

LESSON 6

HOMONYMS

So, my brothers found out I was doing this book and got really upset that they weren't being included. After much haggling, I agreed to give them two chapters in exchange for their doing the dishes for a week. Here goes – I take no responsibility for this one!

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Hey, so we're Alex's brothers. First of all, don't listen to anything she says about us! It's all lies! She'd like you to believe that we're the troublemakers in the house, but everyone knows that *she's* the criminal mastermind, and we're just the poor suckers who get blamed for everything.

This is so cool. We have our own chapter in a book! This is wicked. Think of all the people who are reading these very words *right now* Ah, think of the power!

But, um . . . now that we have this chapter . . . we don't know what to do with it. This whole thing was way cooler in theory. Crap-now it's like homework!

Well, we suppose we could tell you a story. But all our good stories involve activities that are illegal in most states. And frankly, it would be pretty stupid for us to put those here in print. But I'm sure, if we think about it for a while, we can think of something to keep you entertained.

Oh, okay. Here's one. Once, we went to Great America, which is this massive theme park in northern California. Mike stood in line to get on the skyline tram ride – you know, one of those slow rides that takes you across the whole park in about twenty minutes. While he's in line he starts hassling the ride attendant, asking him all kinds of questions about how safe the ride is. He asks when it was last tested, and how many fatalities there have been since it was installed. The guy assured Mike that there was no danger. "What if the wind is, like, blowing really, really hard?" Mike asked. "Could I get blown out of the car?" The guy is getting totally pissed at Mike, and all these little kids behind him are complaining because they want to get on the ride. Finally, the attendant is all, "Look kid, if you don't want to get on the ride, just get out of line." Mike made a big show of looking scared, but then climbed into the little car. He buckled his safety belt, took several deep short, breaths, and gripped the railing as the car took off.

Meanwhile, Wayne had been waiting around the corner, dressed in exactly the same outfit, but covered in dirt and all these fake bruises. After about ten minutes – when there was *no* chance Mike could have gotten off the ride, Wayne went up to the ride attendant and started yelling stuff like, "You jackass! You told me this ride was safe!" The guy was so freaked out he gave Wayne all these free food coupons. Wayne took down the attendant's name and information and stormed off, leaving all these little kids screaming their heads off in line.

It was amazing. And we each got a free pizza out of it!

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Sigh. Alex again. Sorry about that! But my stupid brothers did give me a good vocabulary idea. People are always confusing Mike and Wayne because they look exactly alike. There are also a lot of "twinned" words out there that always get mixed up. These words are called homophones (words that are pronounced the same way but have different meanings) or homographs (words that are spelled the same way but have different meanings). These two categories of words, when taken together, are called homonyms. Think of pairs like "hare" (the animal) and "hair" (which grows on your head), or "lead" (the metal) and "lead" (to walk ahead of someone).

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The following words are pairs that are always confused. Keep 'em straight and you'll be way ahead of the pack (but that's no guarantee you'll be safe from Mike and Wayne!).

HOMONYMS

Even though my brothers are completely identical, they're still two **discrete** human beings. Still, the similarity is pretty uncanny. Little kids (who are not known for being **discreet**) often point and stare at them in public.

discrete (*adj*): separate, unconnected

discreet (*adj*): modest, cautious

Since they were eleven, my brothers' growth has been **continuous**. They seem to grow an inch and a half every year. My father is **continually** having to buy them new pants and shoes.

continuous (*adj*): going on without change or interruption

continual (*adj*): happening again and again

A girl once convinced Wayne to take a dance class. Problem is, he has

no rhythm. He **founded** pretty miserably – though I, for one, enjoyed watching him **flounder** around, trying to find the beat.

founder (v): to collapse, to fail (literally, it means to sink under water)

flounder (v): to move about clumsily

Mike had to write an essay for English class on an **abstract** concept (like love, honor, tradition, etc.) He sat **abstracted** at his desk for a long time, staring out the window and trying to come up with a topic.

abstract (*adj*): something that can't be touched or held, but can only be understood intellectually

abstracted (*adj*): deep in thought

When Wayne decided to **abjure** red meat, he **adjured** Mike to do likewise.

abjure (v): to reject or avoid something

adjure (v): to order someone to do something

After my brothers **arrogated** the car for a late-night joyride, Dad **abrogated** their Internet usage for a whole month.

arrogate (v): to take or claim something without the right to do so

abrogate (v): to cancel, to repeal

Mike and Wayne want to open a veterinary clinic someday. Mike will **administer** the organization while Wayne **ministers** to the animals.

administer (v): to manage the business affairs of a person or organization

minister (v): to care for someone's needs

Mike and Wayne are **averse** to doing their homework, because looking "like a coupla nerds" would be **adverse** to their popularity.

averse (adj): strongly disliking something

adverse (adj): harmful, unfavorable

Ever since they saw *The Matrix*, Mike and Wayne are constantly making **allusions** to that movie. Whenever they have to make a tough decision, they refer to it as choosing between "the red pill or the blue pill." They love the idea that the world as they know it is just an **illusion**. I told them that even if it were true, they wouldn't be any cooler in the real world.

allusion (n): a reference to an event, person, piece of literature, etc., that doesn't explicitly identify what that thing or person is

illusion (n): a deceptive vision, a hallucination

When trying to **elude** being punished by our dad, Mike and Wayne often try to argue their way out by **alluding** to Dad's own stupid, youthful behavior.

elude (v): to avoid, to escape

allude (v): to make an allusion (see above)

Mike has big **calluses** on his feet, and Wayne is always **callously** making fun of him for it.

callus (n): a buildup of hard skin, as on the fingers of a guitar player

callous (adj): cold, unfeeling

When the school administration tried to **ensor** *The Catcher in the Rye*, I wrote an editorial **censuring** the decision.

ensor (v): to remove or edit something because of offensive content

censure (v): to criticize severely

Mike and Wayne once tried to write a screenplay. It was a thriller about **climatic** researchers, and the **climactic** moment involved a series of killer tornadoes.

climatic (adj): having to do with the weather

climactic (adj): describing the most exciting, important moment in a movie, story, novel, etc.

When I shaved my head, my brothers **complimented** me on the fact that my new 'do now **complemented** my sullen, nonconformist

attitude.

compliment (v): a flattering comment

complement (adj): to go well with something; to complete

Mike and Wayne accepted the **counsel** of the student **council** and ran a car wash to raise money for the soccer team.

counsel (n): advice

council (n): a group of people working in an official capacity

When my father **descried** the girlie mags hidden under my brothers' beds, he **decried** Mike and Wayne for having brought them into the house.

descry (v): to discover something

decry (v): to strongly criticize

When they were eleven and dorky, they wanted to write a **definitive** guide to *Magic: The Gathering*. Now that they're fifteen and popular, bringing that up as often as possible is a **definite** way for me to embarrass them.

definitive (adj): the ultimate, most authoritative example or edition of something

definite (adj): sure, unquestionable

Mike and Wayne have really self-**deprecating** senses of humor. They're always making fun of themselves, yet it doesn't seem to cause their popularity to **depreciate** at all - in fact, I think people like them more for it.

deprecate (v): to put down

depreciate (v): to go down in value

Mike and Wayne **disassembled** the computer in one day. When they couldn't put it back together, they dissembled and told Dad I had done it.

disassemble (v): to take apart

dissemble (v): to lie, to pretend

My father is always trying to **elicit** information from me about my brothers' **illicit** activities.

elicit (v): to draw information out

illicit (adj): illegal

When the huge nu **epidemic** was sweeping through our high school, Mike and Wayne- with their **endemic** good luck- managed to avoid catching anything.

epidemic (n): wide-spreading phenomenon (usually an unfavorable one)

endemic (adj): characteristic

Dad gives each of us kids an **equable** amount of money for allowance. But I don't think it's **equitable** that I get the same twenty dollars a week my brothers get - after all, I'm three years older than they are!

equable (adj): even, unchanging

equitable (adj): fair, just

Rather than ask Dad for money to buy concert tickets, Mike and

Wayne decided it would be more **expedient** to 'borrow' it from his wallet. Dad found out, though, and gave them the nasty task of cleaning out the garage. No matter *how* **expeditiously** they worked, there was no way they were going to finish that job in less than three months.

expedient (*adj*): practical, suitable for a particular purpose

expeditious (*adj*): done quickly and efficiently

Once, my brothers tried to **ferment** their own wine in our basement. I told Dad about it, and they blamed me for **fomenting** dissent in the house.

ferment (*v*): to undergo or cause to undergo a biochemical process that breaks substances down into simpler ones (alcohol, for example, is created by *fermenting* sugar)

foment (*v*): to stir up, to incite (usually trouble, revolution, or other disruptive things)

Wayne's claim that he wrote that brilliant paper about the **fictional** character Othello is totally **fictitious**- I know for a fact he got it off the Internet.

fictional (*adj*): drawn from a work of fiction

fictitious (*adj*): a lie, not true