

A Retrieved Reformation

by O. Henry

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: anguish, assiduously, clemency, phoenix, queer, retribution, sauntered, specious, unobtrusively, virtuous

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Vocabulary Preview 2

Answer Key — Preview 3

Caution: share only if self-checking

OPTIONAL POST-READING QUIZ

Vocabulary in Context 4

Answer Key — In Context 5

Caution: do not share with students

About the Pre-Reading Activity (open-dictionary; ungraded or completion grade):

Students preview 10 words from the upcoming reading, each in a sentence that supports understanding. They choose the best meaning from 3 choices.

About the Optional Post-Reading Quiz (use after reading, or skip):

Same words, now in real excerpts from the text, with questions that build reading and analytical skills.



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Vocabulary Preview

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Read each prompt. Then choose the best meaning for the bold word.

1. Her face was full of **anguish** when she heard the news.

- A. intense distress
- B. sudden surprise
- C. total confusion

2. She **assiduously** practiced the piano every single afternoon.

- A. with steady, careful effort
- B. in a calm, relaxed manner
- C. with quick, restless energy

3. The judge was known for her **clemency** toward young offenders.

- A. fairness and honesty
- B. mercy and leniency
- C. patience and calm

4. The **phoenix** is one of the most famous creatures in ancient myth.

- A. a fire-breathing dragon
- B. a bird reborn from its ashes
- C. a winged, flying horse

5. A **queer** noise came from the empty attic at midnight.

- A. strange or odd
- B. soft and faint
- C. loud and sudden

6. The villain finally faced **retribution** for all his crimes.

- A. lasting bad luck
- B. deserved punishment
- C. public humiliation

7. He **sauntered** down the boardwalk with his hands in his pockets.

- A. stumbled clumsily forward
- B. walked quickly and stiffly
- C. walked slowly and casually

8. The salesman's **specious** promises sounded perfect at first.

- A. grand and overly generous
- B. vague and hard to follow
- C. convincing but actually false

9. She moved **unobtrusively** around the edge of the busy party.

- A. without drawing attention
- B. in a clumsy, awkward way
- C. with cheerful confidence

10. The **virtuous** woman was admired by everyone in town.

- A. clever and quick-witted
- B. graceful and elegant
- C. morally good and upright

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

passed away — usually “died”; here, figuratively, an assumed identity comes to an end

burglarious record — his previous best time for breaking into a safe

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY
1	A
2	A
3	B
4	B
5	A
6	B
7	C
8	C
9	A
10	C

Vocabulary in Context

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____ Score _____ / 10

Read each excerpt carefully. Then choose the best answer to each question.

1 “A guard came to the prison shoe-shop, where Jimmy Valentine was assiduously stitching uppers, and escorted him to the front office.”

As it is used in the passage, the word ‘assiduously’ most nearly suggests that Jimmy was stitching the uppers

- A. hastily and carelessly
- B. steadily and with care
- C. rarely and reluctantly

2 “‘Me?’ said Jimmy, still blankly virtuous.”

The ironic use of the word ‘virtuous’ suggests that Jimmy is

- A. putting on an innocent act
- B. truly a man of good morals
- C. sorry for his past crimes

3 “He’ll do his bit next time without any short-time or clemency foolishness.”

According to Ben Price, next time Jimmy will be given

- A. no help from his friends
- B. no honest legal defense
- C. no mercy or leniency

4 “Long jumps, quick get-aways, no confederates, and a taste for good society—these ways had helped Mr. Valentine to become noted as a successful dodger of retribution.”

The passage most strongly suggests that a ‘successful dodger of retribution’ is someone who

- A. escapes deserved punishment
- B. works without partners
- C. commits bolder crimes

5 “Isn’t that young lady Polly Simpson?” asked Jimmy, with specious guile.”

Which statement about Jimmy’s question is best supported by the passage?

- A. It is clearly meant as a joke
- B. It seems sincere but is a trick
- C. It is an honest, real question

6 “Mr. Ralph Spencer, the phoenix that arose from Jimmy Valentine’s ashes—ashes left by the flame of a sudden and alternative attack of love—remained in Elmore, and prospered.”

In context, the word ‘phoenix’ emphasizes

- A. a fortune destroyed by fire
- B. a new life rising from old ruin
- C. a rare and beautiful bird

7 “On the Monday night after Jimmy wrote this letter, Ben Price jogged unobtrusively into Elmore in a livery buggy.”

It can reasonably be inferred that Ben Price entered Elmore ‘unobtrusively’ because he

- A. was tired from a long trip
- B. hoped for a warm welcome
- C. wanted to watch Jimmy unseen

8 “While they were thus engaged Ben Price sauntered in and leaned on his elbow, looking casually inside between the railings.”

According to the passage, Ben Price entered the bank by

- A. strolling in slowly and calmly
- B. slipping in quick and quiet
- C. marching in to take charge

9 “Annabel turned to Jimmy, her large eyes full of anguish, but not yet despairing.”

Which statement about Annabel is best supported by the passage?

- A. Calm and fully confident
- B. Angry and resentful
- C. Distressed but not hopeless

10 “He looked at her with a queer, soft smile on his lips and in his keen eyes.”

It can reasonably be inferred that Jimmy’s ‘queer’ smile shows he is

- A. struck by a strange, hard feeling
- B. calm, confident, and carefree
- C. amused by the family’s panic

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary in Context

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#	KEY	NOTE
1	B	
2	A	Character comprehension. 'Virtuous' is ironic — Jimmy is a safecracker feigning innocence before the warden.
3	C	
4	A	
5	B	
6	B	The phoenix is the story's central metaphor for Jimmy's reformation.
7	C	Character comprehension. Ben Price is the detective on Jimmy's trail.
8	A	
9	C	
10	A	Event comprehension. The smile comes as Jimmy decides to save the child by revealing who he is.