The United Kingdom Linguistics Olympiad

Breakthrough Workout
Colourless Green Ideas

(1) What language(s) does this problem involve? English **What is the aim of this problem?** To explore sentences which are grammatically correct, but semantically incorrect.	(2) **Background Information** The words 'semantic' and 'semantically' relate to the *meaning* of a sentence. In 1957, famous linguist Noam Chomsky wrote a sentence which was grammatically correct, but semantically incorrect. He did this to prove it was possible for a sentence to have perfect grammar, but no real meaning in everyday life.

(3) Data and Instructions

This was Noam Chomsky's famous sentence:

> Colourless green ideas sleep furiously.

Look carefully at the sentence and think about what makes it grammatically correct but semantically incorrect.

4) Tasks

a) There are at least three reasons why Noam Chomsky's famous sentence is semantically incorrect. Explain them below:

Reason 1	
Reason 2	
Reason 3	

b) Cross out one word from Noam Chomsky's sentence, and replace it with one which makes it *grammatically incorrect*. There are many different ways you could do this.

Colourless green ideas sleep furiously.

c) Rewrite Noam Chomsky's sentence by changing the words in bold so that it is *grammatically correct* and *semantically correct*. There are many different ways you could do this.

Colourless green **ideas** sleep **furiously**.

d) Write a sentence of your own which, like Noam Chomsky's original example, is *grammatically correct* but *semantically incorrect ('nonsense')*.