

CHAPTER 8

Words in Context

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Baby Joey is born with a vocabulary of zero. By the time little Joey is three, he knows hundreds of words. How did he learn those words? No, he didn't look them up in the dictionary, although that's certainly one of the best ways to improve one's vocabulary. He learned words by noticing the way they are used.

Joey's uncle yells, "Get the blazes off the sofa, you lousy rascal!" Little Joey has never heard the word *sofa* before. *Sofa* is not in his vocabulary. But he has often been told to get the blazes off a table or a dresser, so he quickly figures out that this furniture under his muddy shoes is called a "sofa." He also gets a distinct feeling that "lousy rascal" is not a term of endearment.

Like Joey, we learn most words in context, that is, by the way the words are used by speakers and writers. For instance, we read: "Violin virtuoso Itzhak Perlman played two Mozart sonatas in Carnegie Hall." Maybe we've never seen the word *virtuoso* before. *Virtuoso* is not in our vocabulary. But we realize from the sentence that Perlman is no hillbilly scratching out a polka on a fiddle. This is a concert violinist playing demanding compositions by Mozart—and at famous Carnegie Hall. That's enough. We assume, quite correctly, that a virtuoso is a highly gifted musician.

In this chapter we'll practice learning new words by analysis of context. We'll try to grasp the meaning of an unfamiliar word by deduction—by close study of the passage in which it occurs. If we look at the clues, we can usually make an intelligent guess.

To get a more complete and exact definition of words in this chapter, we should, of course, consult our desk dictionary. (A dictionary that looks brand new probably belongs to a lazy student. Riffle those pages!)

COVER THIS STRIP ▼



EXERCISES

- adage** (ad'ij): Grandmother was fond of repeating the *adage*: "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched."

 - Adage means (a) the total, (b) poem, (c) proverb, (d) falsehood. ()

(c)
 - authenticate**: Before you accuse the senator of accepting bribes, be sure you can *authenticate* the charge.

 - Authenticate means to (a) repeat, (b) explain it like an author, (c) apologize for, (d) prove true or genuine. ()

(d)
 - bigot** (big'ət): His sneering remarks about minority groups were what one would expect from that *bigot*.

 - A *bigot* is (a) a big national leader, (b) someone intolerant of other creeds, races, or beliefs, (c) the faucet of a beer keg, (d) a man with two wives. ()

(b)
- authenticate
- I'll buy this expensive painting if you can *au* _____ it as a genuine Picasso and not just a clever imitation. I believe in the *ad* _____: "Better be safe than sorry."
- adage
- The prejudices of the elderly *bi* _____ were dipped in cement. He never tried to *au* _____ his wild accusations. He illustrated the *ad* _____: "There's no fool like an old fool."
- bigot
- authenticate
- The signature on this big check looks genuine but I'd like to *a* _____ it.
- adage
- A person strongly prejudiced against other religions or ethnic groups is a *b* _____.
- authenticate
- Please forgive me, darling. Remember the *a* _____: "To err is human; to forgive, divine."
- bigot
- adage
- bovine** (bō'vīn): On the dance floor the stout farmers moved like their own cattle, and with the same *bovine* clumsiness.

 - Bovine means (a) catlike, (b) cowlike, (c) doglike, (d) admirable. ()

(b)

5. **cardiac**: The death of John Jones, 79, was due to *cardiac* arrest. He had complained of chest pains.

- *Cardiac* refers to (a) heart, (b) automobile, (c) gin rummy, (d) police officers. ()

(a)

6. **clandestine** (klan-des'tin): Because churches were outlawed in Soviet Russia, some sects held *clandestine* prayer meetings in homes at night.

- *Clandestine* means (a) formal, (b) showy, (c) secret, (d) musical. ()

(c)

- A person with "*bovine* intelligence" is (a) alert, (b) sly, (c) dull, (d) a genius. ()

(c)

- *Clandestine* meetings would probably be held by (a) baseball teams, (b) an orchestra, (c) a town forum, (d) spies. ()

(d)

- *Cardiac* surgery may involve (a) kidney stones, (b) a triple bypass, (c) reshaping the nose, (d) a sex change. ()

(b)

clandestine
cardiac

- When she learned of her husband's *cl*_____ romance with Lulu, Mrs. Grimm had a *ca*_____ attack.

- Our dairy manager depended on Dr. Schnapps, the veterinarian, to handle any *bo*_____ ailments.

bovine

QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. (c) | () 1. bovine | a. to prove genuine |
| 2. (d) | () 2. adage | b. kept secret; furtive |
| 3. (f) | () 3. bigot | c. a cow; like a cow |
| 4. (a) | () 4. authenticate | d. a proverb |
| 5. (b) | () 5. clandestine | e. of the heart |
| 6. (e) | () 6. cardiac | f. an intolerant person |

7. **contaminate**: If we continue to *contaminate* the air, the water, and the soil, humankind will pass away like the dinosaur.

- *Contaminate* means to (a) devour, (b) kill, (c) use, (d) pollute. ()

(d)

8. **denigrate** (den'ə-grāt'): It became fashionable among biographers to *denigrate* the reputation of our national heroes, emphasizing their sins, weaknesses, and sex lives.

- *Denigrate* means to (a) praise, (b) whitewash, (c) defame or put down, (d) investigate. ()

(c)

9. **docile** (dos'əl): Alice expected her young students to be noisy and unruly, but found them, on the contrary, to be quiet and *docile*.

- *Docile* means (a) highly argumentative, (b) of low intelligence, (c) handsome, (d) easy to handle and teach. ()

(d)

- We *contaminate* some foods with (a) pesticides, (b) high prices, (c) dishonest advertising, (d) boiling. ()

(a)

- The drama critic *denigrates* our class comedy when he refers to it as (a) amusing, (b) gripping, (c) amateurish, (d) hilarious. ()

(c)

denigrate
docile

- I do not wish to *den*_____ the character of Hank's pit bull, but that dog is not exactly *do*_____. It likes visitors, especially if they are soft and tender.

contaminate
denigrate

- Traffic fumes *co*_____ the atmosphere of Azusa. I have no desire to *de*_____ the good name of our city, but to curb this menace we must become active fighters, not *do*_____ spectators.

docile

10. **duress** (dyoo-res'): The judge ruled that the contract was not valid because the widow had been forced to sign under *duress*.

- *Duress* means (a) without a dress, (b) compulsion or pressure, (c) bad weather conditions, (d) an unlucky astrological sign. ()

(b)

11. **ennui** (än-wē'): The rich man's son had seen and experienced everything at an early age. "Life," he complained, "is dullsville." He was overwhelmed by *ennui* and weariness of spirit.

- *Ennui* means (a) hunger, (b) turbulent emotions, (c) boredom, (d) financial greed. ()

(c)

12. **erudite** (er'yoo-dit): For such obscure facts we always turned to Professor Smeeby, an *erudite* fellow with thick glasses.

- *Erudite* means (a) handsome, (b) jolly and fun-loving, (c) scholarly and learned, (d) athletic. ()

(c)

ennui
erudite

■ A lesser man cooped in that silent private library might have suffered from *en* _____; but to the scholarly and *er* _____ Judge Jenkins it was as exciting as a gymnasium.

duress

■ The great mathematician felt no *du* _____ to act and dress like the rest of us. He had no social life, preferring to bury himself in his *er* _____ equations, yet he was quite free of spiritual discontent or *en* _____.

erudite

ennui

duress

■ Mama was too busy to be bored. Those under *du* _____ to make a living while raising a family had no time for *en* _____.

ennui

QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. (d) | () 1. erudite | a. tame; easy to handle |
| 2. (a) | () 2. docile | b. pollute; befoul; render impure |
| 3. (e) | () 3. duress | c. boredom; weariness of spirit |
| 4. (b) | () 4. contaminate | d. learned; scholarly |
| 5. (c) | () 5. ennui | e. compulsion by threat; coercion |
| 6. (f) | () 6. denigrate | f. defame; disparage; blacken |

13. **exhume** (eks-hyōōm'): The officials decided to *exhume* the long-buried corpse of Mrs. Bluebeard and check it for skull fractures.

■ *Exhume* means (a) cover with dirt, (b) dig up, (c) burn, (d) hold services for. ()

(b)

14. **fetid** (fet'id): With the clothespin on her nose, Nancy didn't mind the *fetid* odor of the pigpen, but the clothespin slipped and Nancy fainted.

■ *Fetid* means (a) stinking, (b) strange, (c) interesting, (d) fragrant. ()

(a)

15. **fiasco** (fē-as'kō): A warm sun melted the ice rink and turned our long-awaited hockey game into a ridiculous *fiasco*.

■ *Fiasco* means (a) complete failure, (b) exciting spectacle, (c) triumph, (d) money-maker. ()

(a)

fiasco

■ Dingbat High lost its first basketball game 87 to 21, a real *fi* _____.

fetid

■ The Dingbat players stuffed their sweaty gym clothes into their lockers, and by Monday the room had acquired a ripe, *fe* _____ odor.

exhume

■ The neighbor's dog tore up my daisies while trying to *ex* _____ an imaginary, hidden pork chop.

fiasco

■ My cousin spent his life savings trying to market "no-calorie pizza," but his investment ended in a *f* _____.

fetid, exhume

■ From under the rose bushes, of all places, came a *f* _____ odor, leading the police to *ex* _____ the slain bodies; and so the killer's "perfect crime" proved to be a *f* _____.

fiasco

16. **gawk** (gōk): On this busy corner the visitors to New York would stand open-mouthed and *gawk* at the Empire State Building.

(d)

■ *Gawk* means (a) criticize, (b) throw stones at, (c) sneer, (d) stare stupidly. ()

17. **glib**: Murphy was a *glib* sports commentator who drowned his listeners each evening in a rapid shower of words.

(a)

■ *Glib* means (a) fast-talking, (b) learned, (c) conceited, (d) popular. ()

18. **iconoclastic** (i-kon'ə-klas'tik): Monarchies, religions, and cherished beliefs—all were attacked by the *iconoclastic* Thomas Paine.

(c)

■ *Iconoclastic* means (a) peace-loving, (b) quiet and humble, (c) smashing revered ideas, (d) patriotic. ()

glib

■ I kicked the tires, and before I knew it a *gl* _____ used-car salesman had talked me into buying the jalopy.

iconoclastic

■ In 1492 the belief that the earth is flat was challenged by an *ic* _____ navigator named Columbus.

gawk

glib

■ At the county fair we would gather and *g* _____ at a salesman who assured us with a *g* _____ tongue that his snake oil cured arthritis, baldness, and cancer.

gawk
glib, iconoclastic

■ In "The Music Man" the villagers g_____ at the g_____ young stranger with his ic_____ theories about creating band music through will power.

 **QUIZ**

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. (c) | () 1. glib | a. gape; stare stupidly |
| 2. (f) | () 2. fiasco | b. smashing popular beliefs |
| 3. (d) | () 3. exhume | c. fast-talking; fluent |
| 4. (b) | () 4. iconoclastic | d. dig up; disinter |
| 5. (e) | () 5. fetid | e. having a foul odor; stinking |
| 6. (a) | () 6. gawk | f. a complete failure |

19. **inane** (i-nān'): I made some empty-headed comment, and the chairperson kindly ignored my *inane* remark.

(d) ■ *Inane* means (a) wise, (b) unexpected, (c) clever, (d) silly. ()

20. **indemnity** (in-dem'ni-tē): Our insurance company will pay you a huge *indemnity* if you are hit by a comet while you are riding in a public bus on a Thursday.

(c) ■ *Indemnity* means (a) apology, (b) trial expenses, (c) compensation for damages, (d) hospital bills. ()

21. **indigent** (in'di-jənt): The country doctor often received no payment at all from his *indigent* patients, or perhaps only a skinny chicken or two.

(a) ■ *Indigent* means (a) very poor, (b) exasperated, (c) unmarried, (d) generous. ()

■ Everything seemed funny at the slumber party, and we giggled at the most *in*_____ remark.

inane

■ At Thanksgiving our town provided turkey dinner for the homeless and the *ind*_____, then ignored them the rest of the year.

indigent

■ When his Cadillac hit a cow on the highway, Mr. Biggs agreed to pay a small *in*_____ to the penniless owner, who was indignant as well as *in*_____.

indemnity
indigent

inane
indigent
indemnity

■ Hedda Lettis hated her husband's stupid, *in*_____ small talk. How long could she endure this poverty, this *ind*_____ existence? There on the edge of the cliff with him she thought of his insurance policy: "Double *in*_____ for accidental death."

22. **innuendo** (in'yoo-en'dō): I resented Kay's catty remarks, especially her *innuendo* that my Uncle Waldo liked the bottle.

(b) ■ *Innuendo* means (a) written statement, (b) indirect insult, (c) song, (d) compliment. ()

23. **jeopardize** (jep'ər-diz'): Dr. Schmaltz warned the pregnant woman that her smoking would *jeopardize* the health of her baby.

(a) ■ *Jeopardize* means (a) endanger, (b) improve, (c) affect, (d) the baby would be born with yellow fingers. ()

24. **maim**: The wrestler twisted my leg until I screamed and was sure he would *maim* me.

(c) ■ *Maim* means (a) cure, (b) hurt, (c) cripple, (d) defeat. ()

innuendo
jeopardize

■ Smith's nasty *inn*_____ about my connections with the Mafia may *je*_____ my chances of winning this election.

maim
jeopardize

■ Our football rivals would love to *ma*_____ our star quarterback and thus *je*_____ our scoring threats.

innuendo
maim

■ Louie the Lump is very sensitive, and if he hears your *i*_____ about his not exactly being a genius, he'll probably crush your legs with a bat and *m*_____ you.

 **QUIZ**

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. (f) | () 1. innuendo | a. needy; poor; impoverished |
| 2. (a) | () 2. indigent | b. to imperil; risk; endanger |
| 3. (e) | () 3. maim | c. senseless; silly; empty |
| 4. (d) | () 4. indemnity | d. compensation for loss or damage |
| 5. (c) | () 5. inane | e. to cripple; injure physically |
| 6. (b) | () 6. jeopardize | f. a slur; an indirect insult |

- (a) 25. **nonchalant** (non'shə-länt'): I envied Karen's carefree manner and wished I could be as *nonchalant* as she was.
- *Nonchalant* means (a) cool and casual, (b) excitable, (c) sincere, (d) attractive. ()
- (c) 26. **nonplused** (non'plust): I was so *nonplused* by the accusing tone of the traffic officer that I could hardly remember my name.
- *Nonplused* means (a) pleased, (b) angered, (c) confused, (d) hurt. ()
- (d) 27. **noxious** (nok'shəs): We inhaled *noxious* fumes from a bus in front of us and learned what it is like to die in a gas chamber.
- *Noxious* means (a) unusual, (b) harmless, (c) like after-shaving cologne, (d) injurious to health. ()
- nonchalant ■ The girls who pose for bikini ads usually look skinny and elaborately *non*_____.
- noxious ■ The rat poison contained cyanide and other *no*_____ ingredients that would persuade a rodent to depart for rodent heaven.
- nonchalant, ■ Bomber Benjy entered the ring, confident and *non*_____, but he was quickly *non*_____ when Windmill Willy flattened his nose.
- nonplused ■ I tried to act calm and *n*_____ as I began the chemistry experiment, but when the *n*_____ vapors appeared I was completely *n*_____.
- nonchalant
noxious
nonplused
- (c) 28. **predatory** (pred'ə-tōr'ē): Mrs. Hawkins reports that her pet Pekingese, Fifi, was attacked and eaten by *predatory* animals.
- *Predatory* means (a) friendly and neighborly, (b) fur-bearing, (c) habitually preying on others, (d) prehistoric. ()
- (b) 29. **prevaricate** (pri-ver'ə-kāt'): When it comes to making up fish stories, a long-armed fisherman can *prevaricate* better than a fisherman with short arms.
- *Prevaricate* means (a) catch fish, (b) lie, (c) swim, (d) eat. ()
30. **rabid** (rab'id): Oakland had won the World Series!—and the grandstands became a madhouse of leaping, screaming, *rabid* fans.

- (a) ■ *Rabid* means (a) raving and possibly crazy, (b) extremely hungry, (c) swift-moving, (d) like a rabbi. ()
- prevaricate ■ Honestly, the squirrel that bit me had shaving cream dripping from its fangs. Why would I *pre*_____? I'm sure that squirrel is nutty—I mean *ra*_____.
- rabid ■ Warn Aunt Martha not to buy more junk bonds from that *pre*_____ (hunting for prey) financier. I've heard him *pre*_____ (lie) about "sure" profits, and she believes him because he has blue eyes.
- predatory ■ President Lincoln was called Honest Abe because he did not *pre*_____. A more *pr*_____ (wolfish) leader would have leapt upon the fallen South and gobbled its resources. But Lincoln, unlike his *ra*_____ (maddened) associates, desired reconciliation, not revenge.
- prevaricate,
predatory
rabid

QUIZ

Write the letter that indicates the best definition.

- | | | |
|--------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. (c) | () 1. predatory | a. to lie; tell a falsehood |
| 2. (e) | () 2. nonplused | b. raging; mad; furious |
| 3. (a) | () 3. prevaricate | c. preying on others |
| 4. (d) | () 4. nonchalant | d. calm; unexcited; casual |
| 5. (b) | () 5. rabid | e. confused; perplexed; bewildered |
| 6. (f) | () 6. noxious | f. harmful; injurious; pernicious |

REVIEW TEST

Write a word studied in this chapter that can take the place of the words in italics.

- _____ 1. inhaling *unhealthful, injurious* crop dust [no-]
- _____ 2. a *fast-talking but rather shallow* witness [gl-]
- _____ 3. a *tradition-attacking* scientist [ic-]
- _____ 4. wore a *dull, stolid, oxlike* expression [bo-]
- _____ 5. witnesses who *distort the truth* [pr-]
- _____ 6. to be *utterly puzzled and confused* [no-]
- _____ 7. overcome by *boredom and lack of interest* [en-]
- _____ 8. strolled in with a *casual, unconcerned* air [no-]
- _____ 9. a *man intolerant of other races and creeds* [bi-]
- _____ 10. What a *completely ridiculous failure!* [fi-]
- _____ 11. guilty of *hinting something nasty* [in-]
- _____ 12. to quote the *familiar proverbial saying* [ad-]
- _____ 13. the *strong offensive* odor of rotted fish [fe-]
- _____ 14. an extremely *learned and scholarly* lady [er-]
- _____ 15. to *dig away and bring up* the buried gems [ex-]
- _____ 16. He was always *stalking innocent victims*. [pr-]
- _____ 17. received insurance *payment for damages* [in-]
- _____ 18. performed *problems-of-the-heart* surgery [ca-]
- _____ 19. to *prove the genuineness of* this painting [au-]
- _____ 20. their *silly, empty-headed* chatter [in-]
- _____ 21. *secret* meetings in Lovers' Lane [cl-]
- _____ 22. food and shelter for *penniless* families [in-]
- _____ 23. a *teachable, easily managed* pony [do-]
- _____ 24. to *risk the loss of* your health [je-]
- _____ 25. bitten by a *crazed, hydrophobic* dachshound [ra-]

KEY TO REVIEW TEST

Check your test answers with the following key. Deduct 4% per error from a possible 100%.

- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1. noxious | 10. fiasco | 19. authenticate |
| 2. glib | 11. innuendo | 20. inane |
| 3. iconoclastic | 12. adage | 21. clandestine |
| 4. bovine | 13. fetid | 22. indigent |
| 5. prevaricate | 14. erudite | 23. docile |
| 6. nonplused | 15. exhume | 24. jeopardize |
| 7. ennui | 16. predatory | 25. rabid |
| 8. nonchalant | 17. indemnity | |
| 9. bigot | 18. cardiac | |

Score: _____%