
The Word Within the Word • List 40

• vale	(farewell)	valediction	• dict	(say)	valediction
• <i>proto</i>	(first)	protagonist	• <i>agon</i>	(actor)	protagonist
• mal	(bad)	maladroit	• <i>ism</i>	(doctrine)	stoicism
• <i>sarco</i>	(flesh)	sarcophagus	• <i>phag</i>	(eat)	sarcophagus
• <i>gno</i>	(know)	ignominious	• sur	(over)	surrealistic
• <i>ana</i>	(up)	analect	• <i>lect</i>	(gather)	analect
• ex	(out)	expository, exegesis	• pos	(put)	expository
• magn	(great)	magnum opus	• mort	(death)	moribund
• super	(over)	supercilious	• miss	(send)	emissary

valediction (farewell speech) Read Donne’s “Valediction, Forbidding Morning”

protagonist (leading person) Oedipus is the protagonist of Sophocles’s tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*.

maladroit (clumsy) His maladroit groping for the handle was humorous to observe.

stoicism (indifference to sensation) His austere stoicism helped him overcome the pain.

sarcophagus (stone coffin) The sarcophagus’s cold, sculpted surface was mossy.

ignominious (disgraceful) The convicted traitor faced a future of ignominious oblivion.

surrealistic (unrealistically imaginary) Dali’s dreamy, surrealistic art is popular.

analects (selected writings) She loved reading *The Analects* of Confucius.

expository (explanatory) His essay was expository, not creatively descriptive.

exegesis (critical interpretation) Her brilliant exegesis of *The Inferno* impressed us all.

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magnum opus (great work) Dante’s magnum opus, *The Divine Comedy*, is a classic.

moribund (dying) The moribund economy affected the stock market.

supercilious (scornful) His arrogant, supercilious manner irked us.

diction (word choice) Her scholarly Latin diction was impressive to the students.

emissary (messenger) An emissary sent out from the Queen suddenly arrived.

As Used by Maya Angelou in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

	I	spoke	in	supercilious	accents.
Parts of Speech:	pron.	v.	prep.	adj.	n.
Parts of Sentence:	subject	AVP			
Phrases:	-----prepositional phrase-----				
Clauses:	-----independent clause----- one independent clause, a simple declarative sentence				

Here Angelou uses the adjective *supercilious* to modify the object of the preposition, the plural common noun *accents*. Note that *accents* cannot be a direct object, because it is the object of the preposition; it cannot be both.

Pronunciation

valediction	val eh DICT shun	expository	ex POZZ ih tory
protagonist	pro TAG on ist	exege-sis	ex eh JEE siss
maladro-it	MAL ah droit	<i>magnum opus</i>	mag num OP us
stoicism	STO ih sizzem	moribund	MORE ih bund
sarcophagus	sar KOFF a guss	supercilious	super SILL ee us
ignominious	ig no MIN ee us	diction	DICT shun
surrealistic	sur re a LISS tik	emissary	EM iss ary
analec-ts	AN ah lekts		

Spanish Cognates

stoicism	estoicismo	ignominious	ignominioso
moribund	moribundo	exege-sis	exégesis
emissary	emisario	protagonist	protagonista
sarcophagus	sarcófago	surrealistic	surrealista

1. A **Micropoem**: The adjective **supercilious** means scornful or haughty and comes from the Latin **super** (over) and **cilium** (eyebrow)—raised eyebrow. In other words, the word describes the scornful facial expression of the contemptuous person! Notice that we see **cilium** in other words, such as the cilia of the cell we study in biology.
2. The noun **stoicism** comes from **ism** (doctrine) plus the Greek **stoa** (porch or colonnade), and refers to the philosophy of Zeno, who taught in the shade of a colonnade in Athens in about 308 B.C. Zeno believed that all things are controlled by immutable natural laws and that the wise person should simply follow virtue and nothing else. This means that the wise person would focus on virtue and be indifferent to all but virtue: indifferent to pleasure, to pain, to passion, to emotion. When we say that someone is stoical, we mean that this person resembles the Greek Stoics in his or her austere indifference to sensation or emotion. If you are interested in reading a marvelous ancient work of stoicism, read the *Meditations* of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, who was a student of Epictetus (eh pick teet' us), his slave, whose writings we also still read. By the way, do you remember Zeno's paradox? A paradox is a true contradiction (!), such as Socrates's famous paradox, "I only know that I know nothing." Zeno's paradox is that if you move toward something in steps, going half the distance that remains in each step, you will never get there! If you do, you have cheated by going more than half the distance.
3. We call a stone coffin, especially an elaborate or monumental one, a sarcophagus. This noun comes from the Greek word **sarkophagos**—**sarx** (flesh) and **phagein** (to eat)—and refers to the Greek and Roman practice of burying the dead in great limestone coffins because limestone contributed to the rapid breakdown of the body placed in the coffin. The Greeks and the Romans often carved, inscribed, and elaborately ornamented the sarcophagi.
4. A **protagonist** is a first (proto) actor (agon). The **agon** in the word **protagonist** actually traces back to the Greek **agonistes** (actor), but earlier, the **agon** was a contest, which reminds us that the early Greek tragedies were performed as contests, with leading tragedians such as Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides competing against each other for top prize. The protagonist in a drama is often confronted, of course, by an **antagonist**. The foe of the brave protagonist, Popeye, is the boorish antagonist, Bluto, whom all admirable people detest.
5. You would not expect **stoic** to be a good **Classic Word**, since it seems so philosophical and scholarly, even arcane. But stoic has been used by Defoe, Scott, Cooper, the Brontës, Melville, Hardy, Crane, Wharton, and Wilder. One of the best sentences is from Defoe, who in his 1719 novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, wrote, "It would have made a stoic smile to have seen me and my little family sit down to dinner." Charlotte Brontë wisely noted that "The sternest-seeming stoic is human after all." Stephen Crane described the martial "cheerings, moblike and barbaric, but tuned in strange keys that can arouse the dullard and the stoic." Melville, with characteristic mock-solemnity, reasoned, "This Right Whale I take to have been a Stoic; the Sperm Whale, a Platonian, who might have taken up Spinoza in his latter years." Hardy's Yeobright "was an absolute stoic in the face of mishaps which only affected his social standing."

The Word Within the Word • Classic Words 40

In each case below, one of the choices was really the word used by the author in the sentence provided. All of the choices can be found in the example words on the first page of this lesson. Your challenge is to decide which word the author used. This is not a test; it is more like a game, because more than one word choice may work perfectly well. See if you can use your sensitivity and intuition to guess correctly which word the author used. You may need a dictionary.

1. From Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*

He had imagined himself..._____ accepting suffering without a word.

- a. maladroitly
- b. surrealistically
- c. superciliously
- d. stoically

2. From Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*

He there delivered his _____ remarks.

- a. valedictory
- b. ignominious
- c. expository
- d. maladroit

3. From Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*

The few birds seen anywhere were _____; they trembled violently.

- a. moribund
- b. supercilious
- c. stoic
- d. surrealistic

4. From Jane Austen *Pride and Prejudice*

Elizabeth still saw _____ in their treatment of every body.

- a. surrealism
- b. diction
- c. stoicism
- d. superciliousness

5. From Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*

A German _____ supposes that Jonah must have taken refuge in the floating body of a dead whale.

- a. stoic
- b. exegetist
- c. emissary
- d. sarcophagus

Though it is good to have a rich vocabulary, it is not good to abuse that vocabulary by writing verbose, sesquipedalian sentences (such as this one). Those who overuse their vocabularies often do so at the expense both of clarity and of others' patience. Translate the following ostentatious, ponderous passage into graceful, direct English.

AS THE LOQUACIOUS and gregarious audience came to silence, the curtain rose behind the proscenium. Strange lighting effects, translucent panels, and monolithic forms gave the scene a surrealistic and moribund look. A great limestone sarcophagus carved with the face of a lycanthrope and incised with the single word VALEDICTION stood at the right. With a supercilious physiognomy a patrician protagonist, Agonistes, glared down condescendingly at an obsequious and pusillanimous emissary from the Great Mooboo, a high-ranking and lionized official in the hierarchy of the plutocracy.

“Speak, ignominious neophyte,” said Agonistes.

“Noble Sir,” replied the emissary, “I am instructed to summon you to my Worship’s palace and to say that you must answer for your perfidious writings.”

“Tell your ‘worship,’ if that’s what he is, you miscreant,” said Agonistes with sangfroid, “that my expository exegesis of his sententious analects—that vacuous so-called *magnum opus*, HA!—is none of his concern. Wait until he sees my synopsis of his soporific self-proclaimed classic! That egocentric autodidact! His delineation will soon be the *locus classicus* for *non sequiturs* and false syllogisms! I will not be summoned by you or by him. If he sees no dichotomy between my sedate stoicism and his narcissistic hedonism, then he is nothing more than a maladroit and nihilistic apostate who has abandoned the sacrosanct ideas of our official cosmology.”

“How prolix!” whispered the abased emissary, in a *sotto voce* suspiration.

“Is that a soliloquy,” retorted Agonistes, “or is it merely your demotic diction that makes you so inaudible? Perambulate back to your worship, and tell him I will not mollify his acerbity.”

Reading Comprehension

1. In Translation 40, it can be inferred that:
 - A. The Mooboo misjudged how Agonistes would respond to his emissary.
 - B. Agonistes is making a terrible mistake in speaking so to the emissary.
 - C. Agonistes is playing a clever role to conceal his fear.
 - D. The emissary is actually the Mooboo in disguise.
2. The author does all of the following EXCEPT:
 - A. Describe the appearance of the sarcophagus.
 - B. Reveal the philosophical difference between Agonistes and the Mooboo.
 - C. Explain what is perfidious about Agonistes's writings.
 - D. Show Agonistes's opinion of the Mooboo's writings.

Analogies

3. IGNOMINIOUS : MALADROIT ::

- A. heinous : inept
- B. ignorant : malcontent
- C. disgraceful : shameful
- D. clumsy : ostracized

4. SUPERCILIOUS : STOIC ::

- A. haughty : scornful
- B. indifferent : superior
- C. patronizing : impassive
- D. superior : stolid

Antonyms

5. EXPOSITORY :

- A. revealing
- B. fantastical
- C. poetic
- D. factual

6. VALEDICTION :

- A. salutation
- B. welcome
- C. introduction
- D. explanation

supercilious

analysis and application

If you read *The Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, you will find that he expresses his **stoicism** through the repetition and rephrasing of several principal ideas. Read the *The Meditations*, and make a list of the three ideas you find most commonly reoccurring. Then consider what you have learned about stoicism, and describe a situation in life when stoicism would be an appropriate or appealing posture.

intuition

In order to develop a vivid sense of what the adjective **surrealistic** means, look at a book of Salvador Dali's paintings, with their melting clocks and anthropomorphic landscapes. Then drift into your own imagination, and write a short story that takes place in a dreamy, surrealistic world of your own invention.

synthesis and emotion

Read John Donne's poem "**Valediction**, Forbidding Morning." What other poems can you think of that have similar themes to this poem? Similar styles? How would you describe the emotional tone of the poem? If you were reading the poem aloud, how would you read it in order to properly convey the emotion of the poem? Do you feel the emotion as you read the poem?

ethics

To be **supercilious** is to be scornful and condescending, looking down one's nose with one eyebrow (cilia) raised (super). Is it unethical to behave in a supercilious manner? Is it merely a matter of style? Can you think of a single instance in which supercilious condescension would be the right and good way to behave?

Neologist's Lexicon

Use the stems in this list to create a new word (neologism). Give the word, the pronunciation, the part of speech, the etymology, and the definition(s). Keep a record of the neologisms you create from list to list. Here are some examples:

superlection (soo pur lek shun) n. [super (over), lect (gather), tion (act)] 1. acquiring possessions until you become unaware of what you possess 2. compulsive, indiscriminate collection of seashells, including every mediocre and pedestrian seashell on the beach.

sarcoposition (sar ko po zish' un) n. [sarco (flesh), pos (put), tion (act)] 1. sitting in the middle of a seat for two, so that no one else will sit down, as on a bus 2. sprawling out with arms and legs in a movie theater seat, so that a stranger will not sit in either seat next to you.

Sesquipedalian Shakespeare

Using words from List 40, write a short satirical exchange that captures some of the flavor of a famous scene from a Shakespearean play. Remember to include some of the wonderful archaic language that we find in the plays. An example:

Romero and Juleen

Romero enters and sees Juleen leaning against the Classic Coke machine. She sees him too, whispers to her friend, laughs, and looks demurely at a music video on the television. Instantly a star-crossed lover, Romero tremulously whispers, "Oh, she doth teach the video to glow!" He walks over to Juleen, reaches out, and touches the tip of his index finger to the tip of her index finger.

- Romero: If I profane, with my maladroit hand, this *magnum opus*, my lips, two expository emissaries, ready stand to conduct you to the realm of surrealist forgiveness.
- Juleen: Good Emissary, you do wrong your protagonist's lips too much in this, for a scholarly exegesis is how the truly forgiving kiss.
- Romero: But have not supercilious scholars lips?
- Juleen: Aye, Emissary, lips that they forsooth must use in valediction.
- Romero: Oh, brave stoic, then no move make, while my valediction I take. (kisses her)
- Juleen: Until this night, I have not known the true diction of a valediction. If this be farewell, prithee let me read all your final analects! (kisses him)
- Romero: And yet my mind misgives some moribund end, yet hanging in the ignominious stars, to my despised life, and methinks I do presage the vile chill of a cold sarcophagus. (They kiss again.)

finis