

Hosts and Guests

By Max Beerbohm

Learning About Words

Max Beerbohm's insightful essay concerns hosts and guests and how they differ. Some people are innately guests, while others are innately hosts. In the first paragraph Beerbohm mentions the interesting fact that the Romans did not have separate words for these two very different roles that we play in life. The word *host* ultimately comes from the Latin *hostes* which means "guest" or "host." Fortunately, however, for the English-speaking world, we were able to borrow from the old Norse word *gestr*, which brought us our modern word *guest* to distinguish the two kinds of people.

There are several words related to the word *host*, including *hostel* (also called a *youth hostel*, which is cheap or free place for young people to stay when traveling), *hotel* (a place, usually for travelers, to reside for a day or for an extended time), and *hospital*¹ (a place to reside, ostensibly to get well). Each of these words has the idea of providing shelter to an outsider—the role of all hosts.

Vocabulary

Use context clues to figure out the meaning of the italicized words. The answers are provided at the end of the exercise.

1. Tom was so *averse to* dancing that he refused any woman who suggested going to the prom.
 - a) opposed to
 - b) excited about
 - c) obsessed with
2. Grant gave an *equivocal* answer to my direct question.
 - a) openly deceitful
 - b) reasonable
 - c) unclear or ambiguous
3. It was difficult for us to receive criticism, but we appreciated Tom Wilson for his *candor*.
 - a) friendliness
 - b) direct honesty
 - c) knowledgeable advice

¹ *hospital* An older meaning for the word *hospital* is "a home for the aged or infirm," a meaning which we find in Anthony Trollope's novel *Warden*, the first chapter of which is titled "Hiram's Hospital." The novel centers around not a place where surgeons are performing operations, but a home for old men.

4. We thought he would be biased in the decision, but we praised the judge for being so *dispassionate*.
 - a) unbiased
 - b) principled
 - c) deeply involved
5. The proud man would not deign to speak to us.
 - a) be polite
 - b) be helpful
 - c) stoop
6. The editor wrote a very *ensorious* article that agreed with the reviews that the movie received from other critics.
 - a) critical
 - b) laudatory
 - c) self-promoting
7. Wendy was a giving, selfless, *altruistic* young lady, while her brother Wendell thought only about himself.
 - a) religious
 - b) able
 - c) selfless
8. How many *tomes* do you possess in your library?
 - a) volumes
 - b) shelves
 - c) librarians
9. The *gallant* soldier fought and died for his country.
 - a) brave
 - b) old
 - c) young
10. Bob *foiled* our plans for a picnic this weekend by agreeing to play tennis with his trainer at the gym.
 - a) promoted
 - b) forgot
 - c) sabotaged

11. John performed his duties on his first day of work with such *alacrity*, his boss went home pleased that he had hired the right person for the job.
- a) cheerful willingness
 - b) haste
 - c) carefulness
12. The cellist has never given a *perfunctory* performance in concert.
- a) exceedingly bad
 - b) mechanical without getting fully involved mentally or emotionally
 - c) long and drawn out
13. The recent government regulations seemed, at least in Fred's way of thinking, *redolent of* communist tyranny.
- a) reminding one of something
 - b) opposed to
 - c) preparing the way for
14. Pleasing both the the critics and his listening audience was difficult, but Tom *assayed* it and succeeded.
- a) deplored
 - b) reworked
 - c) tried
15. We were fascinated and pleased by the flower's *variegated* colors.
- a) varied
 - b) beautiful
 - c) having a deep red hue
16. Gabriel's offer to host the students for the summer was absolutely *munificent*!
- a) unusual
 - b) generous
 - c) civil
17. On hot, humid days, Bill often felt irritable and *torpid*.
- a) lacking the energy, strength, interest or will to do do something
 - b) having ample provisions; abundant
 - c) choleric; easily vexed or made angry
18. The *capacious* room held more than two hundred guests.
- a) crowded

- b) roomy
- c) evenly distributed

19. Even from a distance we could *descry* Bobbie with her bright yellow scarf and orange pants.

- a) notice
- b) harshly or vehemently put down
- c) greet

20. While his brother was disagreeable, stubborn and not *amenable to* any of his teacher's suggestions, Blake was very willing listen and learn.

- a) unrelentingly adhering to a plan
- b) appreciative of
- c) open to suggestions or advice

Vocabulary Exercise: Analogies

Write down the letter next to the relationship that most resembles the one given in small capitals.

Example: write : paper ::

grow : stature

sing : opera

manage : organization

engrave : metal

fry : heat

Answer: d

1. AVERSE : OPPOSE ::
 - a) reluctant : be excited about
 - b) prepared : be ready for
 - c) drugged : fail
 - d) luxurious : nettle
 - e) beautiful : decorate
2. EQUIVOCAL : UNAMBIGUOUS ::
 - a) argumentative : dallying
 - b) receptive : pugnacious
 - c) messy : organized
 - d) needy : ample
 - e) fast : drastic
3. CANDOR : HONESTY ::
 - a) alertness : sleepiness
 - b) prevarication : truth
 - c) bombast : humility
 - d) antagonism : hostility
 - e) vivacity : personality
4. DISPASSIONATE : BIASED ::
 - a) childish : mature
 - b) humid : wet
 - c) emotional : passionate
 - d) fair : easy-going
 - e) boastful : antagonistic
5. DEIGN : CONDESCEND ::
 - a) loop : crochet
 - b) grant : take
 - c) hesitate : win
 - d) drape : reveal
 - e) manage : handle
6. CENSORIOUS : DETRACTOR ::
 - a) busy : sluggard
 - b) devious : trickster
 - c) enthusiastic : wallflower
 - d) slippery : road
 - e) organized : club
7. ALTRUISTIC : NARCISSIST ::
 - a) stingy : benefactor
 - b) calloused : braggart
 - c) imitative : monkey
 - d) sizable : land
 - e) irritated : teacher
8. TOME : LEAVES ::
 - a) trench : war
 - b) volume : history
 - c) book : pages
 - d) literature : fables
 - e) story : plot
9. GALLANT : COWARD ::
 - a) brave : soldier
 - b) tyrannical : king
 - c) dastardly : villain
 - d) nihilistic : skeptic
 - e) lazy : go getter
10. FOIL : UNSUCCESSFUL ::
 - a) fix : damaged
 - b) calm : relaxed
 - c) shoo : pestering
 - d) isolate : large
 - e) lubricate : rough

Vocabulary Exercise: Fill in the Blank

Complete each of the following sentences with a word in the word bank. You may have to change the form of the word. None of the words are used twice.

WORD BANK

alacrity, perfunctory, redolent, assay, variegated, munificent, torpid, capacious, descry, amenable

1. _____ While John dawdles and seems unwilling to do what his parents ask of him, his older sister Emma does her parents' bidding with _____.
2. _____ Did Lucas seem _____ to his mother's suggestion, or did he resist?
3. _____ I thought that his great uncle and aunt were downsizing, but instead, they bought a house that was so _____, three families could live in it.
4. _____ Many reporters are saying that the recent fiasco in Afghanistan is _____ of what happened in Vietnam.
5. _____ Grace's brother registered for such a _____ list of courses that his advisor could not figure out if his major was in the humanities or in science.
6. _____ The hot humid weather of the tropics made Gianluca _____.
7. _____ The music teacher insisted that his students never play their music _____, but with all their heart and soul.
8. _____ From the distant southern horizon Anna Rose and Elise could _____ a sailboat coming toward them.
9. _____ After her parents' lecture, Bridget's brother _____ to do better.
10. _____ Jacob's _____ uncle paid for the schooling of all of his nephews.

Reading Questions

1. The author compares the English language to the English landscape in paragraph 1 in order to _____.
 - a) emphasize the English language's lack of words
 - b) express his satisfaction with the English climate
 - c) depict the significance of environment in a word picture
 - d) point out the blurred distinctions between words
 - e) state that the Romans were not so clever as the English

2. The purpose of paragraph 2 is to ____.
 - a) detail what hosts and guests generally do when they interact
 - b) satirize guests who generally act like “sponges” off the generosity of others and hosts who like to show off their wealth
 - c) communicate the idea that distinguishing hosts and guests involves understanding the innate characteristics of people
 - d) explain the reason why some people gravitate toward being a host and others toward being a guest
 - e) objectively explain the economical aspects of a common human interaction
3. Paragraph 3 implies that many people think that guests ____.
 - a) are more numerous than hosts
 - b) follow their heart and not their head
 - c) have nothing to offer in life and that is why they take on the role that they do
 - d) are not as admirable as hosts
 - e) have nothing but bad qualities
4. Which of the following does the author not directly state or imply in his essay?
 - a) The desire to be a host is completely selfless.
 - b) More hosts are found among the rich than the poor.
 - c) Personally, the author finds it more awkward to entertain those who are naturally hosts than those that are naturally guests.
 - d) Man is distinct from animals in that he plays host and guest.
 - e) Guests are humbler than hosts.
5. “Those tomes” mentioned in line 1 of paragraph 6 (printed in bold) refers to ____.
 - a) particular Roman histories that talk about an Italian family
 - b) incidents in history in which the host had devious intentions toward his guest
 - c) general histories of the interaction between barbarians and Romans
 - d) Biblical accounts of horrible violence
 - e) imaginative accounts of pre-historic times
6. Which of the following best identifies the Borgias mentioned in the essay?
 - a) a poor family known for their generosity
 - b) a noble family that were known for giving wine that the guests suspected were poisons
 - c) a noble family that was known to have poisoned its guests, but whom recent historians look on through a kinder lens.

- d) a poor Spanish-Italian family looked on favorably in former days, but not looked on with suspicion
 - e) a Spanish-Italian family that were splendid hosts but bad guests
7. The author states or implies all of the following regarding the Shakespeare and his tragedy of Macbeth except that ____.
- a) Although what he did was barbaric, Macbeth should be considered as no worse than his contemporaries.
 - b) Macbeth is the reason why the Scottish people are better hosts than the English and Americans.
 - c) Scottish people in general do not like Shakespeare's plays.
 - d) The main characters of Macbeth are perfect examples of bad hosts.
 - e) Macbeth was indeed a good host, and the Scottish understand that fact.
8. Why does the author relate a personal anecdote about receiving a hamper of twelve sausage rolls?
- a) to prove how selfishness can lead to deceit
 - b) to show that playing the host is neither something that comes natural to him nor something that he enjoys
 - c) to give an example of his greediness as a child
 - d) to explain why boys naturally grow up to be guests because they are naturally gluttons
 - e) to suggest that English boarding schools were unpleasant places by giving an example of a need to hide food from other boys because of extreme hunger
9. It is clear from the essay that the restaurants in the Soho district in London were ____.
- a) not of the best sort
 - b) unhygienic
 - c) places that catered only to the wealthy
 - d) always less expensive than the author as a host had suspected
 - e) places where hosts liked to trick his guests into thinking that they would have to pay the bill but then take the tab

"This," you may be sure he said to himself, "is my roof, these are my horses, that's a picture of my dear old grandfather." And "This," he would say to us, "is my roof: sleep soundly under it. These are my horses: ride them. That's a portrait of my dear old grandfather: have a good look at it." But he did not ask us to walk off with any of these things.

10. What does the author intend to express in the above passage about Mr. Wardle's roof, horses, and picture of his "dear old grandfather"?
- a) At the heart of hospitality is a sense pride in ownership.
 - b) As a character in literature Mr. Wardle was an ideal host unrealized in actual life
 - c) One's vehicle, house and family are the most important aspects involved in being a host.
 - d) As a very wealthy author, Charles Dickens himself was a host, not a guest.
 - e) Hosts are better serving at restaurants and clubs than in their own homes.

Writing: Classification and Division Essay

Max Beerbohm says that the world is divided into two kinds of people: hosts and guests, and he explains the characteristics of each. Because he divides people into categories and explains their distinctions, his essay would be termed a *classification and division essay*. Many thinkers—scientists, psychologists, physicians, philosophers, theologians—have classified people, environments, things and ideas in interesting and helpful ways. What categories would you set up to identify the people of the world? Givers and takers? Losers and winners? Optimistic and Pessimistic? Using Max Beerbohm's "Hosts and Guests" as your model, write an essay of your own in which you classify and divide people. You may set up two, three, or more categories. Make sure that your essay does not merely state the obvious, but rather communicates some insight into human nature. Your composition may be humorous.