

## Close Read Application

from **Coming to Our Senses**

by Neil deGrasse Tyson

Our five senses even interfere with sensible answers to stupid metaphysical questions like, "If a tree falls in the forest and nobody is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" My best answer is, "How do you know it fell?" But that just gets people angry. So I offer a senseless analogy, "Q: If you can't smell the carbon monoxide, then how do you know it's there? A: You drop dead." In modern times, if the sole measure of what's out there flows from your five senses then a precarious life awaits you.

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1. Discuss the central idea of this essay. How would you describe it?
2. In this section, how does the author support the main idea?
3. Underline *stupid metaphorical questions*. How does this phrase contribute to the author's **tone**, or attitude, in this section?

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4. What is the effect of the author's choice to ask questions, and then answer them? Discuss what this adds to the essay.

5. Explain how the question and answer in this section relates to the one in the previous section. How does it help support the author's central idea?

6. What might the author mean by *a precarious life*?

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### Sample Answers:

1. The central idea of this essay seems to be that it is not practical to rely only on our senses to understand everything— science needs to inform our understanding, too.
2. One way the author supports the main idea is by providing examples, such as the one given here, which leads readers to see that sensory data has limits.
3. The author's tone is informal and friendly, and this phrase adds to that by the light, humorous word choice. This helps make the text accessible and relatable for the reader.
4. The author asks questions and then answers them, making the passage seem like a casual conversation between friends. This might contrast with assumptions that scientific writing has to be dry, complicated, and inaccessible.
5. The author making a comparing between the question in the previous section - *If a tree falls in the forest and nobody is around to hear it, does it make a sound?* and the one he asks here. The comparison suggests that science can help us detect what we can't on our own—especially things that are dangerous or could kill us, which are more important than metaphysical issues.
6. *Precarious* means *lacking in security*. The author may mean that if you rely entirely on your senses, you may be vulnerable to dangerous things around you because you won't be able to perceive them in their entirety.