

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty

by James Thurber

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: craven, derisive, disdainful, distraught, fleeting, grossly, inscrutable, insolent, pandemonium, rending

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. No one expected such **craven** behavior from the team captain.

- A. dishonest
- B. cowardly
- C. selfish

2. The crowd let out a **derisive** laugh when the speaker stumbled.

- A. mocking and scornful
- B. loud and excited
- C. nervous and uneasy

3. She gave the cheap gift a **disdainful** glance and set it aside.

- A. full of scorn
- B. full of pity
- C. full of doubt

4. She was **distraught** when she lost her little brother at the fair.

- A. deeply upset and anxious
- B. angry but in control
- C. tired and distracted

5. She caught only a **fleeting** glimpse of the comet.

- A. blurry and unclear
- B. lasting only a moment
- C. bright and colorful

6. She **grossly** exaggerated how long the trip would take.

- A. extremely
- B. rudely
- C. deliberately

7. The judge kept an **inscrutable** expression throughout the trial.

- A. tired and bored
- B. stern and severe
- C. impossible to read

8. The new clerk gave an **insolent** reply to the manager.

- A. stiffly formal
- B. vague and unclear
- C. boldly rude

9. **Pandemonium** erupted when the power went out at the concert.

- A. nervous excitement
- B. wild, noisy disorder
- C. angry complaints

10. A **rending** sound came from deep in the ship's hull.

- A. soft rustling
- B. steady pounding
- C. violent tearing

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

ta-pocketa-pocketa-pocketa — an invented machine or engine sound that recurs in Mitty's daydreams, linking the fantasies together

obstreosis of the ductal tract — an invented, medical-sounding diagnosis; comic nonsense that parodies technical jargon

ANSWER KEY
Vocabulary Preview
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#	KEY
1	B
2	A
3	A
4	A
5	B
6	A
7	C
8	C
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 *"She seemed grossly unfamiliar, like a strange woman who had yelled at him in a crowd."*

As it is used in the passage, the word "grossly" most nearly suggests that Mrs. Mitty seemed...

- A. only slightly different
- B. strange to an extreme degree
- C. unpleasant and disgusting

2 *"He looked distraught and haggard."*

In the passage, Dr. Renshaw is characterized as...

- A. deeply shaken and anxious
- B. cold and unfeeling
- C. worn out but composed

3 *"Mitty looked at him and at the craven figure of Benbow, who drank, and at the grave, uncertain faces of the two great specialists."*

It can reasonably be inferred that Benbow...

- A. is wanting in courage
- B. is impatient to operate
- C. is the ablest surgeon there

4 *"The attendant vaulted into the car, backed it up with insolent skill, and put it where it belonged."*

The author most likely describes the attendant's "insolent skill" in order to...

- A. show Mitty admired his driving
- B. feed Mitty's scorn for cocky men
- C. praise the attendant's expertise

5 *"Pandemonium broke loose in the courtroom."*

According to the passage, the courtroom...

- A. erupted in noisy disorder
- B. buzzed with low murmurs
- C. broke into cheers for Mitty

6 *"There was a rending of wood and splinters flew through the room."*

The passage most strongly suggests that the wood...

- A. cracked but stayed whole
- B. split only at one corner
- C. was violently torn apart

7 *"'We only live once, Sergeant,' said Mitty, with his faint, fleeting smile."*

It can reasonably be inferred that Mitty's smile...

- A. was broad and merry
- B. lingered as he spoke
- C. passed across his face quickly

8 *"They went out through the revolving doors that made a faintly derisive whistling sound when you pushed them."*

The detail that the doors made a "derisive" sound primarily functions to...

- A. make the doors seem to jeer at Mitty
- B. show how worn the old doors were
- C. stress how crowded the lobby was

9 *"Then, with that faint, fleeting smile playing about his lips, he faced the firing squad; erect and motionless, proud and disdainful, Walter Mitty the Undefeated, inscrutable to the last."*

Which choice best describes Mitty's attitude toward the firing squad?

- A. calm acceptance of his fate
- B. scornful contempt for them
- C. quiet pride in his courage

10 *"Then, with that faint, fleeting smile playing about his lips, he faced the firing squad; erect and motionless, proud and disdainful, Walter Mitty the Undefeated, inscrutable to the last."*

As it is used in the passage, the word "inscrutable" most nearly suggests that Walter Mitty...

- A. stood perfectly still
- B. refused to give up
- C. revealed no feeling at all

ANSWER KEY
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#	KEY	NOTE
1	B	Students may take 'grossly' to mean 'disgustingly'; here it means glaringly, to an extreme degree.
2	A	
3	A	
4	B	Character comprehension. Mitty's resentment of competent, cocky men is voiced just after this line, outside the excerpt.
5	A	
6	C	
7	C	
8	A	
9	B	
10	C	