

Lesson 3

Word List

Study the definitions of the words below; then do the exercises for the lesson.

amalgam
ə mal' gəm

n. 1. An alloy of mercury and other metals.
Silver **amalgam**, which was commonly used for filling teeth, is being replaced by a composite of other materials.
2. A mixture of different elements.
The report is a curious **amalgam** of practical proposals and questionable claims of past accomplishments.

antediluvian
an ti dā lōō' vē ən

adj. Very old or old-fashioned.
In this age of cell phones, faxes, and e-mail, picking up a pen to write a letter seems almost **antediluvian**.

apothecary
ə pā' thə ker ē

n. One who prepares and sells ointments, drugs, and similar items for medicinal purposes.
Romeo convinced the impoverished **apothecary** to sell him the deadly poison illegally.

ascetic
ə se' tik

adj. Refraining from self-indulgence.
Henry David Thoreau lived an **ascetic** life during his two years in a cabin at Walden Pond.
n. A person who practices self-denial.
As he searched for the meaning of life, the man who became the Buddha lived for many years as an **ascetic**.

beneficent
bə ne' fə sən t

adj. Doing or producing good.
Quitting smoking has a **beneficent** effect on the health even of smokers of long duration.

charlatan
shār' lə tən

n. One who falsely claims knowledge or ability.
Anyone whose program promises dramatic weight loss without the need to diet or exercise is a **charlatan**.

denizen
de' nə zən

n. An inhabitant, resident, or frequenter of a place.
In several of his novels, Marcel Pagnol vividly delineates the **denizens** of small rural towns of southern France.

doyen
dōi' ən

n. 1. A senior member of a group, especially one who is highly respected.
Anthropologist Louis Leakey was the **doyen** of a small group searching for evidence of human origins.
2. The oldest example of a category.
doyenne *n.* The female equivalent of **doyen**.

flora
flōr' ə

n. Plants considered as a group in a particular area or era.
Prominent among the **flora** of Florida are dozens of varieties of palm trees.

imbibe
im bib'

v. 1. To consume by drinking.
As the designated driver, I will not **imbibe** even one alcoholic drink.
2. To absorb or take in mentally.
The graphic arts students **imbibed** the capabilities of the new computer with enthusiasm.

nostrum
nās' trəm

n. A medicine or remedy whose effectiveness has not been proven.
Here is a **nostrum** that the makers claim reverses hair loss.

obviate
äb' vē ät

v. To prevent or make unnecessary; to get rid of.
Frequent oil changes may **obviate** the need for expensive engine repairs.

perennial
pə re' nē əl

adj. Lasting indefinitely or recurring.
Until they received financial counseling, incurring credit-card debt was a **perennial** problem for that family.

n. A plant that lives three or more years.
Her garden includes some of my favorite **perennials**—irises, poppies, and peonies.

putative
pyōō' tə tiv

adj. Commonly accepted or supposed; assumed to exist.
Isabel Marlowe is the **putative** heir to the Goldstone fortune and will go to court to prove her claim.

savant
sa vānt'

n. A person with detailed knowledge in a specialized field.
Thomas Jefferson was a self-taught **savant** in several diverse areas of knowledge.

3A Understanding Meanings

Read the sentences below. If a sentence correctly uses the word in bold, write **C** on the line below it. If a sentence is incorrect, rewrite it so that the vocabulary word in bold is used correctly.

1. A **beneficent** substance is one that promotes health.

2. A region's **flora** is all the flowers that grow in it.

3. **Antediluvian** customs are those that take place in or on water.

4. A **perennial** topic is one that keeps coming up again and again.

5. An **amalgam** is a mixture.

6. A **savant** is a clever or witty remark.

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7. A **denizen** of the ocean is a creature that lives there.

8. An **ascetic** is a person who possesses a great deal of knowledge.

9. To **imbibe** facts is to take them in.

10. To **obviate** something is to go around it.

11. An **apothecary** is a person who sells medicinal preparations.

12. The **doyen** of a group is the respected leader of it.

13. A **nostrum** is an offensive remark.

14. A **putative** claim is one that has yet to be proven.

15. A **charlatan** is a person who falsely claims expertise.

3B Using Words

If the word (or a form of the word) in bold fits a sentence in the group below it, write the word in the blank space. If the word does not fit, leave the space empty.

I. **denizen**

- The crocodile is a feared _____ of Africa's upper Nile.
- The elderly _____ of the village seldom ventures out of doors in winter.
- That word is a _____ of the dictionary and is seldom seen anywhere else.

2. **amalgam**

- (a) Most dentists now avoid filling teeth with _____ because of its mercury content.
- (b) Racial prejudice is an _____ of ignorance and fear.
- (c) The judge will decide whether the _____ of the two companies is legal.

3. **flora**

- (a) Cynthia arranged the _____ in a tall glass vase.
- (b) The earth's _____ began over a billion years ago with simple algae.
- (c) The _____ of the Siberian tundra is mostly made up of mosses and lichens.

4. **perennial**

- (a) The delphinium is a _____ that comes back year after year.
- (b) With three young children, daily life in the house was marked by _____ activity.
- (c) Route One is a _____ highway that extends from Maine to Key West, Florida.

5. **ascetic**

- (a) These vitamins have an _____ effect on me.
- (b) The plush, blue velvet curtains enhanced the _____ quality of the room.
- (c) During the war, with many items rationed, most people had no choice but to practice an _____ lifestyle.

6. **obviate**

- (a) The new bridge will _____ the need to increase the ferry service.
- (b) Our friends tried to _____ us from leaving, but we insisted that we had to go.
- (c) A clear directive from the manager will _____ any confusion that may exist among employees.

7. **imbibe**

- (a) Plants _____ moisture through their roots.
- (b) Students in the humanities course _____ a knowledge of Latin and Greek classics.
- (c) The school can _____ no more than fifty students in its freshman class.

8. **doyen**

- (a) Skier Diana Golden, whose twenty-nine gold medals were won after multiple surgeries, has become the _____ of disabled athletes.
- (b) Camilla is running for the position of _____ of the senior class.
- (c) The giant redwood is the _____ of the plant kingdom.

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3C Word Study

Choose from the two words provided and use each word only once when filling in the spaces. One space should be left blank.

antediluvian/old-fashioned

1. There's an _____ soda fountain on Main Street and Maple.
2. An orchard of _____ apple and pear trees is an attractive feature of the property.
3. Using manual typewriters in the computer age seems positively _____.

denizens/inhabitants

4. The town has over twenty thousand _____.
5. According to election law, only _____ are allowed to vote.
6. The TV documentary was about giant squid and other _____ of the deep.

imbibe/drink

7. I was warned that the car would _____ oil at a rate that would astonish me.
8. We paused to _____ in the beauty of the valley below.
9. Infants begin to _____ knowledge as soon as they are born.

obdurate/inflexible

10. The youth became an _____ lawbreaker at quite an early age.
11. It is an _____ rule that the children be in bed by ten o'clock.
12. Water becomes _____ when it turns to ice.

coalesce/unite

13. If you _____ avocado, lime juice, and onion, you get guacamole.
14. The two companies will _____ and pool their resources.
15. A planet forms when dust particles _____ under the force of gravity.

3D Images of Words

Circle the letter of each sentence that suggests the numbered bold vocabulary word. In each group, you may circle more than one letter or none at all.

1. **nostrum**

- (a) The Salk and Sabin vaccines have greatly reduced the incidence of polio.
- (b) Eighty milligrams of aspirin is the dosage in this children's pill.
- (c) Doctors once bled their patients in efforts to restore them to health.

2. **ascetic**

- (a) For breakfast, Sadie has just a bowl of cereal and a glass of orange juice.
- (b) Most plants thrive where there is rich soil, water, and sunshine.
- (c) The costumes for the show were kept as simple as possible.

3. **antediluvian**

- (a) Before the valley was flooded for the reservoir, this was rich farmland.
- (b) I was surprised to see farmers still using horse-drawn plows.
- (c) These air traffic controllers maintain that their computers are outdated.

4. **perennial**

- (a) The mint that I planted five years ago has spread over much of the garden.
- (b) Joe could never make his paycheck last until Friday and always tried to borrow from someone else on the job.
- (c) The factory runs for 24 hours a day 365 days a year.

5. **doyenne**

- (a) Amelia Earhart was the most respected aviator of her time.
- (b) Maria said the quality she most admires in another person is honesty.
- (c) The marathon is one of the most demanding of all Olympic events.

6. **savant**

- (a) I don't think Ms. Williams is aware of what is going on in her department.
- (b) Marie and Pierre Curie discovered radium and studied the properties of this radioactive substance.
- (c) They say that no one knows more about language than Noam Chomsky.

7. **apothecary**

- (a) The sign above the door said "Medicines and Potions Sold Here."
- (b) "Something to help you sleep?" the old woman said. "I have the very thing."
- (c) The patient went from the operating theater to the recovery room.

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8. **charlatan**

- (a) Zambor sold Seth a metal bracelet guaranteed to cure his rheumatism.
- (b) For one thousand dollars Rama will give you the secret of eternal youth.
- (c) Randy shook his head and said there was nothing he could do to help me.

9. **putative**

- (a) We assume that Khanda wrote the poem since it resembles her other work.
- (b) I assumed the money was a gift since you said nothing about repayment.
- (c) The detective assumed the identity of a petty thief to win the suspect's confidence.

10. **beneficent**

- (a) Because of her asthma, my sister prefers the climate of Arizona.
- (b) Fido's behavior improved after he attended dog obedience school.
- (c) The Taj Mahal is one of the great architectural wonders of the world.

3E Passage

Read the passage below; then complete the exercise that follows it.

The Secrets of the Forest

For most of human history, medicine was a curious **amalgam** of ancient dogmas, odd superstitions, and scientific truths, held together by blind faith in the **nostrums** dispensed by the practitioner. A patient could do little to differentiate the **charlatan** from the genuine healer; it was often a matter of luck whether the person who was ill recovered or got worse. Frequently, the best medical advice came from **apothecaries**, skilled herbalists who derived their medicines and ointments from plants whose effectiveness had been proved by trial and error over the centuries.

The organic compounds called alkaloids, formed in the bark, roots, stems, leaves, or berries, give plants their healing properties. Their characteristic bitter taste can be an indication that a particular plant has useful medicinal properties, but alkaloids taken in large doses can also be deadly, causing sickness, paralysis, or even death. An extract called atropine, derived from the plant belladonna, a **perennial** of the nightshade family, can be **beneficent** or deadly, depending on how it is employed. Used properly it relieves muscle spasms; given in larger doses, it becomes a deadly poison.

In 1909, the *Journal of Pharmacology and Therapeutics* began publication in Baltimore, Maryland, an indication that scientists were studying the medicinal properties of plants in a more rigorous manner. At about the same time, researchers for pharmaceutical companies began developing synthetic alkaloids. The success of these products convinced many researchers that the future of drug research lay in the laboratory and not in nature, **obviating** the need to go tramping through field and forest on plant-gathering expeditions. Those who believed otherwise were regarded as **antediluvian** in their outlook. This attitude, however, changed several decades later when scientists discovered that new strains of organisms were resistant to synthetic drugs.

The science ethnobotany, the study of how the people of a particular region relate to the plants that grow there, came into its own when the limitations of synthetic drugs became obvious. The **doyen** of this discipline is Richard Schultes, a retired Harvard professor, who lived for extended periods among Native American people in North, Central, and South America. His research on mushrooms used by the Mazatec peoples of southern Mexico led to the development of Viskin, a drug used to treat heart conditions.

When Schultes first visited the Amazon rain forest in the 1930s, the popular view of this remote part of the world, fed by jungle adventure stories and movies, was that its **denizens** were savages armed with blowguns

and poison-tipped darts. Schultes disproved this notion, for he found the people he lived among to be gentle and peaceful. In particular, he learned a great deal from the tribal shamans, who functioned as both priests and herbalists. Many of them led **ascetic** lives in harmony with nature. Because of their role as healers in their communities, they had an encyclopedic knowledge of the medicinal properties of local **flora**, acquired from preceding generations and through experience. The eminent Harvard professor was happy to adopt the role of student, eager to learn from those whose knowledge in this area was clearly superior to his own.

Botanists who have studied the subject estimate that there are a quarter of a million plant species in the world. There could be as many as sixty thousand, many as yet unknown to Western science, in the Amazon rain forest. Sadly, this treasure house of nature is shrinking rapidly under the onslaught of logging operations that are creating new settlements and grazing lands for livestock. Plant species are disappearing at an alarming rate, and the **putative** loss to medical science is incalculable.

Not only plant species, but also the shamans who understand their healing powers are disappearing as Western popular culture penetrates the distant areas of the Amazon basin. To the young people, who eagerly **imbibe** this commercial culture of designer-labeled T-shirts, transistor radios, canned soft drinks, and video games, the life of a shaman with its long apprenticeship, its harmony with the world of nature, and its simple lifestyle has little appeal. The ethnobotanists who go to the Amazon today are in a race against time as they seek to acquire knowledge before the last of these forest **savants** is gone. It is an odd fact that the shamans' apprentices today are college professors, many from the United States.

Answer each of the following questions in the form of a sentence. If a question does not contain a vocabulary word from this lesson's word list, use one in your answer. Use each word only once.

1. Will synthetic drugs be **obviated** by the research ethnobotanists are now conducting? Explain your answer.

2. Why is it likely that most of the medicinal plants the shamans use are **perennials**?

3. Why is the loss of medicinal plants in the Amazon rain forest described as **putative**?

4. What makes up the **flora** of the Amazon region?

5. What was Schultes's purpose in associating with the shamans?

6. Why would it be inaccurate to describe the shamans' encyclopedic knowledge of plants in their region as **antediluvian**?

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7. In what way were the early **apothecaries** of the western world similar to the shamans of the Amazon region?
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8. Hundreds of years ago, what were some of the problems a sick person faced when trying to get better?
-
9. Based on the details provided in the passage about Schultes's career, do you think one could appropriately consider him a **doyen**? Explain your answer.
-
10. Why might alkaloids be described as "a double-edged sword"?
-
11. Why would it have been accurate to describe Schultes as a **denizen** of the Amazon region?
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FUN & FASCINATING FACTS

The word **antediluvian** is formed from the Latin *ante*-, "before" and *diluvium*, "flood." The flood being referred to in this word is the one described in the Bible. According to the story, Noah built an ark to save himself and various pairs of animals from this deluge. Such an event would have to have occurred a very long time ago. Therefore, anything described as *antediluvian* would have to be extremely old.

There are two separate explanations for the origin of the word **charlatan**. The first is that it comes from the Italian *ciarlare*, "to chatter," a reference to the rapid talk of the seller that distracts customers

while they are being deceived and separated from their money. The second is that it comes from *cerretano*, "a person from Cerreto," a town in Italy that was supposedly notorious for its smooth-talking vendors.

The term **flora** comes from Flora, the Roman goddess of flowers. The equivalent term for a region's animal life is *fauna*, derived from Faunus, a Roman god of nature whose followers were called fauns and were described as having the body of a man and the horns, ears, tail, and legs of a goat.