

SHORT STORIES TO
BOOST YOUR VOCABULARY

AN SAT PREP COMPENDIUM



By

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THE EASIEST WAY TO BOOST YOUR VOCABULARY

THINK ABOUT THE words you know.

Unless you were flipping flashcards in the crib, you probably didn't *study* most of the 10,000-odd words in your linguistic arsenal. Somehow, you just picked them up, effortlessly absorbing them while immersed in the stories of life.

Because you learned most of your *first* language this way, your brain has strong neural pathways to continue learning *new* words in the same manner. With *Short Stories to Boost Your Vocabulary*, we're replicating that immersive experience...but with high-level English vocabulary words.

Rather than flashcards, study guides, and other conventionally didactic rigamarole, this book has stories.

Yes, stories. Funny stories. Interesting stories. Stories you'd (hopefully) want to read anyway.

There is one tiny catch. With enough impressions, your brain can usually figure out what a word means based on the context, but I want you to enjoy the stories *now!*

For your convenience, I've added definitions to the bottom of each page in the physical book, and anyone using an e-reader can double-click on a word they don't know (or something similar, depending on the device—check your user's manual!). Both versions have a glossary of terms at the back of the book.

Feel free to consult the definitions whenever it's helpful!

-Mrs. Abbett

HERA AND THE HEADMASTER

Overview: A surefire hit for fans of the Percy Jackson series, "Hera and the Headmaster" imagines the notoriously vindictive goddess Hera wreaking vengeance on a school principal.

HERA DRESSED HERSELF in only the finest. In ancient times, her perfectly **proportioned** frame was clad exclusively in **gossamer** robes, her hair a model of artful **dishabille**.

Today, her long legs were encased in designer jeans, her previously barefoot toes squeezed into Christian Louboutins. Naturally, her **lustrous** hair was professionally blown out.

But as the goddess of marriage and motherhood entered the double doors of Sunset Preparatory Academy, she began to regret her choice of footwear. It wasn't that they were too tight, too high, or any such *mortal* complaint. Hera waved away such discomforts with a flick of her dainty fingers.

No, it was the **incessant** *click, click, click* they made

Proportioned - A harmonious relationship between the parts and the whole

Gossamer - Very light, thin, delicate

Dishabille - A state of disorder or being only partly dressed

Lustrous - Shiny; having luster

Incessant - Constant; never-ending

as she walked the school's wide, polished hallway. Ye gods, half the **pantheon** of Mount Olympus would know she was here before she made it to the headmaster's office!

Despite her status as the goddess of motherhood, Hera didn't much care for children. She had only a handful of the creatures with her husband Zeus, **loftily** shunning mortal company for millennia.

Her brothers and sisters had no such class. They regularly dropped to earth in a shower of golden coins or (to Hera's eternal puzzlement) **manifested** themselves as animals to woo easily-impressed mortals.

Snotty faces notwithstanding, Hera wouldn't mind having a few hundred of the **petulant** creatures around right now. Their screams and **infernal** energy would provide a lovely bit of camouflage. But they were all in class, staring **vacantly** at laptops or doodling in their notebooks.

Mercifully, Hera made it to the headmaster's office without a chariot of her siblings swooping down from the sky. When she entered, Mr. Thompson was typing away at his standing desk.

"Ah, Mrs. Kolettis," he said with a forced smile. "So nice to finally meet you. Please, have a seat." He ges-

Pantheon - All the gods of a people or religion, usually referring to the Greek or Roman gods

Loftily - In a proud or exalted way

Shunning - Rejecting; ignoring

Manifested - Appeared (usually supernaturally or as if from nowhere)

Petulant - Childishly surly or bad-tempered

Infernal - Irritating to the point of evil; relating to the underworld

Vacantly - In an empty way; showing no interest

tured to the shiny wooden table and chairs on the other side of his office.

Hera stood in the doorway a moment, looking at the headmaster. He was middle-aged and entirely forgettable. This balding **specimen** of humanity wouldn't dare challenge her.

"Why have you summoned me?" Hera glided into the room, taking the seat he offered.

"Coffee? Tea?" Mr. Thompson asked, coming to join her.

"No. And my time is valuable, so..."

"I understand," Mr. Thompson nodded. "It's young Andreas...there's been another fight at recess."

Hera raised a carefully shaped brow. "Who died?"

"Well...no one," Mr. Thompson said, puzzled.

"Can't have been much of a fight."

"Mrs. Kolettis," Mr. Thompson shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "Another student cut Andreas in the lunch line, and Andreas *pushed* him down. This other student has been quite anxious around Andreas since, and our school takes physical violence very seriously. I'm afraid we're going to have to ask Andreas to leave. Permanently."

Hera sat very still. "Expelled?" she asked in a tight-lipped smile.

"Our school has a three-strike policy. The administration had no choice."

"I believe, sir, that there is always a choice." Her voice had an edge to it that made the headmaster want to hide behind the potted plant in the corner of the room. "It is my choice, for instance, to **dispense** grants

Specimen - An individual sample of a larger group

Dispense - Give out; distribute

with a **lavish** hand to the school my son attends. If Andreas is no longer a student here..."

Mr. Thompson steeled himself. The other teachers had made it clear that Andreas had to go, **munificent** mother and all. The boy had already gotten into a mountain of mischief in his **paltry** year at Sunset Prep; it's just that he was so wily, it was impossible to definitively pin most of it on him.

"We've already drawn up the paperwork." Mr. Thompson retrieved the document from his desk drawer, then slid it across the table to the goddess of marriage and motherhood. Hera's manicured fingers tightened around the Hermes bag in her lap.

She wasn't even supposed to have children with mortals. How would it look when everyone found out she'd betrayed her oath to Zeus, and the **offspring** was a failure to boot?

Hera took a deep breath, already plotting her next move. But before moving on, she decided to show a certain headmaster the **folly** of interfering with a **deity**...and a notoriously **vindictive** one, at that.

Hera reached for the pen, signing her **pseudonym** with such force that the dot of the "i" tore the page. Rising, she left Mr. Thompson with a wicked smile and a threat that he would ponder for years to come.

Lavish - Very generous; extravagant

Munificent - Generous

Paltry - Indicating a small amount

Offspring - Child or children

Folly - Foolishness

Deity - A god or goddess

Vindictive - Vengeful

Pseudonym - False name, often for publishing

“I warn you, sir. Those whose house is shaken by the gods escape no form of doom.”

CASTING CALL:
AUTHOR SEEKING NEW VILLAIN

Overview: What if villains had to interview for their books the same way we interview for a job? Ultimately paying homage to my favorite villain, Sethos from the Amelia Peabody series, this story features villains from across film and literature.

“MY NAME IS HANNIBAL LECTER, and I...”

“Pass.”

Caroline politely shuffled the papers on her desk, giving the villain a moment to collect his dignity before walking away. Instead, he growled and threw the script at her before storming off.

“And you wonder why I didn’t want to work with you?” she muttered, collecting scattered pages from the floor of the studio. By the time she was done, Caroline felt like growling herself.

When the room was once again presentable, Caroline poked her head into the foyer where the other applicants were waiting.

Lord Voldemort and the Wicked Witch of the West were arguing over whether the **basilisk** or the flying

Basilisk - A mythical, dragon-like reptile

monkey made a more fearsome **familiar**. Wickham buffed his nails on the couch, and a large, **elderly** woman dominated the armchair, surrounded by her knitting. Gollum was digging through a potted tree in the corner, murmuring something about “preciouses.”

As Caroline entered, a spray of dirt from Gollum’s wiry fingers hit Voldemort in the face. His nostrils would’ve flared, if he had any.

With a sharp swish of his cloak, Voldemort raised his wand and began, “Avada...”

“Stop!” Caroline cried. “Really! *Murder*, during an interview? I can see already that your services won’t be required.”

Wickahm looked up, bored. “Told you. She’s a romance author. You’re not her type.”

“You, told me?” Voldemort hissed. “Cru—”

The Wicked Witch of the West slapped his wand down. “You may be everyone’s favorite now,” she warned, “but once word gets around that you’re difficult to work with? Took me fifty years to book Wicked after *The Wizard of Oz!*”

“I’ve never had any trouble **reprising** my role,” Wickham drawled, crossing his legs in neatly-pressed slacks.

“**Smeagol**, too!” Gollum agreed, still at work destroying the greenery.

“Why did I ever decide to change series?” Caroline wondered aloud. “Next!”

Familiar (n.) - A demon, usually in the form of an animal, that obeys a witch

Elderly - Old or aging

Reprising - Repeating or returning to the performance of something

Smeagol - The hobbit who became Gollum in *Lord of the Rings*

The elderly knitter, who had watched the proceedings with **mild** interest and only chimed in via the *click click* of her needles, put away her yarn and rose to join Caroline.

"Nice to meet you, Ms...?" Caroline ventured.

"Oh, names are so personal, aren't they, dearie?" the woman asked, taking her arm.

Caroline brought the woman into her studio, flushing with embarrassment when she realized there was nowhere for her to sit. All the other applicants had simply auditioned standing before her desk.

"Please," Caroline said, motioning to her own chair.

"Oh, that won't be necessary."

Caroline's jaw dropped. The voice had transformed from a shaky old woman's to that of a **vibrant**, educated British man.

"What...?"

The elderly woman's stooped shoulders straightened, and she (?) began removing a wig, glasses, false teeth...

When the transformation was complete, a British man in the prime of his life stood before her, dressed in an oversized knit sweater.

"I am a master of disguise, you see, which makes me the perfect fit for your new novel," he remarked. "I can **conform** to any plot you create!"

The man withdrew a thick piece of paper from his bag of yarn.

"Here is my resume," he began. "As you can see, in

Mild - Not intense

Vibrant - Full of energy or enthusiasm

Conform - Adapt

addition to my talent in the art of disguise, I **thrive** in high-stress situations. My last author had me managing Egypt's illegal antiquities market for years—and I rarely harm anyone who doesn't truly deserve it."

Caroline eyed the man before her, unable to believe the transformation she'd just witnessed. He was no Mrs. Doubtfire either. There wasn't a doubt in her mind that the person she invited into the room had been an elderly American woman.

"How did you...?"

"Disguise is more about mannerisms and **affectations** than **crude** physical **alterations**," he explained. "We see what we expect. Stooped shoulders made me appear several inches shorter, and surrounded by knitting, why should I not be an elderly woman?"

Caroline looked at his resume. The name at the top read: "The Master Criminal."

"The Master Criminal?" she asked. "Is that what you expect me to call you?"

"I've also been known as 'The Genius of Crime,' if you prefer." He smiled, displaying even, white teeth. "But my friends call me Sethos."

Caroline found it impossible not to smile back. "Why did you leave our last story, Mr. Sethos?"

"**Suffice** it to say I became a little too...close...to the family I was meant to be **antagonizing**. Would you believe I started saving them more than robbing them?"

Thrive - Prosper; do well

Affectations - Forced or unnatural behaviors

Crude - Constructed in a basic or makeshift way

Alterations - Changes

Suffice (it to say) - Indicates that you've said what you intend to say

Antagonizing - Aggravating; acting in opposition to

“Why do you think that is?”

For a moment, the man’s gaze **lingered** on Caroline’s umbrella, leaning against the wall in the corner of the room.

A smile touched the edge of his lips. “It’s all her fault, I suppose. She vowed to change me, and no one can resist her, not even I.”

“Interesting...” Caroline tapped the pen on her desk. “A villain with a conscience. A villain who rescues the protagonist!”

“I did kidnap her a time or two, also,” Sethos said defensively. “And I’d really prefer not to be **typecast** in future roles. Oh, the **larceny** and antiquities theft, that would be fine. But don’t expect me to get attached to another family. I have a hard enough time keeping Amelia and the rest of the Emersons out of trouble as it is.”

Caroline grinned. “I wouldn’t dream of stepping on another author’s toes. But if you’re interested in a new series—one with **ample** vacation time, mind you, leaving you free to pop in and out of other books—I think I may have a job for you.”

Lingered - Stayed longer than necessary

Typecast - Cast an actor/actress in the same types of roles

Larceny - Theft; robbery

Ample - Plenty (of); more than enough

THE GHOSTS OF GOOGLE EARTH

Overview: A group of kindly ghosts worries that new technology may threaten their way of life.

ALL THE CHATTERING SOULS gathered at 5 Manderly Place to discuss the most pressing matters of the century.

The address was an old one in Connecticut, the type you'd expect ghosts to **convene** at—**perpetually** windy and overgrown, with shingles falling from the roof and paint peeling from the walls. Lightning cracked outside. Rain lashed at the windows.

Only New England spirits were welcome, of course, though very few were in attendance. Most had gone on to a better place and had no further interest in human affairs, unless their families were affected.

But some spirits preferred to stay right where they were, thank you very much. It was these spirits who convened that dreary October morning.

"Order, order!" Sir Gawain pounded his gavel on the dining room table, now positioned against the back wall as an **impromptu** judge's box.

Convene - Come together

Perpetually - Never-ending; always

Impromptu - Improvised; done without being planned

The ghosts quieted until only Mrs. Wispinski's voice could be heard. Sir Gawain proceeded, for it was well-known that Mrs. Wispinski's **loquacity** was impossible to contain. He cast a sympathetic look at Mrs. Wispinski's companion, a Civil War-era soldier whose **genial** smile indicated he might be a bit deaf.

"There are three items on the agenda for tonight," Sir Gawain said. "The first two deal with hauntings. The **defendants** have been found guilty, and as we have said before, the Society for the Betterment of Spiritual Causes has a zero-tolerance policy for these matters."

"Hear, hear!" a voice called from the crowd.

"Therefore, I put forward a motion to remove Anna Jeffries and Samuel Nelson from the society, effective immediately. All in favor, say 'aye.'"

"Aye!" "Aye!" the crowd **clamored**.

Sir Gawain drew a sharp line through the former members' names before proceeding.

"The last item requires more discussion," he began. "It has come to my attention that there is a new human technology which may threaten our very way of life. It is called Google World."

A wiry young man leaned down and whispered something to Sir Gawain.

"Google *Earth*," Sir Gawain corrected himself. "Unlikely as it may sound, they are photographing the en-

Loquacity - Talkativeness

Genial - Friendly or cheerful

Defendants - People accused of something

Clamored - Shouted; made a loud, chaotic noise

tire world. Most pictures cannot capture our likeness, of course, but if this technology continues to progress ..."

The crowd began to murmur, and Mrs. Wispinski's **shrill** voice rose above the crowd. "*Some* cameras capture us! I made the family photo at my nephew's wedding. *They* thought I was a shadow in the trees, of course, but my hair looked lovely..."

"Indeed," Sir Gawain continued. "And this gets to the heart of the issue. Who can say how much the cameras will capture? We must, I am afraid, prepare for the worst."

"But how!" an older woman cried out. Her hair was still in old-fashioned curlers, and they shook nervously on her head as she spoke.

"They've got no business, *no business*, taking pictures of us," a lumberjack growled.

The rest of the crowd echoed their **sentiments**. Sir Gawain allowed it for a moment before pounding his gavel once more.

"Too bad we just **banished** Anna and Samuel," Mrs. Wispinski said loudly, *just* as Sir Gawain opened his mouth. "Could've used them to take on these Goggles."

"It's *Goggles*, Mrs. Wispinski," Sir Gawain said, "and under no circumstances will we consider a haunting."

Mrs. Wispinski sniffed, and Sir Gawain proposed a list of alternatives. They included: never go outside, only go outside at night, and hope that Google's technology doesn't advance to the point where ghosts can be seen.

Shrill - High-pitched in a piercing, unpleasant way

Sentiments - Feelings; attitudes

Banished - Sent away as an official punishment

"I gotta say," the lumberjack **interjected**, stroking his grizzled beard. "I agree with Wispinski. Man can't survive all shut-up indoors like that. A good old-fashioned haunting is what we need."

Mrs. Wispinski shot Sir Gawain a triumphant look. "We can't **reinstate** Anna and Samuel *now*, of course," she said. "But if we agreed not to say anything, and acted *very* quietly, we could..."

The lumberjack nodded. "All in favor, say 'aye.'"

"Aye! Aye!" the crowd rang out. The **futile** cracking of Sir Gawain's gavel could barely be heard above the casting of votes.

The spirits **schemed** all night, considering ways they could haunt Google Earth without compromising their collective moral compass as members of the Society for the Betterment of Spiritual Causes.

Nothing could be done to harm the humans, they agreed. Sir Gawain finally agreed to join the **ruse** after this point was made perfectly clear.

Unfortunately, this severely limited the ghosts' abilities. They couldn't do much but cause a cold wind to blow through the room, but they **resolved** that when Google's little car drove by, it would be the coldest car south of Antarctica.

Interjected - Interrupted

Reinstate - Restore (someone or something) to their former position

Futile - Pointless; incapable of producing a useful result

Schemed - Made plans, especially in a devious way

Ruse - A trick or action intended to deceive people

Resolved - Decided

Days and months progressed until, one day, a **telepathic** message reached the spirits that Google would be visiting their own Connecticut neighborhood.

"Get ready, people," the lumberjack growled.

Mrs. Wispinski grinned and rubbed her hands together, giving her deaf companion a wink.

The spirits gathered on the front yard. As the car slowly pulled onto Manderly street, they unleashed a **torrent** of chilling wind.

One of the women, who was holding her cat with one hand and pointing at the car with one palm, Iron Man-style, let out a delighted cackle as the windshield began to frost.

The **bewildered** driver put on his windshield wipers, but the spirits didn't let up. Mrs. Wispinski narrowed her eyes and continued aiming both palms at the vehicle. Her cheeks turned a pleasant shade of pink at the effort, giving her normally gray face new life.

Finally, the car turned the corner and the ghosts let out a **jubilant** cry. "Let's see him try that again!" Mrs. Wispinski said.

The ghosts celebrated with a special dinner that night, made with **ephemeral** indulgences from around the world. The international fare seemed only fitting, considering they'd just put Google Earth out of business.

Telepathic - Psychic; transmitted through thoughts

Torrent - A strong and fast-moving stream of something, usually water

Bewildered - Extremely confused

Jubilant - Feeling great happiness and triumph

Ephemeral - Lasting for a very short time

When Sir Gawain pounded his gavel some time later and informed them that they had not, in fact, been successful in **derailing** the technology, all the ghosts reacted with similar levels of **dismay**.

All the ghosts, that is, except for Mrs. Wispinski.

When she saw the photo that had been taken of 5 Manderly Place, she couldn't help but smile. With her rosy cheeks, she thought she looked quite attractive.

Let someone try to mistake her for a tree *this* time!

Derailing - Diverting from its intended course

Dismay - Distress, usually caused by something unexpected