

The Leap

by Louise Erdrich

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: calibrated, edifice, egocentrism, encroaching, gale, hemorrhaged, radiance, tentative, vaulted, vignette

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 mechanic **calibrated** each instrument on the dashboard until the readings were exact.
 - A. tested under different conditions
 - B. carefully adjusted or measured with precision
 - C. cleaned and restored to working order
2. The stone **edifice** towered over the narrow street, blocking out the afternoon sun.
 - A. a thick wall or barrier
 - B. a large, imposing structure
 - C. a tall column or monument
3. His **egocentrism** made it impossible for him to understand why his friends were upset.
 - A. seeing the world only through his own eyes
 - B. a drive to outshine or defeat others
 - C. the habit of overanalyzing small issues
4. The desert sand was **encroaching** on the farmland, swallowing fields year by year.
 - A. gradually intruding in an unwelcome way
 - B. settling into a thin, even layer over time
 - C. shifting unpredictably from place to place
5. The **gale** bent the trees sideways and ripped shingles from the roof.
 - A. an extremely strong wind
 - B. a powerful tremor from underground
 - C. a sudden downpour of rain and hail
6. After the accident, the patient **hemorrhaged** and needed an emergency transfusion.
 - A. swelled badly around the injury
 - B. bled heavily, especially internally
 - C. went into shock from severe pain
7. The **radiance** of the full moon lit up the entire valley below.
 - A. soft haze drifting across the sky
 - B. steady warmth spreading through the air
 - C. bright, glowing light from a source
8. She gave a **tentative** wave from across the room, unsure if he would recognize her.
 - A. polite but deliberately formal
 - B. brief and barely noticeable
 - C. hesitant; not certain or confident
9. The athlete **vaulted** over the barrier and landed firmly on the other side.
 - A. hoisted herself up slowly and carefully
 - B. leaped or sprang with force
 - C. charged forward at full speed
10. The film opened with a quiet **vignette** of the family eating breakfast together.
 - A. a short scene or act
 - B. an inaudible scene
 - C. a symbolic image

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

trapeze — a high swing-like bar used for death-defying aerial stunts

encroaching and stubborn cataracts — a gradual and stubborn increase of clouding of the eye lens

plumed — decorated with feathers

guy wires — here, cables that stabilized the main pole supporting the tent

superannuated — old and no longer fit for use; outdated

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY
1	B
2	B
3	A
4	A
5	A
6	B
7	C
8	C
9	B
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 “My mother is the surviving half of a blindfold trapeze act, not a fact I think about much even now that she is sightless, the result of encroaching and stubborn cataracts.”

As it is used in the excerpt, the word “encroaching” most nearly suggests that the cataracts are...

- A. appearing suddenly and without warning
- B. gradually spreading and worsening
- C. mild but persistent irritations

2 “In one news account it says, “The day was mildly overcast, but nothing in the air or temperature gave any hint of the sudden force with which the deadly gale would strike.””

It can reasonably be inferred that the “deadly gale” described in the excerpt is...

- A. a violent windstorm that arrived without warning
- B. a slow-building rainstorm visible from a distance
- C. a minor disturbance exaggerated by reporters

3 “In the final vignette of their act, they actually would kiss in midair, pausing, almost hovering as they swooped past one another.”

As it is used in the excerpt, the word “vignette” most nearly suggests...

- A. an unrehearsed moment of spontaneity
- B. a brief scene within a larger performance
- C. a dangerous physical stunt

4 “They rubbed their hands in chalky powder, then Harry launched himself and swung, once, twice, in huge calibrated beats across space.”

In the excerpt, Harry Avalon is characterized as...

- A. precise and controlled in his movements
- B. reckless and eager to impress the crowd
- C. nervous and unsure of the timing

5 “... lightning struck the main pole and sizzled down the guy wires, filling the air with a blue radiance that Harry Avalon must certainly have seen through the cloth of his blindfold ...”

It can reasonably be inferred that the “blue radiance” in the excerpt is...

- A. a reflection of sunlight through the tent
- B. an intense glow produced by the lightning
- C. a stage light used during the blindfold act

6 “... the tent buckled and the edifice toppled him forward, the swing continuing and not returning in its sweep, and Harry going down, down into the crowd with his last thought, perhaps, just a prickle of surprise at his empty hands.”

The author most likely uses the word “edifice” to describe the tent structure in order to...

- A. suggest the tent was a permanent building
- B. convey the scale of what collapsed on him
- C. indicate the tent was poorly constructed

7 “She was taken to the town hospital, and there she must have hemorrhaged, for they kept her confined to her bed, a month and a half before her baby was born without life.”

According to the excerpt, why does the narrator believe the mother stayed in bed?

- A. Her injuries required lengthy surgery.
- B. She was too depressed to resume normal life.
- C. She suffered serious internal bleeding.

8 “I suppose you could call it the egocentrism of a child, of all young children, but I considered her a less finished version of myself.”

The author most likely uses the word “egocentrism” to...

- A. criticize how selfishly young children treat siblings
- B. highlight the grownup narrator’s selfishness
- C. identify the narrator’s self-centered childhood view

9 “... she broke the branch falling so that it cracked in her hands, cracked louder than the flames as she vaulted with it toward the edge of the roof, and how it hurtled down end over end without her, and their eyes went up, again, to see where she had flown.”

Which choice best describes the narrator’s attitude toward the mother’s actions in this excerpt?

- A. awe at her powerful, athletic daring
- B. fear that she was acting recklessly
- C. calm confidence that she would succeed

10 “She was hanging by the backs of her heels from the new gutter ... and she was smiling. ... She tapped on the window. ... It was the friendliest tap, a bit tentative.”

It can reasonably be inferred that the mother’s “tentative” tap conveys...

- A. physical exhaustion after climbing the tree
- B. frustration that the window was locked
- C. a gentle hesitance despite the urgency

ANSWER KEY

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#	KEY	TEACHER NOTE
1	B	
2	A	
3	B	
4	A	
5	B	
6	B	Erdrich uses "edifice" to elevate the circus tent, making its collapse feel monumental rather than flimsy.
7	C	
8	C	
9	A	
10	C	