

Civil Disobedience

Part 1

by Henry David Thoreau

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: aggrieved, alacrity, demagogue, disinterested, expedient, gregariousness, insurrection, leaven, scourge, wrested

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.

Vocabulary Sections for this Essay:

Section 1 · Part 1 · Thoreau on government and conscience

Section 2 · Part 2 · Unjust laws and the duty to resist

Section 3 · Part 3 · The individual and the State

Bold = this section. Other sections are available at [verbalworkout.com](https://www.verbalworkout.com).



[verbalworkout.com](https://www.verbalworkout.com)

(all resources free)

Vocabulary Preview

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

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

1. The **aggrieved** customer demanded a refund for the broken phone.

- A. feeling unfairly wronged
- B. feeling rushed and impatient
- C. feeling confused and unsure

2. She accepted the invitation with **alacrity**.

- A. deep, genuine gratitude
- B. cool, formal politeness
- C. eager, cheerful readiness

3. The **demagogue** drew enormous crowds wherever he campaigned.

- A. a leader who stirs up emotions
- B. a leader skilled in lawmaking
- C. a leader admired for fairness

4. A good referee must remain **disinterested** when the home team is losing.

- A. strict and demanding
- B. fair and unbiased
- C. bored and uninterested

5. Borrowing a friend's car was a useful **expedient** until mine was repaired.

- A. a practical, temporary measure
- B. a permanent, fixed arrangement
- C. a reckless, costly mistake

6. Everyone noticed the new student's **gregariousness**.

- A. a sharp sense of humor
- B. a bold personal ambition
- C. a love of company

7. The general feared an **insurrection** among the underpaid soldiers.

- A. a formal written complaint
- B. a violent uprising or revolt
- C. a sudden mass desertion

8. A little humor can **leaven** even a dull meeting.

- A. spread through and transform
- B. interrupt and delay
- C. shorten and simplify

9. The cruel overseer would **scourge** any worker who paused to rest.

- A. to scold or warn sharply
- B. to whip or punish harshly
- C. to watch or guard closely

10. She **wrested** the keys from his hand.

- A. secretly removed
- B. loudly demanded
- C. forcibly pulled

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

motto — a short statement expressing a guiding belief; here, the political principle Thoreau says he accepts: "That government is best which governs least"

posse comitatus — a group of citizens a sheriff may summon to help enforce the law; here, one of Thoreau's examples of people who serve the state with their bodies rather than their judgment or conscience; (literally Latin, "the force of the county")

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY
1	A
2	C
3	A
4	B
5	A
6	C
7	B
8	A
9	B
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 "Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient."

As it is used in the passage, the word "expedient" most nearly suggests that government is...

- A. a permanent moral ideal
- B. a useful, temporary tool
- C. a corrupt, harmful force

2 "Yet this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way."

Which choice best describes the speaker's attitude toward government, shown by the ironic word "alacrity"?

- A. anxious and fearful
- B. mocking and disapproving
- C. grateful and admiring

3 "If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself."

It can reasonably be inferred that the speaker believes something taken from another by force...

- A. may be kept once it is needed
- B. should be repaid with money later
- C. must be returned even at great cost

4 "It is not so important that many should be good as you, as that there be some absolute goodness somewhere; for that will leaven the whole lump."

The author most likely uses the metaphor in "leaven the whole lump" to argue that...

- A. a small good can transform the whole
- B. goodness must first be widespread
- C. small goodness has no real effect

5 "... thus proving that he is himself available for any purposes of the demagogue."

The passage most strongly suggests that the "respectable man" who adopts a pre-chosen candidate...

- A. becomes a tool of manipulative leaders
- B. shows independent political judgment
- C. helps reform a corrupt system

6 "The American has dwindled into an Odd Fellow—one who may be known by the development of his organ of gregariousness, and a manifest lack of intellect and cheerful self-reliance ..."

The author describes the conformist American's "organ of gregariousness" mainly to...

- A. praise his civic generosity
- B. explain his lonely independence
- C. mock his herd-like conformity

7 "... I should like to have them order me out to help put down an insurrection of the slaves, or to march to Mexico ..."

According to the passage, the "insurrection of the slaves" the townsman speaks of would be...

- A. a violent uprising against masters
- B. a peaceful protest for wages
- C. a legal petition to the courts

8 "... as if the state were penitent to that degree that it hired one to scourge it while it sinned, but not to that degree that it left off sinning for a moment."

The ironic image of the state hiring "one to scourge it while it sinned" conveys the speaker's...

- A. contempt for its false repentance
- B. hope for its sincere reform
- C. respect for its strict justice

9 "The broadest and most prevalent error requires the most disinterested virtue to sustain it."

As it is used in the passage, "disinterested" virtue most nearly means virtue that is...

- A. passionate and biased
- B. impartial and free of self-interest
- C. bored and indifferent

10 "Is there any enjoyment in it, if his opinion is that he is aggrieved?"

According to the passage, a man whose opinion is that he is "aggrieved" feels that he has been...

- A. treated fairly on the whole
- B. merely inconvenienced once
- C. wronged or treated unjustly

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY	NOTE
1	B	
2	B	
3	C	
4	A	
5	A	Theme comprehension.
6	C	Character comprehension. The 'civic generosity' option reflects the Odd Fellow's superficial concerns the passage mocks.
7	A	
8	A	
9	B	The tempting wrong answer is the common confusion of 'disinterested' with 'uninterested' (bored).
10	C	

Teacher Context: Part 1

Thoreau opens with the motto 'that government is best which governs least,' arguing that government is at best an expedient and often an obstacle, and that the citizen must put conscience above the law. He condemns complicity with a government that upholds slavery and the Mexican War, and faults those who oppose injustice in opinion yet do nothing. The break follows the standard division between the critique of government and the argument for active resistance.