

Full Circle by Edith Wharton Part 8

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Level: Advanced

Age: Young adults / Adults

Aims: In this lesson the students will:

1. recall the end of Part 7 and make predictions for the end of the story;
2. listen for attitude and key information;
3. predict the contents and nature of a conversation between the main characters;
4. listen for key information;
5. produce a short summary of the entire story;
6. review the pronunciation points studied so far in the series and read aloud a short extract from the story.

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (first part of Part 8), Track 2 (second part of Part 8) and Track 3 (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 the final part, Betton confronts Vyse about the letter he received from the Dead Letter Office and the story comes full circle.

Activity 1

Aims: to recall the situation at the end of Part 7; to predict the situation at the beginning of Part 8; to listen for attitude

1. Ask the students to recall what happened at the end of the previous instalment (*Betton received a letter from the Dead Letter Office*).

Elicit the significance of the letter. Prompt students to recall who the letter was for and why Betton was so anxious to receive a reply.

Key: *Betton's letter to the lady in Florida asking her to meet him in person was returned to him by the Dead Letter Office. He had been waiting anxiously for a reply as he still hoped that she would go back on her initial one-word refusal. (She had written a letter saying simply 'Impossible'). The letter was returned to him as the post office had no record of that person at that address, which would seem to suggest that she didn't exist.*

2. Ask the students to recall the other letter from the Dead Letter Office earlier on in the story. Prompt them to recall who the letter was for and why Vyse was confused by its arrival. If you have the earlier transcripts to

hand, ask the students to look back to Track 2 of Part 5, and Track 1 of Part 6. Alternatively, play the audio for Track 1 of Part 6 again to remind the students of the back story.

Key: *Earlier in the story, a letter was returned from 'Hester Macklin', another female correspondent. At the time, Vyse suggested that her letters were a hoax and that they might possibly have been written by Strett, the butler.*

3. Ask the students to work in pairs or small groups to complete the three sentences on the worksheet. When they have finished, asked them to compare their predictions in small groups and, then, with the whole class. Make a note of the predictions on the board.

4. Ask the students to listen to the first instalment of Part 8, which will allow them to check their predictions. Play Track 1. Then, check answers with the whole class. If you want, you can hand out the transcript for Track 1 so students can refer to it to justify their answers. Note that the answer to the first sentence depends on the students' interpretation of the scene rather than factual information given in the story.

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Key (suggested answers): 1. ... shocked and embarrassed.; 2. ... about the letter from Hester Macklin and the similarities between the two cases.; 3. ... showed him the letter.

Activity 2

Aims: to predict the contents and nature of the conversation they're going to hear; to listen for key information

1. Ask the students to work in pairs and discuss what they think will happen next. Ask them to use the questions on the worksheet to help them.
2. Discuss the answers to the questions with the whole class. Vote on the most likely answers and make a note of those answers on the board.
3. The students listen to the second instalment of Part 8, which is the final instalment of the story. They check their predictions.
4. In small groups, the students compare their answers. At this point, you may want to prompt them to read the transcript for the final instalment, marked 'Track 2'.

Key: 1. Vyse. He identifies the letter in a neutral tone of voice.; 2. Yes; Vyse does.; 3. Vyse doesn't offer an explanation; Betton gives a long and detailed explanation, basically saying that Vyse had written the letters and that the lady doesn't exist.; 4. Betton; 5. Betton; 6. Vyse; 7. tense, on the whole; 8a. students' own answers; 8b. students' own answers 9. Vyse

5. Field answers from the groups. Then, ask them in what way the story, and the relationship between Betton and Vyse, has come full circle.

Key: students' own answers; Suggested answer: Despite all the complications and twists and turns of the story, nothing has really changed: Vyse still needs a job and Betton is still totally self-absorbed. Their relationship has not moved on at all.

Activity 3

Aims: to review the main events in the story; to write a summary of the story; to practise condensing information in a short, written text

1. Ask the students to work in groups and map out the main events of the story as a whole. After a couple of minutes, ask them to decide which are the three key events and why. They should complete the table in Activity 3 on the worksheet. Ask the groups to compare and justify their lists as a whole class.

Key: students' own answers

2. Working in the same groups, students should write a short summary of the story based on their three events. Give them an initial word limit of 60 words. Once the groups have a rough draft that is under 60 words, ask them to cut it down to 30 words. Ask the groups to share their summaries. Use elements from each to create a class summary and make a note of it on the board.

Optional task: If you want to take it a step further, you can add a competitive element. Challenge the groups to cut the class summary down to as few words as possible. Give a time limit (of maybe two or three minutes) and the group that writes the shortest, most coherent summary within that time is the winner.

Pronunciation review

Aims: to review the pronunciation areas covered in the series of lessons; to practise reading an extract aloud

1. If you have the worksheets for the previous parts of the story to hand, ask the students to look back and identify all the pronunciation focuses from the past lessons. If you haven't, then ask the students to recall and brainstorm the pronunciation focuses.

Key: Part 1: stress patterns accompanying repetition; Part 2: none; Part 3: imitating intonation and stress patterns to put across a range of attitudes; Part 4: weak forms; Part 5: emphatic sentence stress; Part 6: reading aloud with attitude; Part 7: pausing and chunking, according to punctuation

Ask them to decide which areas they found a. most useful and b. most difficult, and ask them to explain why.

2. Ask the students to work in pairs and look back over the script for Part 8 and to choose

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a short extract that they are going to read aloud to the class and to choose specific areas of pronunciation to work on. Allow them five minutes' preparation time before they read their section aloud to the class. They may want to rehearse by recording themselves on, for example, their phones before they go public.

3. Ask each pair to read their extract aloud and ask their classmates to comment on any positive aspects in their delivery.

Follow-up activities

1. Ask the students to think about the time setting of the story and how it would be different if it were set today with the use of emails and social networks. Could the story be transposed to the modern day and, if so, how?

2. Ask the students to discuss what will happen next. Will Vyse lose his job? Will Betton find something else for him to do? Is there any future for their relationship? They could take it further and discuss the future for the two characters. Will Betton write another book? Will he remain rich and famous? What will happen to Vyse?

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Activity 1

Complete the sentences with your predictions.

1. When Betton saw his letter to Swazee Springs, Florida, fall from the envelope he felt ...
2. He sat down heavily on a chair and thought ...
3. When Vyse walked into the room, Betton immediately ...

Activity 2

What do you think the two men say to each other at this point? Use the questions below to help you make predictions.

1. Who speaks first, Vyse or Betton? What does that person say? In what tone of voice?
2. Does either man refer to the letter from Hester Macklin? If so, who?
3. What kind of explanation does Vyse offer for the latest returned letter? And Betton?
4. Which man speaks most?
5. Who gives a long and complicated answer?
6. Who gives a short and simple answer?
7. Is their conversation relaxed? Tense? Angry? Friendly?
8. How do the two men feel a. at the beginning of the conversation and b. at the end?
9. Who has the last word?

Activity 3

What do you think are the three key events of the story? Justify your choices.

	key event	justification
1		
2		
3		

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Track 1

Betton studied the ironic “Unknown” for an **appreciable** space of time; then he broke into a laugh. He had suddenly recalled Vyse’s similar experience with “Hester Macklin”, and the light he was able to throw on that obscure episode was searching enough to penetrate all the dark corners of his own adventure. He felt a rush of heat to the ears; catching sight of himself in the glass, he saw a red ridiculous congested countenance, and dropped into a chair to hide it between flushed fists. He was roused by the opening of the door, and Vyse appeared on the threshold.

“Oh, I beg pardon – you’re ill?” said the secretary.

Betton’s only answer was an inarticulate murmur of derision; then he pushed forward the letter with the imprint of the Dead Letter Office.

“Look at that,” he jeered.

Vyse peered at the envelope, and turned it over slowly in his hands. Betton’s eyes, fixed on him, saw his face decompose like a substance touched by some powerful acid.

Transcript and glossary

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Track 2

Transcript and glossary

He clung to the envelope as if to gain time.

“It’s from the young lady you’ve been writing to at Swazee Springs?” he asked at length.

“It’s from the young lady I’ve been writing to at Swazee Springs.”

“Well – I suppose she’s gone away,” continued Vyse, rebuilding his countenance rapidly.

“Yes; and in a community numbering perhaps a hundred and seventy-five souls, including the dogs and chickens, the local post-office is so ignorant of her movements that my letter has to be sent to the Dead Letter Office.”

Vyse meditated on this; then he laughed in turn. “After all, the same thing happened to me – with ‘Hester Macklin’, I mean,” he recalled sheepishly.

“Just so,” said Betton, bringing down his clenched fist on the table. “*Just so*,” he repeated, in italics.

He caught his secretary’s glance, and held it with his own for a moment. Then he dropped it as, in pity, one releases something scared and squirming.

“The very day my letter was returned from Swazee Springs she wrote me this from there,” he said, holding up the last Florida missive.

“Ha! That’s funny,” said Vyse, with a damp forehead.

“Yes, it’s funny; it’s funny,” said Betton. He leaned back, his hands in his pockets, staring up at the ceiling, and noticing a crack in the **cornice**. Vyse, at the corner of the writing-table, waited.

“Shall I get to work?” he began, after a silence measurable by minutes. Betton’s gaze descended from the cornice.

“I’ve got your seat, haven’t I?” he said, rising and moving away from the table.

Vyse, with a quick gleam of relief, slipped into the vacant chair, and began to stir about vaguely among the papers.

“How’s your father?” Betton asked from the hearth.

“Oh, better – better, thank you. He’ll **pull out of it**.”

“But you **had a sharp scare** for a day or two?”

“Yes – it was **touch and go** when I got there.”

Another pause, while Vyse began to classify the letters.

“And I suppose,” Betton continued in a steady tone, “your anxiety made you forget your usual precautions – whatever they were – about this Florida correspondence, and before you’d had time to prevent it the Swazee post-office blundered?”

Vyse lifted his head with a quick movement. “What do you mean?” he asked, pushing his chair back.

“I mean that you saw I couldn’t live without flattery, and that you’ve been lading it out to me to earn your keep.”

Vyse sat motionless and shrunken, digging the **blotting-pad** with his pen. “What on earth are you driving at?” he repeated.

“Though why the deuce,” Betton continued in the same steady tone, “you should need to do this kind of work when you’ve got such faculties at your service – those letters were magnificent, my dear fellow! Why in the world don’t you write novels, instead of writing to other people about them?”

Vyse straightened himself with an effort. “What are you talking about, Betton? Why the devil do you think I wrote those letters?”

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Betton held back his answer, with a brooding face. “Because I wrote ‘Hester Macklin’s to myself!”

Vyse sat **stock-still**, without the least outcry of wonder. “Well?” he finally said, in a low tone.

“And because you found me out (you see, you can’t even **feign** surprise!) – because you saw through it at a glance, knew at once that the letters were faked. And when you’d foolishly put me on my guard by pointing out to me that they were a clumsy forgery, and had then suddenly guessed that *I* was the forger, you drew the natural inference that I had to have popular approval, or at least had to make *you* think I had it. You saw that, to me, the worst thing about the failure of the book was having *you* know it was a failure. And so you applied your superior – your immeasurably superior – abilities to carry on the **humbug**, and deceiving me as I’d tried to deceive you. And you did it so successfully that I don’t see why the devil you haven’t made your fortune writing novels!”

Vyse remained silent, his head slightly bent under the mounting tide of Betton’s denunciation.

“The way you differentiated your people – characterized them – avoided my stupid mistake of making the women’s letters too short and logical, of letting my different correspondents use the same expressions: the amount of ingenuity and art you wasted on it! I swear, Vyse, I’m sorry that damned post-office went back on you,” Betton went on, piling up the waves of his irony.

But at this height they suddenly paused, drew back on themselves, and began to recede before the spectacle of Vyse’s pale distress. Something warm and emotional in Betton’s nature – a lurking kindness, perhaps, for anyone who tried to soothe and smooth his writhing ego – softened his eye as it rested on the drooping figure of his secretary.

“Look here, Vyse – I’m not sorry – not altogether sorry this has happened!” He moved slowly across the room, and laid a friendly palm on Vyse’s shoulder. “In a queer illogical way it evens up things, as it were. **I did you a shabby turn** once, years ago – oh, out of sheer carelessness, of course – about that novel of yours I promised to give to Aphorn. If I *had* given it, it might not have made any difference – I’m not sure it wasn’t too good for success – but anyhow, **I dare say** you thought my personal influence might have helped you, might at least have got you a quicker hearing. Perhaps you thought it was because the thing was so good that I kept it back, that I felt some nasty jealousy of your superiority. I swear to you it wasn’t that – **I clean** forgot it. And one day when I came home it was gone: you’d sent and taken it. And I’ve always thought since you might have owed me a grudge – and not unjustly; so this ... this business of the letters ... the sympathy you’ve shown ... for I suppose it is sympathy ... ?”

Vyse startled and **checked him** by a queer crackling laugh.

“It’s *not* sympathy?” broke in Betton, the moisture drying out of his voice. He withdrew his hand from Vyse’s shoulder. “What is it, then? The joy of uncovering my nakedness? **An eye for an eye?** Is it that?”

Vyse rose from his seat, and with a mechanical gesture swept into a heap all the letters he had sorted.

“I’m **stone broke**, and wanted to keep my job – that’s what it is,” he said wearily ...

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Glossary

appreciable enough to be noticed or considered important

cornice a raised line of plaster, wood, or stone at the edge of a ceiling

pull out of it to get better

have a sharp scare to be worried

touch and go not certain and with a risk of death

blotting pad special thick paper used for drying ink

stock-still not making any movements

feign (formal) to pretend to have a particular feeling

humbug behaviour or talk that is not sincere

do someone a shabby turn to do something that harms someone

I dare say (old-fashioned, spoken) used for saying that something is probably true, although you do not know for certain

clean used for emphasizing that something happens completely

check someone to stop someone from doing something

an eye for an eye the idea that someone who has harmed another person should be punished by having the same thing done to them

stone broke (informal) very poor