

MAKING NEW WORDS YOUR OWN

Lesson 7 CONTEXT: Expression

The Romance of Elizabeth and Robert Browning

There really is poetry in the romance of Elizabeth and Robert Browning. Both Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861) and her husband Robert Browning (1812–1889) are ranked among England’s greatest poets. They are equally famous for their romance, including their elopement; for Elizabeth’s love poems to Robert, published as *Sonnets from the Portuguese*; and for their sixteen years of marital happiness.

In the following exercises, you will have the opportunity to expand your vocabulary by reading selected thoughts about the romance of Elizabeth and Robert Browning from various students. Below are ten vocabulary words that will be used in these exercises.

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|-----------|----------|--------------|----------|-----------|
| aesthetic | cliché | emphatically | paradox | recipient |
| charisma | conceive | martial | prolific | wan |

EXERCISE 1 Mapping

Directions. In the item below, a vocabulary word is provided and used in a sentence. Take a guess at the word’s meaning and write it in the box labeled **Your Guess**. Then look the word up in your dictionary and write the definition in the box labeled **Definition**. In the **Other Forms** box, write as many other forms of the word, such as adjective and noun forms, as you can think of or find in your dictionary.

Then, following the same procedure, draw your own map for each of the nine remaining vocabulary words. Use a separate sheet of paper.

1. **aesthetic**

What I find most appealing about the Brownings is their **aesthetic** awareness. They both must have been extremely sensitive to beauty in nature and in the arts.

Your Guess: _____

Definition: _____

Other Forms: _____

2. **charisma**

Robert first fell in love with Elizabeth through her poetry. In her poems she showed a charisma, a special charm, that captured Robert’s—as well as the general public’s—imagination and devotion.

3. **cliché**

It may be a **cliché** to say that with the Brownings it was “love at first sight,” but I think that the expression, though overused, is appropriate.

4. **conceive**

I can’t **conceive** how Robert Browning had the nerve to write to Elizabeth after reading her books of poetry and to say, “I do . . . love these books with all my heart—and I love you, too.” That is just beyond my grasp!

5. **emphatically**

I’m glad that Elizabeth and Robert married, even though her father had declared **emphatically** that none of his twelve children should marry. He had no right to forcefully impose such a rule on his children.

6. **martial**

Well, I was disappointed in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* because I don’t care for all this romance stuff. I thought the poems were about a Portuguese warrior, but they are far from **martial** poems!

7. **paradox**

“The more things change, the more they stay the same” is a **paradox** that comes to mind after reading about the Brownings’ romance. That seemingly contradictory statement suggests that, while the world has changed much since the 1800s, love has not.

8. **prolific**

The Brownings had a happy marriage, but they were not **prolific** parents. They had only one child, Robert Wiedeman Barrett-Browning, who was known as Pennini or Pen.

9. **recipient**

After the Brownings had been married three years, Elizabeth gave Robert the manuscript of the sonnets she had written about him. He must have been a proud **recipient** of those sonnets.

10. **wan**

Elizabeth Browning was a semi-invalid and spent a lot of time indoors, where she read and wrote. As a result of not being outdoors much, I imagine that she probably often looked sickly pale, or **wan**.

EXERCISE 2 Context Clues

Directions. Scan the definitions in Column A. Then think about how the boldface words are used in the sentences in Column B. To complete the exercise, match each definition in Column A with the correct vocabulary word from Column B. Write the letter of your choice on the line provided; then write the vocabulary word on the line preceding the definition.

COLUMN A

11. word: _____

adj. military; suggesting war; warlike

12. word: _____

n. an overused idea or expression; a trite saying

13. word: _____

adj. producing a great deal of something; producing many young or much fruit

14. word: _____

adj. sickly pale or faint; colorless

15. word: _____

adj. artistic; having to do with art or beauty; sensitive to art and beauty

16. word: _____

n. a special quality of leadership or a special charm that captures the public imagination and inspires devotion

17. word: _____

n. a person who receives something

18. word: _____

adv. forcefully; assertively

19. word: _____

n. a statement that may be true but that seems to say contradictory things

20. word: _____

v. to imagine or develop as an idea; to understand or grasp; to become pregnant with

COLUMN B

(A) The Brownings were **prolific** authors and produced many poems, partly because they both began writing at a very early age.

(B) I wonder how the thirteen-year-old Elizabeth conceived the idea for her epic poem *The Battle of Marathon*. How could a young girl come up with such an ambitious idea?

(C) The poem's **martial** title certainly is not in keeping with Elizabeth Browning's image as a love poet.

(D) I'm sure you have heard the expression "All's fair in love and war." Although a **cliché**, the expression applies to Elizabeth's first epic poem.

(E) Love, as I'm sure the Brownings discovered, is often full of **paradoxes**, for emotions can be contradictory.

(F) The image of Elizabeth as a **wan**, or sickly, poet who only read and wrote is not completely accurate. She actually was quite active in social causes.

(G) This woman, famous for her love sonnets, **emphatically** endorsed women's issues and also forcefully protested against slavery.

(H) I envy the Brownings' **aesthetic** life in Florence, Italy, where they were surrounded by much art and beauty.

(I) Poets today do not inspire public devotion as they once did. One can only imagine the **charisma** of a Robert Browning. His charms would probably be lost on contemporary people.

(J) From what we've read, it sounds as if the Brownings were certainly worthy **recipients** of all the honors and love they received.

EXERCISE 3 Sentence Completion

Directions. For each of the following items, circle the letter of the choice that best completes the meaning of the sentence or sentences.

21. Elizabeth Browning's line "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways" may be considered a _____ today because it is overused.

- (A) charisma
(B) conception
(C) paradox
(D) recipient
(E) cliché

22. In the sonnet that starts "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways," Elizabeth _____, or forcefully, declares her love.

- (A) aesthetically
(B) conceivably
(C) emphatically
(D) martially
(E) prolifically

23. The poet obviously has much love to give, and if you ask me, her beloved was a lucky _____ of her affections.

- (A) recipient
(B) cliché
(C) paradox
(D) emphasis
(E) charisma

24. Although some love poems I have read contain contradictory statements, that sonnet doesn't contain any _____.

- (A) clichés
(B) paradoxes
(C) postulates
(D) recipients
(E) mentors

25. I would look as _____ as a sick person if I had to express my love as openly as Elizabeth Browning did!

- (A) aesthetic
(B) martial
(C) prolific
(D) wan
(E) whimsical

26. Can you possibly imagine, or _____ of, yourself as the _____ of someone's love sonnets?

- (A) harass . . . recipient
(B) conceive . . . paradox
(C) repress . . . cliché
(D) conceive . . . recipient
(E) grimace . . . charisma

27. Some people, such as the Brownings, enjoy _____ lives and artistic pursuits, but I would become colorless and _____ living such a life.

- (A) paradoxical . . . aesthetic
(B) wan . . . martial
(C) aesthetic . . . wan
(D) martial . . . paradoxical
(E) conceivable . . . wan

28. In contrast to the Brownings, I _____ state, with all the force in me, that I want an adventurous life. You may see me in _____ garb as an army officer someday.

- (A) aesthetically . . . prolific
(B) conceivably . . . emphatic
(C) martially . . . clichéd
(D) prolifically . . . wan
(E) emphatically . . . martial

29. My sister's goal is to "follow in the footsteps" of the Brownings (forgive the _____ or trite saying) so that she can become a _____ poet with many successful books.

- (A) cliché . . . prolific
(B) recipient . . . martial
(C) paradox . . . prolific
(D) recipient . . . clichéd
(E) charisma . . . conceivable

30. In the portrait of Elizabeth Browning, the painter succeeded in capturing that special charm that we call _____. The beautiful background certainly suggests her _____ nature.

- (A) paradox . . . charismatic
(B) charisma . . . aesthetic
(C) emphasis . . . wan
(D) cliché . . . aesthetic
(E) recipient . . . prolific