

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Answer Key: Lexical Labyrinth: Vernacular vs. Vague Expressions for College Composition

Evaluate and deconstruct socio-political and academic idioms through contextual analysis to bridge the gap between colloquial fluency and formal rhetoric.

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**1. In the context of institutional change, what is the most accurate interpretation of the expression 'turning the Titanic'?**

**Answer:** B) A slow, difficult process of altering the direction of a large organization.

This idiom draws a parallel between the massive physical momentum of an ocean liner and the bureaucratic momentum of a large institution, emphasizing that change cannot happen instantly.

**2. True or False: The expression 'moving the goalposts' refers to a logical fallacy where the criteria for success are changed after the initial requirements have been met.**

**Answer:** A) True

In rhetoric and debate, 'moving the goalposts' is a common expression used to describe an unfair change in the terms of an argument or a process to prevent the opponent from reaching a conclusion or goal.

**3. In legislative discourse, a '\_\_\_\_\_ bill' refers to a piece of legislation that attracts various unrelated amendments often intended to secure funding for local projects.**

**Answer:** C) Christmas tree

A 'Christmas tree bill' is a political idiom describing a bill that has many 'ornaments' (amendments or riders) attached to it by various legislators for their own interests.

**4. When a scholar is said to be 'standing on the shoulders of giants,' they are specifically acknowledging:**

**Answer:** C) The intellectual debt owed to the discoveries of previous researchers.

Attributed famously to Isaac Newton, this expression signifies that progress in science and philosophy is cumulative and relies on the foundations laid by earlier thinkers.

**5. True or False: To describe a policy as a 'stalking horse' suggests it is a formidable and unstoppable force in the upcoming election.**

**Answer:** B) False

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A 'stalking horse' is actually a figure or policy used to test the strength of the opposition or to mask a real candidate or agenda; it is a deceptive front rather than a direct force.

**6. If a journalist refers to a political scandal as a '\_\_\_\_\_ issue,' they mean it is so controversial that politicians risk their careers by touching it.**

**Answer:** B) Third rail

The 'third rail' refers to the high-voltage rail on a train track. Metaphorically, it describes a political topic (like Social Security) that is considered 'electrically charged' and dangerous to touch.

**7. The term 'dog-whistle politics' uses a metaphor based on high-frequency sound to describe:**

**Answer:** B) Coded language that appears normal to the general public but resonates with a specific subgroup.

Just as a dog whistle is heard by dogs but not humans, a political dog-whistle is a coded message that communicates a specific (often controversial) point to a target audience while maintaining plausible deniability.

**8. When an analyst refers to a 'black swan event,' they are describing an occurrence that is:**

**Answer:** C) A highly improbable event with a massive impact that is often rationalized after the fact.

Nassim Nicholas Taleb popularized this expression to describe major, unforeseen events (like the 2008 financial crisis) that defy standard prognostications.

**9. True or False: In legal or philosophical theory, a 'slippery slope' argument assumes that one relatively small initial step will inevitably lead to a chain of related, negative events.**

**Answer:** A) True

The 'slippery slope' is both an expression and a logical fallacy used to suggest that a minor action will trigger a catastrophic and unstoppable sequence of consequences.

**10. To '\_\_\_\_\_ the Gordian Knot' is an expression used to describe solving a complex problem through a bold, decisive, and often unconventional action.**

**Answer:** B) Cut

Based on the legend of Alexander the Great, 'cutting the Gordian Knot' implies that instead of trying to untangle a complex problem slowly, one applies a creative or forceful shortcut.