

Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 5

Author: Ceri Jones

Level: Advanced

Age: Young adults / Adults

Aims: In this lesson the students will:

1. recall the main events in Part 4;
2. listen for gist;
3. write a short summary of a conversation;
4. convert reported speech into dialogue;
5. listen for key information;
6. infer information from the text;
7. practise the use of emphatic sentence stress.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (first part of Part 5), Track 2 (second part of Part 5), Track 3 (extract) and Track 4 (full audio) 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 5, Betton and Vyse have dinner together and Vyse shares his 'dark secret'.

Warmer

Aim: to recall the events in Part 4

1. Ask the students to recall the events of the previous instalment in pairs or small groups.
2. Field the students' answers and ask them if they remember what happened in the final paragraph. (*Vyse turned up for dinner, looking shabby and truculent.*) Make sure that they remember why Betton wanted to invite Vyse to dinner. (*He wants to fire him.*)

3. Write on the board, read out or dictate Betton's words at the end of Part 4.

He might be an agent of something – a chap who carries deadly secrets.

Ask the students to speculate on what dark secrets Vyse might be hiding or that Betton thinks he might be hiding.

Activity 1

Aim: to listen for gist

1. Tell the students that, in the first instalment of Part 5, Betton and Vyse are at dinner. Ask the students to write down three things they think Betton might say to Vyse. Write their suggestions on the board.

2. Tell students that they are now going to listen to the first instalment. They should check if any of their suggestions were correct. Hand out the worksheet and ask them also to answer the questions in Activity 1.

Play Track 1.

3. Allow the students time to compare their answers in pairs and then check answers with the class.

Key: 1. *No, he doesn't.*; 2. *He is incredibly poor.*

Activity 2

Aims: to report on the conversation; to expand reported speech into direct speech

1. Ask half the class to write a summary of what Betton said in the first instalment of Part 5 and the other half to write a summary of what Vyse said.
2. Ask the students to work in pairs, comprising of one student who has summarized Betton's words and one who has summarized Vyse's words. Ask them to read each other's summaries. Then, give them the transcript and ask them to read through the section labelled 'Track 1' and check their summaries.

Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 5

3. Ask the students to look at Activity 2 on the worksheet. Explain that this is the opening section of the instalment they have just heard. Ask them to read the extract carefully and then act out the conversation between the two men.

4. Ask for volunteers to act out the exchange for the whole class. Invite comments on appropriacy and register.

5. You may want to ask the students to write out the dialogue in direct speech and use a comparison between the original text and the students' texts as an opportunity to look at the language and conventions of reported speech.

Activity 3

Aims: to listen for key information; to infer information from the text

1. Tell students to look at Activity 3a on the worksheet. Ask them to read the introduction and the questions. Then, play Track 2 and ask the students to make notes of their answers on the worksheet. Alternatively, ask them to listen without writing anything and then give them a few moments to write their answers on the worksheet as soon as the instalment has finished.

2. Ask the students to compare their answers in pairs and, then, to check them in the transcript for the second instalment. Check the answers with the class.

Key: 1. a number of weeks after the men have dinner; 2. very flattering letters, full of praise for the novel; 3. two letters from women; 4. because there's no such person at the address the writer gave Betton

3. Ask the students to look at Activity 3b on the worksheet. Ask them to read the extracts, paying special attention to the words in bold. Then, they are to work in pairs to explain the connection between the extracts and the question *Who wrote the letters?*

4. Ask the students to report back on their discussion and guide the class towards the discovery that Betton is writing his own fan letters. Ask them to look again at the transcript for the second instalment and find

any other "clues" that help us understand what Betton has done.

Activity 4

Aim: to practise the use of emphatic sentence stress

1. Ask students to look at Activity 4 on the worksheet. Play Track 3. Ask the students to underline the word that carries heavy, emphatic stress.

Key: *your*

2. Check answers with the class. Other words are also stressed fairly strongly (for example, *my* and *official*), but *your* has the most marked stress. Tell students to look back at Activity 3 and tell you what technique the writer uses to indicate the emphatic stress (*italics*). Ask the students to work in pairs to repeat the short dialogue, imitating the stress patterns as closely as they can.

3. Ask the whole class to discuss what they think will happen in the next part of the story. Prompt them with questions such as: *Do they think that Vyse suspects Betton? Will he say anything? Will Betton keep writing the letters?*

4. Ask the students to work in pairs to write a summary of their predictions to refer to when they listen to the next part of the story.

Follow-up activities

1. Ask the students to find out more about the Dead Letter Office by doing an online search.

2. Ask the students to write a summary of Part 5 of the story told from Vyse's point of view.

Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 5

Activity 1

Listen to the first instalment of Part 5 and answer the questions.

1. Does Betton dismiss Vyse?
2. What confession does Vyse make to Betton?

Activity 2

Read the extract and then act out the conversation between the two men.

Vyse, it was to appear, did carry a deadly secret; but one less perilous to society than to himself. He was simply poor – inexcusably, irremediably poor. Everything failed him, had always failed him: whatever he put his hand to went to bits.

This was the confession that, reluctantly, yet with a kind of white-lipped bravado, he flung at Betton in answer to the latter's tentative suggestion that, really, the letter-answering job wasn't worth bothering him with – a thing that any type-writer could do.

Activity 3

a. Read the introduction to the second instalment and the questions. Then, listen and make notes on the answers.

The letters get fewer and fewer but still Betton cannot bring himself to fire Vyse. Luckily, something happens to ease the situation. Listen and find out what. Answer the questions below.

1. When do the letters start coming again?
2. What kind of letters are they?
3. Which letters is Vyse particularly interested in?
4. Why was one of the letters returned?

Full Circle

by Edith Wharton

Part 5

b. Read the three short extracts below and explain their link to the following question: *Who wrote the letters?*

1

“Poor devil, I’m damned if I don’t do it for him!” said Betton, sitting down at his desk.

2

“Well, it’s from a girl – a lady – and she thinks she’s the only person who understands ‘Abundance’ – has the clue to it. Says she’s never seen a book so misrepresented by the critics –”

“Ha, ha! That is good!” Betton agreed with too loud a laugh.

3

Vyse shrugged his shoulders. “Yes; but the interesting question is – why on earth didn’t your answer come back, too?”

“My answer?”

“The official one – the one I wrote in your name. If she’s unknown, what’s become of that?”

Activity 4

Listen and mark the word that is given a heavy stress.

Vyse shrugged his shoulders. “Yes; but the interesting question is – why on earth didn’t your answer come back, too?”

“My answer?”

“The official one – the one I wrote in your name. If she’s unknown, what’s become of that?”

Full Circle

by Edith Wharton

Part 5

Track 1

Vyse, it was to appear, did carry a deadly secret; but one less perilous to society than to himself. He was simply poor – inexcusably, irremediably poor. Everything failed him, had always failed him: whatever he **put his hand to** went to bits.

This was the confession that, reluctantly, yet with a kind of white-lipped bravado, he flung at Betton in answer to the latter's tentative suggestion that, really, the letter-answering job wasn't worth bothering him with – a thing that any **type-writer** could do.

"If you mean you're paying me more than it's worth, I'll take less," Vyse rushed out after a pause.

"Oh, my dear fellow –" Betton protested, flushing.

"What do you mean, then? Don't I answer the letters as you want them answered?"

Betton anxiously stroked his silken ankle. "You do it beautifully, too beautifully. I mean what I say: the work's not worthy of you. I'm ashamed to ask you –"

"Oh, **hang** shame," Vyse interrupted. "Do you know why I said I shouldn't have time to dress to-night? Because I haven't any evening clothes. As a matter of fact, I haven't much but the clothes I stand in. One thing after another's gone against me; all the infernal ingenuities of chance. It's been a slow Chinese torture, the kind where they keep you alive to have more fun killing you." He straightened himself with a sudden blush. "Oh, I'm all right now – getting on capitally. But I'm still **walking rather a narrow plank**; and if I do your work well enough – if I take your idea –"

Betton stared into the fire without answering. He knew next to nothing of Vyse's history, of the mischance or mis-management that had **brought** him, with his brains and his training, **to** so unlikely a **pass**. But a pang of **compunction** shot through him as he remembered the manuscript of "The Lifted Lamp" **gathering dust** on his table for half a year.

"Not that it would have made any earthly difference – since he's evidently never been able to get the thing published." But this reflection did not wholly console Betton, and he found it impossible, at the moment, to tell Vyse that his services were not needed.

Track 2

During the ensuing weeks the letters grew fewer and fewer, and Betton foresaw the approach of the fatal day when his secretary, in common decency, would have to say: "I can't draw my pay for doing nothing."

What a triumph for Vyse!

The thought was intolerable, and Betton cursed his weakness in not having dismissed the **fellow** before such a possibility arose.

"If I tell him I've no use for him now, he'll see straight through it, of course; – and then, hang it, he looks so poor!"

This consideration came after the other, but Betton, in rearranging them, put it first, because he thought it looked better there, and also because he immediately perceived its value in justifying a plan of action that was beginning to take shape in his mind.

"Poor devil, I'm damned if I don't do it for him!" said Betton, sitting down at his desk.

Full Circle

by Edith Wharton

Part 5

Three or four days later he sent word to Vyse that he didn't care to go over the letters any longer, and that they would once more be carried directly to the library.

The next time he lounged in, on his way to his morning ride, he found his secretary's pen in active motion.

"A lot to-day," Vyse told him cheerfully.

His tone irritated Betton: it had the inane optimism of the physician reassuring a discouraged patient.

"Oh, Lord – I thought it was almost over," groaned the novelist.

"No: they've just **got their second wind**. Here's one from a Chicago publisher – never heard the name – offering you thirty per cent. On your next novel, with an advance royalty of twenty thousand. And here's a **chap** who wants to **syndicate** it for a bunch of Sunday papers: big offer, too. That's from Ann Arbor. And this – oh, *this* one's funny!"

He held up a small scented sheet to Betton, who made no movement to receive it.

"Funny? Why's it funny?" he growled.

"Well, it's from a girl – a lady – and she thinks she's the only person who understands 'Abundance' – has the clue to it. Says she's never seen a book so misrepresented by the critics –"

"Ha, ha! That is good!" Betton agreed with too loud a laugh.

"This one's from a lady, too – married woman. Says she's misunderstood, and would like to correspond."

"Oh, Lord," said Betton. "What are you looking at?" he added sharply, as Vyse continued to bend his blinking gaze on the letters.

"I was only thinking I'd never seen such short letters from women. Neither one fills the first page."

"Well, what of that?" queried Betton.

Vyse reflected. "I'd like to meet a woman like that," he said wearily; and Betton laughed again.

The letters continued to pour in, and there could be no farther question of dispensing with Vyse's services. But one morning, about three weeks later, the latter asked for a word with his employer, and Betton, on entering the library, found his secretary with half a dozen documents spread out before him.

"What's up?" queried Betton, with a touch of impatience.

Vyse was attentively scanning the outspread letters.

"I don't know: can't make out." His voice had a faint note of embarrassment. "Do you remember a note signed *Hester Macklin* that came three or four weeks ago? Married – misunderstood – Western army post – wanted to correspond?"

Betton seemed to grope among his memories; then he assented vaguely.

"A short note," Vyse went on: "the whole story in half a page. The shortness struck me so much – and the directness – that I **wrote her**: wrote in my own name, I mean."

"In your own name?" Betton stood amazed; then he broke into a groan.

"Good Lord, Vyse – you're **incurable!**"

The secretary pulled his thin moustache with a nervous laugh. "If you mean I'm an ass, you're right. Look here." He held out an envelope stamped with the words:

Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 5

“**Dead Letter Office.**” “My **effusion** has come back to me marked ‘unknown’. There’s no such person at the address she gave you.”

Betton seemed for an instant to share his secretary’s embarrassment; then he burst into an uproarious laugh.

“**Hoax**, was it? That’s rough on you, old fellow!”

Vyse shrugged his shoulders. “Yes; but the interesting question is – why on earth didn’t *your* answer come back, too?”

“My answer?”

“The official one – the one I wrote in your name. If she’s unknown, what’s become of that?”

Track 3

Glossary

put your hand to do an activity for the first time in order to find out whether you like it or are good at it

type-writer typist

hang (old-fashioned slang) damn; used in interjections / mild curses

capitally (informal; old-fashioned) brilliantly

walking rather a narrow plank to be in a dangerous position; metaphor taken from the practice of making prisoners walk along a plank of wood off the side of a ship and into the sea

bring to a pass used for saying that a situation has become very unpleasant or difficult

compunction guilt

gather dust to be left untouched for a long time

fellow (old-fashioned) man

get your second wind when someone resumes an activity after a break (usually because they no longer feel tired)

chap (old-fashioned) man

syndicate to buy the rights to the story in order to be able to publish it in a number of different newspapers

wrote her American English; In British English, we use the preposition *to* (*wrote to her*).

incorrigible (often humorous) doing bad things and not able or willing to change

Dead Letter Office an office that returned letters that could not be delivered, for whatever reason

effusion (mainly literary) an act of expressing feelings in an extremely enthusiastic way (here, referring to the letter he wrote)

hoax a deception or trick