Lesson 6  CONTEXT: Expression

William Faulkner: Voice from the South

A while ago a friend said that her favorite book is William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* because it’s darkly humorous. She said Faulkner lived from 1897 to 1962 and mostly wrote about the southern United States, where he lived. It sounded intriguing to me because I’ve always had a taste for weird humor. Assuming that Faulkner wrote only humorous books, I dropped by the library and checked out his novel *Wild Palms*. It wasn’t funny; furthermore, it was confusing and hard to read. It’s two completely different stories that are told in alternating chapters. The book is extremely strange, but it interested me, and I read it again. Then I read about Faulkner.

In the following exercises, you will have the opportunity to expand your vocabulary by reading about William Faulkner and his writing. Below are ten Vocabulary Words that will be used in these exercises.

- atrocious
- composure
- discern
- lament
- painstaking
- compassion
- deteriorate
- insipid
- loathe
- repress

**EXERCISE 1: Wordbusting**

*Directions.* Follow these instructions for this word and the nine words on the next page.

- Figure out the word’s meaning by looking at its context, its structure, and its sound. Fill in at least one of the three CSS boxes. Alternate which boxes you complete.
- Then, look up the word in a dictionary, read all of its meanings, and write the meaning of the word as it is used in the sentence.
- Follow this same process for each of the Vocabulary Words on the next page. You will need to draw your own map for each word. Use a separate sheet of paper.

1. **atrocious**

   Faulkner is considered one of the finest writers in the United States. His formal education, however, was limited as a result of his atrocious attendance record at school: He almost never went to class, and he dropped out after the tenth grade.

   **Context:**
   
   **Structure:**
   
   **Sound:**

   **Dictionary:**
2. compassion
A friend, Phil Stone, took compassion on Faulkner and let him use the Stones' family library. Faulkner loved to read, and Stone's sympathetic help made it possible for Faulkner to educate himself.

3. composure
Faulkner had the maturity and composure to work at many different jobs in his early years. However, he was at his calmest and most self-possessed later in his life when he was writing at his home in Oxford, Mississippi.

4. deteriorate
Many of Faulkner's stories and novels are about human relationships that deteriorate. The Sound and the Fury, for instance, is about the worsening relationships in a Southern aristocratic family.

5. discern
Although a southerner himself, Faulkner had the ability to discern the peculiarities of traditional, aristocratic southern families and analyze their inability to adapt to modern life. He recognized their living in the past as the cause of their deterioration.

6. insipid
Faulkner's writing is lively and spirited. I don't think it could ever be considered insipid, because he wrote about people who were far from dull and lifeless. His characters lead funny, tragic, happy, sad, and violent lives.

7. lament
Faulkner spoke against federal interference in the racial policies of the South, but his writings are often a lament for the mistreatment of African Americans in the South. His sorrow and regret over their situation is clearly demonstrated in his stories.

8. loathe
If you loathe having to figure out what you are reading, Faulkner is not for you. However, if you like a challenge as much as I do, give his novels or short stories a try.

9. painstaking
Faulkner was painstaking in reconstructing historical times and places in his writing. I think his very careful attention to detail makes his stories believable.

10. repress
Because the library's copy of As I Lay Dying was missing, I had to repress my eagerness to read the novel until my friend lent it to me. I'm glad I was patient; the novel was worth waiting for.
**EXERCISE 2**  
**Context Clues**

**Directions.** Scan the definitions in Column A. Then, think about how the boldface words are used in the sentences in Column B. To complete the exercise, match each definition in Column A with the correct Vocabulary Word from Column B. Write the letter of your choice on the line provided; then write the Vocabulary Word on the line preceding the definition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLUMN A</th>
<th>COLUMN B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. word: __________________________</td>
<td>(A) My composure was shaken when I realized I had forgotten to write a required report on Plato. I dropped my Faulkner reading, wrote the Plato paper, and was soon my usual calm self again.</td>
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<tr>
<td>adj. flavorless; dull or unexciting; lifeless</td>
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<td>12. word: __________________________</td>
<td>(B) I'll never lament my mistake in thinking Faulkner was a humorous writer. How could I regret discovering my favorite author?</td>
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<td>adj. very careful; diligent; requiring great care; meticulous</td>
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<td>13. word: __________________________</td>
<td>(C) I wonder whether Faulkner needed money so badly that he had to hold back, or repress, his desire to write novels, writing screenplays for Hollywood instead.</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. to become worse or less valuable; to diminish</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. word: __________________________</td>
<td>(D) Faulkner was not as painstaking with screenplays as he was with his other writing. He didn't think scripts for films required as much thoughtfulness and attention to detail.</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. to feel deep sorrow; to express sorrow or mourning for; to grieve; n. an expression of grief; a song or poem expressing grief</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15. word: __________________________</td>
<td>(E) Absalom, Absalom! and other Faulkner novels are filled with the flavor of the South. They make other books I have read seem as insipid as weak tea in comparison.</td>
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<td>n. pity for someone else's suffering, along with a desire to help</td>
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<td>16. word: __________________________</td>
<td>(F) Some of Faulkner's books describe atrocious happenings such as lynchings, murders, and assaults. These horrible events are important parts of the stories.</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. to detect with one of the senses, to notice; to recognize as different or to identify as separate; to come to know mentally, to judge.</td>
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<td>17. word: __________________________</td>
<td>(G) Faulkner had reason to loathe the way African Americans were treated in the South, and his disgust is evident in his writing.</td>
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<td>v. to restrain; to keep or put down</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. word: __________________________</td>
<td>(H) Faulkner used his writing to help the reader discern and understand, rather than overlook, what he called &quot;eternal verities.&quot; He did this by contrasting the faults of society with values such as pride, compassion, love, and honor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>v. to feel intense dislike or hatred; to detest</td>
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<td>19. word: __________________________</td>
<td>(I) Faulkner wrote of Southern customs and manners that were beginning to deteriorate, and he gave reasons for the decline.</td>
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<td>n. self-possession; tranquility</td>
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<td>20. word: __________________________</td>
<td>(J) One of my favorite aspects of Faulkner's writing is the compassion he shows for all sorts of people. I feel that his deep sympathy is sincere.</td>
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<tr>
<td>adj. exceedingly bad; wicked or cruel; abominable</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
EXERCISE 3  Sentence Completion

Directions. For each of the following items, circle the letter of the choice that best completes the meaning of the sentence or sentences.

21. Although Faulkner _____ school when he was young, he did like to read. He therefore educated himself.
   (A) deteriorated
   (B) loathed
   (C) discerned
   (D) lamented
   (E) repressed

22. Faulkner used a technique of creating characters that had different reactions to the same people or situation. He considered that this helped readers to _____ how difficult it could be to understand and to arrive at valid judgments.
   (A) lament
   (B) repress
   (C) loathe
   (D) discern
   (E) deteriorate

23. Faulkner stayed calm, showing great _____ when he gave his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in literature in 1950.
   (A) lamentation
   (B) compassion
   (C) composure
   (D) deterioration
   (E) loathing

24. If I become a writer, I'll try to be extremely careful with details so that my writing will be as _____ as Faulkner's.
   (A) insipid
   (B) compassionate
   (C) atrocious
   (D) repressive
   (E) painstaking

25. I like exciting stories that are filled with life, not spiritless, _____ ones.
   (A) insipid
   (B) painstaking
   (C) compassionate
   (D) lamenting
   (E) repressing

26. In *As I Lay Dying*, a sorrowful family _____ the death of a family member, but spends its time doing _____ unimportant things.
   (A) loathes ... deteriorated
   (B) discerns ... repressive
   (C) represses ... painstaking
   (D) laments ... insipid
   (E) deteriorates ... compassionate

27. Faulkner, mourning the condition of African Americans in the South, _____ their plight and wrote about the _____ they had to endure at the hands of controlling whites.
   (A) discerned ... compassion
   (B) repressed ... deterioration
   (C) lamented ... repression
   (D) loathed ... composure
   (E) deteriorated ... atrociousness

28. *Sartoris* is a _____ sympathetic look at the steady _____ of the life of a war veteran, whose mental condition slowly worsens.
   (A) loathsome ... compassion
   (B) compassionate ... deterioration
   (C) painstaking ... insipidty
   (D) repressive ... composure
   (E) lamentable ... compassion

29. Faulkner was not satisfied with *Sanctuary*. He did not want to diminish his literary status and allow his reputation to _____, so he revised the novel to meet his exacting, _____ standards.
   (A) deteriorate ... painstaking
   (B) repress ... atrocious
   (C) discern ... insipid
   (D) lament ... compassionate
   (E) loathe ... lamentable

30. Faulkner took a stand against the hateful, _____ acts committed against some Southerners by showing deep sympathy and _____ for the victims.
   (A) compassionate ... composure
   (B) loathsome ... repression
   (C) repressive ... composure
   (D) painstaking ... deterioration
   (E) atrocious ... compassion