

## Discussion questions for *A Modest Proposal* – Jonathan Swift

---

For homework, answer the following questions. Be as specific as possible and when applicable, quote from the essay.

1. What is the problem identified in the first two paragraphs? What persuasive techniques are used to engage the reader?
2. In paragraph 4, the speaker of the essay mentions proposals set forth by “projectors”; that is, by advocates of other proposals or projects. On the basis of the first two paragraphs of AMP, how would characterize this projector, the speaker of the essay? (What satire term should we use to refer to the speaker?) Then upon reading the entire essay, characterize the projector as you now understand him. What techniques does Swift use to achieve this difference? Explain.
3. Find at least three examples of irony in AMP. What effect does this technique have on the essay? What purpose do these examples serve?
4. Find two examples where Swift uses ambiguity in the essay. What effect does this technique have on the essay? What purpose do these examples serve?
5. Find at least two examples of understatement in the essay. (This is when the speaker makes a serious problem seem inconsequential). What effect does this technique have on the essay? What purpose do these examples serve?
6. Find at least two examples of overstatement in the essay. What effect does this technique have on the essay? What purpose do these examples serve? (Overstatement though similar to hyperbole, overstatement is when the speaker makes a minor problem seem critical).
7. Find at least two examples of hyperbole in the essay. What effect does this technique have on the essay? What purpose do these examples serve?
8. Look for examples of logos, pathos, and ethos. Does the speaker rely on one more than the others? What is the effect of the speaker creating these aspects of argument? Why?
9. Swift does offer more realistic solutions to the problems in Ireland. Find the place in the text where he does this. Quote three of the possible solutions he offers. Why do you think Swift puts in these realistic solutions?
10. How do satire and irony help Swift accomplish what a more conventional approach to persuasion would not?
11. Swift uses language laden with emotion to convey a sarcastic, downright bitter tone. Locate several examples of emotionally charged language. How does this language support Swift’s real purpose for writing AMP?
12. In paragraph 20, the speaker apologizes for having “digressed” in the last few paragraphs. Do paragraphs 17, 18, 19 really represent a digression or are they germane to the issue? Explain.
13. Writers of argumentation-persuasion essays often anticipate and then refute opposing opinions. In what paragraphs does the speaker in AMP refute the dissenting viewpoint? What is the real purpose of the refutation?
14. What other methods of essay development does Swift use in this essay? Find examples and explain how these additional viewpoints add to his proposal.