

MAKING NEW WORDS YOUR OWN

Lesson 29

CONTEXT: Writers, Their Work, and Their Worlds

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) was a doctor and a writer of historical fiction, but he is best remembered as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, the most famous detective in all of fiction. Conan Doyle introduced his detective to the reading public in *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887. Holmes was featured in four novels and fifty-six short stories. At one point, Conan Doyle became bored with Holmes and tried to kill him off, but readers were so upset that he was forced to bring him back.

In the following exercises, you will have the opportunity to expand your vocabulary by reading about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes. Below are ten vocabulary words that will be used in these exercises.

- | | | | | |
|---------|------------|------------|-------------|-------|
| agility | elapse | nonchalant | surpass | vener |
| dwindle | exasperate | retract | susceptible | wary |

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.

agility

→

Readers are fascinated by Sherlock Holmes's **agility** in assembling the facts and solving the mystery. His keen mind never fails to amaze us.

↓

Your Guess:

↓

Other Forms:

←

Definition:

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2.

dwindle

Holmes's popularity never seems to **dwindle**. Over a century after his creation, he is still a favorite character in drama and film, as well as fiction.

3.

elapse

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle supervised the making of the first movies about Holmes in the days of silent film. From then until now, a decade has not **elapsed** without someone making a movie featuring the great detective.

4.

exasperate

The success of his Sherlock Holmes stories began to **exasperate** Doyle because writing the stories kept him from doing more serious work. At one point, he became so frustrated that he decided to kill the detective.

5.

nonchalant

Readers were outraged by Doyle's **nonchalant** attitude toward their hero. They pleaded with him not to be indifferent to their desire to read more of Holmes's adventures.

6.

retract

Fortunately, it was fairly easy to bring Holmes back to life. Doyle did not have to **retract** the story of Holmes's death completely. He simply had to allow Holmes to survive a fall from a cliff.

7.

surpass

Other fictional detectives have been quite popular with readers, but none has been able to **surpass** Holmes in the hearts of many detective-fiction fans. For these fans, no one is better than Holmes.

8.

susceptible

Dr. Watson, Holmes's friend, is more **susceptible** to trickery and flattery than Holmes. Unlike Holmes, he can be easily fooled.

9.

veneer

Holmes is an excellent judge of character. He can see through an attractive **veneer** and recognize a person's true character.

10.

wary

Holmes is always **wary** when dealing with his archenemy, the evil Moriarty, but in spite of Holmes's caution, the villain slips away.

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: _____

v. to draw back or in; to withdraw; to take back; to recant

_____ 12. word: _____

v. to excel; to go beyond the limit of

_____ 13. word: _____

n. an ability to move quickly and easily; keenness and liveliness; quickness

_____ 14. word: _____

adj. easily influenced or affected; unresistant; sensitive and impressionable

_____ 15. word: _____

n. a thin layer of valuable wood put over other wood; an outwardly attractive appearance that hides what is underneath

_____ 16. word: _____

v. to become less and less; to decrease; to shrink

_____ 17. word: _____

adj. on guard against danger or deception; cautious; suspicious

_____ 18. word: _____

v. to irritate or annoy greatly

_____ 19. word: _____

adj. apparently unconcerned or uninterested; casually indifferent

_____ 20. word: _____

v. to slip away or to pass (as with time)

COLUMN B

- (A) Doyle modeled Holmes in part after Dr. Joseph Bell, whom he met in medical school. Doyle was impressed with Bell's **agility** in guessing occupation and character as well as his skill in diagnosing diseases.
- (B) Holmes is a complicated character. Sometimes he appears **nonchalant**, casual, and relaxed; but in a moment he can become a highly driven, energetic individual.
- (C) Sometimes Holmes **exasperates** his companion, Dr. Watson. For example, Watson is irritated by the clutter and mess in Holmes's apartment.
- (D) Holmes's skills at solving crimes **surpass** those of the professionals at Scotland Yard. He always arrives at the correct solution before they do.
- (E) Holmes is willing to abandon an idea if he cannot find enough supporting evidence. The Scotland Yard detectives, on the other hand, seem unwilling to **retract** an opinion.
- (F) No matter how **wary** and clever a criminal might be, his or her caution and wit will be no match for the brilliant Sherlock Holmes.
- (G) Dr. Watson narrates Holmes's adventures. At the beginning of the story, he usually lets us know how much time has **elapsed** since the case was solved.
- (H) Although his own interest in Sherlock Holmes began to **dwindle** early on, Doyle would probably be delighted to learn that other writers remain fascinated by his detective.
- (I) Many people wrongly assume Holmes was a real person. Visiting London, where his image adorns the Baker Street subway station, can make someone particularly **susceptible** to that notion.
- (J) Some modern readers enjoy the stories for the details of their Victorian settings. They like to go back to a period when drapes were made of real velvet and walnut furniture was real walnut all the way through and not just cheap **vener**.

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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. Holmes believes in the power of his reasoning; he would be _____ of claims that physical _____ is important in solving mysteries.
 (A) wary . . . veneer
 (B) wary . . . agility
 (C) nonchalant . . . veneer
 (D) susceptible . . . agility
 (E) susceptible . . . veneer
22. Sometimes Holmes seems almost _____ about a case; however, this is usually _____. Deep down, he is always greatly interested in solving the mystery.
 (A) susceptible . . . a veneer
 (B) wary . . . an agility
 (C) nonchalant . . . an agility
 (D) nonchalant . . . a veneer
 (E) wary . . . a veneer
23. Most Holmes fans don't let much time _____ without reading a story or seeing a film about their favorite hero.
 (A) dwindle
 (B) retract
 (C) elapse
 (D) surpass
 (E) exasperate
24. Some fans have been particularly _____ to Holmes mania; their interest _____ the interest of the ordinary fan, and they form clubs to discuss the detective.
 (A) wary . . . dwindles
 (B) nonchalant . . . surpasses
 (C) susceptible . . . elapses
 (D) nonchalant . . . dwindles
 (E) susceptible . . . surpasses
25. The number of such clubs may have _____ in recent years, but there are still a large number of devoted fans.
 (A) elapsed
 (B) dwindled
 (C) retracted
 (D) surpassed
 (E) exasperated
26. It's easy to _____ Holmes fans. Just pretend you don't recognize the phrase "Watson, the game is afoot" and watch them turn red.
 (A) exasperate
 (B) elapse
 (C) surpass
 (D) retract
 (E) dwindle
27. Sometimes Watson must wish he could _____ a statement when Holmes makes him feel foolish for saying it.
 (A) dwindle
 (B) elapse
 (C) retract
 (D) surpass
 (E) exasperate
28. Other fictional detectives have equaled Holmes's mental abilities, but not one has _____ him. And as action-oriented detectives become more popular, the number of fictional detectives who rely primarily on their deductive powers has begun to _____.
 (A) dwindled . . . retract
 (B) elapsed . . . exasperate
 (C) retracted . . . surpass
 (D) surpassed . . . dwindle
 (E) exasperated . . . elapse
29. The film *They Might Be Giants* is about a man who is so _____ to the legend of Sherlock Holmes that he believes he is Holmes.
 (A) susceptible
 (B) wary
 (C) nonchalant
 (D) retracted
 (E) dwindled
30. The refusal of the film's hero to _____ his claim _____ many people, but his psychiatrist comes to understand and accept him.
 (A) retract . . . dwindles
 (B) retract . . . exasperates
 (C) dwindle . . . exasperates
 (D) dwindle . . . retract
 (E) elapse . . . surpasses

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