

Vocabulary Warm-up Word Lists

Study these words from the selection. Then, complete the activities.

Word List A

assassin [uh SAS in] *n.* murderer, usually of a prominent person

John Wilkes Booth was the assassin who killed President Abraham Lincoln.

assented [uh SENT id] *v.* agreed

When Clara asked her father for permission to visit Tulsa, he readily assented.

audibly [AW duh blee] *adv.* in a manner that can be heard

Tom spoke audibly, so the person in the next row heard every word.

convulsively [kuhn VUL siv lee] *adv.* in a manner marked by spasms and twitches

The dog's tail twitched convulsively, and we immediately called the vet.

intervals [IN ter vuhlz] *n.* spaces between objects or points in time

Gina will record the behavior of her lab mice at 10-minute intervals.

keen [KEEN] *adj.* sharp; vivid; strong

Evelyn's memory is so keen that she can recall what our teacher wore last Tuesday.

matchless [MACH les] *adj.* unequaled; unsurpassed

Matchless musical talent makes Vivian our town's greatest pianist.

rustic [RUS tik] *adj.* of or relating to country life or country people; unrefined

In a rustic cottage, there are few decorations.

Word List B

congestion [kuhn JES chuhn] *n.* crowded condition; excessive build-up

Alice is suffering from lung congestion due to her recent bout of pneumonia.

etiquette [ET i ket] *n.* appropriate behavior; code or system of good manners

Since proper etiquette is important to Lola, she never interrupts when others are talking.

ineffable [in EF uh buhl] *adj.* too overwhelming to be spoken or expressed

After being caught stealing his sister's money, Ian blushed with ineffable shame.

luminous [LOOM in uhs] *adj.* full of light; illuminated

Glowing candlelight makes Jane's face seem luminous.

perilous [PER il uhs] *adj.* dangerous

Traveling through the vast desert can be perilous for children.

sentinel [SEN ti nel] *n.* watchman; guard

Each gate at the military post was guarded day and night by a sentinel.

summarily [sum AYR uh lee] *adv.* promptly and without formality

Kevin was summarily called to the principal's office after being late again.

velocity [vuh LAHS uh tee] *n.* speed; swiftness

The velocity of that high-speed train amazes me.

“An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” by Ambrose Bierce**Vocabulary Warm-up Exercises**

Exercise A Fill in each blank in the paragraph below with the appropriate word from Word List A.

When Matthew asked me to go bird watching with him last Saturday, I readily [1] _____. Sunrise is a lovely time of day, and the [2] _____ surroundings outside of town were beautiful. Walking along the nature trail, we could hear a bird calling [3] _____ and at regular [4] _____. Knowing what a(n) [5] _____ bird watcher Matthew is, I asked him if he could identify the call. “Sure,” he said, “that’s a Northern Shrike. What an elegant little [6] _____! Shrikes feed on insects, worms, little snakes, and field mice. You can often see the prey wriggling [7] _____ in a shrike’s beak.” Matthew continued, “Shrikes have a(n) [8] _____ ability to plan for the future. No other birds are quite like them. They store up their food, much the same as we keep groceries in a fridge or on a kitchen shelf.”

Exercise B Decide whether each statement below is true or false. Circle T or F, and explain your answer.

1. With *congestion* on the highway, you may not arrive on time at your destination.
T / F _____
2. People respecting *etiquette* can be expected to behave impolitely.
T / F _____
3. If an emotion is *ineffable*, it is impossible to put into words.
T / F _____
4. A *luminous* theory fails to shed light on a scientific issue or problem.
T / F _____
5. If you undertake a *perilous* mission, you should be prepared for danger.
T / F _____
6. A person acting as a *sentinel* at night must take good care not to fall asleep.
T / F _____
7. An action performed *summarily* is carried out slowly and deliberately.
T / F _____
8. The *velocity* of a vehicle is its total weight.
T / F _____

“An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” by Ambrose Bierce**Reading Warm-up A**

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities. Use a separate sheet of paper for your written answers.

Because of his pessimistic and sour views of human nature, Ambrose Bierce is often labeled a cynic. Indeed, Bierce’s belief that death is meaningless is just as ruthless as the attitude of an assassin.

Today’s cynics audibly—sometimes even loudly—raise doubts about the motives of others. Cynics believe that people are selfish and insincere. According to cynics, people strongly pursue personal goals, driven mostly by a keen desire for their own success. There is no such thing as unselfish concern for others. Try to convince a cynic that some people possess the potential for doing good without being rewarded. He or she might laugh convulsively and then gasp spasmodically for breath. Cynics have never assented to the notion that people may act out of a desire to help others. True cynics would vigorously disagree with that idea.

Cynicism can be traced back to the Greek philosopher Diogenes, who lived during the fourth century B.C. The most famous story about Diogenes is that he would roam the streets with a lighted lantern in the daytime, as though he were searching. At intervals—each day at dawn and midday—passersby would stop him to ask what he was doing. “I am looking for an honest man,” Diogenes would answer, implying that his unending search really meant that he had little or no hope of finding one. Instead, Diogenes believed that matchless dishonesty is a human trait that overcomes all others.

The Cynics—the philosophical group Diogenes led—stressed self-sufficiency and rejection of luxury. The group led a simple, almost rustic life, even when they did not live in the country. The word *cynic* itself comes from the Greek word for “dog,” and one legend has it that because the cynics lived so plainly, they were regarded as dogs, not humans. If you think about it, that is a rather cynical view of Cynics!

1. Underline the phrase in this sentence that gives a clue to the meaning of assassin. What is a synonym for *assassin*?
2. Circle the words in this sentence that add to the meaning of audibly. What are two antonyms for *audibly*?
3. Circle the adverb in this sentence that offers a clue to the meaning of keen. What is a synonym for *keen*?
4. Underline the phrase in this sentence that helps define convulsively. What is a synonym for *convulsively*?
5. Underline the words in the next sentence that are the opposite of assented. Then, rewrite that sentence using a synonym of *assented*.
6. Circle the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of intervals.
7. Circle the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of matchless. What are two synonyms for *matchless*?
8. What clue can you find in this sentence to the meaning of rustic?

“An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” by Ambrose Bierce**Reading Warm-up B**

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities. Use a separate sheet of paper for your written answers.

In his story, Ambrose Bierce uses all three types of irony: verbal, dramatic, and situational. In verbal irony, a word or phrase is used to suggest the opposite of its usual meaning. Consider, for example, Bierce’s statement that death is a “dignitary” who must be greeted politely according to a formal code of etiquette. Bierce describes Peyton Farquhar as “the man who was engaged in being hanged,” as if Farquhar was leisurely indulging in a favorite pastime rather than being summarily executed. Both these examples illustrate verbal irony.

The story’s unusual structure allows Bierce to create dramatic irony in the flashback in Part II. In this type of irony, there is a striking conflict between what a character thinks and what the reader knows. When Farquhar sets out on his perilous mission to destroy the Owl Creek bridge, we know he has been tricked by a Federal scout.

In Part III, Bierce slows down the velocity of his fast-paced plot so that the story moves at a crawl. Through vivid, luminous images, he sheds light on Farquhar’s inner state of consciousness. Slowly, the overcrowding and congestion of thoughts in Farquhar’s mind give way to a single goal: to get home to his wife. At length he glimpses her, standing watchfully like a sentinel near the veranda of their home. The joy that seizes Farquhar is ineffable, and he cannot translate his emotions into words. Then, in an almost unbearable stroke of situational irony, Bierce reveals the climax of the story, a surprise ending that violently contradicts our expectations.

1. Underline the words that hint at the meaning of etiquette. Write a sentence using this word.
2. Circle the words that help define summarily through contrast. What is a synonym for *summarily*?
3. Underline the words that hint at the meaning of perilous. What are two antonyms for *perilous*?
4. Underline the words that hint at the meaning of velocity. What is a synonym for *velocity*?
5. Circle the words in this sentence that give a clue to the meaning of luminous. Write two words meaning the opposite of *luminous*.
6. Underline the words in this sentence that help define congestion. What is a synonym for *congestion*?
7. Circle the words in this sentence that hint at the meaning of sentinel. Use the word *sentinel* in an original sentence.
8. Underline the words that give a clear definition of ineffable. What is an antonym for *ineffable*?