

LESSON 4

HOW TO TALK ABOUT THE BARE NECESSITIES

"Okay, spill it, Gonzales. What have you learned?"

It was Thursday night, which meant I was on duty at MFC, Mississippi Fried Chicken – "Home of the Big Wing." This was not exactly my first choice for an after-school job, I don't know about you, but I'm not crazy about fluorescent lighting and deep fryers. Still, there's not much out there for an eighteen-year-old who hates children (which rules out babysitting). I'm hoping it'll be character building – you know, give me real-world experience to put in my first novel.

Janet was sitting under the big cardboard "If It's Chicken, You're lickin'" sign that was twisting aimlessly in the air-conditioning. She had her Stanford application material spread out in front of her, and she was desperately scribbling on a legal pad.

"I told you, Alex, I haven't heard anything yet. All I know is he's new, his name is Rex, and he's the year below us. I think he plays in a band."

"You're kidding me!" I shrieked. "A *band!*? What kind of band? A good band? I *love* guys in bands!"

Janet giggled. "Yes, I know. And no, I don't know what kind of band it is."

I adjusted my hairnet. "I can't believe you didn't hear anything else."

"You know, Alex," Janet sighed, "I *do* have a life outside being your personal private investigator. I have all these to do." She gestured at the papers in front of her.

"Oh my God, Janet. I mean, aren't you done yet? Haven't you filled out, like, fourteen of those already? Can't you stop yet?"

She frowned. "Alex, this is my future we're talking about, you know? I want to make absolutely sure."

I pulled a bag of chicken nuggets out of the freezer. "God, you sound like my dad,"

"Well, your dad is a smart guy, Alex. I mean, have you even *started* your apps?" I mumbled something as I dumped the nuggets into the fryer.

"Promise me you'll at least start on your essays, Alex."

"Fine, fine! I'll start them tonight."

"Behind on apps, Lee?" rang out an oozing voice, as the door banged open. Walter walked up to the counter and whipped a coupon out from his jacket pocket. "Says here I get a free Jumbotron drink with my order." I took the coupon grudgingly and got him his food as quickly as possible.

"Thanks and have a good night," I mumbled – but only because they make us say that.

"Thanks, Lee." He fished around in his pocket again. "By the way, you guys should stop by." He pushed a postcard across the counter at me.

"What is this, like, a math team party?" I scowled.

He rolled his eyes. "No, it's a concert. My cousin Rex is new in town, and his band is playing at the TIn Cup this weekend." He took his food, tipped his baseball cap to Janet, and headed out the door.

Uh-oh. Did this mean I was going to have to start being nice to *Walter*?

WORDS ABOUT FOOD

Every evening after work, I come home with the **pungent** smell of fried chicken in my hair and clothing.

pungent (*adj*): strong smelling

RELATED WORDS

The following words can be used to describe the way something smells.

The **piquant** smells of the pumpkin pie left the whole kitchen **redolent** of Thanksgiving – that is, until my **malodorous** brother walked in and ruined everything with the **fetid** smell of his **rancid** old gym socks.

piquant (*adj*): tasting or smelling savory or spicy

redolent (*adj*): having a strong, pleasing smell. It can also mean suggestive or reminiscent of something.

malodorous (*adj*): bad smelling. You can guess the meaning of this word by breaking it apart – mal means "bad" in Latin, and *odorous* means "smelling":

fetid (*adj*): smelling rotten

rancid (*adj*): tasting or smelling rotten

When my dad goes out of town, my brothers and I eat nothing but ramen noodles. It's our only **sustenance**.

sustenance (n): something – especially food – that sustains life

My father is a real **epicurean** – he's ashamed to have a daughter who works at such an awful restaurant.

epicurean (n): someone who takes pleasure in luxurious things, especially good food

The following two words also describe particular kinds of eaters.

If you're not careful, my brothers will eat anything in sight. They say they're **gourmands**, but I think they're just a couple of **gluttons**.

gourmand (n): someone who loves food, and often eats too much

glutton (n): someone who eats and drinks to excess

Glutton has a much more negative meaning than *gourmand*.

Mississippi Fried Chicken's corn on the cob is merely **palatable**, but the mashed potatoes are truly **delectable**. Don't believe the **succulent** pictures of chicken in our ads though. Our chicken is really as dry as bone.

palatable (*adj*): acceptable tasting

delectable (*adj*): delicious

succulent (*adj*): juicy and delicious

All that fried food left **oleaginous** spots on my clean, new apron.

oleaginous (*adj*): oily

The food at our restaurant is truly **abysmal** – even my brothers avoid it.

abysmal (*adj*): completely awful

Our favorite game at work is watching the fat at the bottom of the fryer **coagulate** into interesting shapes.

coagulate (*v*): to thicken into a semisolid mass

In the United States, the **consumption** of alcohol is forbidden for people under the age of twenty-one.

consumption (*n*): eating or drinking

If I ate all my meals at MFC, I would grow truly **corpulent**.

corpulent (*adj*): fat

Sometimes I like to dare my coworkers to eat the **dregs** of chicken left at the bottom of the fryer,

dreg (*n*): a small remainder of something

WORDS ABOUT WORK

Dumping big bags of chicken into the deep fryer all day is **arduous** work – but at least I'm developing nice, big arm muscles.

arduous (*adj*): requiring hard work

RELATED WORDS

Moving boxes up and down the stairs is also **strenuous** and laborious work, but it's not an overly **onerous** task. I kind of like it actually.

strenuous (*adj*): and laborious (*adj*): are synonyms for *arduous*.

onerous (*adj*): also means "requiring great effort": but it has the added negative meaning of being a burden or a lot of trouble.

Refilling the ketchup bottles is the most **stultifying** task – there are so many of them!

stultifying (*adj*): boring, tedious

I can't think of a more **mundane** job than the one I have.

mundane (*adj*): boring and everyday

My father thinks that having an after-school job is an **unparalleled** learning experience.

unparalleled (*adj*): unable to be matched

Every evening I **diligently** wipe down the countertops. My manager freaks out if I miss any little spot of chicken grease.

diligently (*adj*): carefully, with a lot of effort

Just because she doesn't have to wear this stupid chicken hat, my manager feels justified in acting really **haughty** to all of us.

haughty (*adj*): cocky, arrogant

Even though I only work four-hour shifts, an evening at MFC always seems **interminable**.

interminable (*adj*): unending

As much as I complain about it, there is something really **gratifying** about making your own money.

gratifying (*adj*): pleasing, satisfying

They other day, though, I **malingered** in order to stay home and watch the MTV Video Music Awards.

malingering (*v*): to pretend to be sick, especially to avoid work

I thought my coworker was going to spill the beans about my **truancy**, but luckily I was able to bribe him by taking over bathroom duty the next night.

truancy (*n*): the act of being absent without permission

In general, our manager isn't very **cognizant** of what goes on behind her back.

cognizant (*adj*): fully aware

WORDS ABOUT MONEY

I took this job because my **meager** allowance just wasn't cutting it.

meager (*adj*): very little (in quantity, substance, or size)

RELATED WORDS

The following words all have to do with not having stuff.

Before I took this job, I was **penurious** – **impecunious-destitute**, even. My dad's extreme **parsimony** meant that there was no way he was going to shell out an extra twenty bucks a week for *my* allowance – even if I promised to be **frugal**. I was suffering from a great **paucity** of clothes, books, CDs, and concert tickets, which made me feel sad and **bereft**. Without *any* money, *my* social life was in a **derelict** condition.

penurious (*adj*): lacking money or being unwilling to spend money (a rich person can be penurious as well.)

impecunious (*adj*): poor

destitute (*adj*): desperately lacking money, food, or resources

parsimony (*n*): thrift; an unwillingness to spend money

frugal (*adj*): thrifty, not wasteful

paucity (*n*): a lack of something

bereft (*adj*): deprived of something; filled with a sense of loss

derelict (*adj*): neglected and in poor condition; also, (*n*) someone who has no home, employment, or family

I tried to borrow five bucks from *my* brothers, but they said they'd only do it if I paid them twenty dollars next week. No way am I getting involved in that kind of **usury**!

usury (*n*): lending money at an extremely high rate of interest

My father said he wouldn't increase *my* allowance because he didn't want to support *my* **prodigal** ways.

prodigal (*adj*): wasteful

This job isn't all that **lucrative**, but it does mean I can stop bugging my dad for money all the time.

lucrative (*adj*): producing profit

These words all have to do with making money.

I thought about taking an unpaid volunteer job this year, but I needed something that was going to be **remunerative**. I don't need to be **affluent** or anything, but my meager savings do need to be **augmented** somehow. If I can just **accrue** a little money each week – and not blow it all at once – I might just be **prosperous** at the end of the year.

remunerative (*adj*): paying or rewarding someone with money. Be careful you don't switch the *n* and the *m* in this word!

affluent (*adj*): wealthy

augment (*v*): to increase, supplement

accrue (*v*): to increase in value or amount over time

prosperous (*adj*): wealthy, successful, or fortunate. The word is similar to *affluent*, but *affluent* only deals with material wealth; *prosperous* usually implies wealth, but can also mean "successful" more generally.