

By the Waters of Babylon

by Stephen Vincent Benét

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: bade, fasting, haunches, perplexed, purified, restless, ruins, slay, unclean, unconquered

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. The captain **bade** the sailors lower the sails.
 - A. warned; cautioned
 - B. commanded; directed
 - C. begged; pleaded with
2. Many people spend the holy month **fasting** from dawn to dusk.
 - A. going without food
 - B. resting from all work
 - C. praying in silence
3. The wolf crouched low on its **haunches**.
 - A. front paws and chest
 - B. hind legs and rump
 - C. soft padded belly
4. The strange riddle left the students **perplexed**.
 - A. puzzled; confused
 - B. amused; delighted
 - C. annoyed; impatient
5. The priests **purified** the temple before the festival.
 - A. filled with sweet incense
 - B. made ritually clean
 - C. scrubbed clean by hand
6. The **restless** child kept pacing the room.
 - A. nervous and fearful
 - B. bored and impatient
 - C. unable to stay still
7. Tourists wandered through the ancient **ruins** all afternoon.
 - A. tombs of ancient kings
 - B. halls of a grand palace
 - C. remains of fallen buildings
8. The knight set out to **slay** the dragon.
 - A. to kill
 - B. to capture
 - C. to tame
9. In their faith, the pig was considered **unclean**.
 - A. cursed with bad luck
 - B. filthy and diseased
 - C. ritually impure
10. The **unconquered** fortress stood for a thousand years.
 - A. not defeated or overcome
 - B. crumbling slowly with age
 - C. grand and richly built

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

god-roads — the narrator's name for the ancient paved highways believed to have been built by the gods, now cracked into great blocks of stone

lose one's spirit — here, to lose one's inner self or soul

Great Burning — the catastrophe that destroyed the city of the gods

Truth is a hard deer to hunt — truth is difficult to uncover and must be approached gradually

ANSWER KEY

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

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 *"He bade me look into the smoke of the fire and see—I saw and told what I saw."*

As it is used in the passage, the word "bade" most nearly suggests that the father

- A. ordered John to look into the fire
- B. cautioned John against looking
- C. asked John's leave to look

6 *"Looking down from where I lay, I saw a dog sitting on his haunches."*

According to the passage, when John first sees the dog, it is sitting on its

- A. hind legs and rump
- B. heap of broken stone
- C. bed of dry leaves

2 *"I prayed and purified myself, waiting for a sign."*

The information in the excerpt primarily functions to show that, before seeking a sign, John

- A. searched the area for danger
- B. cleansed himself by sacred rite
- C. rested to rebuild his strength

7 *"Restless, restless, were the gods and always in motion!"*

In the passage, the gods are characterized as

- A. playful and full of joy
- B. driven and never satisfied
- C. orderly and patient in all things

3 *"I waited again on the flat rock, fasting, taking no food."*

It can reasonably be inferred that John goes without food during his wait in order to

- A. observe a sacred discipline
- B. move more swiftly when needed
- C. make his supplies last longer

8 *"When I woke in the morning, I was hungry, but I did not think first of my hunger for my heart was perplexed and confused."*

The passage most strongly suggests that, on waking, John is troubled chiefly because he

- A. dreads crossing the river again
- B. cannot make sense of what he saw
- C. is weak with hunger and fear

4 *"And always the current took me nearer to the Place of the Gods, and the huge ruins rose before my eyes."*

Which statement is best supported by the excerpt?

- A. The river is carrying John to safety
- B. The gods still live among the towers
- C. The Place of the Gods lies in wreckage

9 *"I knew, that, if I touched him, he would fall into dust—and yet, there was something unconquered in the face."*

In the passage, the dead god is characterized as

- A. dignified and unbroken in death
- B. frightened in his final hour
- C. peaceful as if merely asleep

5 *"... rats are unclean, and there must have been many tribes of them ..."*

The passage most strongly suggests that John avoids the rats because they are

- A. carriers of a deadly sickness
- B. too quick for him to catch
- C. forbidden under sacred law

10 *"I said, 'Father, they were men! I have been in the Place of the Gods and seen it! Now slay me, if it is the law—but still I know they were men.'"*

The author most likely has John ask to be slain, if it is the law, in order to show that John

- A. expects to be praised as a hero
- B. hopes to be exiled from the tribe
- C. accepts death as the price of truth

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY	NOTE
1	A	'bade' is the past tense of 'bid,' meaning to command or direct.
2	B	
3	A	Tests the religious sense of 'fasting' — going without food as discipline — not the unrelated 'fast' meaning quick.
4	C	
5	C	Here 'unclean' means ritually impure under sacred law, not disease-carrying; that is why the sickness option, true as it is in real life, is not the key.
6	A	
7	B	
8	B	Event comprehension.
9	A	Character comprehension. 'Unconquered' points to an undefeated spirit, so the 'peaceful as if asleep' option is a near-miss, not the key.
10	C	