

Bunnicula

by Deborah and James Howe

Classroom Favorites



Teacher's Guide by Joan C. Benson

A Perma-Bound Production

Synopsis

Recalling a family story involving a small bunny with suspicious and unusual characteristics, the family dog (named Harold) writes this tale from his perspective. Harold is uniquely bestowed with intelligence. Chester, the cat, was named for the author G. K. Chesterton. As a result of his early introduction to literature (by the head of the household, an English professor), Chester develops a penchant for reading. As a result of his great love of mysteries and tales of the supernatural, Chester has a highly developed imagination. This becomes very important considering the events that follow the arrival of a small rabbit.

The Monroe family arrives home from a Dracula movie one evening with a small box containing a very little rabbit. The rabbit has been found in a seat at the theatre. The boys, Toby (aged eight) and Pete (aged ten) argue about what to call the rabbit and where it will live in the house. To settle them down, the mother suggests a compromise, calling him "Bunnicula" combining "bunny" and "Dracula."

Chester and Harold are less than thrilled with their new company. The real adventure begins when Chester studies the little bunny closely late one night. After reading Edgar Allan Poe's "*The Fall of the House of Usher*," Chester notices the rabbit smile with what he thinks are little fangs (instead of the usual buck teeth). He is also convinced that Bunnicula is wearing a cape.

Chester, totally convinced that this new animal is a threat to the household, begins staying up nights to spy on him. He eventually catches the bunny out of his cage and finds signs of its mysterious trip to the Monroe's refrigerator. Strange-looking white vegetables are later discovered and no one in the family can figure out what has caused the phenomenon. Chester convinces Harold that this rabbit is truly a vampire and the family is in danger. He warns, "Today vegetables, tomorrow the world!"

Chester's antics while trying to reveal this horrible truth about Bunnicula cause much commotion in the Monroe household. He is first considered ill by everyone after he does a vampire impersonation wearing a towel draped across his back. Next, he reads *The Mark of the Vampire* and insists that Harold and he both wear garlic around their necks to render Bunnicula helpless. When the plan fails (because Mrs. Monroe disposes of the smelly garlic and vigorously

bathes Chester) he devises a new scheme. Having read that one can destroy a vampire by pounding a sharp stake into its heart, Harold and Chester become misled and try pounding a dinner steak on top of the sleeping bunny. Catching this scene, Mrs. Monroe furiously throws the beloved cat out the door. Harold escapes judgment by looking like an innocent bystander.

When Chester is finally allowed back into the house, he becomes the model pet by day. At night however, he continues with a renewed determination to stop Bunnicula by starving him to death. Harold has befriended the bunny by now and decides he must do something to save Bunnicula. Harold is convinced that the bunny just likes to eat vegetables his own way, by draining the juice.

The final escapade begins with Harold's rescue mission. He takes Bunnicula from the cage to the kitchen table where a large salad is waiting for the family dinner. After Chester enters the scene, both he and the rabbit end up in the salad while Harold barks wildly to ultimately save Bunnicula's life.

The conclusion is happy despite many complications. The Monroes decide all the pets should go to the vet -- Bunnicula because he is so scared and sick, Chester because he is behaving so strangely, and Harold in case he needs his seasonal shots. The vet prescribed a vegetable juice diet for Bunnicula since he is suffering from extreme malnutrition. Chester is diagnosed as having a nervous condition set off by sibling rivalry with the bunny, and Harold is relieved to find that his shots are all current!

Life returns to normal except for Chester. He becomes fascinated with psychology after seeing a cat psychiatrist twice a week for therapy. The mysterious bunny is no longer a stranger and doesn't seem quite as mysterious as before. Harold leaves it up to the reader to decide if Bunnicula could really be a modern-day vampire bunny.

Biographical Sketch

Deborah Howe died in 1979. She and James Howe wrote *Bunnicula* and *Teddy Bear's Scrapbook* together. They wrote for their own entertainment as well as others. Previously the Howes had theatre experience. James has continued to write since Deborah's death (mostly fun mysteries). Some of these titles are *The Celery Stalks at Midnight*, *Howliday Inn*, *Nighty-Nightmare*, and *Morgan's Zoo*.

Critic's Corner

The *New York Times*' credit that *Bunnacula* is a "mystery-comedy...sure to delight" makes a statement about the writing style penned here. There is humor for child and adult alike, with some suspense to make the plot roll easily to a strong climax. This should draw student readers into the story giving them a strong motivation to continue reading. Since research has supported long-held beliefs that students must read in order to read better, we applaud this type of book which will captivate and hold student attention with its strong plot and contextually sound supporting details.

General Objectives

1. To actively respond to the literature through spontaneous dramatization, story mapping, and writing
2. To examine and describe the concept of problem and solution in story plots
3. To use prediction skills to propose the author's solution to the story problem
4. To identify point of view in a novel and to demonstrate understanding through writing activities
5. To analyze the concept of friendship as illustrated by the main characters and to decide if relationships are adjusted by self-interest
6. To expand student vocabulary through meaningful context, discussion, and reinforcing activities

Introductory Activities

1. Have students illustrate their imaginative interpretations of a vampire bunny. Prepare an art display and hold a naming contest for such a creature prior to introduction of the book title.
2. Before reading any of *Bunnacula*, let students use their vampire bunny character in a group story-writing activity. Lead students through the writing process from brainstorming events, composing, revising, and editing the draft on chart paper or overhead transparency. By using the theme in a group writing activity, the teacher can use discretion in limiting the plot possibilities given the nature of the topic.
3. Discuss student knowledge of vampires and brainstorm their inherent characteristics. Poll the students to see what background knowledge they may have on the character of Dracula.
4. Present a collection of age-appropriate mystery stories to the students. After discussion of story plots, construct a chart listing attributes of this genre.

Meaning Study

Below are words and phrases used within the story. Using the context, explain the meaning intended. To assist in finding the passage with the term, page numbers have been given.

1. I had been left home by the family with the admonition to take care of the house until they returned. (p. 3)
(The family warned or gently cautioned Harold to watch over things when they left him home.)
2. ...but the Monroes were unable to decipher them because they were in a totally unfamiliar language. (p. 8)
(They couldn't decode the words or make out the meaning.)
3. He lifted his tiny nose and inhaled deeply, as if gathering sustenance from the moonlight. (p. 20)
(The bunny looks as though he is getting something from the moonlight that is a necessity of life. This is a reference to the suspicion that he is a vampire, who performs his acts by night.)
4. ...his eyes intense and staring, an unearthly aura about them. (p. 23)
(His eyes appeared to take over everything around him as though he were seeing things differently. They radiated a subtle power or light seemingly not of this earth.)
5. I was aghast. What did it all mean? Could Chester be right? Was this harmless little ball of fluff really a vampire? (p. 49)
(He was shocked and horrified at the possibility of Bunnacula being a vampire.)
6. "Hey maybe it's a vegetable blight, Mom." (p. 54)
(A blighted plant would be wilted or dead. He is saying that perhaps the white vegetables have some disease.)
7. He cackled menacingly and threw back his head as if he were laughing at all of us. (p. 56)
(He laughed in an evil way as though he planned to do harm such as a vampire would do.)
8. I felt myself floating, lost in them, (Chester's eyes) my will no longer my own. I felt an inexplicable urge to murmur, "Yes Master," when he walked slowly, steadily toward me. (p. 59)
(He couldn't understand or explain why he was having such strange feelings.)
9. Strange noises emanated from downstairs. (p. 62)
(The noises flowed out of, or were carried up from, the downstairs.)
10. Standing in the doorway was Chester, a strange pendant hanging from his neck. (p. 63)
(A hanging ornament worn around one's neck, typically a necklace with a locket. In this case, it was garlic.)
11. The body will then shrivel and disappear, as the vampire emits one last scream of terror. (p. 76)
(The vampire lets out or utters a final scream.)

12. In the days that followed, Chester's behavior was exemplary. (p. 78)
(Chester's behavior was perfect, model pet behavior as he tried to get back on the good side of the family.)
13. Chester's sense of timing was as astute as my own. (p. 87)
(Their timing showed good judgment and understanding of the situation.)
14. Chester was diagnosed as being emotionally overwrought. (p. 93)
(He was overly excited or disturbed.)
15. The Mark of the Vampire sits, its usefulness obsolete, on its shelf. (p. 96)
(It is no longer read, having been put away and replaced by new books on psychology.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages from the book.

1. What was so unique about the Monroe household?
(Mr. Monroe is a professor, Mrs. Monroe is a lawyer and the pets are considered special. Everyone treats everyone else with great respect for his or her intelligence which is demonstrated by the conversations the family carries on with the animals.)
2. When did Harold like to sleep in Toby's room?
(He always slept with Toby when he knew the boy had a leftover ham sandwich in his drawer or some chocolate cake to share.)
3. How did Harold describe the rabbit when the family first arrived home with it?
(He thought the bunny looked like Chester only with longer ears, a shorter tail, and a motor in his nose.)
4. How did the family finally arrive at the name Bunnacula for the founding bunny?
(Toby wanted to call him Dracula but Pete wanted to call him Mr. Johnson for the man who owns the theatre. Mother settled the issue by saying he was a bunny found at a Dracula movie so he could be called Bunny-cula, or Bunnacula!)
5. What is unusual about Chester the cat?
(Chester was named for an author and from his early kittenhood was an audience to Mr. Monroe's practice English lectures. He learned to love literature and was in the habit of reading every night while the family slept.)
6. How could Chester's love of horror stories and the supernatural affect his opinion of Bunnacula?
(He had enough information about vampires to stir his vivid imagination. Chester could have just thought up some weird looks and happenings that he attributed to Bunnacula.)
7. What were some of the possible reasons the family thought the vegetables turned white?
(The dad thought Peter had played with his chemistry set using the tomato as an experiment. Mrs. Monroe thought it had "gone bad" or rotted. Later when more white vegetables appeared, they thought something had gone wrong with the refrigerator or maybe there was a vegetable blight. Pete mentioned the possibility of the use of DDT.)
8. Compare Harold and Chester as scholars. How are they alike and how are they different?
(Harold could apparently read and write since he authored the story, but he confessed his problem with words. He struggled with word meaning and must have a limited vocabulary since he didn't know what a parrot was. However he did feel as though he was smart, but he didn't read as much as Chester did. Chester apparently read so much that he had an enormous vocabulary and was considered much more scholarly.)
9. Why was it important that the note around Bunnacula's neck was in a language of the Carpathian mountain region, specifically an area called Transylvania?
(Background information is important to this undeveloped clue in the mystery. Transylvania is a reference to Dracula's residence making an implication that it was a region from which vampires came.)
10. How is Bunnacula like a vampire and how is he different?
(He seems to be able to get in and out of his cage and the refrigerator by himself, and vampires supposedly can get in and out of locked rooms. Bunnacula looks like he has fangs like a vampire. He doesn't eat vegetables but bites them and sucks out the juices as a vampire would bite people and suck their blood.)
11. Why did Chester feel that human beings can be so slow?
(They didn't understand his attempt to dramatize a vampire and apply it to the situation with the white vegetables.)
12. Why did Chester insist the house wasn't safe anymore after Mrs. Monroe bathed him?
(He had read that garlic kept vampires from going anywhere, immobilizing them, so he had worn garlic and placed it around the house. Mrs. Monroe just thought he had been playing with it as cats are apt to play with things that bat and roll. After he had been bathed and all the garlic put up, his plan was then inoperable.)
13. How did Chester get confused with the steak? What did he hope to accomplish and why was he using a steak?
(He confused the homophones steak and stake. When the book The Mark of the Vampire suggested he could end the power of a vampire by pounding a sharp stake into its heart, Chester thought a steak would work.)
14. Why did Harold act so pitiful when Mrs. Monroe threw Chester outside after the steak and water attack on Bunnacula?
(He had gotten wet and didn't want it to look like he was in on the act with Chester. He was selfishly avoiding getting into trouble and ended up getting to eat the ruined steak.)
15. How did Harold feel about Bunnacula? Did he agree with Chester's viewpoint?
(Harold seemed to wonder at times if Chester was right and at times cooperated with his schemes. But overall he sympathized with the little bunny's plight and actually tried to make friends with him.)

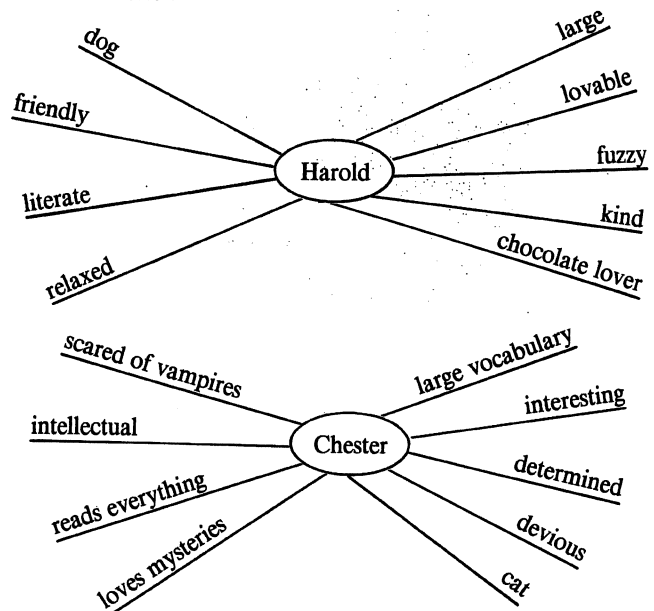
16. Why did Chester behave so well for the days after the steak incident?
(He knew how much trouble he'd gotten into so he became more devious with his plot to get rid of Bunnacula.)
17. What did Chester mean when he said, "It may seem harsh, but I'm only being cruel to be kind," as he proceeded to starve the little rabbit?
(He thought he was saving the world from a vampire so he had to be cruel to Bunnacula to be kind to everyone else.)
18. Prior to reading Chapter Eight, predict what plans Harold might have up his sleeve to save Bunnacula from starvation. Write your ideas down and compare with the actual story. How alike or different is your prediction from the author's idea?
(This can be done as a whole class activity, or individually.)
19. How did Harold save Bunnacula from Chester in the salad bowl incident?
(He could see that Chester was going to attack the dazed, starving bunny so Harold barked as loud as he could bringing the family into the scene.)
20. Do you think Bunnacula was really a vampire rabbit or not? Support your answer with your reasons.
(Possible answers will vary but students should validate their viewpoint with supporting details.)
21. If you were Harold, could you have remained friends with Chester and Bunnacula both? Why or why not?
(Accept logical answers that students support with reasons.)
22. Why do you think Chester quit worrying about Bunnacula being a vampire?
(Chester reasoned that since Bunnacula was now receiving vegetable juice he would be content and not feel the urge to attack anything else. No more white vegetables appeared in the household. Also the psychiatrist diverted his attention and his intellect was absorbed in new learning.)
23. What is the main story problem?
(Bunnacula is perceived by Chester to be a real vampire and his life became endangered as various plans were employed to end his supernatural powers.)
24. Does the problem get solved? How?
(Chester gets so obsessed with his dilemma that he gets in trouble with the family and Harold turns against him in an effort to save the bunny. They all end up at the vet who solves the problem by recommending vegetable juice for Bunnacula; and psychological help for Chester which totally distracts him from his vampire concerns.)

Student Involvement Activities

1. Purchase or borrow a young rabbit from a pet store to have in the classroom to observe. Make a chart listing his eating and sleeping habits. Compare its behavior with that of Bunnacula.
2. If a vegetable or fruit dehydrator is available, try an experiment to see what happens when vegetables lose their juice. Do they

look like the ones in the story *Bunnacula*? Observe and describe the difference. Research to see if removal of all juice would discolor or just dry out the object.

3. Discuss whose point of view this story is written from. Give other story examples such as *The Kid in the Red Jacket* by Barbara Park and *Owls in the Family* by Farley Mowat and compare to stories written by a third person narrator like *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* by Mordecai Richler. Let students brainstorm together or individually to create their own characters. Decide on a story problem and solution as a pre-writing activity. Have students try writing their short story in the voice of the main character. Share stories in small conference groups, or in a whole class setting. Illustrate stories and, after revising and editing, display.
4. Let the children choose parts to spontaneously reenact the scene where the family discovers all the white vegetables and Chester goes into his vampire impersonation (Chapter 5). Have them find other scenes they might find interesting to dramatize.
5. Using a webbing or mapping technique, let the class think up characteristics as well as physical descriptions of Harold and Chester.



Divide the children up into pairs. Give them interest inventories with which they can interview each other. After they have discovered some of their partner's interests and attributes, assign the task of making a character web about each other. Follow up by having students write descriptive characterization paragraphs composed with the webs as outlines.

6. Make bingo boards using the words listed in the Meaning Study section. Choose a caller to read the meanings while players cover the words that match. Follow up by letting the children divide into teams, finding other words from the story that are not familiar. Let them use the dictionary and the book to discover the context definition. Have each group make up their own bingo game, then when completed, exchange games.

7. Examine Harold's behavior toward Chester when they were getting into trouble with the plans to rid the house of the presumed vampire.

(When Chester got caught using the steak and tried to throw water on Bunnacula, Harold tried to look very innocent as water dripped from his ears. (p. 75) He indulged himself by eating the steak and getting petted on all evening while Chester cried outside. When Chester got sent to the vet for having "flipped his lid," Harold says, "Of far greater concern at that time, of course, was my own future, for on that night all that consumed my thoughts was the fear of the next day's injections! It all seemed hopeless indeed." [p. 92])

Divide the class into two groups. Have students discuss and decide if Harold was acting out of selfishness or if he was being loyal to his friend. Can he be a loyal friend and still behave the way he did? Take a class vote when discussion is finished.

Let the students write an essay on their viewpoint supporting their feelings with reasons. Plan for students to list or map their main idea and supporting details about friendship loyalty versus selfish motivation as a pre-writing activity.

Bibliography

Here is a list of other books by James Howe.

Carol Burnett: The Sound of Laughter

Celery Stalks at Midnight

Day the Teacher Went Bananas

Eat Your Poison, Dear

Fright Before Christmas

Howliday Inn

I Wish I Were A Butterfly

Nighty-Nightmare

Night Without Stars

Stage Fright

Teddy Bear's Scrapbook (with Deborah Howe)

There's A Monster Under My Bed

What Eric Knew

TEST

I. Vocabulary (30 points)

Complete the blanks by using one of the words listed below. Use the meaning of the surrounding words to help you.

Mr. and Mrs. Monroe gave Harold an (1)_____ about watching over the house as they left for the movies. He was used to it, though; he thought it was their way of making him feel needed. When they returned with the bunny Toby had found, a note was discovered around its neck. The language was unfamiliar to the Monroes, and the message could not be (2)_____. Chester began observing Bunnicula, especially watching every little detail that first night. He thought it looked like the bunny was getting (3)_____ from the moon (making him a night creature). He told Harold that Bunnicula's eyes had a strange (4)_____ about them, making him seem very distant. Harold was (5)_____ at the thought of the little ball of fluff really being a vampire.

After Bunnicula had gotten out and the vegetables were found dry and white, the family became confused. They thought maybe a (6)_____ had caused the vegetables to turn white. Trying to get the family to guess that a vampire was involved, Chester tried to act like one. He wore Mr. Monroe's towel for a cape and laughed (7)_____ as though he were evil. His behavior was (8)_____ to the family. They all thought he must be sick.

Harold was awakened in the night by the strange sounds (9)_____ from downstairs as Chester got the garlic out. When the dog went down to see what was up, Chester explained that the garlic would immobilize the vampire bunny. Chester tried to get Harold to wear a garlic (10)_____ around his neck.

After Chester was caught pounding the steak into the rabbit's little chest, he made a last attempt to end its life by throwing water on it. Supposedly the vampire's body would shrivel and (11)_____ a final scream. Chester was thrown out of the house overnight but in the days that followed his behavior was (12)_____.

When Harold planned to rescue Bunnicula from starvation, his timing was (13)_____. He had checked out every detail as to where every family member would be so the bunny could eat the salad. The problem arose when Chester arrived on the scene, ready to mess up the plan. Soon cat, rabbit, and salad were flying in every direction so Harold had no choice but to alert the family.

The vet decided that Chester was (14)_____ with feelings of jealousy toward the new rabbit. *The Mark of the Vampire* became (15)_____ as Chester received therapy. He studied new books like *Finding Yourself by Screaming a Lot* and was content that Bunnicula was a modern vampire who drinks vegetable juice. Harold's life returned to a more normal routine and he adjusted to having a new friend, Bunnicula, as well as weird Chester.

admonition	aghost	astute	aura	deciphered
emanating	emit	exemplary	inexplicable	menacingly
pendant	plight	obsolete	overwrought	sustenance

II. Matching (12 points)

Choose the character described. Put the letter of the character in front of each sentence.

- | | | |
|--------------|---------|----------------|
| a. Chester | b. Toby | c. Harold |
| d. Bunnicula | e. Pete | f. Mrs. Monroe |

- _____ 1. "Most people call me a mongrel but I have pretty fancy bloodlines running through these veins."
- _____ 2. ". . . he has developed a very vivid imagination."
". . . developed a taste for reading early in life."
- _____ 3. ". . . hadn't changed his socks for a week."
". . . doesn't believe in sharing."
- _____ 4. ". . . always the practical one." ". . . a lawyer."
- _____ 5. ". . . he's got longer ears and a shorter tail. And a motor in his nose."
". . . was a good listener."
". . . cute to look at, but generally useless."
- _____ 6. "a nice kind . . . shares his stash with me."
"But sometimes he thinks he's funny and he plays little games with me."

III. True/False (40 points)

Write T in front of the sentence if it is a true statement. Write F in front of the sentence if any part of it is not true.

- _____ 1. Mrs. Monroe thought Bunnacula was a good name because the new pet was a vampire bunny.
- _____ 2. Chester heard a caravan of gypsies surrounding the house with their violin playing and magic.
- _____ 3. Harold enjoyed playing with Bunnacula when Chester was too tired.
- _____ 4. Chester felt the bunny was a danger to the household.
- _____ 5. Chester only imagined that Bunnacula got out of his cage at night.
- _____ 6. Mr. Monroe thought Pete had turned the tomato white with a chemistry experiment.
- _____ 7. Harold had a good mind but a limited vocabulary.
- _____ 8. Chester thought the note around Bunnacula's neck was an important clue to the bunny being a vampire.
- _____ 9. Harold never once believed Bunnacula was a vampire.
- _____ 10. Chester thought the family would take a hint from his vampire act and figure out why the tomato was white.
- _____ 11. Chester loved his sweater with the little purple mice on it.
- _____ 12. Mrs. Monroe scolded Chester and bathed him after the garlic was left all over.
- _____ 13. Bunnacula couldn't leave his cage because the garlic was too much for him.
- _____ 14. Harold tried to look innocent when Chester got caught.
- _____ 15. Chester starved Bunnacula by keeping guard over his cage.
- _____ 16. Harold's sense of timing was no good or Bunnacula could have eaten the salad.
- _____ 17. Bunnacula was saved from possible harm by Harold's barking during the salad bowl incident.
- _____ 18. Mr. Monroe figured out what was wrong with Chester.
- _____ 19. The vet solved the problem when he decided the bunny should go on a liquid diet.
- _____ 20. Harold was eager to learn how to be in touch with himself just like Chester.

IV. Multiple Choice (8 points)

Choose the best ending to each sentence. Write the letter in the blank.

- _____ 1. Harold thought cats are strange when they
- A. eat.
 - B. decide where to sit.
 - C. bathe themselves.
 - D. play with string.
- _____ 2. Chester was so fascinated with the pendulum that he
- A. tried to smack it.
 - B. climbed up it.
 - C. thought it was a toy.
 - D. checked the time.
- _____ 3. When Chester threw the water dish, Harold tried to look pathetic because
- A. he was sorry he got wet.
 - B. he was sorry for Chester.
 - C. he wanted the steak and didn't want to get in trouble.
 - D. he was hysterical from the incident.
- _____ 4. Chester was getting therapy because
- A. he was tired of reading novels.
 - B. he had caused so much trouble.
 - C. he was through proving Bunnacula was a vampire.
 - D. he was diagnosed by the vet as overwrought with a serious case of sibling rivalry.

V. Essay Questions (10 points)

1. Explain your feelings about the incident when Chester was sent to sleep outside while Harold got to eat the steak and was given attention all evening. Do you believe it was fair, and how would you have felt if you were Chester?

2. Harold asks you to draw your own conclusions about this story. What do you think of the way it ended? Do *you* think there is enough evidence given to prove Bunnacula really was a vampire? How do you explain his mysterious escapes from his cage, his ability to get into the refrigerator, and his fangs? Support your answer with reasons why you feel the way you do.

ANSWER KEY

I. Vocabulary (30 points)

1. admonition
2. deciphered
3. sustenance
4. aura
5. aghast
6. plight
7. menacingly
8. inexplicable
9. emanating
10. pendant
11. emit
12. exemplary
13. astute
14. overwrought
15. obsolete

II. Matching (12 points)

- | | |
|------|------|
| 1. C | 4. F |
| 2. A | 5. D |
| 3. E | 6. B |

III. True/False (40 points)

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 11. F |
| 2. F | 12. T |
| 3. F | 13. T |
| 4. T | 14. T |
| 5. F | 15. F |
| 6. T | 16. F |
| 7. T | 17. T |
| 8. T | 18. F |
| 9. F | 19. T |
| 10. T | 20. F |

IV. Multiple Choice (8 points)

1. B
2. A
3. C
4. D

V. Essay Questions (10 points)

Answers will vary.

TEACHER'S NOTES



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