Guy de Maupassant, the famous French short story and novel writer, supposedly lunched every day at one of the restaurants in the Eiffel Tower. He maintained that he ate there because that was the only place in the French capital where he could eat without having to look at the famous Paris landmark. Although this story is most likely spurious, de Maupassant and many other luminaries of the art world were, in fact, implacably opposed to the tower from the start. When work on it began in 1887, a group of disgruntled artists, writers, musicians, and architects issued a manifesto calling the proposed tower “monstrous” and “useless.” In a gratuitous slap at the United States, they declared that a structure that “even the United States would not countenance surely dishonors Paris.”

The late nineteenth century was the age of monumental iron structures. The famed Brooklyn Bridge had been completed in 1883, and the French government wanted something equally impressive for the 1889 World’s Fair in Paris, which celebrated the centennial of the French Revolution. Over one hundred proposals were submitted, and the adjudicators declared Gustave Eiffel’s proposal the winner. His plan called for a thousand-foot iron tower that would be the tallest structure in the world; it retained this title until the 1,046-foot Chrysler Building in New York was built in 1930.

The World’s Fair was to open in May 1889; Eiffel signed the contract on January 8, 1887. He had just over two years to complete the project, and he moved expeditiously—work on the tower’s foundations was completed in five months! In order to achieve this feat, 40,000 cubic yards of earth had to be removed. Each of the tower’s four feet were set in a 20-foot-thick base of concrete, limestone, and granite. Once the foundation was completed, the iron girders and other components, which were made in workshops three miles from the site, began arriving daily. When these were riveted together, the four corner sections began rising, leaning inward at an angle of 54 degrees, until they reached a height of 180 feet. At this point, a 25-foot-wide iron “belt” was used to gird them into a single structure. A similar operation was carried out at 380 feet, and from this platform, the four corners converged to form a single spire.

There was no precedent for such a massive structure in Paris. Many Parisians were mesmerized by the sight of the great iron tower getting taller by the day. Others expressed misgivings, fearing that the tower would topple in a strong wind. But such fears proved illusory. Fierce weather had no impact on the structure. It could easily support elevators as well as the numerous people they would carry to the top. In installing elevators, Eiffel did not choose a single, vertical elevator, which would have been simple to install but which would have cluttered the graceful open
arches at the base of the tower. Instead, Eiffel placed elevators at two of the four corners.

The Eiffel Tower was a well-managed and remarkable feat of engineering. It was completed within the time allotted and within its $1.6 million budget. It is a huge structure, yet its curving shape is light and airy, giving it a sense of lift. At the same time, the tower appears to be firmly rooted in the earth. These two opposing elements work together in complete equilibrium to make France’s great national monument a triumph of design.

Answer each question in the form of a sentence. If a question does not contain a word from the lesson, use one in your answer. Use each word only once.

1. Why might the story about de Maupassant be considered spurious?

2. How did Maupassant and some other luminaries feel about the Eiffel Tower?

3. Who issued a manifesto that claimed that the Eiffel Tower is “useless”?

4. What was the gratuitous insult made to the United States in the manifesto?

5. What did the 1889 World’s Fair in Paris celebrate?

6. Who declared Gustave Eiffel the winner of the contest to create a monument for the 1889 World’s Fair?

7. Did Paris have any structures as large as the Eiffel Tower?

8. How did some Parisians react to the tower?
9. How were the fears of the tower’s toppling shown to be **illusory**?

___________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________

10. Why is the Eiffel Tower called a “triumph of design” in the passage?

___________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________

11. Describe Gustave Eiffel’s possible **countenance** after he heard that his proposal was declared the winner.

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12. Why were some people **disgruntled** about the tower?

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**FUN & FASCINATING FACTS**

- **Centennial** and **centenary** both mean a hundredth anniversary or refer to its celebration. **Centennial** is the preferred American form, while **centenary** is more common in Britain. Both are formed from the Latin word **centum**, which means “one hundred.” Both can take the prefixes **bi-**, “two,” **tri-**, “three,” or **quadri-**, “four,” to indicate multiples of one hundred years. Since Mozart died on December 5, 1791, the **bicentenary** of his death occurred in 1991. The year 2007 marked the **quadricentennial** of the founding of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607.

- **Countenance** can be a noun, meaning “facial expression,” or a verb, meaning “to approve.” The meanings are related. The initial meaning of **countenance** was “facial expression.” Because we can show our approval with a favorable facial expression, the meaning “to approve” was later taken as an additional meaning of **countenance**.

- Around two hundred years ago, an Austrian physician named Mesmer discovered hypnosis as a new way of treating patients. He called it “animal magnetism.” But one of Mesmer’s pupils coined the word **mesmerize** to describe this treatment. When **hypnotize** later came into use, **mesmerize** took on its present meaning.