Questions on George Orwell’s “Politics and the English Language”
Summer, 2011

THE FACTS

1. What connections does the author make between politics and the English language?
2. In paragraph 3 Orwell cites five examples of bad writing. What two faults do all of the examples share?
3. According to Orwell, why do people use hackneyed imagery and prefabricated phrases?
4. Many people use big words and foreign words in order to sound educated. According to Orwell, what do such words do to a piece of writing?
5. What does Orwell mean when he states that “in our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible” (paragraph 14)?
6. Orwell states, “In prose, the worst thing one can do with words is to surrender to them” (paragraph 18). Give an example of what he means by this surrender.
7. Enumerate Orwell’s six elementary rules concerning the choice of words and phrases. If, in your opinion, he has left out any major rule, state it.

THE STRATEGIES

1. Orwell deplores the use of stale imagery. Identify three examples of fresh imagery that he uses in his essay.
2. What is the analogy used for illustration in paragraph 2?
3. Which paragraph is developed first by contrast and then by example?
4. In what paragraph does Orwell make the transition from poor writing in general to poor writing in politics? Point out the transitional sentence.
5. What is the topic sentence for paragraph 14? What is the chief method of development for this paragraph?

THE ISSUES

1. Do you agree with Orwell’s opening statement that English is in a bad way? If you had to, how would you refute this statement?
2. What are some examples from the current political, psychological, or economic scenes that indicate how foolish thought is reflected in writing?
3. What are some dead metaphors used by most students nowadays? What fresher image or metaphor do you suggest for each?
4. What kind of writing do you consider truly bad?
5. What rules, if followed, would most improve your own writing? List three. How do you plan to implement these rules?