

Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 2

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Level: Advanced

Age: Young adults / Adults

Aims: In this lesson the students will:

1. recall the first part of the story;
2. write a character profile of the main character;
3. discuss memories of old friends;
4. listen for gist;
5. act out a conversation between the two main characters.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (full audio) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of the full transcript per student

Summary: The story is about two writers who were once friends. Their lives have taken very different directions since they left university. One has become a successful novelist; the other is poor and out of work. An advertisement in the paper brings the two together in a new relationship, one that brings to light quite a few uncomfortable truths about the two men. In Part 2, Geoffrey Betton decides to take on a secretary to answer his fan mail and is surprised when an old friend applies for the job.

Teacher's notes

Activity 1

Aims: to recall the first part of the story; to create a character profile for Geoffrey Betton

1. Ask the students to work in pairs. Hand out the worksheet and direct them towards the first activity, the character profile of Geoffrey Betton. Ask them to complete as many details as they can. You may want to ask them to refer back to the transcript from Part 1. Explain that they may need to make conjectures and that they do not have all the information yet. Do not spend too much time on this. They will be able to fill in more details as they listen to this and future parts of the story.

2. Compare notes with the whole class. You may want to discuss any information that the students have added from their own imaginations, such as a physical description.

Key: age – unknown but probably late 20s or early 30s; profession – writer; social status – upper class, wealthy; home address – Fifth Avenue, New York; personality – students' own answers, probably including vain or conceited; physical description – students' own answers

Activity 2

Aim: to set up the context for Part 2 of the story

1. Explain that, in this part of the story, Geoffrey Betton is going to reminisce about a friend from his past. Ask each student to quietly think about a friend from their past that they haven't seen for a long time. It might be a classmate from their early school days, someone they studied with at university or a friend who has moved away. Allow them time to make their choice and then ask them to listen to the following questions and gather their thoughts. Read these questions aloud to the class, allowing time between each question for the students to gather their thoughts.

- When did you last see your friend?
- Why did you lose touch?
- Were you good friends or just acquaintances?
- What did you use to do together?
- Can you remember any one special occasion or event you shared with your friend?
- Would you like to get back in touch? Why? Why not?

Activity 3

Aims: to listen to Part 2 of the story; to practise listening for gist

1. Write the following questions on the board.

- How long has it been since Betton last saw his friend Duncan Vyse?

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- *What was Vyse doing at the time?*
- *In what way did Betton let his friend down?*
- *How does he feel about it?*

Before setting students the task, make sure they understand the phrase *to let someone down* (*to make someone disappointed by not doing something that they are expecting you to do*). You may want to elicit some examples of friends letting each other down; for example, forgetting to meet, arriving late or breaking a promise. Also, write up the names of the four men mentioned in this part of the story: Betton, Strett, Vyse (pronounced /vaɪzi/) and Aphorn. Explain who each one is: Betton is the main character; Strett is his valet; Vyse is his old friend; Aphorn is Betton's publisher. Explain that they need to know who the characters are in order to follow the story.

2. Ask them to listen to the story, follow the gist and answer the questions on the board. Play Track 1.

3. Ask the students to compare their answers in small groups.

Key: 1. *many years*; 2. *writing*; 3. *He kept forgetting to show Vyse's manuscript to his publisher friend.*; 4. *He feels some guilt.*

4. Elicit the answers. Then, prompt a discussion on why Betton let his friend down and what might have happened if he hadn't.

5. Ask them to look at the more detailed comprehension questions in Activity 3 on the worksheet. Explain that this is a memory test – you don't expect them to be able to answer all the questions but to try and answer as many as they can. Allow them a few minutes to answer as many of the questions as possible and then give them the transcript for them to check their answers.

Key: 1. *the following Monday*; 2. *half a million*; 3. *at 10 o'clock*; 4. *getting dressed*; 5. *He kept forgetting.*; 6. *anything, as long as they would advance him \$200*; 7. *It went missing.*; 8. *Although he felt some guilt to start with, he comes to suspect that Vyse has sent a lady to retrieve his manuscript, which makes him furious, and so feels exonerated.*

6. Ask the students to think about how Vyse felt about the incident of the forgotten manuscript. Then, ask them to work in pairs and write a brief account of what happened from Vyse's point of view.

Activity 4

Aim: to imagine and act out a conversation between the two main characters

1. Ask the students to work in two groups, A and B. Explain that they are going to prepare a conversation between Betton and Vyse about the forgotten manuscript, and then they are going to act it out. Refer them to Activity 4 on the worksheet. Allow plenty of time for preparation. Monitor closely, prompting where necessary.

2. Put students in pairs, with one student from group A and one student from group B. Ask them to act out the conversation between the two men.

3. Ask each pair to report back on their conversation. Invite one or two of the pairs to repeat the role-play for the whole class and invite comments on similarities and differences.

Alternative approach: If you have recording facilities available in the classroom (smartphones, for example), ask the students to record their role-plays. Then, listen back and have students comment on the experience to the whole class.

Follow-up tasks

1. Ask students to find and bring to class photos of themselves with friends from the past. They can be used as a springboard for discussing who they still keep in touch with and who they don't, what has happened to the people in the photos and how they've changed (or haven't changed) and so on.

2. Ask the students to research the early life of a current best-selling novelist, writing either in English or in the student's mother tongue. It should preferably be someone they like or are familiar with. They prepare short presentations for the following lesson.

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Activity 1

Character profile: Geoffrey Betton

age	
profession	
social status	
home address	
personality	
physical description	

Worksheet

Activity 2

Read the short introduction and discuss the questions.

Geoffrey Betton's first novel, which was a best-seller and made him both rich and famous, was called *Diadems and Faggots*. A diadem is a type of crown and it is sometimes used as a symbol of power or dignity. A faggot is a bundle of firewood and can symbolize humility or poverty. His second novel is called *Abundance*.

Think about the titles of the novels. What do you think they might be about? What connection do you think they might have with Betton's life?

Activity 3

Answer as many of the questions as you can from memory.

1. When will Betton's second novel appear?
2. How many people will read it in the first month?
3. At what time is Vyse coming to see Betton?
4. What is Betton doing as he thinks about Vyse?
5. Why didn't Betton get in touch with Aphorn?
6. How much money did Vyse want for his novel?
7. What happened to the manuscript?
8. How does Betton feel about the forgotten manuscript by the end of Part 2?

Activity 4

Group A – Discuss Betton's version and point of view. Prepare to apologize and explain what happened, maybe even defend your actions.

Group B – Discuss Vyse's version and point of view. Discuss how you think Vyse might feel about the incident, whether he is still angry with Betton or not and what happened to the manuscript once he got it back.

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Part 2

Track 1

Transcript and glossary

Wistfully, almost plaintively, he contemplated the breakfast-tray with which Strett **presently** appeared. It bore only two notes and the morning **journals**, but he knew that within the week it would groan under its **epistolary burden**. The very newspapers flung the fact at him as he opened them.

READY ON MONDAY.

GEOFFREY BETTON'S NEW NOVEL.

ABUNDANCE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DIADEMS AND FAGGOTS".

FIRST EDITION OF ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND ALREADY SOLD OUT.

ORDER NOW.

A hundred and fifty thousand volumes! And an average of three readers to each! Half a million of people would be reading him within a week, and every one of them would write to him, and their friends and relations would write too. He laid down the paper with a shudder.

The two notes looked harmless enough, and the **calligraphy** of one was vaguely familiar. He opened the envelope and looked at the signature: Duncan Vyse. He had not seen the name in years – what on earth could Duncan Vyse have to say? He ran over the page and dropped it with a wondering exclamation, which the watchful Strett, re-entering, met by a tentative "Yes, sir?"

"Nothing. Yes – that is –" Betton picked up the note. "There's a gentleman, a Mr. Vyse, coming to see me at ten."

Strett glanced at the clock. "Yes, sir. You'll remember that ten was the hour you appointed for the secretaries to call, sir."

Betton nodded. "I'll see Mr. Vyse first. My clothes, please."

As he got into them, in the state of irritable hurry that had become almost chronic with him, he continued to think about Duncan Vyse. They had seen a lot of each other for the few years after both had left Harvard: the hard happy years when Betton had been grinding at his business and Vyse – poor devil! – trying to write. The novelist recalled his friend's attempts with a smile; then the memory of one small volume came back to him. It was a novel: "The Lifted Lamp." There was stuff in that, certainly. He remembered Vyse's tossing it down on his table with a gesture of despair when it came back from the last publisher. Betton, taking it up indifferently, had sat riveted till daylight. When he ended, the impression was so strong that he said to himself: "I'll tell Aphthorn about it – I'll go and see him to-morrow." His own secret literary yearnings gave him a passionate desire to champion Vyse, to see him triumph over the ignorance and timidity of the publishers. Aphthorn was the youngest of the **guild**, still capable of opinions and the courage of them, a personal friend of Betton's, and, as it happened, the man afterward to become known as the privileged publisher of "Diadems and Faggots." Unluckily the next day something unexpected turned up, and Betton forgot about Vyse and his manuscript. He continued to forget for a month, and then came a note from Vyse, who was ill, and wrote to ask what his friend had done. Betton did not like to say "I've done nothing," so he left the note unanswered, and vowed again: "I'll see Aphthorn."

The following day he was called to the West on business, and was gone a month.

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When he came back, there was another note from Vyse, who was still ill, and desperately **hard up**. "I'll take anything for the book, if they'll advance me two hundred dollars." Betton, full of compunction, would gladly have advanced the sum himself; but he was hard up too, and could only swear inwardly: "I'll write to Aphthorn." Then he glanced again at the manuscript, and reflected: "No – there are things in it that need explaining. I'd better see him."

Once he went so far as to telephone Aphthorn, but the publisher was out. Then he finally and completely forgot.

One Sunday he went out of town, and on his return, rummaging among the papers on his desk, he missed "The Lifted Lamp," which had been gathering dust there for half a year. What the **deuce** could have become of it? Betton spent a feverish hour in vainly increasing the disorder of his documents, and then **bethought himself of** calling the maid-servant, who first indignantly denied having touched anything ("I can see that's true from the dust," Betton scathingly interjected), and then mentioned **with hauteur** that a young lady had called in his absence and asked to be allowed to get a book.

"A lady? Did you let her come up?"

"She said somebody'd sent her."

Vyse, of course – Vyse had sent her for his manuscript! He was always mixed up with some woman, and it was just like him to send the girl of the moment to Betton's lodgings, with instructions to force the door in his absence. Vyse had never been remarkable for delicacy. Betton, furious, glanced over his table to see if any of his own **effects** were missing – one couldn't tell, with the company Vyse kept! – and then dismissed the matter from his mind, with a vague sense of **magnanimity** in doing so. He felt himself **exonerated** by Vyse's **conduct**.

The sense of magnanimity was still uppermost when the valet opened the door to announce "Mr. Vyse," and Betton, a moment later, crossed the threshold of his pleasant library.

Glossary

presently (old-fashioned) soon

journals daily newspapers

epistolary burden heavy weight of letters

calligraphy (old-fashioned, formal) handwriting

guild an association of craftsmen or professionals in a particular trade; here, refers to an association of publishers

hard up (informal) not having much money

deuce (old-fashioned) used in questions for emphasizing how surprised or annoyed you are

bethought himself of (old-fashioned) thought about

with hauteur (formal) in a proud and unfriendly way

effects (formal) the things that belong to you

magnanimity generosity

exonerated (formal) officially cleared, or freed, of guilt

conduct behaviour