

## Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 3

**Author:** Ceri Jones

**Level:** Advanced

**Age:** Young adults / Adults

**Aims:** In this lesson the students will:

1. recall Part 2 of the story;
2. discuss the two main characters' states of mind;
3. look at language for describing physical appearance;
4. listen for gist;
5. listen for attitude;
6. practise using appropriate attitude markers;
7. act out the scene between the two men.

**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (full audio) and Track 2 (extracts) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of the full transcript per student

**Summary:** The story is about two writers who were once friends. Their lives have taken very different directions since they left university. One has become a successful novelist; the other is poor and out of work. An advertisement in the paper brings the two together in a new relationship, one that brings to light quite a few uncomfortable truths about the two men. In Part 3, Geoffrey Betton interviews Duncan Vyse for a job as his secretary.

### Activity 1

**Aims:** to recall Part 2 of the story; to discuss the two main characters' states of mind

1. Ask the students to work in pairs to recall Part 2 of the story in as much detail as possible. Then, hand out the worksheet and ask them to complete the summary in Activity 1.

**Key:** 1. Betton; 2. Vyse; 3. Vyse; 4. Betton; 5. Aphorn; 6. Vyse

2. Remind students that the two men are about to meet for the first time in a long time. Remind them of, or elicit, the nature of the meeting (Betton has advertised for a secretary). Ask them to work in small groups and imagine how the two men might be feeling about the meeting. Do not elicit answers or feedback at this stage.

3. Ask each group to choose one of the two characters, but they are not to say who (this is important for the next stage). Ask them to write a short first-person text explaining the character's thoughts and feelings immediately before the meeting. Allow time for discussion as they write. You may need to do quite a lot of prompting with the groups to get them started. You might want to give them an opening sentence to start them off, such as –

*It's been such a long time since I last saw him – I wonder if he's changed.*

Remind them not to use names. Circulate, monitoring and correcting as necessary.

4. Ask each group to read out their texts to the class. Ask the class to identify the character. Is it Betton or Vyse?

### Activity 2

**Aim:** to pre-teach language for physical descriptions

1. Ask the students to look at Activity 2 on the worksheet. Ask them to read through the words and their definitions and complete the task in pairs. Compare the students' answers with the whole class. Note that there are no right or wrong answers at this stage; they are to speculate and their speculations will be confirmed when they listen to the story. You may want to make a note of the students' predictions on the board to come back to after the listening task.

**Key (for your reference):** Betton – high-coloured; stout; well-fed; Vyse – anaemic; bald; bleached; bony; shabby; starved

2. Ask the students to think of people they know who can be described using the words

## Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 3

and phrases in Activity 2. Ask them to share their answers briefly with the rest of the class.

### Activity 3

**Aim:** to listen for gist

1. Refer the students to Activity 3 on the worksheet. Read the questions with the class. Point out that answers to the first question can include more than just physical descriptions. Ask them to listen to the story without making any notes. They can write their answers down once the story has finished. Play Track 1. When the track has finished, allow the students a few moments of quiet time to make a note of their answers.

2. Ask the students to work in pairs or small groups to compare their answers. They should also look back at the physical features discussed earlier in the class and check their predictions.

**Key:** 1. *Betton thinks Vyse has not changed in appearance, except that he is shabbier, and bald. Vyse seems to have grown bitter.; Betton has grown stout and, of course, he is now wealthy.;* 2. *the secretaryship;* 3. *Betton;* 4. *strained; tense; awkward; formal, considering how well they know each other*

3. Field answers from the whole class and prompt discussion on the last question in particular. You may want to ask each group to choose one or two adjectives to describe the atmosphere and share these on the board.

4. Ask the pairs or groups to try to remember some of the things the two men said to each other. Encourage them to try to remember the exact wording, if possible. Allow them a few minutes to do this, prompting if necessary. Then, give the students the transcript and let them check their answers. This should encourage the students to scan the text, focusing only on the dialogue. This is in preparation for the role-play later on.

5. Field responses from the students, encouraging them to look for similarities and difference in the snippets of conversation they remembered.

6. Ask the students to think about how Vyse felt about the incident of the forgotten manuscript. Then, ask them to work in pairs

and write a brief account of what happened from Vyse's point of view.

### Activity 4

**Aims:** to listen for attitude; to imitate intonation and stress patterns to put across a range of attitudes

1. Ask the class to look at the list of questions in Activity 4 on the worksheet, and, working in pairs, ask them to decide who asked the questions, Betton or Vyse.

**Key:** 1. *Betton;* 2. *Vyse;* 3. *Betton;* 4. *Vyse;* 5. *Betton*

2. Check the answers with the whole class. Ask them to recall the context – who said what before and after. Then, ask them to think about any emotions that might be betrayed by those questions.

3. Ask them to listen to the questions and mark the main stress(es) on each. They should also check for any emotions betrayed by the way the question is asked. Play Track 2.

**Key:** 1. *Is that really serious?*; 2. *Serious? Why not? Aren't you?*; 3. *Have you any idea of the deluge of stuff that people write to a successful novelist?*; 4. *Oh – you keep them, do you?*; 5. *The tone?*

4. Ask the students to listen again. Pause the recording after each question and ask the students to repeat, modelling the same intonation and attitude. Allow time for repeated attempts and discussion of attitude. Encourage the students to comment on the recording. Do they think the attitude comes across strongly enough? Ask if they would read the questions differently if they were reading the story.

### Role-play

**Aims:** to practise intensive reading; to read the dialogue aloud; to interpret the attitudes and body language of the two main characters

1. Ask the class to look at the first two paragraphs of the transcript and to picture the scene. Ask them to think about where the men are and what they're doing (are they standing, sitting, moving?). Allow a few moments for the students to picture the scene

## Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 3

and, then, ask two volunteers to come to the front of the class to act out the actions and body language of the two men. Encourage the students to comment and make suggestions.

2. Ask the students to work in groups of three. Explain that they are going to read through the transcript again and prepare to act out the scene. Assign roles in the groups or allow the students time to choose their roles. Student A is Betton, student B is Vyse and student C is the producer. Explain that the role of the producer is to prompt and manage the actors' movements and speech during the scene.

Allow plenty of time. Circulate, monitoring the students' efforts. Point out that they need only read out the direct speech, but that they must read the descriptions carefully in order to capture the tone and the mood of the scene.

3. Call on volunteers to act out the scene in front of the whole class. Alternatively, get the students to video each other, if you have the facilities. You may want to ask students to use their smartphones for this. They can then watch each other's scenes.

### Follow-up tasks

1. Ask the students to write a short summary of the story so far, emphasizing the attitudes, thoughts and feelings of the two men.

2. Ask the students to imagine they are either Betton or Vyse and that they are talking to a friend about the meeting later that day. Ask them to write (or record) what they would say.

## Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 3

### Activity 1

Complete the summary using the names *Betton*, *Vyse* and *Apthorn*.

The two men studied at Harvard together, and, after leaving college, spent a lot of time in each other's company. At the time, \_\_\_\_\_ (1) was working in business and \_\_\_\_\_ (2) was trying to make a living as a writer. \_\_\_\_\_ (3) wrote a novel called *The Lifted Lamp*. \_\_\_\_\_ (4) read it and was very impressed. He offered to show it to a publisher friend, \_\_\_\_\_ (5), but somehow time passed and he forgot. One day, he returns home to find that the manuscript has disappeared. \_\_\_\_\_ (6) sent a friend round to pick it up. The two men have not seen or spoken to each other since that time.

### Activity 2

Read the list of adjectives and their definitions. Which do you imagine might be used to describe a. *Betton* and b. *Vyse*? Why?

**anaemic** weak, colourless, lacking in strength  
**bald** with no hair on his head  
**bleached** pale, as if colour had been removed  
**bony** thin so that the bones can be seen or felt  
**high-coloured** red in the face  
**shabby** old and uncared-for, possibly also dirty  
**starved** not eating enough  
**stout** not thin, with a heavy build, though not necessarily fat  
**well-fed** not thin; possibly a polite way of saying *fat*

### Activity 3

After listening to the story, write notes on your answers to the questions below.

1. Have the two men changed a lot since they last saw each other?
2. What do they talk about?
3. Who does most of the talking?
4. What's the atmosphere like between the two men?

### Activity 4

Who asked the questions? *Betton* or *Vyse*?

1. Is that really serious?
2. Serious? Why not? Aren't *you*?
3. Have you any idea of the deluge of stuff that people write to a successful novelist?
4. Oh – you keep them, do you?
5. The tone?

## Full Circle

by Edith Wharton

### Part 3

His first thought was that the man facing him from the hearth-rug was the very Duncan Vyse of old: small, starved, bleached-looking, with the same sidelong movements, the same queer air of anaemic **truculence**. Only he had grown shabbier, and bald.

Betton held out a hospitable hand.

“This is a good surprise! Glad you looked me up, my dear fellow.”

Vyse’s palm was damp and bony: he had always had a disagreeable hand.

“You got my note? You know what I’ve come for?” he said.

“About the secretaryship? Sit down. **Is that really serious?**”

Betton lowered himself luxuriously into one of his vast Maple arm-chairs. He had grown stouter in the last year, and the cushion behind him fitted comfortably into the crease of his **nape**. As he leaned back he caught sight of his image in the mirror between the windows, and reflected uneasily that Vyse would not find *him* unchanged.

“Serious?” Vyse rejoined. **“Why not? Aren’t you?”**

“Oh, perfectly.” Betton laughed apologetically. “Only – well, the fact is, you may not understand what rubbish a secretary of mine would have to deal with. In advertising for one I never imagined – I didn’t aspire to any one above the ordinary **hack**.”

“I’m the ordinary hack,” said Vyse drily.

Betton’s **affable** gesture protested. “My dear fellow –. You see it’s not business – what I’m in now,” he continued with a laugh.

Vyse’s thin lips seemed to form a noiseless “*Isn’t it?*” which they instantly transposed into the audible reply: “I inferred from your advertisement that you want somebody to relieve you in your literary work. Dictation, **short-hand** – that kind of thing?”

“Well, no: not that either. I type my own things. What I’m looking for is somebody who won’t be above tackling my correspondence.”

Vyse looked slightly surprised. “I should be glad of the job,” he then said.

Betton began to feel a vague embarrassment. He had supposed that such a proposal would be instantly rejected. “It would be only for an hour or two a day – if you’re doing any writing of your own?” he threw out interrogatively.

“No. I’ve given all that up. I’m in an office now – business. But it doesn’t take all my time, or pay enough to keep me alive.”

“In that case, my dear fellow – if you could come every morning; but it’s mostly awful **bosh**, you know,” Betton again broke off, with growing awkwardness.

Vyse glanced at him humorously. “What you want me to write?”

“Well, that depends –” Betton sketched the obligatory smile. “But I was thinking of the letters you’ll have to answer. Letters about my books, you know – I’ve another one appearing next week. And I want to be beforehand now – dam the flood before it swamps me. **Have you any idea of the deluge of stuff that people write to a successful novelist?**”

As Betton spoke, he saw a tinge of red on Vyse’s thin cheek, and his own reflected it in a richer glow of shame. “I mean – I mean –” he stammered helplessly.

“No, I haven’t,” said Vyse; “but it will be awfully jolly finding out.”

## Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 3

There was a pause, groping and desperate on Betton's part, **sardonically** calm on his visitor's.

"You – you've given up writing altogether?" Betton continued.

"Yes; we've changed places, as it were." Vyse paused. "But about these letters – you dictate the answers?"

"Lord, no! That's the reason why I said I wanted somebody – er – well used to writing. I don't want to have anything to do with them – not a thing! You'll have to answer them as if they were written to *you*." Betton pulled himself up again, and rising in confusion jerked open one of the drawers of his writing-table.

"Here – this kind of rubbish," he said, tossing a packet of letters onto Vyse's knee.

"Oh – you keep them, do you?" said Vyse simply.

"I – well – some of them; a few of the funniest only."

Vyse slipped off the band and began to open the letters. While he was glancing over them Betton again caught his own reflection in the glass, and asked himself what impression he had made on his visitor. It occurred to him for the first time that his high-coloured well-fed person presented the image of commercial rather than of intellectual achievement. He did not look like his own idea of the author of "Diadems and Faggots" – and he wondered why.

Vyse laid the letters aside. "I think I can do it – if you'll give me a notion of the tone I'm to take."

"The tone?"

"Yes – that is, if I'm to sign your name."

"Oh, of course: I expect you to sign for me. As for the tone, say just what you'd – well, say all you can without encouraging them to answer."

Vyse rose from his seat. "I could submit a few **specimens**," he suggested.

"Oh, as to that – you always wrote better than I do," said Betton **handsomely**.

"I've never had this kind of thing to write. When do you wish me to begin?"

Vyse enquired, ignoring the tribute.

"The book's out on Monday. The deluge will begin about three days after. Will you turn up on Thursday at this hour?" Betton held his hand out with real **heartiness**. "It was great luck for me, your **striking** that advertisement. Don't be too harsh with my correspondents – I owe them something for having brought us together."

## Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 3

### Glossary

**truculence** aggression

**nape** the back of your neck

**hack** (informal) a journalist, artist or writer who does boring work or work that isn't very good

**affable** friendly and relaxed

**short-hand** a quick way of writing that uses symbols to represent letters, words or phrases, used especially when you write what someone is saying as they are talking

**bosh** (old-fashioned) nonsense

**deluge** flood

**sardonically** with irony or sarcasm

**specimens** examples

**handsomely** generously

**heartiness** sincerity

**striking** noticing