

MAKING NEW WORDS YOUR OWN

Lesson 11

CONTEXT: Reading, Writing, and Performing

Understanding Characters on the Page

For literary characters to be realistic, they must be as complex as real people. It follows that to understand realistic characters, we must get to know them in much the same way we do real people. For example, we must think about how they look, what they say and how they say it, how they behave towards us and towards other people, what they think about, what they like to do, and so on. Approaching characters this way is an effective way to analyze literature. It is also very rewarding. In fact, readers often find that some of their favorite people are characters in literature.

In the following exercises, you will have the opportunity to expand your vocabulary by reading about fictional characters. Below are ten vocabulary words that will be used in these exercises.

- | | | | | |
|---------|--------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|
| bland | contemptible | ideally | incomprehensible | obtuse |
| chronic | diligent | impertinent | malicious | pessimistic |

EXERCISE 1

Mapping

Directions. In the item below, a vocabulary word is provided and used in a sentence. Take a guess at the word's meaning and write it in the box labeled **Your Guess**. Then look the word up in your dictionary and write the definition in the box labeled **Definition**. In the **Other Forms** box, write as many other forms of the word, such as adjective and noun forms, as you can think of or find in your dictionary.

Then, following the same procedure, draw your own map for each of the nine remaining vocabulary words. Use a separate sheet of paper.

1.
bland

Many people read to escape from the everyday routine. Such readers want excitement, conflict, and stormy emotions. A character who is always pleasant and kind may be a bit too bland for these readers' tastes.

Your Guess:

Definition:

Other Forms:

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EXERCISE 2 *Context Clues* 

Directions. Scan the definitions in Column A. Then think about how the boldface words are used in the sentences in Column B. To complete the exercise, match each definition in Column A with the correct vocabulary word from Column B. Write the letter of your choice on the line provided; then write the vocabulary word on the line preceding the definition.

COLUMN A

- _____ 11. word: _____
adj. despicable; hateful; low
- _____ 12. word: _____
adj. not sharp-edged or pointed; blunt; dull; slow to understand
- _____ 13. word: _____
adv. in agreement with an ideal; perfectly; theoretically
- _____ 14. word: _____
adj. lasting a long time; constant; habitual
- _____ 15. word: _____
adj. impossible to understand; obscure
- _____ 16. word: _____
adj. disrespectful; rude and impolite; unrelated to a given topic
- _____ 17. word: _____
adj. soothing; mild; dull
- _____ 18. word: _____
adj. expecting things to turn out badly; gloomy
- _____ 19. word: _____
adj. harmful; mean; spiteful
- _____ 20. word: _____
adj. hardworking; painstaking

COLUMN B

- (A) Madame Loisel, the main character in Guy de Maupassant's short story "The Necklace," is unhappy with the rather **bland**, ordinary life she lives.
- (B) She finds her shabby apartment **contemptible** and disgusting.
- (C) Madame Loisel is constantly finding fault with her life. She lives in a state of **chronic** dissatisfaction.
- (D) Since Madame Loisel has the necessities of life, her unhappiness might be **incomprehensible** to someone who is truly poor.
- (E) Madame Loisel does not intend to be hateful when she first rejects an invitation to an upper-class party, but to her husband her reaction probably seems hurtful, or **malicious**.
- (F) Madame Loisel acts as though her husband is being deliberately **obtuse** when he doesn't understand her reluctance to go to the party. She thinks it is obvious that her meager wardrobe won't allow it.
- (G) Madame Loisel borrows a necklace to wear to the party, then loses it. She and her husband are **diligent** in their efforts to replace the necklace; in fact, they ruin themselves in order to buy a new one.
- (H) When Madame Forestier, the woman from whom Madame Loisel borrowed the necklace, sees her old friend again after ten years, she does not recognize her. At first she thinks Madame Loisel is an **impertinent** stranger who is disrespectful in approaching her.
- (I) Certainly, the story of Madame Loisel is a **pessimistic** one, but not all of Maupassant's stories are quite so gloomy.
- (J) **Ideally**, the reader will recognize that even though she is far from perfect, Madame Loisel does not deserve her fate. Not all readers come to this conclusion, however.

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EXERCISE 3**Sentence Completion** 

Directions. In each of the following items, circle the letter of the choice that best completes the meaning of the sentence or sentences.

21. "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry is not a _____ story, even though the main characters, Jim and Della, live in a _____ state of poverty.
 (A) malicious . . . contemptible
 (B) diligent . . . bland
 (C) pessimistic . . . chronic
 (D) impertinent . . . malicious
 (E) contemptible . . . pessimistic
22. Della conducts a _____ search for the perfect Christmas present for Jim. She doesn't give in until she finds the ideal gift.
 (A) bland
 (B) chronic
 (C) malicious
 (D) pessimistic
 (E) diligent
23. Jim is so startled when he sees Della's hair that he asks twice if she has cut it. Della may find Jim's questions _____, but Jim finds Della's actions equally _____.
 (A) pessimistic . . . incomprehensible
 (B) impertinent . . . pessimistic
 (C) malicious . . . obtuse
 (D) chronic . . . pessimistic
 (E) obtuse . . . incomprehensible
24. Della is such a sweet and gentle person that it seems unlikely that she could ever be _____.
 (A) bland
 (B) diligent
 (C) impertinent
 (D) obtuse
 (E) chronic
25. Jim is also a loving and caring person who seems incapable of doing anything _____ or _____.
 (A) bland . . . malicious
 (B) contemptible . . . malicious
 (C) malicious . . . diligent
 (D) diligent . . . obtuse
 (E) obtuse . . . contemptible
26. _____, the reader will see "The Gift of the Magi" as something more than a sweet, _____ story. At least, that is what O. Henry probably hoped.
 (A) Incomprehensibly . . . obtuse
 (B) Maliciously . . . contemptible
 (C) Diligently . . . diligent
 (D) Ideally . . . bland
 (E) Impertinently . . . pessimistic
27. Since O. Henry states his message plainly at the end of the story, readers don't need to be _____ to find its theme. In fact, they would have to be _____ to miss it.
 (A) chronic . . . impertinent
 (B) chronic . . . obtuse
 (C) obtuse . . . bland
 (D) diligent . . . obtuse
 (E) impertinent . . . incomprehensible
28. People who do not like O. Henry may find it _____ that some people do like him. Sometimes it is hard to understand differences in taste.
 (A) impertinent
 (B) incomprehensible
 (C) chronic
 (D) contemptible
 (E) bland
29. The married couple in "The Necklace" has an unhappier fate than the couple in "The Gift of the Magi." Thus, "The Necklace" might seem _____.
 (A) pessimistic
 (B) malicious
 (C) bland
 (D) impertinent
 (E) incomprehensible
30. A reader who enjoys the upbeat tone of "The Gift of the Magi" might find the _____, continual misery in "The Necklace" unbearable.
 (A) chronic
 (B) bland
 (C) malicious
 (D) diligent
 (E) contemptible

