

Making New Words Your Own



esson 27 | CONTEXT: Writers, Their Work, and Their Worlds

American Humorists

Humor has always played a key role in literature. Odysseus was known to toss off a few witty remarks and so was Beowulf. Shakespeare is as famous for his comedies as he is for his tragedies. Laughter has also played a role in the development of the United States. One of the founding members of our nation, Benjamin Franklin, was a noted humorist. One of our most treasured writers, Mark Twain, is ranked among the funniest men who ever lived. Today we enjoy situation comedies on television, stand-up comics in the clubs and theaters, novelists who make us laugh, and screenplay writers who make us smile.

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

connive

discriminate

intimidate

raucous

transpire

discreet

instigate

nimble

skeptical

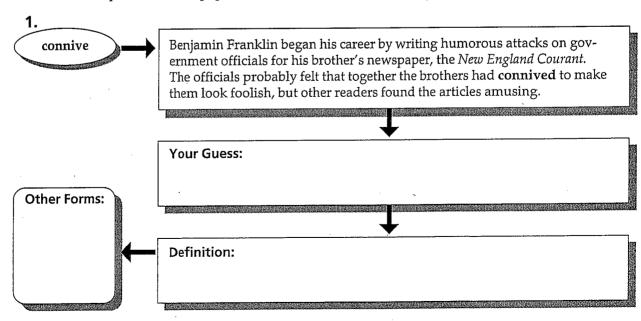
wry

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.



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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. deft; light and quick; agile			
	v. to cooperate secretly; to scheme; to join secretly in another's wrongdoing			
	13. word: adj. rough sounding and harsh; rowdy			
	v. to make distinctions; to distinguish small differences; to show prejudice			
	15. word: adj. inclined to doubt; not easily convinced; showing doubt; doubtful			
his work.	16. word: adj. careful in speech and action; tactful; modest; prudent			
ring earlier in tl	v. to happen; to occur			
er notice appea	18. word: v. to urge on; to stir up; to provoke; to cause			
HRW material copyrighted under notice appearing earlier in this work.	19. word: adj. bent or twisted; cleverly humorous; made by twisting or distorting the features			
HRW material o	20. word:v. to frighten; to make afraid; to bully into doing or not doing something			

COLUMN B

- (A) Once literary critics were **skeptical** that humorous writing could be counted as great literature.

 Writer Mark Twain helped change their minds.
- (B) Twain is responsible for some of the funniest scenes in all of American literature. For example, people still laugh at the humorous episode in *Huckleberry Finn* when the nimble Huck, disguised as a girl, makes a skillful catch in his lap, but gives away his identity in doing so.
- (C) Twain was influenced by the **raucous** humor of the American frontier. *Roughing It* is the story of his western adventures.
- (D) Huckleberry Finn is probably the most popular character Twain ever created. The boy who connives to help a slave escape to freedom has won the hearts of generations of Americans.
- (E) Much of the wry humor in the novel is a result of Huck's innocence. He speaks openly, without any sense that what he says is cleverly funny.
- (F) Huck follows his own conscience. Once he decides to help Jim, not even the thought of going to hell can intimidate him.
- (G) Because Huck is so innocent, he cannot always discriminate between honest people and con artists.
- (H) Tom Sawyer instigates a plot to rescue Jim after Jim is captured. But Tom is actually only stirring up the action because he feels the need for some adventure; he knows that Jim's old owner back home has already made Jim free.
- (I) In his later years, Twain was a public figure. When anything important transpired anywhere in the country, reporters usually asked his opinion about what had happened.
- (J) Although Twain was discreet, or prudent, in many aspects of his life, he was always outspoken about the flaws in the human race.

EXERCISE 3 Sentence Completion []

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

- **21.** Most audiences now are _____ of humor that clearly ____ against a racial or ethnic group. They don't find the jokes funny.
 - (A) discreet ... discriminates
 - (B) skeptical . . . discriminates
 - (C) skeptical . . . intimidates
 - (D) wry . . . instigates
 - (E) nimble . . . connives
- **22.** Some television producers seem _____ that we will understand the humor of situation comedies, so they provide _____ laugh tracks to tell us that a joke was funny.
 - (A) wry ... nimble
 - (B) skeptical . . . raucous
 - (C) discreet . . . raucous
 - (D) raucous ... nimble
 - (E) skeptical . . . wry
- **23.** Many writers for late-night television comics make a daily ritual of reading the newspapers. What _____ in the world of politics is often a good source for jokes.
 - (A) transpires
 - (B) connives
 - (C) discriminates
 - (D) instigates
 - (E) intimidates
- **24.** Politicians have learned that it pays to have a _____ wit. The most skillful politicians don't let laughter _____ them; instead they use it to their advantage.
 - (A) discreet ... instigate
 - (B) wry . . . transpire
 - (C) raucous . . . discriminate
 - (D) skeptical . . . connive
 - (E) nimble . . . intimidate
- 25. It can be easy to make an ordinary situation humorous. For instance, Anna and Gloria have a _____ chat about a personal problem, but Eduardo assumes the girls are _____ against him.
 - (A) raucous ... instigating
 - (B) skeptical . . . intimidating
 - (C) wry . . . discriminating
 - (D) discreet . . . conniving
 - (E) nimble . . . transpiring

- **26.** Humor often involves exaggeration. A story about an attempt to get more fruit on the salad bar becomes a plot to _____ the overthrow of the school system.
 - (A) instigate
 - (B) irritate
 - (C) discriminate
 - (D) intimidate
 - (E) transpire
- **27.** Some humor produces a _____, or twisted, grimace; other humor produces loud and _____ laughter.
 - (A) skeptical ... nimble
 - (B) skeptical . . . discreet
 - (C) wry . . . raucous
 - (D) intimidated . . . transpired
 - (E) nimble . . . discreet
- **28.** Laughter is a source of healing as long as it is not used to embarrass or _____ innocent people.
 - (A) connive
 - (B) instigate
 - (C) transpire
 - (D) intimidate
 - (E) discriminate
- **29.** Writers of comedy sketches have frequently made use of fairy tales such as "The Frog Prince" and nursery rhymes such as "Jack be _____, Jack be quick."
 - (A) nimble
 - (B) raucous
 - (C) skeptical
 - (D) wry
 - (E) discreet
- **30.** Some comedy writers are _____ in their choice of subject matters, but others will tackle anything—even material that some consider to be in bad taste.
 - (A) nimble
 - (B) skeptical
 - (C) discreet
 - (D) wry
 - (E) raucous

Weekly Writing Assignment