

Vocabulary Warm-up Word Lists

Study these words from “Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket.” Then, apply your knowledge to the activities that follow.

Word List A

astonishingly [uh STAHN ish ing lee] *adv.* amazingly; surprisingly

Although it is small, the book is astonishingly heavy.

comical [KAHM i kuhl] *adj.* humorous; causing amusement

The clown’s comical act earned many laughs.

fragments [FRAG mints] *n.* broken pieces; parts

The vase fell and broke into many small fragments.

hopelessly [HOHP luhs lee] *adv.* in a way showing lack of hope or of a reason to hope

My test was hopelessly difficult because I had not read the book.

infinite [IN fuh nit] *adj.* without limit; endless

People’s lives are filled with infinite possibilities.

intention [in TEN shuhn] *n.* aim; determination to do something

My firm intention is to write a play before New Year’s Eve.

postponed [pohst POHND] *v.* put off until later; delayed

The baseball game was postponed due to rain.

protruding [pruh TROO ding] *v.* sticking out; projecting

I snagged my sweater on a nail protruding from the wall.

Word List B

accelerated [ak SEL uh ray tid] *v.* sped up

The ball accelerated as it rolled down the steep hill.

brittle [BRIT uhl] *adj.* hard and likely to break

The branch was so brittle it snapped off when a bird landed on it.

duplicated [DOO pluh kay tid] *v.* copied; made happen again

I duplicated my aunt’s tasty soup by using her recipe at home.

impossibly [im PAHS uh blee] *adv.* not possible; not able to be done

The problem was impossibly complex, even for a computer.

incomprehensible [in kahm pri HEN suh buhl] *adj.* unable to be understood

The speaker’s quiet mumbling was totally incomprehensible.

revelation [rev uh LAY shuhn] *n.* new information that is surprising or valuable

Last night, I had a revelation that helped me solve the problem.

utmost [UT mohst] *adj.* to the highest degree; extremely

Please handle the injured animal with the utmost care.

yearning [YERN ing] *n.* strong desire for something

When I am away from home, I feel a yearning for my family.

“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” by Jack Finney
Vocabulary Warm-up Exercises

Exercise A *Fill in each blank in the paragraph below with an appropriate word from Word List A. Use each word only once.*

The jigsaw puzzle looked easy but was [1] _____ difficult. The box said there were 2,500 pieces, but the number of combinations seemed [2] _____. My family worked together with the [3] _____ of finishing the puzzle in an afternoon. Ha! It was several days before small [4] _____ of the picture began to appear. When we were almost done, we even [5] _____ going to the movies so we could finish the job. At last, we had just one piece to go. It was [6] _____ over the edge of the table. Oh no! My baby brother put it in his mouth. The piece was [7] _____ ruined. Now it seems [8] _____, but you should have seen our faces at the time.

Exercise B *Write a complete sentence to answer each question. For each item, use a word from Word List B to replace each underlined word or group of words without changing its meaning.*

1. What is something for which most people feel a strong desire?

2. Is a tree branch more breakable when it is living or dead?

3. Do you know someone whose handwriting is not understandable?

4. What sport would be hopelessly difficult for someone with no training?

5. How might visitors react if they found out that a museum’s artwork was actually copied and not original?

6. What is one goal that you tried your hardest to achieve and did?

7. What is something that came as a complete surprise to you?

8. What might happen if Earth sped up in its orbit?

“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” by Jack Finney
Reading Warm-up A

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities. Use a separate sheet of paper for your written answers.

I finally reached the top of the hill and was rewarded with a view so astonishingly beautiful that I could only stop and stare. The valley spread out below my feet like a vast green blanket. Standing atop the hill, I felt the limitless sky cradle my shoulders and stretch an infinite distance up into the galaxies.

My original plan was to walk down and have lunch near a stream I had passed on my way up. When I felt the power of this magnificent place I immediately postponed my return.

I decided to take a few pictures, but when I opened my backpack, I couldn’t find my camera. Then, I remembered the sad truth. I had taken it out to recharge the battery and had forgotten to put it back. Disappointed, I picked up my backpack to put it on. That’s when I noticed the corner of my journal protruding from the inside. I took it out.

My original intention was to jot down a brief description, but soon I discovered that I was writing a poem. My first ideas came in fragments, incomplete ideas and words. Yet the scene was so inspiring that within half an hour, these pieces had come together in a finished poem. I tore out the page, placed it in my pocket, and headed for home.

When I reached the stream again, I had a snack, took out my poem, and started to read it aloud. I was nearly done when a sharp wind swept the paper out of my hand. I stared hopelessly as my poem was carried up into the trees. Finally, it got stuck in a high clump of branches.

I dropped my backpack and started up the tree, even though I am a poor climber. Inching my way up, I felt almost confident until another gust of wind grabbed the poem. I watched sadly as my poem was carried out of the trees and into the infinite sky. Meanwhile, I was a mere five feet off the ground, hugging the tree like it was a giant teddy bear. I’m sure I made quite a comical picture, though I didn’t feel like laughing.

1. Circle words that tell what the narrator did because the view was astonishingly beautiful. Tell what *astonishingly* means.
2. Circle the word that is a synonym for infinite. Write about something that you think is *infinite*.
3. Underline the words that tell you what the narrator postponed. Then, write about another event that could be *postponed*.
4. Circle the words that tell what was protruding from the backpack. Then, write what *protruding* means.
5. Underline the words that explain the narrator’s intention. Then, tell what *intention* means.
6. Underline the words that describe the fragments. Tell what *fragments* are.
7. Circle the words that tell what the narrator stared at hopelessly. Write about something that would make you stare *hopelessly*.
8. Underline the words that describe the comical picture. Describe an event that you would find *comical*.

“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” by Jack Finney**Reading Warm-up B**

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities. Use a separate sheet of paper for your written answers.

Most buildings in the nineteenth century were no more than six stories tall. Their height was limited by building methods of that period. An engineer in 1850 would probably have found the idea of a skyscraper incomprehensible. Nonetheless, builders dreamed of creating magnificent structures, and that yearning became reality due to several important inventions.

One key revelation was the discovery that steel could be used to create a strong supporting skeleton for buildings. The main weight-bearing elements in earlier buildings were the walls. In 1889, inventor George Fuller changed architectural history when he designed the Tacoma Building in Chicago. This was the first building in which the weight was supported not by the walls but by an interior system of steel cages.

Fuller’s methods have been duplicated around the world. Architects copied his design and used it in buildings from the 102-story Empire State Building in New York City (1931) to the 108-story Sears Tower in Chicago (1974).

The invention of a new building material also accelerated the development of skyscrapers. Reinforced concrete, inspired by an accidental discovery by a French gardener in 1860, contains steel bars. Plain concrete is too brittle to support the stress and tension of a building. When it is reinforced with steel rods, the resulting material is both strong and flexible. Reinforced concrete is a combination of materials that acts as a single substance.

Using a steel framework and reinforced concrete, designers could create buildings that soared ten or twenty stories in the air. Who would want to walk up all those stairs, however? The problem of finding a way to take people up and down these tall buildings had to be handled with the utmost care. Fortunately, Elisha Otis’s invention of the elevator in 1853 provided the essential solution.

“Skyscraper” once referred to the tall mast on a large sailing ship. Today skyscrapers are the giant buildings at heights that once seemed impossibly ambitious.

1. Describe something else that people in 1850 would find incomprehensible about our modern world.
2. Circle the word that tells what the yearning became for builders. Then, tell what yearning means.
3. Circle the word that is a synonym for revelation. Then, tell what revelation means.
4. Circle the word that is a synonym for duplicated. Then, describe another invention that people duplicated.
5. Describe how a recent invention has accelerated change.
6. Circle the words that tell what plain concrete is too brittle to do. Identify another brittle substance.
7. What do you think is the utmost problem facing inventors today?
8. Write about a goal that seems impossibly ambitious today, but might be possible in 100 years.

"Contents of the Dead Man's Pocket" by Jack Finney

Writing About the Big Question



Is there a difference between reality and truth?

Big Question Vocabulary

comprehend	concrete	confirm	context	differentiate
discern	evaluate	evidence	improbable	objective
perception	reality	subjective	uncertainty	verify

A. Write the word from the list above that best fits each definition.

1. the part of a passage, in which a word is used, that defines that word's meaning _____
2. to detect or see something that is concealed _____
3. to see or show the difference between two or more things _____
4. not based on emotion or prejudice _____
5. personal, or taking place within an individual's mind _____

B. Follow the directions in responding to each of the items below.

1. Write one or two sentences describing a time or an event in people's lives that might make them look at the reality about themselves and change their perception about what is really important.

2. Write a sentence describing how the perceptions or attitudes of people you described above might have changed. Use one or two Big Question vocabulary words.

C. Complete the sentence below. Then, write a short paragraph in which you connect this experience to the Big Question.

The most important thing in life is _____

“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” by Jack Finney
Literary Analysis: Conflict and Resolution

Conflict is the struggle between two forces. In an **external conflict**, a character struggles against an outside force, such as an element of nature or another character. In an **internal conflict**, a character struggles with his or her own opposing desires, beliefs, or needs. A **resolution** occurs when the conflict is settled or resolved.

Writers use **suspense**, a rising curiosity or anxiety in readers, to build interest in a conflict. To accomplish this, writers may hint at events to come or “stretch out” action that leads up to an important moment in the story.

A. DIRECTIONS: Answer the following questions about conflict and suspense in “Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket.”

1. Both internal conflict and external conflict are present in “Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket.” Find one sentence in the story that shows internal conflict and one that shows external conflict and write them on the following lines.

Internal conflict: _____

External conflict: _____

2. If Finney had chosen to focus only on the external conflict and had not included internal conflict at all, how would the story have been affected? _____

3. How does the title “Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” contribute to the story’s suspense?

B. DIRECTIONS: Write a brief alternative ending for “Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” in which Tom Benecke’s internal conflict is resolved differently than it was in Finney’s version.

“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” by Jack Finney

Reading: Reflect on Key Details to Analyze Cause and Effect

A **cause** is an event, an action, or a situation that produces a result. An **effect** is the result produced. To better follow a story, **analyze causes and effects** as you read, determining which earlier events lead to which later events. To analyze causes and effects, **reflect on key details**, details that the writer spends time explaining or describing.

Example of a cause-and-effect sequence from “Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket”:

- Cause:** As he picks up the paper, Tom looks down between his legs and sees the street far below.
- Effect 1:** He instantly becomes terrified and loses his deftness.
- Effect 2:** The trip back to the window is much more difficult than the trip to the paper had been.

A. DIRECTIONS: Complete the following organizer by filling in the boxes with the events that resulted from Tom Benecke’s decision to go out on the ledge.

Cause	Tom decides to go out on the ledge to get the yellow paper.
	↓
Effect 1	
	↓
Effect 2	
	↓
Effect 3	

B. DIRECTIONS: Describe three future effects that may result from Tom’s realizations about his wife and his job at the end of the story.

“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” by Jack Finney
Vocabulary Builder

Word List

convoluted deftness imperceptibly interminable reveling verified

A. DIRECTIONS: For each of the following items, think about the meaning of the italicized word, and then answer the question in a complete sentence.

1. Which is more likely to be *convoluted*: a pebble or a seashell? Why?

2. If a factory worker completes her tasks with *deftness*, how do you think her supervisor feels about her work?

3. What is an example of something that happens *imperceptibly*?

4. If your wait in a doctor’s reception area is *interminable*, was the doctor prompt in seeing you? Why or why not?

5. Why is it important that your identity be *verified* when you are cashing a check?

6. Do you think you would be *reveling* if you received a perfect score on a test? Why or why not?

B. WORD STUDY: The Latin root *-ver-* means true. Define each word showing how *-ver-* contributes to the meaning.

1. **verity:**

2. **veracious:**

3. **very:**

“Contents of the Dead Man’s Pocket” by Jack Finney
Enrichment: Making Decisions

What led Tom to risk his life for a piece of paper? Ambition motivates people to work hard, achieve goals, and improve themselves. Ambition can lead to success, but, as Tom learned, it can also cloud judgment. Good decisions are based on an analysis of the problem—exploring one’s purpose, possible choices, and probable outcomes.

A. DIRECTIONS: *Analyze Tom’s decision about whether or not he should go out on the ledge to retrieve the paper. Answer the following questions on the lines provided.*

1. What is the reason for, or purpose of, this decision?

2. What is one possible solution to the problem?

3. What, if anything, could go wrong with this solution?

4. What is an alternative choice he could make and its probable outcome?

B. DIRECTIONS: *Analyze a decision of your own on the following lines.*

Decision _____

Purpose of or Reason for Decision

One Possible Choice and Its Probable Outcome

An Alternative Approach and Its Probable Outcome

Final Course of Action

