

Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 1

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Level: Advanced

Age: Young adults / Adults

Aims: In this lesson the students will:

1. set up the cultural and historical background to the story;
2. discuss the main character;
3. listen for gist;
4. look at the stress patterns accompanying repetition in the narrative;
5. write a short text describing someone's early-morning routine.

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (start of Part 1), Track 2 (rest of Part 1) and Track 3 (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 1, we meet Geoffrey Betton, the main character.

Activity 1

Aims: to supply the historical and cultural background to the story; to visualize the opening scene; to pre-teach some of the difficult vocabulary in Part 1

1. Explain to the class that, in the next activity, they are going to listen to the first part of a short story. Hand out the worksheet. Ask them to read the short introduction and discuss the questions in small groups (task a). Monitor and prompt the discussion, if necessary.

2. Ask the groups to share their ideas about Geoffrey Betton's lifestyle. Then, ask them to complete task b. Explain that the vocabulary they are looking at will come up in the first part of the short story.

Key: 1. *apartment*; 2. *breakfast tray*; 3. *cigarette-box*; 4. *correspondence*; 5. *dressing-room*; 6. *luncheon*; 7. *porcelain*; 8. *valet*

3. Ask students to share their ideas in answer to the question in task c.

Activity 2

Aims: to listen for gist; to tune in to the voice, accent and pace of the narrator

1. Ask the students to think back to the moment when they woke up today. Ask them to remember as many details as they can: what time it was, whether or not it was light, what noises they could hear, if any, what woke them up, how they felt ...

2. Ask them to compare their early-morning memories with a partner and find any similarities. When they have finished, ask them to report back to the class.

3. They will now listen to the opening paragraphs of the story and compare Betton's early morning with their own. Play Track 1.

4. After listening to Track 1, refer students to the headings in Activity 2 and ask them to make notes under the headings on what they understood.

5. Tell them you are going to listen again. They should check their notes and expand on them, if possible. Play Track 1 again.

6. After listening, students compare notes as a whole class. Ask them to choose one or two words to sum up the atmosphere.

Key (possible answers): *time of day – late morning; light – bright winter sunlight; noises – shrill crisp morning noises from the street outside; mood – languid*

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Activity 3

1. Ask the students to work in pairs and look at Activity 3 on the worksheet. Ask them to read through the events and put them in the order they imagine they probably happened. Let the students compare their answers with another pair, but don't confirm or check the answers at this stage.

2. Ask the students to read the questions in task b. Then, play Track 2, the rest of the story. Ask students to check the order of the events and make notes on the questions in task b.

3. After listening, ask the students to compare their answers to Activity 3 in small groups.

Key: a. (suggested order) 1. Betton lived in a poor flat.; 2. Betton wrote a best-selling novel.; 3. He started to receive letters from his fans.; 4. He became famous and was asked to perform all kinds of public duties.; 5. He got tired of being famous.; 6. His lifestyle changed completely.; 7. He loved his new lifestyle.; 8. The letters stopped coming.; 9. He wrote a second novel.

4. Give students the transcript and ask them to answer the questions below. (You can dictate them or write them on the board.) You may need to check that the students understand exactly what *vain* means. You may want to ask them to look the word up in a dictionary or give examples of vanity or vain behaviour.

1. How did Betton feel about the letters at the beginning?

2. What aspects of his new-found fame did Betton enjoy most? Why?

3. Why did he write a second novel?

4. Do you think Betton is vain? Why? Why not?

5. Conduct some feedback on the answers.

Key (possible answers): 1. He was thrilled.; 2. the 'grosser evidences of popularity' (e.g. people recognizing him in public), and his new flat and lifestyle; 3. because he wanted to extend and perpetuate his popularity; 4. The evidence seems to suggest he is (he admits that enjoying the trappings of fame was vain).

6. Write this saying on the board:

Pride comes before a fall.

Ask the class what they think the proverb means. (If you're too conceited or self-important, something will happen to make you look foolish.) Do they have a similar proverb in their own language? Ask them how they think the proverb might relate to the story. (Possible answer: Betton is too proud and is about to be made to look foolish.)

Activity 4

Aims: to raise awareness of the dramatic effect of repetition; to listen for, and practise, the use of stress on the repeated words

1. Ask the students to look at the two short extracts in Activity 4 on the worksheet. Ask them to underline the repeated words in each extract.

Key: a. same; over; b. letters

2. Then, ask them to listen to the extracts and notice the stress on the repeated words. Play Track 3.

3. Allow the students time to practise reading the extracts aloud, giving the correct stress to the repeated words. Then, ask them to read the extracts in time with the audio. Play Track 3 again.

Activity 5

Aim: to write the opening paragraph of a short story

1. Ask the students to work in small groups. Explain that they are going to create the profile for a main character in a short story. Ask them to look at Activity 5 on the worksheet. Ask them to fill in the information for their character. The character must be different from Geoffrey Betton in at least three ways.

2. Once they have decided on their character, ask them to imagine their character's early-morning routine. What time do they wake up? What do they do first? What noises can they hear? What can they see or smell or feel? Is it just a normal, everyday morning or has something special happened? Are they waking up at home or somewhere else? Monitor the

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discussion closely, prompting and helping the students to visualize their character and that character's thoughts, feelings and actions.

3. Now, ask each group to write a short description of their character's early-morning routine. They are not to describe the person directly, but just their actions – explain that authors often introduce their main characters through their actions, rather than describing them directly. Students can choose to write in the first person or the third person, in the present or the past.

4. The groups exchange texts. They read each other's texts and complete a second character profile form like the one on the worksheet, giving as much information as possible, deducing the answers from the text. They then compare their profiles with the authors' original profile.

Follow-up tasks

1. Students find a clip from a film or TV series that focuses on the main character's early-morning routine and share it – or describe and comment on it – in the next class.
2. Students find out as much as they can about New York at the turn of the twentieth century. They present their findings to the class, orally or as a (digital) poster.

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Part 1

Activity 1

a. The story is set in the world of the New York upper classes at the beginning of the twentieth century. The main character, Geoffrey Betton, has recently become both famous and wealthy after the great success of his first novel. Think about what you know, or can imagine, about the period the story is set in and discuss the questions.

How many servants do you think he has?

What do they do for him?

What do you think he does all day?

b. Read the description. Match the words in bold to their definitions.

Geoffrey Betton lives in an **apartment** on Fifth Avenue. He has a **valet** who looks after him. The valet comes into his bedroom every morning, opens the curtains and fills his **porcelain** bath in the **dressing-room** next to his bedroom. He places a crystal and silver **cigarette-box** at the side of his bed, lights a fire and opens the windows. All of this he does before Betton is awake. When Betton has had his bath, Strett, the valet, brings him his **breakfast tray** to his bedroom. On the tray is his **correspondence**. Once he has eaten, Betton goes for a ride in the park and comes back in time for **luncheon**.

1. (mainly American English) a set of rooms for living in, usually on one floor of a large building. The usual British word is *flat*.
2. a flat piece of wood used to carry food, in this case the first meal of the day
3. an ornate container for tobacco
4. letters
5. a small room next to a bedroom where clothes are kept
6. (formal) a meal eaten at midday
7. a hard, shiny, white substance used for making expensive dishes, cups, decorations etc
8. a man whose job is to look after another man's clothes and cook his meals

c. What do the words tell us about the main character Geoffrey Betton's lifestyle and home?

Activity 2

Make notes under the headings.

- time of day
- light
- noises
- mood

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Activity 3

a. Put the events in the order they happened.

He got tired of being famous.

Betton wrote a best-selling novel.

Betton lived in a poor flat.

He wrote a second novel.

He loved his new lifestyle.

The letters stopped coming.

He started to receive letters from his fans.

He became famous and was asked to perform all kinds of public duties.

His lifestyle changed completely.

b. Listen and check your answers to task a. Then, answer the questions below.

What is Betton's attitude to ...

1. ... his lifestyle?
2. ... his two novels?
3. ... his fans and their letters? Why?

Activity 4

Look at the extracts and underline the words that are repeated.

a.

No – it was always the same thing, over and over and over again – the same vague gush of adjectives, the same incorrigible tendency to estimate his effort according to each writer's personal preferences.

b.

And this very week the book was to come out, and the letters, the cursed letters, would begin again!

Activity 5

Complete the character profile.

name	
sex	
age	
social status	
occupation	
location	

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Geoffrey Betton woke rather late – so late that the winter sunlight sliding across his warm red carpet struck his eyes as he turned on the pillow.

Track 1

Strett, the valet, had been in, **drawn the bath** in the adjoining dressing-room, placed the crystal and silver cigarette-box at his side, put a match to the fire, and thrown open the windows to the bright morning air. It brought in, on the glitter of sun, all the shrill crisp morning noises – those piercing notes of the American **thoroughfare** that seem to take a sharper vibration from the clearness of the medium through which they pass.

Betton raised himself languidly. That was the voice of Fifth Avenue below his windows. He remembered that when he moved into his rooms eighteen months before, the sound had been like music to him: the complex orchestration to which the tune of his new life was set.

Now it filled him with horror and weariness, since it had become the symbol of the hurry and noise of that new life. He had been far less hurried in the old days when he had to be up by seven, and down at the office sharp at nine. Now that he got up when he chose, and his life had no fixed framework of duties, the hours hunted him like a pack of **blood-hounds**.

Track 2

He dropped back on his pillows with a groan. Yes – not a year ago there had been a positively sensuous joy in getting out of bed, feeling under his bare feet the softness of the sunlit carpet, and entering the shining tiled sanctuary where his great porcelain bath **proffered** its renovating flood. But then a year ago he could still call up the horror of the communal plunge at his earlier lodgings: the listening for other bathers, the dodging of shrouded ladies in “**crimping**”-pins, the cold wait on the **landing**, the reluctant descent into a blotchy tin bath, and the effort to identify one’s soap and nail-brush among the promiscuous implements of **ablution**. That memory had faded now, and Betton saw only the dark hours to which his blue and white temple of refreshment formed a kind of glittering **antechamber**. For after his bath came his breakfast, and on the breakfast-tray his letters. His letters!

He remembered – and *that* memory had not faded! – the thrill with which he had opened the first **missive** in a strange feminine hand: the letter beginning: “I wonder if you’ll mind an unknown reader’s telling you all that your book has been to her?”

Mind? Ye gods, he minded now! For more than a year after the publication of “Diadems and Faggots” the letters, the inane indiscriminate letters of condemnation, of criticism, of interrogation, had poured in on him by every post. Hundreds of unknown readers had told him with unsparing detail all that his book had been to them. And the wonder of it was, when all was said and done, that it had really been so little – that when their thick broth of praise was strained through the author’s anxious vanity there remained to him so small a sediment of definite specific understanding!

No – it was always the same thing, over and over and over again – the same vague gush of adjectives, the same incorrigible tendency to estimate his effort according to each writer’s personal preferences, instead of regarding it as a work of art, a thing to be measured by objective standards!

Track 3

He smiled to think how little, at first, he had felt the vanity of it all. He had found a savour even in the grosser evidences of popularity: the advertisements of his book, the daily

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shower of “**clippings**,” the sense that, when he entered a restaurant or a theatre, people nudged each other and said “That’s Betton.” Yes, the publicity had been sweet to him – at first. He had been touched by the sympathy of his fellow-men: had thought indulgently of the world, as a better place than the failures and the **dyspeptics** would acknowledge. And then his success began to submerge him: he gasped under the thickening shower of letters. His admirers were really unappeasable. And they wanted him to do such preposterous things – to give lectures, to head movements, to be tendered receptions, to speak at banquets, to address mothers, to plead for orphans, to go up in balloons, to lead the struggle for sterilized milk. They wanted his photograph for literary supplements, his autograph for charity bazaars, his name on committees, literary, educational, and social; above all, they wanted his opinion on everything: on Christianity, Buddhism, **tight lacing**, the drug-habit, democratic government, female suffrage and love. Perhaps the chief benefit of this demand was his incidentally learning from it how few opinions he really had: the only one that remained with him was a rooted horror of all forms of correspondence. He had been unutterably thankful when the letters began to fall off.

“Diadems and Faggots” was now two years old, and the moment was at hand when its author might have counted on regaining the blessed shelter of oblivion – if only he had not written another book! For it was the worst part of his plight that his first success had goaded him to the perpetration of this particular folly – that one of the incentives (hideous thought!) to his new work had been the desire to extend and perpetuate his popularity. And this very week the book was to come out, and the letters, the cursed letters, would begin again!

Track 3

Glossary

draw a bath (old-fashioned) to fill a bath with water

thoroughfare (formal) a main road through a town or city

blood-hounds hunting dogs, used especially for tracking escaped prisoners

proffer (formal) to offer something

“crimping”-pins special hair pins used to create small waves in hair

landing small corridor between two flights of stairs – in this case, the bathroom door was on this corridor

ablution (formal, often considered humorous in modern English) the process of washing yourself, cleaning your teeth, etc

antechamber (old-fashioned) a small room that leads to a larger and more important room

missive (formal) a letter, especially a long or important one

ye gods (spoken, old-fashioned) used for showing that you are very surprised or annoyed

clippings articles or pictures you have cut from a newspaper or magazine

dyspeptics literally, people suffering from indigestion; used to talk about people who complain a lot

tight lacing the practice, which was still common at the time among young women, of wearing very tight corsets (a form of underwear) that were tied with a long lace, in order to make a woman’s waist appear very small