Miss America: Not Just Another Pretty Face

Many people are against the very idea of a beauty pageant. Most probably have no idea that the Miss America Scholarship Program provides more scholarships to young women than any other organization in the world. It started as just a beauty contest in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1921. However, Miss America has been giving away scholarships since 1945. Bess Myerson became the first person to receive a cash award. Between the national, state, and local organizations, Miss America reports that it gave away more than $45 million in cash and scholarships last year.

One of the biggest objections to the pageant has been the swimsuit competition. In 1996, the pageant conducted a poll. Almost 90 percent of voters wanted to keep the swimsuit portion. It is still used today to judge physical fitness. However, several other parts of the competition are scored more heavily. The personal interview that contestants have with the judges is worth 25 percent. The talent competition is worth 35 percent. Evening wear counts for 20 percent. The swimsuit competition counts for 15 percent, and the onstage question is worth 5 percent of the final score.

The young women who compete in pageants like this aren’t just pretty faces. Each contestant is required to select a “platform” issue. They are asked to choose something they feel strongly about and that is relevant to the United States. The winners help bring attention to their issues by speaking to organizations, businesses, and the media. HIV/AIDS prevention, domestic violence, school bullying, literacy, and homelessness have all been highlighted by past Miss America winners.

Miss America has changed from a simple beauty pageant to its current role as a scholarship program. Since 1945, women have received money to pay for graduate school and to pay off student loans. Miss America is much needed. The thousands of young women who have benefited from it have also gone on to have careers in television, film, and business.

1. According to the information in the passage, which of these events is most significant to the Miss America Program’s current role?

A. In 1945, the pageant awarded its first scholarship.
B. In 1996, 90 percent of viewers voted to keep swimsuits.
C. The competition is based on five distinct categories.
D. Contestants represent 52 U.S. states and territories.
Kevon was determined to pin Cameron’s arms to the ground, but Cameron was doing everything in his power to keep that from happening. The fact that the two boys were tussling in an elevator didn’t help Kevon’s plight at all. And his little sister’s screaming was disrupting his concentration.

“Oh my goodness! Would you two just stop it already? There’s not enough room in this tiny elevator for you to fight,” Kelly screamed. “Could you at least wait until we get out of here?”

“Okay, okay! If you agree to stop that screaming, we’ll stop fighting,” Cameron said. Kevon never thought he’d see the day when the school bully was taking orders from a little girl. He wasn’t sure if he could trust Cameron’s word.

“I never thought I’d see the day Cameron Maines would let a girl tell him what to do,” he said.

“Dude, nobody tells me what to do,” Cameron said, pushing Kevon’s shoulder. “I stopped because I have a little sister at home, and I never let her see me fight.”

“You mean your parents have more kids?” Kevon said. “I’m going to have to teach Kelly how to defend herself sooner than I anticipated, he thought.

“I never would have guessed you had any soft spots,” Kevon blurted out before he even realized it. “I mean, you just don’t seem like you let people get close to you.”

Cameron sighed. “I am very close to my family. I don’t think people realize what it’s like to be me.”

“You mean it’s like to be the strongest, tallest kid in the whole school?” Kevon laughed. “Do tell!”

“I have been the biggest, tallest person in school for as long as I can remember. People made fun of me until I started standing up for myself,” Cameron said. “I wasn’t always mean. I just give people what they expect.”

“You shouldn’t be mean to people because that’s what they expect,” Kelly chimed in.

“You should just be yourself.”

“Kelly, you’re a lot wiser than I give you credit for,” Kevon said.

“I have tried being nice to people before,” Cameron replied. “And I wound up eating lunch alone anyway. People were afraid I was trying to play a joke on them.”

Wow, I had no clue Cameron felt that way, Kevon thought. Puts things in a different light. He doesn’t seem so scary after all.

Just then the elevator doors creaked open.

“Are you kids okay?” a voice said.

“Yes, we are! Thank you so much for coming,” Kelly said.

“You must’ve been the one who called for help?”

“Wait, how did you call them?” Cameron said.

“I used the emergency phone in the elevator,” Kelly replied. “You two were so busy wrestling that you missed it.”

“Wow, you really are just like my little sister Claire.” Cameron laughed. “You two would get along great.”

“You’ll have to introduce us sometime,” Kelly said.

“Well, I guess I will see you around school,” Cameron mumbled.

“Hey, do you want to go to the pizza parlor with us to grab a slice?” Kevon asked.
“Are you sure you want me to come with you?”
“I insist!” Kelly said. “You should also invite Claire.”
“That sounds like a great idea. We can compare notes on our bratty little sisters!” Kevon laughed.
“Kevon!” Kelly screamed.
Cameron and Kevon looked at each other and laughed.

2. Which quote from the passage best supports the idea that Kevon's opinion about Cameron has changed?

A. "You mean your parents have more kids?"
B. "We can compare notes on our bratty little sisters!"
C. "Hey, do you want to go to the pizza parlor with us to grab a slice?"
D. He wasn't sure if he could trust Cameron's word.

“Your main problem is that you take yourself too seriously, Flo,” Aubrey said. “There’s nothing wrong with being a poet, but do you have to wear all black and speak in that sing-song voice all of the time?”
“Don’t try to stifle my intellectual growth, man,” Flo said. “I need to think, walk, and act poetry all of the time so that I am ready to write a poem whenever it comes to me!”
“Flo, I have known you since we were 5 years old, and you are not that deep!” Aubrey responded. “You read all of the Midnight series, for goodness sake! Stop pretending, and just be yourself!”
“Aubrey, keep your voice down!” Flo said, checking to make sure no one heard her.
“I didn’t come here for you to tell me what to do. I came so you could tell me what to do to get a date for the poetry reading.”
“Since when are you interested in getting a date? I thought you said you enjoyed being alone so you could ‘channel all of your high school anguish’ into your poetry?”
“Since I found out all of the other girls in my poetry group are bringing dates,” Flo said. “Are you going to help your best friend or what?”
“You know there’s nothing I wouldn’t do to help you, but I don’t know any special strategies or anything,” Aubrey said. “I am just myself around guys. If they like me, then great. If they don’t, it’s not the end of the world.”
“You do what?” Flo said in disbelief. “If that’s what it takes to get a boyfriend, I think I will stay single!” She slammed her locker.
Aubrey just shook her head and laughed. “Are we still on for movie night Friday?”
“Only if you bring Mean Girls,” Flo said, pouting. “You know it’s my favorite!”

3. From the passage the reader can tell that

A. Aubrey and Flo have been friends for a long time.
B. Flo is naturally gifted when it comes to meeting guys.
Is Junk Food Habit-Forming?

Some scientists think so. A Princeton University study of rats found that many of them became anxious and had the shakes after the sugar in their diets was removed. These symptoms are similar to those of people who once used illegal drugs and are experiencing pain from discontinuing their use.

Researchers said that high fat foods may release “pleasure chemicals” in the brain that mimic the effects of drugs like opiates. These are drugs that can be used as pain relievers like morphine. Some people also abuse them in the form of illegal drugs like heroin. Using opiates for too long can cause people to form an addiction, or habit. Scientist and researchers say that people can also become dependent on sweet food.

Another study from the University of Wisconsin Medical School observed how a group of rats behaved after they had sweet, salty, and fatty food. Scientists then injected the rats with a fake form of the opiates the brain produces on its own. The rats ate up to six times more fat when they received access to the junk food again. Researchers said the lasting changes in the rats’ brain chemistry were similar to those of people who have abused morphine or heroin.

In yet another study, rats were given unlimited access to candy bars, bacon, pound cake, and other junk food. They quickly gained weight and eating became so compulsive for the rats that they kept doing it even when their legs were receiving an electric shock as a warning to stop eating.

The junk food was then taken away and replaced by healthier food. Surprisingly, the rats refused to eat anything at all for two weeks. Again, researchers noticed changes in the rat’s brains that resulted from their unhealthy diets. Other rats in the study were fed healthy food and had limited access to junk food. They did not eat compulsively.

There is not yet scientific research that shows how this relates to the human mind, but many researchers have suggested that severe weight gain in humans may be linked to changes in the brain caused by diets high in fat and sugar.

4. Based on the evidence from the passage, what can be concluded?

A. The rats in the last study preferred healthy food over the junk food options.
B. Human beings and rats have similar brain reactions to high sugar foods.
C. Fast food should be regulated just like other illegal drugs that people use.
D. If the rats in the last study couldn't have junk food, they would rather starve.

Micro Pig

Most people have probably heard that pigs are smarter than dogs. Studies have shown that pigs are thought to have the intelligence of a 3-year-old human child. A Penn State study showed that pigs can play video games that use joysticks. In fact, they
proved to be better at the games than some members of the chimp family. The same study revealed that pigs could be taught to recognize and use objects, like a Frisbee or a dumbbell, and still remember them three years later. University of Illinois scientists conducted a study in which pigs used trial and error to figure out how to turn the heat on and off in a cold barn.

Although we might find a pig’s intelligence to be impressive, most of us would be unlikely to allow a full-grown one to live in our homes. People who would consider a pig for a pet are in luck. Micro pigs are the latest craze in unusual pets. But don’t think of them as purse or pocket pigs! They grow to be about 40 to 65 pounds, the size of many adult dogs. Because pigs have hair instead of fur, they might actually prove to be better pets for people with allergies. They can be trained to use a litter box, and most owners say they’re clean animals.

However, do your research before choosing a pig as a pet. Pigs can be destructive if they don’t have the companionship, attention, stimulation, and boundaries they require. Pigs are social animals, and some breeders only sell them in pairs.

5. What does the statement "Studies have shown that pigs are thought to have the intelligence of a 3-year-old human child" mean?

A. Dogs and kids could learn a lot from pigs.
B. At the age of three, kids are smarter than dogs.
C. Pigs and dogs are equally smarter than kids.
D. Despite being animals, pigs are extremely smart.

**Why Go Vegetarian?**

People choose to eliminate meat from their diets for many reasons. Concerns about health risks, farming practices, and environmental problems are just a few.

In recent years, many animal rights activists have investigated the way animals are treated on large factory farms. They found that many farm animals spend their entire lives in cages where they are often neglected and abused. Investigators also found that these animals are often fed chemicals in order to fatten them up or to make them produce more milk or eggs.

Some health experts say that a healthy vegetarian diet can help reduce heart disease, cancer, and stroke. They say vegetarians also have lower cholesterol and blood pressure and are less likely to develop diabetes. Others claim that a vegetarian diet will lead to a longer life. Much of the evidence to support these claims comes from scientific studies.

Many vegetarian supporters would say the best thing you can do for the environment is to stop eating meat. Some estimates show that the amount of water used just for farming equals the amount of water used for everything else in the United States combined. Supporters say it takes 2,500 gallons of water to produce a single pound of beef. This is equivalent to taking a long shower every day for two-and-a-half weeks. The fertilizer used to grow crops that feed animals has also been identified by the Environmental Protection Agency as a major water pollutant.
However, there are many who disagree with vegetarian supporters. A recent United Kingdom study shows that while vegetarians seemed less likely to have cancer overall, they were more likely to have colon cancer. Another study says that vegetarians risk not having enough iron because the richest sources of iron come from meat. Some experts even say that animal fats are "necessary for human health."

Organizations such as The Heartland Institute, a Chicago-based research center, deny that meat production harms the environment. In fact, they say that most of the land that is used for livestock farming is not suitable for growing food. So using it to raise cattle doubles the amount of food produced. Heartland also says that safe practices are required by law and that farmers must take care of their animals in order to make money. They say that poorly fed and treated animals produce less meat. In turn, farmers make less money.

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6. What does the author mean when he or she writes, "No matter which side you agree with, you should always consult with your doctor before changing your diet"?

A. A health professional can refer you to a qualified dietician and personal trainer for weight loss.

B. It is important to seek the advice of a health professional before making drastic diet changes.

C. A doctor would convince you that keeping lean meats in your diet is the healthiest choice.

D. Doctors are more likely to agree that a vegetarian diet is the best choice for everyone.

Of Donkeys and Elephants

You may be familiar with the elephant as a symbol for the Republican Party and the donkey as a representative for the Democratic Party. But have you ever wondered how these symbols were chosen?

The Democratic National Convention says it never officially adopted the donkey as its mascot, but it does make use of the symbol. The donkey first made an appearance in the 1828 presidential election. The opponents of Andrew Jackson called him a donkey. Jackson decided to make the image work in his favor by using it on his campaign posters. Then, an 1837 political cartoon showed Jackson riding a donkey that represented the Democratic Party. In 1870, Thomas Nast’s Harper’s Weekly political cartoon revived the use of the donkey as a symbol for the party. Other cartoonists soon adopted this use.

Nast also introduced the use of the elephant as a symbol for the Republican Party. In his 1874 political cartoon, he drew a donkey in lion’s skin scaring away all of the animals at the zoo. The elephant in the cartoon was labeled “The Republican Vote.”
After that, the use of the elephant symbol stuck with the Republican Party. When asked what the symbols mean today, Democrats respond that the donkey is “smart and brave,” and Republicans say the elephant is “strong and dignified.”

7. What can be inferred from the political cartoon in the passage?

A. Nast thought the Democrats of his day were aggressive and maybe even frightening.
B. In Nast’s view, the Republican Party was the largest and most influential political group.
C. The Democratic Party also chose the lion to represent them in addition to the donkey.
D. Political parties were responsible for causing inflation and destroying government reform.

“If I had to pick one book that has had a major impact on me, it would be *The House on Mango Street,*” Hope said, staring at the floor and picking at the hem of her dress.
“Hope, I would love for you to tell us why that is, but first, I want you to lift your head and stand up straight,” Ms. Richardson said. “You know no one here is going to bite you, right? This room is full of the same people who have been with you all year.”

“Yes ma’am,” Hope replied. She took a deep breath and looked out at her audience. The room was filled with students who looked terrified. I guess that’s one of the benefits of having to go first, she thought. Everyone is so worried about speaking in front of the class that no one is really listening.

“Are you ready?” Ms. Richardson asked.

Hope nodded and started again. “The reason why The House on Mango Street is my favorite book we’ve read this year is because of Esperanza,” Hope said slowly. “First of all, her name is the same as mine because ‘Esperanza’ means ‘hope’ in Spanish.”

“I have always really wanted to be a writer, and the way Sandra Cisneros organized the book with each chapter as a different story really impressed me,” she continued. “I never thought I could write a whole book, but The House on Mango Street has changed what a book looks like for me.”

From the corner of her eye, Hope could see a smile on Ms. Richardson’s face. “The ‘Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark’ chapter was one of my favorites because it reminded me a lot of my dad. He works very hard like Esperanza’s dad.”

The more Hope talked about The House on Mango Street, the less afraid she was. She was so excited that some of her classmates actually sat up and appeared to be listening to what she had to say. Before she knew it, her book report was over. And she didn’t faint like she thought she would.

“See, that wasn’t as hard you thought it would be, was it?” Ms. Richardson said, interrupting Hope’s thoughts. She gave Hope a pat on the back.

“It sure wasn’t,” Hope said.

8. Which quote from the passage supports the idea that Ms. Richardson is a caring teacher?

A. "If I had to pick one book that has had a major impact on me, it would be The House on Mango Street."

B. "You know no one here is going to bite you, right? This room is full of the same people who have been with you all year."

C. "Hope, I would love for you to tell us why that is, but first, I want you to lift your head and stand up straight."

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“Dude, nobody tells me what to do,” Cameron said, pushing Kevon’s shoulder. “I stopped because I have a little sister at home, and I never let her see me fight.”

“You mean your parents have more kids?” Kevon said. “I’m going to have to teach Kelly how to defend herself sooner than I anticipated, he thought.

“I just have one little sister, and we’re close,” Cameron said. “Kelly, I’m sorry for behaving this way in front of you.”

“I never would have guessed you had any soft spots,” Kevon blurted out before he even realized it. “I mean, you just don’t seem like you let people get close to you.”

Cameron sighed. “I am very close to my family. I don’t think people realize what it’s like to be me.”

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“I insist!” Kelly said. “You should also invite Claire.”

“That sounds like a great idea. We can compare notes on our bratty little sisters!”

Kevon laughed.

“Kevon!” Kelly screamed.

Cameron and Kevon looked at each other and laughed.

9. What can be inferred from the evidence in the passage?
A. Kelly is the smarter sibling.
B. Cameron is afraid of Kevon.
C. Kelly and Kevon fight a lot.
D. Cameron is really a nice guy.

Is Junk Food Habit-Forming?

Some scientists think so. A Princeton University study of rats found that many of them became anxious and had the shakes after the sugar in their diets was removed. These symptoms are similar to those of people who once used illegal drugs and are experiencing pain from discontinuing their use.

Researchers said that high fat foods may release “pleasure chemicals” in the brain that mimic the effects of drugs like opiates. These are drugs that can be used as pain relievers like morphine. Some people also abuse them in the form of illegal drugs like heroin. Using opiates for too long can cause people to form an addiction, or habit. Scientist and researchers say that people can also become dependent on sweet food.

Another study from the University of Wisconsin Medical School observed how a group of rats behaved after they had sweet, salty, and fatty food. Scientists then injected the rats with a fake form of the opiates the brain produces on its own. The rats ate up to six times more fat when they received access to the junk food again. Researchers said the lasting changes in the rats' brain chemistry were similar to those of people who have abused morphine or heroin.

In yet another study, rats were given unlimited access to candy bars, bacon, pound cake, and other junk food. They quickly gained weight and eating became so compulsive for the rats that they kept doing it even when their legs were receiving an electric shock as a warning to stop eating.

The junk food was then taken away and replaced by healthier food. Surprisingly, the rats refused to eat anything at all for two weeks. Again, researchers noticed changes in the rat’s brains that resulted from their unhealthy diets. Other rats in the study were fed healthy food and had limited access to junk food. They did not eat compulsively.

There is not yet scientific research that shows how this relates to the human mind, but many researchers have suggested that severe weight gain in humans may be linked to changes in the brain caused by diets high in fat and sugar.

10. What evidence from the passage supports the claim that junk food could be addictive, or habit-forming?

A. Surprisingly, the rats refused to eat anything at all for two weeks.
B. In yet another study, rats were given unlimited access to candy bars, bacon, pound cake, and other junk food.
C. Another study from the University of Wisconsin Medical School observed how rats behaved after they had sweet, salty, and fatty food.
Researchers said the lasting changes in the rats' brain chemistry were similar to that of people who have abused morphine or heroin.