

The American Language

by Henry L. Mencken

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Contents & Printing Notes

Unlike our most popular resources, this one's auto-selected.
Review before use, or edit the DOCX from the Resources menu.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

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OPTIONAL POST-READING QUIZ

Vocabulary in Context	5	
Answer Key — In Context	7	teacher use only

Pages are ordered for double-sided printing.

About the Pre-Reading Activity

Open-dictionary; ungraded or completion grade. Students preview 20 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. The same words appear in excerpts from the text.

Practice words: affectation, analogy, conjugate, convey (2), denounce, derive, dialect, displace, diverge, idiom, novel, obsolete, pedantic, revise, succumb, uncouth, vulgar, yield (2)



More Vocabulary Printables

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ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary Preview

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#	KEY
1	B
2	A
3	C
4	A
5	B
6	A
7	B
8	C
9	A
10	C
11	C
12	A
13	A
14	C
15	C
16	C
17	C
18	B
19	A
20	B

Vocabulary Preview

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

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

1. His British accent turned out to be an **affectation** he picked up in college.
 - A. honest trait
 - B. fake mannerism
 - C. old hobby
2. An **analogy** can make a complex problem seem simpler by comparing it to a similar situation.
 - A. comparison of similar things
 - B. summary of key arguments
 - C. list of opposite traits
3. **Conjugate** the verb into the past tense.
 - A. pronounce
 - B. inactivate
 - C. change
4. Please **convey** my gratitude for her hospitality.
 - A. express
 - B. accept
 - C. understand
5. This document **conveys** title to the new owner.
 - A. prevents giving
 - B. gives or transfers
 - C. divides
6. She bravely stepped forward to **denounce** the corruption within her company.
 - A. openly condemn
 - B. warmly praise
 - C. quietly ignore
7. I **derive** pleasure from my work.
 - A. refuse
 - B. obtain
 - C. ignore
8. India has twenty-two officially recognized languages and thousands of **dialects**.
 - A. different ethnic groups
 - B. words shared by different languages
 - C. regional varieties of languages
9. Many people were **displaced** by the hurricane.
 - A. forced to move
 - B. put to work
 - C. injured
10. We had a lot in common when we were younger, but then our interests began to **diverge**.
 - A. get weaker or less enthusiastic
 - B. move in opposition to each other
 - C. move apart or become different
11. She was not familiar with the **idiom**, "bite the bullet."
 - A. a type of figurative language that uses words in a non-literal way to create a vivid or imaginative description
 - B. an expression that is unique to a particular language or dialect and cannot be translated directly into another language
 - C. an expression whose meaning cannot be inferred from the meanings of the words that make it up

12. It is a **novel** idea and just might work.
- A. original
 - B. important
 - C. valuable
13. That old phone is **obsolete**.
- A. outdated
 - B. classic
 - C. broken
14. Her essay was filled with creative ideas, but it was vulnerable to **pedantic nitpicking**.
- A. of someone too concerned with regional style
 - B. of someone too concerned with statistical studies
 - C. of someone too concerned with book learning
15. Do you think the writer should **revise** the underlined sentence?
- A. remove
 - B. highlight
 - C. improve
16. He **succumbed** to peer pressure and joined the protest.
- A. held out
 - B. ran off
 - C. gave in
17. The **uncouth** man's behavior at the dinner party was embarrassing to his guests.
- A. not bathed
 - B. drunken
 - C. rude or unpleasant
18. His **vulgar** jokes embarrassed everyone at the formal dinner party.
- A. stale
 - B. crude
 - C. clever
19. The experiment **yielded** data that raised a new set of questions.
- A. produced
 - B. destroyed
 - C. slowed down
20. After the scandal, she **yielded** to public pressure and resigned her position.
- A. added
 - B. gave in
 - C. produced

Vocabulary in Context

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____ Score _____ / 20

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

- 1 *On American spelling, with its wide and constantly visible **divergences** from English usages, there was little more.*
 - A. acts of taking something on as one's own
 - B. logical conclusions reached by reasoning
 - C. to move apart; or be or become different
- 2 *That it should be regarded as an anti-social act to examine and exhibit the constantly growing differences between English and American, as certain American **pedants** argue sharply—this doctrine is quite beyond my understanding.*
 - A. constrains in some way -- such as ties up, requires, or obligates
 - B. people, organizations, lifeforms, or things that exist separately
 - C. people too concerned with formal rules, details, or book learning
- 3 *On the contrary, they are keenly aware of the differences between the two **dialects**, and often discuss them, as the following pages show.*
 - A. measures of general intelligence
 - B. wedding ceremony and festivities
 - C. regional varieties of a language
- 4 *For one thing, I am eager to attempt a more scientific examination of the grammar of the American **vulgar** speech, here discussed briefly in Chapter VI.*
 - A. increasing reason or general desire to do something
 - B. of bad taste (crude, offensive, or unsophisticated)
 - C. the state of being unaware of one's mental activity
- 5 *Contributions of materials and suggestions for a possible **revised** edition of the present book will reach me if addressed to me in care of the publisher at 220 West Forty-second Street, New York.*
 - A. adapted
 - B. delayed
 - C. changed
- 6 [24] *Chesterton, however, refrained from **denouncing** this lack of identity; on the contrary, he allowed certain merits to American*
 - A. strongly criticizing or accusing publicly OR (more rarely) informing against someone
 - B. trying to obtain a result through gentle and careful effort -- often gently persuading
 - C. giving authority, power, knowledge, or confidence to someone so they can do something
- 7 *His novels are mines of American **idiom**, and his style shows an undeniable revolt against the trammels of English grammarians.*
 - A. microorganisms (living creatures so small it takes a microscope to see them)
 - B. the smallest part of any material that cannot be broken up by chemical means
 - C. a way of putting things that is characteristic of a specific group of people
- 8 *Fraternizing was made difficult by the wide divergence in vocabulary and pronunciation—a divergence interpreted by each side as a sign of **uncouthness**.*
 - A. related to the spreading of a disease to another part of the body
 - B. relating to a surface rather than to anything deep or penetrating
 - C. rude or unpleasant due to a lack of manners, refinement, or taste
- 9 *Others, which have long been **obsolete** in England, are still retained in common use among us.*
 - A. no longer in general use because it was replaced by something better
 - B. surprise -- often so much so that one doesn't know what to say or do
 - C. an appropriate size, amount, or degree in relation to something else
- 10 *An early authority, John G. E. Heckwelder, argued that it was **derived** from an Indian mispronunciation of the word /English/.*
 - A. hid
 - B. got
 - C. cut

- 11 /Selectman/ is first heard of in 1685, **displacing** the English /alderman/.
- A. force to move; or to take the place of
 - B. making strips of hair lighter in color
 - C. requiring (obligating) to do something
- 12 "A /scooner/ let her be!" replied Captain Andrew Robinson, her [Pg048] builder—and all boats of her peculiar and **novel** fore-and-aft rig took the name thereafter.
- A. new and original
 - B. important and valuable
 - C. traditional (having withstood the test of time)
- 13 At an early date they shortened the English law-phrase, /to **convey** by deed/, to the simple verb, /to deed/.
- A. take on or adopt
 - B. transfer
 - C. make more varied
- 14 Both are useful words; it is impossible, not employing them, to **convey** the ideas behind them without circumlocution.
- A. communicate or express
 - B. create dramatic change
 - C. mirror back (an image)
- 15 But it was as much an **affectation** in those [Pg060] days as it is today, and Webster indicated the fact pretty plainly in his "Dissertations."
- A. a particular way of seeing or thinking about things
 - B. behaving in an artificial way to make an impression
 - C. collection of star systems held together by gravity
- 16 [10] This use of the word was then relatively new in England, though, according to White, the /Saturday Review/ and the /Spectator/ had already **succumbed**
- A. caused great mental or physical suffering
 - B. extremely embarrassed (decreased dignity)
 - C. consented reluctantly; or suffered defeat
- 17 Of **analogous** character are artificial words of the /scalawag/ and /rambunctious/ class, the formation of which constantly goes on.
- A. similar in some respect
 - B. unable to get closer to
 - C. not sensible or careful
- 18 But we still have two plainly defined **conjugations** of the verb, and we still inflect it for number, and, in part, at least, for person.
- A. light seen after bouncing off a surface to another
 - B. inexperience, innocence, or lack of sophistication
 - C. grammatical changes of verb forms to match context
- 19 And as it thus **yielded** to /are/ in the indicative, it now seems destined to yield to /am/ and /is/ in the subjunctive.
- A. with rises and falls in pitch
 - B. gave in, gave way, or gave up
 - C. embarrassed or self-conscious
- 20 Here there is room for inquiry, and that inquiry deserves the best effort of American phonologists, for the language is undergoing rapid changes under their very eyes, or, perhaps more accurately, under their very ears, and a study of those changes should **yield** a great deal of interesting matter.
- A. produce or give
 - B. stop (something from happening)
 - C. think deeply or carefully about

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary in Context

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#	KEY	WORD	NOTE
1	C	diverge	High-utility academic word; used 16 times in this book.
2	C	pedantic	Used 16 times in this book.
3	C	dialect	Used 118 times in this book.
4	B	vulgar	Used 37 times in this book.
5	C	revise	High-utility academic word; used 13 times in this book.
6	A	denounce	Used 37 times in this book.
7	C	idiom	Used 26 times in this book.
8	C	uncouth	Used 11 times in this book.
9	A	obsolete	High-utility academic word; used 16 times in this book.
10	B	derive	High-utility academic word; used 30 times in this book.
11	A	displace	Used 30 times in this book.
12	A	novel (<i>as in: a novel situation</i>)	High-utility academic word; 2 meanings in this book.
13	B	convey (<i>as in: convey title to the property</i>)	3 meanings in this book.
14	A	convey (<i>as in: convey her thoughts</i>)	High-utility academic word; 3 meanings in this book.
15	B	affectation	Used 14 times in this book.
16	C	succumb	Used 18 times in this book.
17	A	analogy	High-utility academic word; used 25 times in this book.
18	C	conjugate (<i>as in: conjugate the verb</i>)	Used 18 times in this book.
19	B	yield (<i>as in: yield to pressure</i>)	High-utility academic word; 2 meanings in this book.
20	A	yield (<i>as in: will yield valuable data</i>)	High-utility academic word; 2 meanings in this book.