of it made room. It made room for the student who needed a quiet table before a test, for the team that needed a dry floor, for anyone who needed proof that someone was paying attention.

I used to think the opposite of ordinary was extraordinary. Now I think its opposite is careless. The extraordinary moments in our lives will be few, and most of them will depend on luck. The ordinary moments will be countless, and every one of them will depend on us. Luck may decide whether we ever win a championship or meet someone famous, but it cannot decide whether we return a borrowed book, keep a promise to a friend or notice when a classmate is struggling.

So here is what I wish for this class. I hope we stay ordinary. I hope we keep unlocking doors early and stacking chairs late. I hope that years from now, someone will say of each of us, without any fanfare at all, that we were the kind of person you could count on. That may not sound like much. I have come to believe it is the largest thing a person can be. Congratulations, ordinary class. I could not be prouder to be one of you.

1. Which word best describes the speaker's tone in the opening paragraph's story about the robotics club's robot?

A. resentful B. lighthearted C. apprehensive D. mournful

2. In the sentence "Ordinary sounded like a polite way of saying forgettable, the sort of word a yearbook uses when it has run out of compliments," which word itself carries a negative judgment?

A. forgettable B. compliments C. polite D. yearbook

3. The speaker notes that when a pipe burst in the gym, "nobody posted a single photo about it." What does this detail suggest about the motives of the students who cleaned up?

A. They helped because the work needed doing, not to earn attention.

B. They were embarrassed that the gym had flooded during the school year.

C. They wished that someone had noticed all of their hard work.

D. They were not allowed to bring their phones into the gym.

4. In the sentence "None of that made headlines, but all of it made room," what does the phrase made room mean as the speaker uses it?

A. Added several new rooms to the high school building

B. Pushed other students out of the library to make extra space

C. Earned the class a story in the local newspaper that spring

D. Created space for other people to learn, play and feel noticed

5. How does the speaker's understanding of the word ordinary change over the course of the speech?

A. It shifts from a description of the school building to a description of its teachers.

B. It shifts from a word of praise to a word the speaker uses as an insult by the end.

C. It shifts from seeming to mean forgettable to naming the steady acts others rely on.

D. It stays the same, because the speaker uses ordinary only to criticize the class.

6. Compared with the opening story about the robot, how does the tone change in the paragraph that begins "I used to think the opposite of ordinary was extraordinary"?

A. It becomes more serious and reflective. B. It becomes more fearful and uncertain.

C. It becomes angrier and more resentful. D. It becomes more mocking and sarcastic.

7. The speaker says that most extraordinary moments "will depend on luck," while every ordinary moment "will depend on us." What does this contrast suggest?

A. Ordinary moments are within our control, while most extraordinary ones are not.

B. Extraordinary moments happen far more often in life than ordinary ones do.

C. The class has been unlucky during its four years together in high school.

D. Luck matters more than effort in most people's lives, as the class has learned.

8. Which two words describe the speaker's tone in the final paragraph, which begins "So here is what I wish for this class"?

☐ A. hopeful ☐ B. apprehensive ☐ C. indifferent

☐ D. proud ☐ E. resentful

9. In the final paragraph, the speaker imagines someone describing each graduate "without any fanfare at all." What does this phrase mean?

A. Without speaking a single word out loud B. Without any showy celebration or praise

C. Without any doubt or hesitation at all D. Without any time to prepare in advance

10. The speaker says that being the kind of person others can count on is "the largest thing a person can be." What does largest mean in this sentence?

A. Most common among people B. Most expensive to achieve

C. Tallest or biggest in physical size D. Most important or meaningful