FREN 2200 Name:

French for Reading Knowledge Date:

**Voltaire**

Read the short Voltaire text “[Histoire d'un bon bramin](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Histoire_d%E2%80%99un_bon_Bramin).” Then do the exercises below.

# Pre-reading activities

# I. Line by line

**Title:** *Histoire* has 2 meanings: and .

Its probable meaning for this text is .

**Lines 1 & 2:**  What noun is used in English to mean “a wise person”?

Find 2 adjectives that describe a wise person: and . The first adjective means . The second adjective derives from the verb

; therefore, it probably means .

Do we typically think of wise people as mostly happy or sad?

Why might they be happy?

Why might they be sad?

**Lines 9-22:** This paragraph explains the title character’s state of mind; is he happy or sad? The paragraph offers an explanation presented in a series of complementary clauses, e.g., “J’étudie depuis quarante ans, ce sont quarante années de perdues” (ll. 9-11).

These 2 clauses are complementary because they present (check the correct answer):

1) similar elements (e.g., 2 positive facts or situations)

2) an opposition or contradiction (e.g., a positive and then a negative fact or situation).

This relationship of similarity/opposition (circle one) is also present in which of the following sentences from the paragraph (check the ones that apply):

“j’enseigne les autres, et j’ignore tout” (l. 11)

“je suis né, je vis dans le temps, et je ne sais pas ce que c’est que le temps” (l. 12-13)

“je me trouve dans un point entre deux éternités … et je n’ai nulle idée de l’éternité” (ll. 13-14)

“je pense, je n’ai jamais pu m’instruire de ce qui produit la pensée” (ll. 15-16)

“j’ignore si … je pense avec ma tête comme je prends avec mes mains” (ll. 17-18)

“je ne sais pourquoi j’existe; cependant on me fait chaque jour des questions sur tous ces points” (ll. 19-21)

“il faut répondre; je n’ai rien de bon à dire “ (l. 21)

“je parle beaucoup, et je demeure confus et honteux de moi-même après avoir parlé” (ll. 21-22)

The reason for the title character’s state of mind could best be summarized in what way?

Even though there are things he doesn’t know, he is glad to be able to explain some things to people.

Even though the character has spent his life studying, he feels like he doesn’t know anything.

Even though the character has spent his life studying, he feels like he doesn’t know or understand the most basic things about being human.

**Lines 8 and 22:** *demeurer* means “to live; to stay; to remain; to be left.” Which meaning does it have in line 8? In line 22?

**Line 40:** If *voisin* means “neighbor,” *voisinage* means .

**Line 51:** Given the context, i.e., how the old woman is described in the 2 preceding paragraphs, what does *sot* probably mean?

**II. Literal versus idiomatic translation:** context determines which is more appropriate. Circle the letter of the best modern (i.e., colloquial English) translation for the following phrases, given their context:

“Dieu m’est témoin (= *witness*)” (l. 24):

a) God knows b) Let God be my witness c) As God is my witness

“il y paraît bien à mes réponses” (l. 25):

a) it appears so (i.e., thus) clearly at my answers b) it’s really clear in my answers c) you can really tell from my answers

“je n’aurais pas voulu être heureux à condition d’être imbécile” (ll. 54-5):

a) as a condition of being b) on the condition of being c) if it meant being d) while conditioning myself to be

“une furieuse contradiction” (l. 57):

a) a furious contradiction b) a striking contradiction c) a mad contradiction

# III. Word families

# “Mots apparentés/faux amis [false cognates]”: Donnez l’équivalent anglais du mot français. S’il s’agit d’un faux ami (\*), donnez aussi l’équivalent français du faux ami anglais. (You may look the latter up in a dictionary if you don’t know them.)

la pensée (l. 16) la métamorphose (l. 44)

le principe (l. 19) l’automate (*m.*) (l. 49)

inonder (l. 26) la félicité (l. 66)

se moquer de (ll. 31) \* ignorer (l. 11)

l’état (*m.*) (l. 37) *ignore*

affliger (l. 41)

1. English correspondences to accented words in French.
2. *ét → st*: If *étudier* (root verb of *s’étudier*, line 4) = “to study,” then what do the following words probably mean?

établir: étage: étoffe: étrange: étrangler:

1. If a circonflex accent (^) over a vowel often indicates that an “s” would follow that vowel in English, what do the following words mean:

forêt: hôtel: château:

1. The suffixe *dé-*/*des-* has 2 common transpositions into English. Find them by translating the following words:

*désespoir* (line 34): *défaut:*

*déshériter: déshonnête:*

*déshonorer: déshydrater:*

*désinformation: désordre:*

What is the general meaning of these 2 suffixes in English, i.e., how does it affect a word that it is attached to?

Sometimes there is not a single equivalent word in English for a word with the suffix *dé- /dés-* in French, but if you know the general meaning of the suffix, you can figure out what the word probably means. Translate the following words:

*désinformer:*

*déshabituer:*

*désintoxiquer:*

*déterrer:*

1. Given the 2 parallel constructions described in 1 and 2 above, what does the following word probably mean: *dégoût* (line 12)?

# IV. Grammar

1. Literary texts typically contain numerous verb tenses, but generally will be in the present, the past, or sometimes the future. Does this text take place in \_\_\_\_the present, \_\_\_\_ the past, or \_\_\_\_ the future? (check the correct answer)

Therefore, the main tense for the narration in this text is .

What is the first example of this tense? , line .

The rest of the first paragraph contains verbs in what tense, and why?

2. Some verbs in the *passé simple* have a similar, or even the exact same spelling. What does the verb *vis/vit* mean in the following lines, and give its infinitive in French:

*vis* (line 13): *vis* (line 40):

means: means:

infinitive: infinitive:

*vit* (line 49): *vis* (line 55):

means: means:

infinitive: infinitive:

# Reading: Read “[Histoire d'un bon bramin](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Histoire_d%E2%80%99un_bon_Bramin).” You may use a dictionary, but you should try to limit yourself to looking up no more than 10 words per page (this text = 2 pages) . This will force you to make choices and rely on the reading strategies you’re developing to guess at less essential words. You must learn how to identify words essential to understanding a text, and this comes with practice.

# Post-reading activities

**Translation:** Translate the fourth paragraph (ll. 23-36) and the last paragraph (ll. 66-68) of the text into good modern English. You may use a dictionary. Do not produce a translation which sounds like French; i.e., do not be overly influenced by the French so that you, for example, retain French sentence structure or use close cognates when another word in English would make for better-sounding English.