

Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 4

Author: Ceri Jones

Level: Advanced

Age: Young adults / Adults

Aims: In this lesson the students will:

1. recall information about the main characters;
2. listen for gist;
3. read extracts in detail and look at referencing within the dialogue;
4. discuss Betton's attitude to his fan letters;
5. practise using appropriate sentence stress;
6. raise awareness of weak forms in speech;
7. write a fan letter to Betton and also two responses.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (full audio) and Track 2 (extract) 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 4, Vyse starts work but things start to go wrong as the letters get fewer and fewer.

Warmer

Aims: to recall information about the two main characters; to predict the nature of their working relationship

1. Ask the students to work in two groups. If you have a large class, divide the class into four or six or even eight groups, if necessary. Ask group (or groups) A to remember as much as they can about Betton. Ask group (or groups) B to remember as much as they can about Vyse. Allow them time to discuss what they remember. Monitor, prompting more information, if necessary.

2. Ask the students to work in pairs consisting of one student from group A and one student from group B. Ask them to report what they remembered.

3. As the pairs finish talking about the two characters, write this question on the board:

What kind of working relationship do you think the two men will have?

Ask the pairs to continue their discussion by answering the question.

4. Field answers from the whole class. Explain that they are now going to hear about the

beginning of that relationship and that they can check their guesses as they listen.

Activity 1

Aim: to listen for gist

1. Hand out the worksheet and ask the students to look at Activity 1. Explain that it gives them a brief summary of what happens in the next part and three questions that they need to answer. Ask them to read the summary and the questions. Clarify any doubts or problems.

2. Play Track 1. Students write their answers on the worksheet.

3. Allow the students time to compare their answers with a partner and to discuss anything else they've understood.

4. Before checking their answers, ask the students if there's anything they felt confused about or didn't feel they'd understood very well. Field their questions on the board, without answering the questions. Allow their classmates to try and help them, if possible.

Then, give them the transcript so that they can check their answers to Activity 1 and resolve their own, and their classmates',

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doubts. Allow plenty of time for the students to process the transcript. Circulate, monitoring and helping where necessary. Then, field answers from the class.

Key: 1. 20; 2. He begins to miss reading the letters.; 3. The book is not a success. Betton feels embarrassed that Vyse should see that the book is not a success.; 4. Betton wants to fire Vyse.; 5. Vyse is still in his daily wear.

Activity 2

Aims: to read extracts of the transcript in detail and discuss their significance; to raise awareness of referencing within the text

1. Ask the students to look at Activity 2 on the worksheet. Draw their attention to the words in bold. Allow the students time to look at the exercise individually before they compare their answers in pairs. Check the answers with the whole class.

Key: 1. they – some of the answers that Vyse has written and that he has shown Betton; these people – the people who have written the letters to Betton about his book; this – the new answer that Vyse has just written; it – what Vyse is doing in the letter, that is, writing in such a way that they will be happy with the answer but will not write back.
2. the others – the other letters (Betton is hoping that Vyse is not sending him all the letters and that this is the reason why he is receiving fewer letters.);
any – letters;
it – that Betton looks at all the letters before sending them to Vyse (This was the arrangement they had agreed on when Betton started to show an interest in his letters.);
to-day's – the letters that have arrived that day (Betton is disappointed that there are only three.)

2. Write the following question on the board:

What do these two extracts show us about Betton's feelings about the letters?

3. Ask the students to discuss the question in groups or as a whole class. Accept all the students' answers, but make sure they explain and justify them fully.

Key (suggested answers): In the first extract, Betton is excited and pleased. He's glad to be receiving so many letters and he is also happy that he doesn't have to answer them himself. In the second extract, Betton is looking for an excuse for the dwindling letters. He doesn't want to believe that his readers have stopped writing to him and he is embarrassed by the fact that Vyse is aware of the situation.

Activity 3

Aim: to raise awareness of the schwa (ə) in weak forms and unstressed syllables

1. Draw students' attention to the sentence from Part 4 in Activity 3 on the worksheet. Ask them to listen to the sentence and mark the stresses. Play Track 2.

Key: Betton, on his way to the Park for a ride, came into the library, smoking the cigarette of indolence, to look over his secretary's shoulder.

2. Ask students to practise reading the sentence using the correct sentence stress, as marked above.

3. Ask them to repeat the name *Betton*, and highlight the use of the schwa in the second syllable. Then, ask them to look at the rest of the sentence and find as many other examples of the schwa as they can. Explain that the schwa is the most common vowel sound in English and that vowels in stressed syllables are not pronounced as a schwa.

Key: Betton, on his way to the Park for a ride, came into the library, smoking the cigarette of indolence, to look over his secretary's shoulder.

4. If you like, you can ask them to shadow read the sentence (read it aloud in time with the recording).

Creative writing

Aims: to write a short fan letter; to write two different answers

1. Ask the class what kind of thing they think the fans were writing in their letters. Make a note of their suggestions on the board.

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2. Ask the students to form pairs. Ask them to choose some of the ideas from the board and write a short fan letter to Betton. Explain that they must think about the register and tone of their letter as they write. Monitor, prompting and helping, where necessary.

3. Ask the pairs to swap letters with another pair. Then, ask them to read the letters and write two replies, one that will encourage the fan to write back and one that will thank the fan for their letter, but subtly bring the correspondence to a close. Remind them of the two drafts that Vyse wrote in the story. Again, circulate, monitoring and prompting, as necessary.

4. Ask the pairs to give the replies back to the pair who wrote the original letter. They must read the replies and decide which is inviting further correspondence and which is discouraging them from writing back.

5. Ask the students as a whole class which letter they found most difficult to write and why.

You might want to collect in the letters for correction or you might like to display them in the classroom, with the three letters displayed together: the original fan letter and the two replies. In the next lesson, you could jumble them up and ask the students to match the letters and their replies.

Follow-up tasks

1. Ask the students to write a fan email or message to the author of a book they have read or the director of a film they have seen.
2. Ask students to add to the summary they wrote at the end of Part 3.

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Activity 1

Read the summary and answer the questions.

When Vyse starts work that Thursday morning, there are a lot of letters to answer.

1. How many?

And, for the first five or six days, Betton enjoys the freedom of not having to read the letters.

2. What changes after the first few days?

After several weeks, Betton starts to receive fewer letters.

3. Why does this happen? How does Betton feel about it?

One day, Betton invites Vyse to dinner.

4. What does Betton want to talk to Vyse about?

Vyse accepts his invitation.

5. What does he look like when he arrives for dinner?

Activity 2

Read the two extracts below. What do the words in bold refer to?

1

“My dear fellow, **they**’re beautiful – too beautiful. I’ll be let in for a correspondence with every one of **these people**.”

Vyse, at this, meditated for a while above a blank sheet. “All right – how’s **this**?” he said, after another interval of rapid writing.

Betton glanced over the page. “By George – by George! Won’t she *see it*?” he exulted, between fear and rapture.

“It’s wonderful how little people see,” said Vyse reassuringly.

2

“There’s a note – a personal note – I ought to have had this morning. Sure you haven’t kept it back by mistake among **the others**?”

Vyse laid down his pen. “The others? But I never keep back **any**.”

Betton had foreseen the answer. “Not even the worst twaddle about my book?” he suggested lightly, pushing the papers about.

“Nothing. I understood you wanted to go over them all first.”

“Well, perhaps **it**’s safer,” Betton conceded, as if the idea were new to him.

With an embarrassed hand he continued to turn over the letters at Vyse’s elbow.

“Those are yesterday’s,” said the secretary; “here are **to-day**’s,” he added, pointing to a meagre trio.

Activity 3

Listen and mark the stresses.

Betton, on his way to the Park for a ride, came into the library, smoking the cigarette of indolence, to look over his secretary’s shoulder.

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The deluge began punctually on the Thursday, and Vyse, arriving as punctually, had an impressive pile of letters to attack. Betton, on his way to the Park for a ride, came into the library, smoking the cigarette of **indolence**, to look over his secretary's shoulder.

"How many of 'em? Twenty? Good Lord! It's going to be worse than 'Diadems'. I've just had my first quiet breakfast in two years – time to read the papers and **loaf**. How I used to dread the sight of my letter-box! Now I **sha'n't** know I have one."

He leaned over Vyse's chair, and the secretary handed him a letter.

"Here's rather an exceptional one – lady, evidently. I thought you might want to answer it yourself –"

"Exceptional?" Betton ran over the mauve pages and tossed them down. "Why, my dear man, I get hundreds like that. You'll have to be pretty short with her, or she'll send her photograph."

He clapped Vyse on the shoulder and turned away, humming a tune. "Stay to **luncheon**," he called back gaily from the threshold.

After luncheon Vyse insisted on showing a few of his answers to the first batch of letters. "If I've struck the note I won't bother you again," he urged; and Betton groaningly consented.

"My dear fellow, they're beautiful – too beautiful. I'll be let in for a correspondence with every one of these people."

Vyse, at this, meditated for a while above a blank sheet. "All right – how's this?" he said, after another interval of rapid writing.

Betton glanced over the page. "**By George** – by George! Won't she *see* it?" he exulted, between fear and rapture.

"It's wonderful how little people see," said Vyse reassuringly. The letters continued to pour in for several weeks after the appearance of "Abundance." For five or six blissful days Betton did not even have his mail brought to him, trusting to Vyse to single out his personal correspondence, and to deal with the rest according to their agreement. During those days he luxuriated in a sense of wild and lawless freedom; then, gradually, he began to feel the need of fresh restraints to break, and learned that the zest of liberty lies in the escape from specific obligations. At first he was conscious only of a vague hunger, but in time the craving resolved into a shame-faced desire to see his letters.

"After all, I hated them only because I had to answer them"; and he told Vyse carelessly that he wished all his letters submitted to him before the secretary answered them.

At first he pushed aside those beginning: "I have just laid down 'Abundance' after a third reading," or: "Every day for the last month I have been telephoning my bookseller to know when your novel would be out." But little by little the freshness of his interest revived, and even this stereotyped homage began to arrest his eye. At last a day came when he read all the letters, from the first word to the last, as he had done when "Diadems and Faggots" appeared. It was really a pleasure to read them, now that he was relieved of the burden of replying: his new relation to his correspondents had the glow of a love-affair unchilled by the **contingency** of marriage.

One day it struck him that the letters were coming in more slowly and in smaller

Track 1

Track 2

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Part 4

numbers. Certainly there had been more of a rush when “Diadems and Faggots” came out. Betton began to wonder if Vyse were exercising an unauthorized discrimination, and keeping back the communications he deemed least important. This sudden conjecture carried the novelist straight to his library, where he found Vyse bending over the writing-table with his usual inscrutable pale smile. But once there, Betton hardly knew how to frame his question, and blundered into an enquiry for a missing invitation.

“There’s a note – a personal note – I ought to have had this morning. Sure you haven’t kept it back by mistake among the others?”

Vyse laid down his pen. “The others? But I never keep back any.”

Betton had foreseen the answer. “Not even the worst **twaddle** about my book?” he suggested lightly, pushing the papers about.

“Nothing. I understood you wanted to go over them all first.”

“Well, perhaps it’s safer,” Betton conceded, as if the idea were new to him. With an embarrassed hand he continued to turn over the letters at Vyse’s elbow.

“Those are yesterday’s,” said the secretary; “here are to-day’s,” he added, pointing to a meagre trio.

“H’m – only these?” Betton took them and looked them over lingeringly. “I don’t see what the deuce that chap means about the first part of ‘Abundance’ ‘certainly justifying the title’ – do you?”

Vyse was silent, and the novelist continued irritably: “Damned **cheek**, his writing, if he doesn’t like the book. Who cares what he thinks about it, anyhow?”

And his morning ride was embittered by the discovery that it was unexpectedly disagreeable to have Vyse read any letters which did not express unqualified praise of his books. He began to fancy there was a **latent rancour**, a kind of baffled sneer, under Vyse’s manner; and he decided to return to the practice of having his mail brought straight to his room. In that way he could edit the letters before his secretary saw them.

Vyse made no comment on the change, and Betton was reduced to wondering whether his imperturbable composure were the mask of complete indifference or of a watchful jealousy. The latter view being more agreeable to his employer’s self-esteem, the next step was to conclude that Vyse had not forgotten the episode of “The Lifted Lamp,” and would naturally take a vindictive joy in any unfavourable judgments passed on his rival’s work. This did not simplify the situation, for there was no denying that unfavourable criticisms **preponderated** in Betton’s correspondence. “Abundance” was neither meeting with the unrestricted welcome of “Diadems and Faggots,” nor enjoying the alternative of an animated controversy: it was simply found dull, and its readers said so in language not too tactfully **tempered** by regretful comparisons with its predecessor. To withhold unfavourable comments from Vyse was, therefore, to make it appear that correspondence about the book had died out; and its author, mindful of his unguarded predictions, found this even more embarrassing. The simplest solution would be to get rid of Vyse; and **to this end** Betton began to address his energies.

One evening, finding himself unexpectedly disengaged, he asked Vyse to dine; it had occurred to him that, in the course of an after-dinner chat, he might delicately hint his feeling that the work he had offered his friend was unworthy of so accomplished a hand.

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Vyse surprised him by a momentary hesitation. "I may not have time to **dress**." Betton stared. "What's the odds? We'll dine here – and as late as you like."

Vyse thanked him, and appeared, punctually at eight, in all the shabbiness of his daily wear. He looked paler and more shyly **truculent** than usual, and Betton, from the height of his **florid** stature, said to himself, with the sudden professional instinct for "type": "He might be an agent of something – a **chap** who carries deadly secrets."

Transcript and glossary

Glossary

indolence (formal) laziness

loaf (informal) to spend time doing nothing, usually when you should be working

sha'n't (formal) shall not; also written *shan't*

luncheon (formal) lunch, especially a formal lunch

by George (old-fashioned) used to express surprise

contingency possibility

twaddle (informal) nonsense

cheek rude or disrespectful behaviour

latent something that exists but is not obvious

rancour a feeling of hate or anger that lasts a long time

preponderate (formal) to be most common

tempered made less strong or extreme

to this end in order to achieve this particular aim

dress to change into formal evening dress

truculent easily annoyed and always ready to argue or fight

florid red-faced

chap (old-fashioned) a man, especially one that you like