

Bret Harte *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*

~~(Page 414)~~

USING CONTEXT CLUES

ACTIVITY

In "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," Bret Harte uses a variety of carefully chosen words to describe the small group of outcasts. In some of the following sentences, one of those words is used incorrectly. When you find a word used incorrectly, cross out the word and write a replacement on the blank provided. If no word is used incorrectly, leave the sentence as it is and write *C* on the blank. Use your dictionary as necessary.

1. Piney Woods displays such a malevolent character that Mother Shipton and the Duchess become protective of her.

2. According to the citizens of Poker Flat, each of the outcasts is guilty of one impropriety or another.

3. Among the outcasts themselves, the only member of the group guilty of felonious intent is Uncle Billy.

4. In a jocular voice, Mother Shipton confides to Oakhurst that she is about to die.

5. Oakhurst apparently meets each crisis with equanimity; it is only at the conclusion of the story that his weakness is revealed.

6. In his willingness to risk his life for others, Tom Simpson demonstrates his anathema for humanity.

7. In the small, close community that the outcasts establish for themselves, each is a pariah of the other.

8. Around the refuge of the outcasts, snow cached higher and higher.

HBJ material copyrighted under notice appearing earlier in this work.

continued 

NAME _____

CLASS _____ DATE _____

VOCABULARY WORKSHEET 52—CONTINUED

9. At the end of the story, Mother Shipton's only vituperative thought occurs when smoke becomes visible from Poker Flat.

10. The reading of the *Iliad* provides the outcasts with some bellicose hours.

HBJ material copyrighted under notice appearing earlier in this work.

Vocabulary
Test
22

NAME _____

CLASS _____ DATE _____

SCORE _____

Bret Harte *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*

~~(Page 414)~~

VOCABULARY TEST

Write the letter of the *best* synonym for each word. ~~(5 points each)~~

- _____ 1. **conjecture** (a) joint (b) analysis (c) guesswork (d) solution
- _____ 2. **reimburse** (a) repay (b) buttress (c) borrow (d) refinish
- _____ 3. **expatriate** (a) murder (b) relieve (c) encircle (d) exile
- _____ 4. **expletive** (a) answer (b) insertion (c) oath (d) specific
- _____ 5. **coquetry** (a) beauty (b) flirting (c) omelet (d) skill
- _____ 6. **malevolence** (a) ill will (b) crime (c) storm (d) friendship
- _____ 7. **anathema** (a) curse (b) song (c) argument (d) blessing
- _____ 8. **bellicose** (a) enormous (b) fruitful (c) hostile (d) loud
- _____ 9. **pariah** (a) den (b) outcast (c) fern (d) father
- _____ 10. **equanimity** (a) quantity (b) friendship (c) composure (d) hostility
- _____ 11. **guileless** (a) ridiculous (b) unfair (c) fearful (d) naive
- _____ 12. **jocular** (a) humorous (b) athletic (c) arterial (d) angry
- _____ 13. **malevolent** (a) generous (b) willful (c) evil (d) undesirable
- _____ 14. **felonious** (a) trivial (b) treacherous (c) catty (d) benevolent
- _____ 15. **occult** (a) foreign (b) infrequent (c) mysterious (d) eyestrain
- _____ 16. **extemporize** (a) improvise (b) delay (c) chill (d) construct
- _____ 17. **beguile** (a) confirm (b) deceive (c) trust (d) inform
- _____ 18. **malediction** (a) prayer (b) illness (c) stuttering (d) curse
- _____ 19. **sublimity** (a) darkness (b) incompleteness (c) loftiness (d) cache
- _____ 20. **travail** (a) prairie (b) struggle (c) peak (d) journey

Bret Harte (1836–1902)

THE OUTCASTS OF POKER FLAT ~~(Pages 413–421)~~

~~Understanding the Writer and His Background~~

- ~~1. What important literary position did Bret Harte hold in California? _____
_____~~
- ~~2. What staples of today's Westerns were Harte's inventions?

_____~~

Understanding the Selection

3. In the story, what three events provoked the decision to banish certain objectionable characters from Poker Flat?
 - (1) _____

 - (2) _____

 - (3) _____

4. Why do the outcasts decide to go to Sandy Bar? _____

HBJ material copyrighted under notice appearing earlier in this work.

continued 

5. What is the reason behind Tom Simson's devotion to Oakhurst?

6. Who is the only outcast who does not undergo a reformation? _____

Understanding Vocabulary

7. ~~On page 415~~, what is described as *bellicose*? _____

On the same page, who is described as *maudlin*? _____

~~On page 417~~, what is described as *jocular*? _____

8. In the glossary, find the meaning of each adjective italicized above. Then on the lines provided, use each word in an original sentence that reveals its meaning.

bellicose _____

maudlin _____

jocular _____

Writing and Responding to Literature

9. Briefly explain how Oakhurst can be both the strongest and the weakest of the outcasts. In your explanation include details from the story.

Bret Harte *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*

~~(Page 414)~~

READING CHECK

A. True/False. Write T for a true statement. Write F for a false statement.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>_____ 1. The story takes place in 1850.</p> <p>_____ 2. Poker Flat suffers a "spasm of virtuous reactions" after a bloody range war.</p> <p>_____ 3. John Oakhurst is a gambler by profession.</p> <p>_____ 4. Among the outcasts are Uncle Billy and Jim Wheeler.</p> <p>_____ 5. The group is on the way to a little town called Sandy Bar.</p> | <p>_____ 6. Piney Woods is twenty-three years old.</p> <p>_____ 7. The young man with Piney Woods is called the Bandit.</p> <p>_____ 8. One night Uncle Billy runs off with the mules.</p> <p>_____ 9. The stories which the young man tells during the evening are from a famous book called the <i>Iliad</i>.</p> <p>_____ 10. At the end of the story, Oakhurst freezes to death.</p> |
|--|--|

B. List the major events in the narrative in the order in which they occurred.

HBJ material copyrighted under notice appearing earlier in this work.

Bret Harte *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*

(Pages 413-421)

Directions: Write the letter of the best answer to each question. (10 points each)

1. When Harte left California to return to the East, he was
 - a. an unknown literary figure
 - b. a frustrated writer of serious literature
 - c. an established regional Western writer
 - d. an unpublished author

1. _____

2. In "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" (page 414), the "outcasts" are forced to leave Poker Flat by
 - a. the churchgoing citizens
 - b. an elected committee
 - c. a secret committee of townspeople
 - d. cheated, angry card players

2. _____

3. Which of the following statements is *not* an accurate description of John Oakhurst?
 - a. He cheats at cards.
 - b. He never drinks while gambling.
 - c. He is coolheaded.
 - d. He is a gentleman, as gamblers go.

3. _____

4. The story contains some humorous touches in the
 - a. later activities of the outcasts
 - b. early behavior of John Oakhurst
 - c. first behavior of Mother Shipton and Uncle Billy
 - d. final departure of Tom Simson

4. _____

5. How does Mother Shipton die?

a. From frostbite	c. From a heart attack	
b. By a suicidal shooting	d. From intentional starvation	5. _____

6. The one member of the original group whose character and attitude do not change is

a. John Oakhurst	c. Uncle Billy	
b. the Duchess	d. Mother Shipton	6. _____

7. After the group is snowed in, Oakhurst thinks of their situation as

a. a tragedy	c. a curse	
b. an ironic accident	d. a bit of bad luck	7. _____

8. Which of the following indicates the outcome of events?
 - a. Four people freeze to death; one survives.
 - b. Two commit suicide; two freeze to death; one survives.
 - c. All five members freeze to death.
 - d. Three starve to death; two commit suicide.

8. _____

continued

NAME _____

CLASS _____ DATE _____

SELECTION TEST 39—CONTINUED

9. Harte treats the story's main characters
- a. realistically
 - b. sentimentally
 - c. objectively
 - d. absurdly
9. _____
10. The narrator is different from the others mainly in
- a. attitude
 - b. costume
 - c. feelings
 - d. vocabulary
10. _____

HBJ material copyrighted under notice appearing earlier in this work.

Reading Quiz:

Name: _____

Remembering the Details

Date: _____

The Outcasts of Poker Flat

Match the descriptions in Column A with the names of the characters in Column B.

Column A

1. _____ A waitress at the Temperance House; now she is about to be married
2. _____ A gambler with a kind heart
3. _____ A woman with a bad reputation who shows motherly interest in one of the others marooned in the cabin
4. _____ A young man who once lost \$40 to the gambler
5. _____ A drunk and ne'er-do-well who left the others in a predicament
6. _____ The non-drinker among the outcasts
7. _____ The gambler kissed her before he left forever
8. _____ She starved herself to save her rations for someone else
9. _____ He entertained the others with stories from *The Iliad*.
10. _____ He hid away his cards along with the whiskey.
11. _____ She played the accordion to entertain the others.
12. _____ He went off to Poker Flat to bring help.
13. _____ They died in each other's arms.
14. _____ Having done everything he could to help the others, he went off into the snow and shot himself.
15. _____ They were the outcasts (4 names) of Poker Flat.

Column B

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| A. Uncle Billy | D. Mother Shipton |
| B. Piney Woods | E. Tom Simson |
| C. John Oakhurst | F. The Duchess |