Practice Test Explanations: Reading

1. **Correct Response:** A. This selection focuses on the profound impact of Emile Durkheim on the development of sociology. Choice A, which indicates Durkheim's primary contributions to the discipline, thus best expresses the main idea of the selection. Of the other responses listed, choice B is a misinterpretation of Durkheim's social group theory, choice C is too narrow in scope to constitute the main idea of the selection, and choice D reflects a misunderstanding of information presented in the selection.

2. **Correct Response:** B. This question assesses the ability to recognize a writer's purpose for writing a given selection. Choice B is the best response because the writer's primary intention is to inform readers of Emile Durkheim's influence on the development of sociology. Although choices A and D relate to ideas and issues that the writer addresses in developing the main theme of the selection, they do not reflect an accurate understanding of the primary purpose of the work. Choice C reflects a misinterpretation of the writer's basic intent, which is to inform and describe rather than to persuade.

3. **Correct Response:** B. In the first paragraph, the writer states that sociology does not attempt to explain the behavior of a particular individual. Choice B is therefore the best response to the question because, unlike psychologists, sociologists tend to be concerned with people as members of groups rather than as individuals. Of the other choices listed, both sociologists and psychologists are concerned with explaining behavior (choice A), while psychologists are likely to spend more time than sociologists helping people solve their problems (choice C). Concerning choice D, the text explicitly states that sociologists are interested in understanding patterns of human relationships.

4. **Correct Response:** A. This question requires an understanding of the analogy that Durkheim used to illustrate the nature of social groups. Choice A is the best response because, according to the selection, Durkheim observed that just as the hardness of bronze cannot be predicted by knowing about the hardness of its component metals, the characteristics of a social group as a collective unit cannot be determined by analyzing the traits of the group's individual members. Choices B, C, and D all reflect misinterpretations of Durkheim's reason for comparing social groups to bronze.

5. **Correct Response:** C. This question assesses the ability to organize information for study purposes. Of the alternative choices provided, choice C is the best response because it represents the most complete and accurate listing of the main themes presented in the selection. By comparison, the other choices provided not only omit one or more major themes, but also state main ideas in ways that are either inaccurate or misleading. For example, social groups rather than sociology are compared to bronze in the second paragraph (choice A), and the author does not attempt at any point in the selection to examine sociology before or after Durkheim (choices B and D).

6. **Correct Response:** D. This question assesses the ability to use context clues to determine the intended meaning of a word with multiple meanings. Within the context of the fourth paragraph of the selection, the best definition of the word *model* is a plan to be imitated (choice D). The reader knows this because the writer goes on to state that Durkheim's approach "guided the work of nearly all sociologists." Although choices A (one of two or more alternative styles), B (an artist's subject), and C (a small copy of an object) are all possible meanings of the word *model*, they inaccurately convey the word's meaning as it is used in this context and distort what the writer is trying to say in the paragraph.
7. **Correct Response: D.** In the seventh paragraph, the writer discusses what the Joy Luck parties meant to the women who attended them. That choice D is the best response is evidenced not only by information contained in the paragraph, but also by the extensive discussion of the mother's past losses in preceding parts of the selection. Of the other responses provided, the women realized that the parties were at best a brief respite from the often hard reality of their lives (choice A), and they did not expect to win prizes of any significant value at these gatherings (choice C). Concerning choice B, feasting on various delicacies was an important feature of the parties, but it was not the main reason that the women organized them.

8. **Correct Response: B.** This question assesses the ability to recognize the likely effect on an audience of a writer's choice of certain phrases. That choice B is the best response is confirmed by the following sentence in which the writer observes that her mother "recognized the numbness in these women's faces." Of the other responses provided, the women were trying to improve their English, but not because they had any particular desire to give fuller expression to past tragedies (choice A). The passage does not tell us how these women felt about having emigrated from China (choice C), nor is there any suggestion that the narrator's mother felt superior to the women (choice D).

9. **Correct Response: A.** This question assesses the ability to draw conclusions from a passage. Choice A is the best response because information contained in the fourth paragraph indicates that the narrator's mother conceived of the Joy Luck Club in an effort to come to grips with the harshness of her current circumstances. She had no illusions, however, that Joy Luck would generate the money needed to escape those conditions (choice D). Of the other responses provided, the paragraph tells us nothing about the mother's state of health on the night in question (choice B), and it was the actual screaming sounds from the street that led her to imagine terrible sights that evening (choice C).

10. **Correct Response: C.** This question assesses the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion in a reading selection. Choice C is the best response because it is based on an intentional exaggeration on the part of the writer's mother: that the smells had nowhere else to go but to her nose. By comparison, the observations contained in choices A, B, and D all represent efforts to convey accurate descriptions and recollections of various matters.

11. **Correct Response: D.** This question assesses the ability to summarize a reading passage for study purposes. Choice D is the best response because it provides the most accurate and complete statement of the main points discussed in the passage. By comparison, the other responses provided all omit important elements of the story; choices A and C also misinterpret parts of the selection.

12. **Correct Response: B.** Within the context of the selection, choice B is the best definition of *casting long shadows into her life* because the following paragraph provides a vivid description of the hard life the writer's mother had experienced in earlier years—a life that she could never forget (choice A). Of the other choices provided, the mother appears to have had a remarkably clear recollection of the past (choice C), and made little or no effort to erase those memories, however unpleasant they may have been (choice D).
13. Correct Response: A. This selection focuses on the complex procedures involved in the development of television commercials. Choice A, which notes that commercials require a great deal of time, effort, and money to produce, thus best expresses the main idea of the selection. Of the other choices listed, the selection provides no evidence that commercials are more difficult to produce than other types of film (choice B), nor does it indicate that shorter commercials are more costly and complex to develop than longer commercials (choice D). Choice C is too narrow in scope to constitute the main idea of the selection. It may also be inaccurate, as it does not take into consideration all the important information presented in the selection.

14. Correct Response: B. This question assesses the ability to infer a writer’s purpose for including particular content in a reading selection. Choice B is the best response because it is most in accord with the main purpose of the first paragraph, which is to inform readers that television commercials have become increasingly shorter in recent decades. Of the other choices listed, the writer makes no effort at any point in the paragraph to compare U.S. development or technology with that of other nations (choices A and C) or to assess the quality of television commercials (choice D).

15. Correct Response: D. This question assesses the ability to identify the proper sequence of steps presented in a reading selection. Choice D is the best response because the writer implies in the third paragraph that businesses typically conduct several market surveys before making any decisions related to the style or content of a television commercial. These surveys are designed to identify the typical users of the product to be advertised. Without such information, the producers of television commercials would have no guidelines for developing scripts (choice A), determining general style (choice B), or selecting actors for commercials (choice C).

16. Correct Response: B. Choice B provides the best assessment of the writer’s credibility. Even though readers are unable to judge the representativeness of the example presented, the amount of detail contained in the selection indicates that the passage is based on extensive research. That the passage evidences considerable enthusiasm for television commercials does not detract from the writer’s credibility because the selection is not intended to promote or defend the interests of the advertising industry (choice A). Of the other choices provided, the comparative amount of space devoted to actors and technical personnel has little bearing on the writer’s credibility (choice C), and there was no compelling reason for the writer to present additional information about costs (choice D).

17. Correct Response: B. This question assesses the ability to organize information for study purposes. Choice B is the best response because it most accurately targets the main themes presented in the selection. Each of the alternative answers contains at least one element that represents a minor detail from the selection rather than a major point. For example, the writer devotes no more than passing attention to television commercials around the world (choice A), the role of networks and manufacturers in the production of television commercials (choice C), and the goals of television commercials (choice D).

18. Correct Response: C. Within the context of the fourth paragraph of the selection, the best definition of the word *storybook* is a sequence of pictures and text illustrating the major segments of a film (choice C). The reader knows this because the writer indicates that a *storybook* is an outline for a commercial that is composed of both images (i.e., "sketches") and words (i.e., "lines of ‘voice-over’ "). The definitions provided in choices A, B, and D each misinterpret the information provided by the writer about the purpose and components of a *storybook*. 


19. **Correct Response: C.** This question assesses the ability to recognize ideas that support the main idea of a paragraph or a passage. Choice C is the best response because encouraging children to explain why they are afraid, and then offering reassurance, is one means by which caregivers can help children to deal with their fears. Of the other responses provided, Choice A describes a way in which children overcome their fears without assistance, and Choice B indicates what caregivers should not do rather than what they can do to aid children. Choice D mentions something that caregivers should bear in mind when helping children to conquer their fears, but it says nothing about how they might offer such aid.

20. **Correct Response: C.** This question assesses the ability to recognize the likely effect on an audience of a writer's choice of certain words. Choice C is the best response because adults can readily understand the sense of security one feels when dealing with the familiar. The sentence says nothing about the actual fears of children (choices A and B), nor does it provide advice on how to help children overcome their fears (choice D).

21. **Correct Response: B.** This question assesses the ability to identify a solution to a problem presented in a passage. Choice B is the best response because contact desensitization studies show that fear reduction is most likely to occur when children are told how to approach the object of fear, encouraged by an adult to do so, praised when they try, and allowed to watch an adult do so as well. The techniques described in choices A and D may also reduce a child's fears, but contact desensitization studies show that they are not as effective as the approach outlined in choice B. Although children should not be forced to confront a feared situation before they are ready to do so, allowing them to avoid the object of fear (choice C) does nothing to eliminate the fear.

22. **Correct Response: D.** Understanding and dealing with children's fears are the main topics discussed in the passage. Choice D is therefore the best response because it says nothing about the nature of children's fears or the ways in which adults can help children to overcome them. By comparison, choice A states a major theme of the passage, choice B provides information about the learning process of fear reduction, and choice C offers advice about how to respond to children's fears.

23. **Correct Response: A.** This question assesses the ability to organize information for study purposes. Choice A is the best response because it provides the most accurate and inclusive statement of the main themes of the selection. Of the other responses provided, choices B and C misinterpret information presented in the selection. For example, the passage does not compare the fears of children and adults (choice B) or distinguish between the fears experienced by toddlers and older children (choice C); the latter also fails to list a major theme of the selection—how caregivers can help children to overcome their fears. Although the information provided in choice D is accurate, it does not reflect the flow and balance of major ideas discussed in the selection as well as choice A.

24. **Correct Response: A.** Within the context of the selection, choice A is the best definition of the word *index* because it most accurately describes the situation to which the word refers: allowing an observer to measure or gauge a child's level of development. Although choices B, C, and D are all acceptable definitions of the word *index*, they do not convey the correct meaning of the word as it is used in the passage. Their adoption in this context would be contrary to the writer's intentions.
25. **Correct Response: A.** In the first paragraph, the author explains why he chose to make topics and themes from his Native American background the focus of his writings. Choice A, which notes the connection between the writer's heritage and literary work, thus best states the main idea of the paragraph. Of the other responses provided, the writer certainly appreciates the artistic endeavors of Native American people; but it is unclear whether he believes art should be a part of everyone's existence (choice B); nor does he appear to have ever abandoned traditional Native American values (choice D). Concerning choice C, the author does have positive memories about his parents and childhood, but these recollections do not constitute the main idea of the paragraph.

26. **Correct Response: D.** This question assesses the ability to recognize the likely effect on an audience of a writer's choice of a certain word. Choice D is the best response because the word "guttural" is often used to describe strange or disagreeable utterances, and the following sentence suggests that the newspaper disapproved of the author's poems. Of the other responses provided, "guttural" may be used to describe the sound of language, but that does not appear to have been the newspaper's intention in using the word (choice A); nor was the newspaper attempting to describe how the author felt about his poems (choice C). Concerning choice B, "guttural" is not a word that one would customarily use to characterize an audience's reaction to a performance.

27. **Correct Response: B.** This question assesses the ability to identify cause-effect relationships. Choice B is the best response because information in the passage indicates that memories of the sacrifices made to send tribal elders to Washington most influenced his decision to accept the White House invitation. Of the other responses provided, the author went to Washington despite a feeling that he was possibly being exploited as a Native American (choice A). There is no indication that he was especially eager to read his work before an audience of other poets and literary critics (choice C); and while he may have wished that the writings of other Native Americans assume a more political tone, that was not the reason why he changed his mind about the White House invitation (choice D).

28. **Correct Response: A.** Choice A is the best response to the question because the selection focuses on the ways his literary work and that of other Native American writers have been influenced by their cultural heritage, a heritage that has been marked by cultural repression on the part of U.S. policymakers. It thus follows that the author would view literature as a powerful means of asserting both the cultural values and political rights of Native Americans. Of the other responses provided, the author makes no effort to compare European and Native American artistic traditions (choice B), nor does he suggest that all Native American writings express a political position (choice C). Concerning choice D, much of the author's own work is intended to preserve Native American cultural traditions, but he does not insist that other Native American writers follow his example.

29. **Correct Response: B.** This question assesses the ability to identify a summary of a reading passage for study purposes. Of the responses provided, choice B is the best response because it provides the most informative and complete listing of the main points discussed in the selection. By comparison, many of the topics listed in the other choices are so vaguely phrased as to be of little help for study purposes; nor do any of these responses note the importance of the author's Native American background to his literary work, which is a central theme of the passage.
30. Correct Response: C. Within the context of the second paragraph of the selection, the best definition of the word *spare* is meager because the author implies that U.S. policymakers largely ignored the many appeals of tribal elders. Of the other responses provided, adoption of choices A or D would distort the meaning of this part of the selection, and choice B is not an accepted meaning of the word *spare*.

31. Correct Response: B. The first paragraph of the selection is intended to distinguish between the negative and positive attributes of bacteria. Choice B, which notes that bacteria can be beneficial as well as harmful to humans, thus best expresses the main idea of the paragraph. By contrast, choices A, C, and D state that bacteria are either dangerous or useful, but do not indicate that they possess both of these characteristics.

32. Correct Response: A. The writer's primary intention in this selection is to examine important factors and procedures involved in bacteria farming. Therefore, choice A is the best response to the question. Although choices B and D relate to background issues and ideas that the writer addresses in developing the main theme of the selection, neither constitutes the primary purpose of the work. Concerning choice C, no effort is made in the selection to compare different methods of growing bacteria.

33. Correct Response: A. This question assesses the ability to identify cause-effect relationships in a reading selection. Choice A is the best response because the accumulation of wastes in the growth container is a major factor in bringing about the "death phase" of the bacterial growth cycle. Of the other responses provided, there is no compelling reason to monitor growth during the "start phase" of the growth cycle (choice B), increasing the amount of liquids in the culture medium is more likely to postpone than hasten the "death phase" of the growth cycle (choice C), and the culture medium should be kept at a constant temperature (choice D).

34. Correct Response: D. This question assesses the ability to recognize an assumption on which the validity of an argument depends. Choice D is the best response because an important theme of the selection is that, to be commercially successful, bacteria farmers must understand and take advantage of the organism's unique growth cycle. The selection provides no indication that the assumptions listed in choices A, B, and C had any influence on the writer. At no point in the selection does the writer attempt to compare the benefits of bacteria cultivation with other types of farming (choice A), to examine the growth rates of other kinds of organisms (choice B), or to assess the comparative influence of different factors on progress in medicine and industry (choice C).

35. Correct Response: C. This question assesses the ability to interpret information presented in a graph. The selection states that a bacterial population begins to decrease in size as it passes from the "stationary growth phase" to "death phase" of the bacterial growth cycle. According to the bacterial growth curve presented in the graph, this point is reached after approximately 24 hours of incubation (choice C). Of the other choices provided, the graph shows that a bacterial population is still increasing in size at the 6 and 12 hour marks (choices A and B), and is at the end of its "death phase" after 36 hours of incubation (choice D).
36. **Correct Response:** B. This question assesses the ability to use context clues to determine the intended meaning of a word with multiple meanings. Within the context of the last paragraph of the selection, producing (choice B) is the best definition of the word *yielding*. The reader knows this because the writer is discussing the good crop of usable organisms that bacteria farmers are able to produce and harvest during the "stationary growth phase." Although choices A, C, and D are all possible meanings of *yielding*, they do not convey the meaning intended by the writer in the context of the last paragraph.

37. **Correct Response:** C. In the first paragraph, the writer attempts to set the stage for the remainder of the selection by describing the gulf that developed between the promises contained in the Civil War era amendments and the realities of American social and political life. Choice C, which notes that the important provisions of the amendments were not honored in later decades, thus best expresses the main idea of the paragraph. Of the other responses provided, choice A is too narrow in scope to constitute the main idea of the paragraph, while the primary function of choices B and D is to furnish details that support the main idea.

38. **Correct Response:** C. This question assesses the ability to use the content of a reading passage to determine a writer's opinions. Choice C is the best response because a main purpose of the writer in the third paragraph is to show that political authorities in a democratic society are responsive to popular demands for change. The other choices provided all represent misinterpretations of the writer's intentions in the paragraph. The paragraph contains no criticism of the first phase of the civil rights movement (choice A), nor is any effort made to evaluate the comparative influence of Supreme Court decisions and Congressional actions (choice B). Concerning choice D, the paragraph indicates only that civil disobedience is sometimes an effective means of securing political change.

39. **Correct Response:** B. This question assesses the ability to identify a solution to a problem presented in a reading selection. Choice B is the best response because the writer states that when court orders to desegregate public schools encountered massive resistance, Blacks and their supporters adopted new tactics that emphasized nonviolent direct action. Although this campaign of civil disobedience eventually prompted Congressional action, there is no evidence in the selection that initial efforts to secure enforcement of the *Brown* decision focused on the enactment of civil rights legislation (choice A). Of the other responses provided, choices C and D are both unsupported by information presented in the selection.

40. **Correct Response:** A. Choice A is the best response to the question because the selection focuses on the century-long struggle of Blacks and their supporters to give meaning to the Civil War era amendments. Therefore, implicit throughout the selection is an assumption that nations should ensure that all their laws are observed, to whomsoever they may apply. The other choices provided all reflect a misunderstanding of the writer's argument in the selection. Amendments to the Constitution are not singled out for their effectiveness in eliminating social injustice (choice B), and at no point in the selection does the writer contend that people must in general be forcibly compelled to respect the rights of others (choice C). Concerning choice D, the selection suggests that the success of a social movement depends more on the justice of its cause than the forcefulness of its leaders.
41. **Correct Response:** D. This question assesses the ability to summarize information for study purposes. Choice D is the best response because it provides the most accurate and complete statement of the main themes of the selection. Of the other responses provided, choices A and B not only omit one or more of the selection's main ideas, but also misinterpret information presented in the passage. For example, the selection does not argue that the Brown decision ended segregation in American social life (choice A), nor does it contend that individuals were more important than organizations during the second stage of the civil rights movement (choice B). Although the information provided in choice C is accurate, it does not well reflect the flow and balance of the ideas presented in the selection and is too narrow in scope to constitute an adequate summary of the selection.

42. **Correct Response:** D. Within the context of the selection, choice D is the best definition of the word *culminated* because the next paragraph makes it clear that the Brown decision marked the highest point of achievement of the first phase of the civil rights movement. According to the third paragraph, subsequent progress would depend more on nonviolent direct action than the legal challenges that characterized the first stage of the movement. Choices A, B, and C are not accepted meanings of the word *culminated.* Their adoption in this context would also distort the broader meaning of the selection.