
The Word Within the Word • List 40

• vale	(farewell)	valediction	• dict	(say)	valediction
• proto	(first)	protagonist	• agon	(actor)	protagonist
• mal	(bad)	maladroit	• is	(actri)	stoicism
• sarco	(flesh)	sarcophagus	• o	(c)	sarcophagus
• gno	(know)	ignominious	• re	(c)	surrealist
• ana	(up)	analects	• er	(r)	analect
• ex	(out)	expository	• po	(s)	pository
• magn	(g)	magnum opus	• m	(death)	missary
• per	(c)	supercilious	• m	(send)	missary

(farewell) valediction is the title of a poem by Anne Sexton'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 prepositional phrase

Phrases:

prepositional phrase

Clause:

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* can't be a direct object, because it is the object of the preposition; it can't be both.

Pronunciation

valediction	val eh DICT shun	expository	ex POZZ ih tory
protagonist	pro TAGG on ist	exege-sis	ex eh JEE siss
maladroit	MAL ah droit	magnum opus	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
analects	ah na LEKTS		

Spanish Cognates

English and Spanish are very close relatives, as we see in these 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 the school of **Stoicism** in Athens in 308 B.C. Zeno believed that humans are controlled by a noble natural reason. The wise person would simply follow the natural meaning of things. This means that the wise person would focus on virtue and be indifferent to all but virtue—different to pleasure, to pain, to passion, to emotion. When we say someone is stoical, we mean that this person is able to be indifferent to pain or heat, to indifference to sensation or emotion. If you are interested in reading the 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. His most 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 which 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 wouldn't really 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. If you cannot use your sensitivity and intuition to guess correctly which word the author used, you may need to consult a dictionary.

1. From Aldous Huxley's *Love and Money*

He had managed himself _____ according to the principle of doing without a word.

- a. maladroit
- b. surrealist
- c. supercilious
- d. stoic

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's *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 using verbose, sesquipedalian sentences (such as this one). Those who overuse their vocabulary often do so at the expense both of clarity and of others' patience. Translate the following overblown, ponderous passage into graceful, direct English.

AS THE LOQUACIOUS neophyte came to sit behind the curtain, he noticed a strange light emanating from the translucent, non-Newtonian fluid that gave the scene a surrealistic and moribund quality. A gleaming stone sarcophagus covered with the face of a lion, carved in a single piece of marble, stood to the right. With a supercilious and haughty prognomy, the parricidal 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 which 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 receive his emissary.
 - B. Agonistes is making a terrible mistake in speaking so to the emissary.
 - C. Agonistes is playing a clever role to reveal his true self.
 - D. The emissary is actually the Mooboo's disguised self.
2. The author develops the following *CLT*:
- A. Describe the appearance of the Mooboo's emissary.
 - B. Reveal the philosophical differences between Agonistes and the Mooboo.
 - C. Explain the author's attitude about Agonistes's writings.
 - D. Show how Agonistes's opinion of the Mooboo's writings.

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

analysis and application

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

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 away in your imagination, and write a short story which 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), lection (gather), (a)ction (act)] 1. acquisition of possessions until you become unaware of what you possess 2. compulsive indiscriminate collection of objects, including every object on the beach and pebbles on the beach

sarcoposition (sar kə pə zishən) n. [sarc (flesh), position (act)] 1. sitting in the middle of a seat facing two other people so that no one else will sit down, as on a bus 2. sprawling out on the floor in a 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 which 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 away demurely at MTV 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 surrealistic 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 which 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.)

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