

DIRECTIONS FOR TEACHERS

LISTENING SECTION

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH

Wednesday, August 16, 2006—8:30 to 11:30 a.m., only

BE SURE THAT THE LISTENING SECTION IS ADMINISTERED TO EVERY STUDENT.

- 1 Before the start of the examination period, say:

Do not open the examination booklet until you are instructed to do so.

- 2 Distribute one examination booklet and one essay booklet to each student.

- 3 After each student has received an examination booklet and an essay booklet, say:

Tear off the answer sheet, which is the last page of the examination booklet, and fill in its heading. Now circle “Session One” and fill in the heading on each page of your essay booklet.

- 4 After the students have filled in all headings on their answer sheets and essay booklets, say:

Look at page 2 of your examination booklet and follow along while I read the **Overview** and **The Situation**.

Overview:

For this part of the test, you will listen to an account about yellow rice, answer some multiple-choice questions, and write a response based on the situation described below. You will hear the account twice. You may take notes on the next page anytime you wish during the readings.

The Situation:

Your communications class is studying propaganda. You have been asked to write an essay on one industry’s use of propaganda. You have chosen the biotechnology industry. In preparation for writing your essay, listen to an account by Michael Pollan about yellow rice. Then use relevant information from the account to write your essay.

Now I will read the passage aloud to you for the first time.

- 5 Now read the passage aloud, including the attribution at the end. Read with appropriate expression, but without added comment.

Listening Passage

Unless I'm missing something, the aim of the biotechnology industry's audacious new advertising campaign is to impale people like me — well-off first worlders dubious about genetically engineered food — on the horns of a moral dilemma. Have you seen these ads? Over a speedy montage of verdant [green] rice paddies, smiling Asian kids and kindly third-world doctors, a caring voice describes something called golden rice and its promise to “help prevent blindness and infection in millions of children” suffering from vitamin-A deficiency. This new rice has been engineered, using a daffodil gene, to produce beta-carotene, a nutrient the body can convert into vitamin A. Watching the pitch, you can almost feel the moral ground shifting under your feet. For the unspoken challenge here is that if we don't get over our queasiness about eating genetically modified food, kids in the third world will go blind.

It appears that biotechnology, which heretofore had little more to offer the world than plants that could shake off a shower of herbicide, has finally found a “killer app” that can silence its critics and win over journalists. It's working, too: Time magazine put golden rice on its cover, declaring, “This rice could save a million kids a year.” Even Greenpeace has acknowledged that “golden rice is a moral challenge to our position.”

Yet the more one learns about biotechnology's Great Yellow Hope, the more uncertain seems its promise — and the industry's command of the moral high ground. Indeed, it remains to be seen whether golden rice will ever offer as much to malnourished children as it does to beleaguered biotech companies. Its real achievement may be to win an argument rather than solve a public-health problem. Which means we may be witnessing the advent of the world's first purely rhetorical technology.

If that sounds harsh, consider this: an 11-year-old would have to eat 15 pounds of cooked golden rice a day — quite a bowlful — to satisfy his minimum daily requirement of vitamin A. Even if that were possible (or if scientists boosted beta-carotene levels), it probably wouldn't do a malnourished child much good, since the body can only convert beta-carotene into vitamin A when fat and protein are present in the diet. Fat and protein in the diet are, of course, precisely what a malnourished child lacks.

Further, there's no guarantee people will eat yellowish rice. Brown rice, after all, is already rich in nutrients, yet most Asians prefer white rice, which is not. Rice has long had a complicated set of meanings in Asian culture. Confucius, for example, extolled the pure whiteness of rice as the ideal backdrop for green vegetables. That works fine so long as you've still got the vegetables. But once rice became a monoculture cash crop, it crowded the green vegetables out of people's fields and out of their diet.

Proponents of golden rice acknowledge that persuading people to eat it may require an educational campaign. This begs a rather obvious question. Why not simply a campaign to persuade them to eat brown rice? Or how about teaching people how to grow green vegetables on the margins of their rice fields, and maybe even give them the seeds to do so? Or what about handing out vitamin-A supplements to children so severely malnourished their bodies can't metabolize beta-carotene?

As it happens, these ridiculously obvious, unglamorous, low-tech schemes are being tried today, and according to the aid groups behind them, all they need to work are political will and money.

Money?

More than \$100 million dollars has been spent developing golden rice, and another \$50 million has been budgeted for advertisements touting the technology's future benefits. A spokesman for Syngenta, the company that plans to give golden rice seeds to poor farmers, has said that every month of delay will mean another 50,000 blind children. Yet how many cases of blindness could be averted right now if the industry were to divert its river of advertising dollars to a few of these programs?

Which brings us to some uncomfortable questions about the industry's motives. In January, Gordon Conway, the president of the Rockefeller Foundation — which financed the original research on golden rice — wrote, “The public-relations uses of golden rice have gone too far.” While genetically engineered rice has a role to play in combating malnutrition, Conway noted, “We do not consider golden rice the solution to the vitamin-A deficiency problem.”

So to what, then, *is* golden rice the solution? The answer seems plain: To the public-relations problem of an industry that has so far offered consumers precious few reasons to buy what it's selling — and more than a few to avoid it. Appealing to our self-interest won't work, so why not try pricking our conscience? (Do I hear an echo? *Eat your peas — there are children starving in Africa.*)

Ordinarily, evaluating a P.R. strategy in terms of morality rather than efficacy would seem to be missing the point. But morality is precisely the basis on which we've been asked to think about golden rice. So let us try. Granted, it would be immoral for finicky Americans to thwart a technology that could rescue malnourished children. But wouldn't it also be immoral for an industry to use those children's suffering in order to rescue itself? The first case is hypothetical at best. The second is right there on our television screens, for everyone to see.

— from “The Great Yellow Hype”
The New York Times Magazine, March 4, 2001

6 After reading the passage aloud once, say:

You may take a few minutes to look over **The Situation** and your notes.
(Pause) Now I will read the passage aloud a second time.

7 Read the passage a second time.

8 After the second reading, say:

Now turn to page 4 of your examination booklet, read the directions, and answer the multiple-choice questions. Be sure to follow all the directions given in your examination booklet and your essay booklet. You may now begin.

