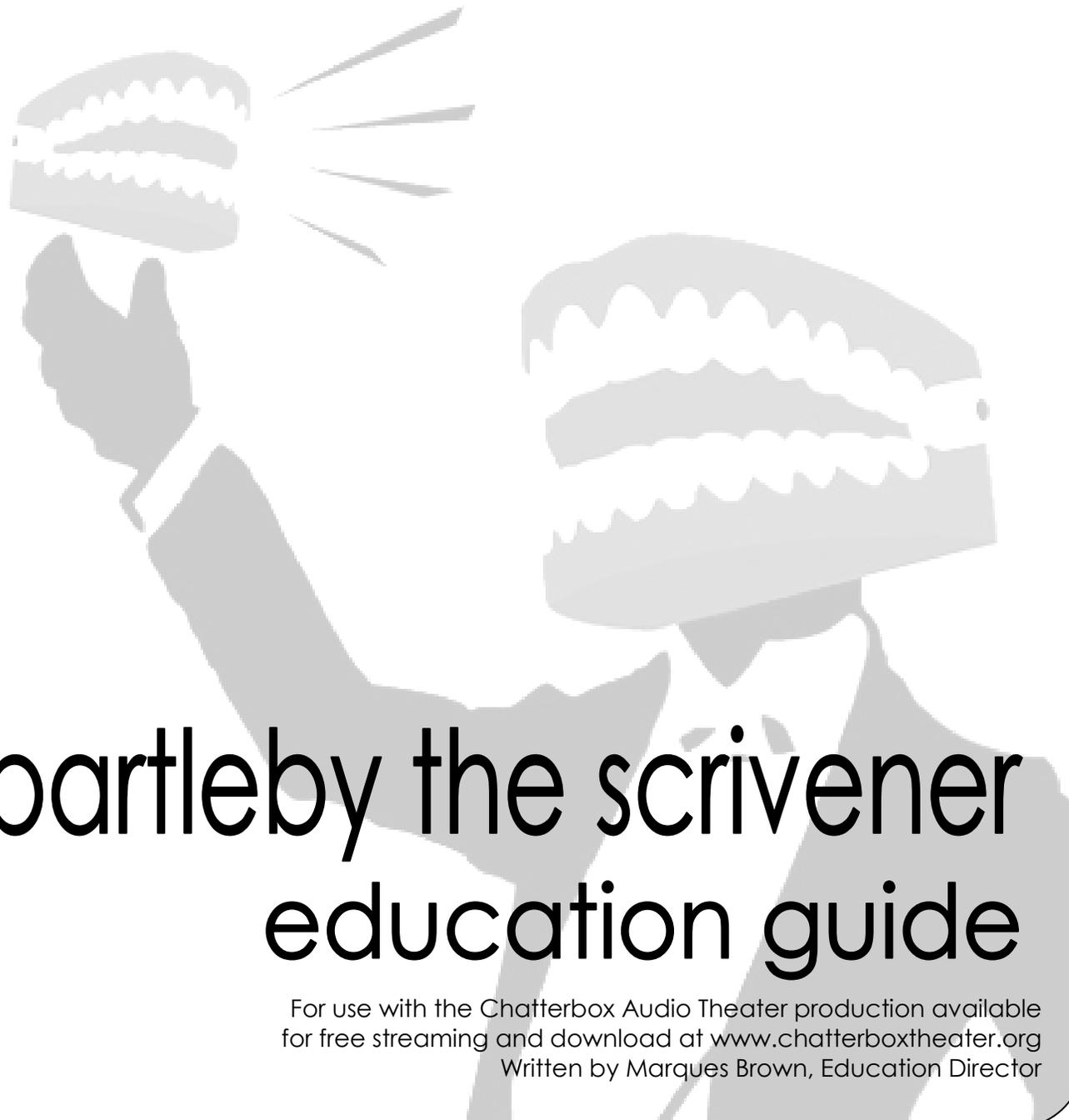


CHATTERBOX AUDIO THEATER

www.chatterboxtheater.org



bartleby the scrivener education guide

For use with the Chatterbox Audio Theater production available
for free streaming and download at www.chatterboxtheater.org
Written by Marques Brown, Education Director



CHATT
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AUDIO
THEATER

about chatterbox

Chatterbox Audio Theater was created in 2007 by four friends with a lot of creativity and ambition but very little money. Based in Memphis, TN, Chatterbox creates fully soundscaped audio works for free streaming or download. With rare exceptions, Chatterbox shows are recorded live, with manual sound effects and as little post-production editing as possible.

Chatterbox is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. Every Chatterbox production is available for free streaming and download from iTunes or from the group's website, www.chatterboxtheater.org.

mission

Chatterbox Audio Theater is a non-profit web-based community theater that advances the exchange of ideas by channeling creativity and artistic collaboration into recorded audio works that enlighten, entertain, and inspire.

contact

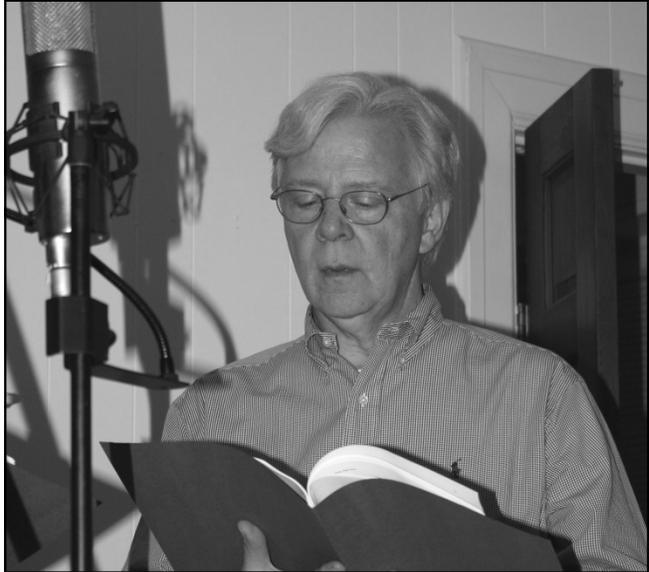
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Study guide designed with help from Heather Klein, www.heatherkleindesign.com

about audio theater



Once known as **radio drama**, audio theater is the production of dramatic performances written and performed specifically for audiences to hear. It had its greatest popularity on radio, before television was introduced, during the period known as the “Golden Age of Radio.”

The development of audio theater began as early as the 1880s, when theatrical performances could be listened to over the telephone! In the next ten years, phonograph recordings were all the rage, and music and comedy acts—like those of the vaudeville stage—were recorded and sold all over the country.

Eventually, the comical “sight gags” that were a part of the hilarious appeal of live vaudeville performances had to be adapted into “sound gags,” and “sound effects” for audiences at home listening to their radios or record players. By the 1920s, these techniques were improved upon—and the art form of audio theater was born.

As “radio drama,” it became the most popular form of mass entertainment from the 1920s through the 1940s, now referred to as the “Golden Age of Radio.” Classic shows such as *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, *The Shadow*, and *The Lone Ranger* kept people of all ages glued to their radios. Some of these shows ran for several decades.



about audio theater (continued)

Television sets began to pop up in American homes in the late 1930s and early 1940s. After WWII, the television started to replace the radio in most American homes as the main source of news and entertainment. By the 1960's, with a few special exceptions, radio networks began shutting down their radio drama productions altogether to make way for television shows, and instead focused on delivering news and popular music.

Since the days that television replaced the radio, audio theater has survived through the efforts of many individual theater groups like Chatterbox. Thanks to technological innovations such as computer software and the internet, audio theater is being resurrected online, and is proving a rapidly growing art form and source of entertainment.

Audio theater also is growing in another way as well. This sensory art form is gaining recognition in educational institutions around the world as an effective teaching method. Audio theater has been employed to teach subjects such as literature, theatre, and technology, but also unexpected fields such as history, social science, and ethics.

about bartleby the scrivener

"Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" is a novella by the American writer Herman Melville. It first appeared anonymously in two parts in the November and December editions of *Putnam's Magazine* in 1853. The story was reprinted in Melville's *The Piazza Tales* in 1856.

It is believed that Herman Melville wrote the story as an emotional response to the fact that *Moby-Dick* was not as successful a novel in his own time as he had expected. The work is also said to have been inspired, in part, by the essay "The Transcendentalist" by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Bartleby is a lawyer's clerk (a "scrivener," or copyist), "who obstinately refuses to go on doing the sort of writing demanded of him." In the year 1851, Melville seemed to feel similarly about his own previous work on *Moby-Dick*. Bartleby can be seen to represent Melville's frustration with his own situation as a writer, and the story itself is "about a writer that forsakes conventional modes because of an irresistible preoccupation with the most baffling philosophical questions."

summary

The lawyer who serves as Narrator runs a law practice on Wall Street in New York. The Narrator tells us the story of Bartleby, whom he finds to be the most interesting of all the employees he has ever had. Before hiring Bartleby, the Narrator employed two other scribes, or copyists. (Before the technology to make photocopies was invented, scribes hand-copied legal documents such as contracts.) Their nicknames are Turkey and Nippers. Ginger Nut, an errand boy, is the final member of the office. All of the Narrator's employees have their positive traits, as well as their own set of peculiar quirks and faults.

Bartleby comes to the office in answer to an ad for employment. The Narrator hires Bartleby and gives him a space in the office. Bartleby proves to be an incredibly industrious worker, and the Narrator is greatly pleased with his performance. One day, however, the Narrator presents a document that needs proofreading. He calls Bartleby in to do the job, to which Bartleby responds: "I would prefer not to." This unhelpful answer takes the Narrator aback; he is confused and amazed by Bartleby's response, and by the calm manner in which it is delivered. He cannot even bring himself to scold Bartleby, and assigns Nippers to examine the document instead.

Bartleby's calm and straightforward refusal to perform his duties is repeated in increasingly outlandish ways. The Narrator does press Bartleby to explain his refusal, but cannot get a clear answer. Angry at first, the Narrator soon becomes fascinated by Bartleby, and watches him closely. Despite the resentment of Turkey and Nippers, the Narrator keeps Bartleby on staff.

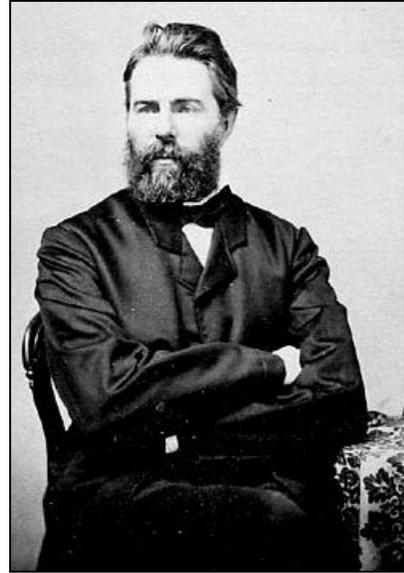
Shortly thereafter, The Narrator discovers that Bartleby has, in fact, been living in the offices, and has no other home. Soon Bartleby refuses to do any more writing, and the Narrator attempts to fire him. Bartleby states that he prefers not to go. Eventually, concerned for his reputation, the Narrator decides to move his offices, leaving Bartleby behind. The new lawyer who takes residence in the offices refuses to accept Bartleby's presence.

Before long, Bartleby is arrested as a vagrant and thrown in jail. The Narrator does his best to keep an eye on Bartleby's well-being, but Bartleby refuses to speak to him, or to even eat or drink. One day, the narrator attempts to visit Bartleby, only to discover that he has died.

The Narrator reflects on Bartleby's plight and his possible history, about which little is known. He ends the story with a heartfelt lament: "Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!"

about the author

Herman Melville



American writer Herman Melville was born August 1st, 1819 to a wealthy New York family. After his family suffered great financial losses, however, Melville received little formal schooling, and in 1839 he took to the sea. At the age of twenty-two, Melville found employment on a whaling ship bound for the South Seas. The next year, he jumped ship in the Marquesas Islands.

Melville took inspiration from his adventures in Polynesia to write his successful first novels, *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847). Several similar novels were to follow, but it was in 1851 that he published his masterpiece, *Moby-Dick*. The story is an intense tale about the excursions of a whaling vessel, and also serves as a symbolic examination of the problems and possibilities of American democracy. It is now regarded as a classic work of literature.

At the time of publication, however, *Moby-Dick* brought Melville neither acclaim nor reward. Increasingly reclusive and despairing, he wrote several more books in an attempt to explore other genres of fiction, though most of them failed to bring him recognition. Melville took to writing short fiction for magazines, a genre that seemed well suited for his writing style, and it is in this form that he created "Bartleby the Scrivener" in 1853, and "Benito Cereno" in 1855. After 1857 Melville changed his style again, and focused on writing verse.

In 1866, a customs-inspector position finally brought him a secure income. He returned to prose for his last work, the novel *Billy Budd, Foretopman*, which remained unpublished until 1924. Sadly neglected for much of his living career, Melville has since come to be regarded by modern critics as one of the greatest of American writers. He died in his New York home on September 28th, 1891.

cast & crew

Role	Performer
Bartleby.....	Bill Short
Narrator.....	Robert Arnold
Turkey.....	Matt Reed
Nippers.....	Kyle Hatley
3rd Lawyer / Officer.....	Ralph Hatley
1st Lawyer / Landlord	Allen Busby
2nd Lawyer / Mr. Cutlets.....	Joe Vescovo
Sound Effects	Erin McGhee
Musician.....	Katherine Whitfield
Dramaturge.....	Karen Strachan
Producer	Andrew Sullivan
Adaptation	Robert Arnold
Director.....	Robert Arnold
Announcer.....	Tom Badgett
Artist	Amy Hutcheson

characters

The Narrator

The Narrator is an unnamed lawyer. He owns a law firm on Wall Street, and employs four men as scriveners, or copyists. The Narrator is “rather elderly,” level-headed, industrious, and has a good mind for business. He is a good manager of people, and knows how to work well with them—that is, until he meets Bartleby.

Bartleby

Bartleby is one of the men hired by the Narrator to serve as a scrivener, or law-copyist. He is young, and starts out as an excellent copyist. But when asked to proofread his own work, he replies that he “would prefer not to.” Bartleby soon answers every request made of him with this awkward but straightforward phrase, slowly causing the Narrator, and his fellow scriveners, great distress.

Turkey

Turkey is the eldest employee of the Narrator. He is a good worker in the morning, but in the latter half of the day, he gets a short temper, and he becomes visibly flustered. Because of this, he makes more mistakes in his work in the afternoon.

Nippers

Nippers is another scrivener employed by the Narrator, and his character acts as the perfect foil for Turkey. Nippers is young, and he works best in the afternoon. In the morning, however, he is troubled by stomach problems and a constant need to adjust the height of his desk.

Ginger Nut

Ginger Nut represents the lowest rung on the ladder of the Narrator's assistants. He has been given this nickname by the others because Turkey, Nippers, and Bartleby often send him to get ginger nut cakes for them to snack on.

themes, motifs, and symbols

Literary works often use **themes** (unifying or dominant ideas), **motifs** (recurring subjects, ideas, or other patterns), and **symbols** (an object or image used to represent a larger idea). Below are just a few examples and suggestions of these literary devices to explore in your classroom discussions.

THEME: Charity, selfishness, and materialism

In “Bartleby the Scrivener,” Melville takes a somewhat critical view of “charity,” and especially of how such influences as materialism and capitalism affect it. Throughout the story, the Narrator allows Bartleby to continue in his employ despite Bartleby’s refusal to do the work assigned to him. Several times, the Narrator abandons Bartley, only to return with even more personally sacrificial—and desperate—offers. He is denied the ability to help Bartleby, though, as the young man always responds to his “charity” with the statement that he “prefers not to” take him up on his offers. There is a sense that the Narrator’s attempts to help Bartleby, while increasingly generous, are a way to “purchase” self-approval or, in his own words, a “sweet morsel for his conscience.” In a broader sense, he also believes he is making the best use possible of Bartleby, which satisfies his analytical mind. Nevertheless, we are left with the feeling that the Narrator’s generosity may have, in fact, been a form of selfishness all along.

MOTIF: Food

One obvious motif in “Bartleby the Scrivener” is the many references to food. The names of two of the Narrator’s employees reference food: Turkey and Ginger Nut. In the story, the Narrator takes notice of the fact that Bartleby was never seen to be eating anything other than the occasional ginger nut cake. Materialism is a major theme of “Bartleby the Scrivener,” and therefore food serves as a powerful metaphor both for basic needs as well as for desire and overindulgence. Bartleby prefers not to deal with these things and ultimately dies of starvation. Bartleby’s death is symbolically caused by his withdrawal into apathy, but is physically caused by his refusal to eat, or rather, his “preference not to eat”—in other words, his preference not to engage in the avarice and greed of the materialistic world in which he finds himself.

themes, motifs, and symbols (continued)

SYMBOL: Dead Letters

At the conclusion of “Bartleby the Scrivener,” the Narrator relates the one clue he has to Bartleby’s history and bizarre behavior: that Bartleby once worked in a dead-letter office. “Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men?” The Narrator supposes that having to read all those dead letters—intended for people who are dead, missing, or otherwise unreachable—must have caused or exacerbated Bartleby’s depression, apathy, and emotional detachment.

The “dead letters” symbolize a number of things. Some critics look at “Bartleby the Scrivener” as a comment on Melville’s life, believing that the “dead letters” represent previous (and less popular) writings by Melville—including *Moby-Dick*, which he believed had fallen on deaf or dead ears. The letters also represent the drudgery of the emerging middle class, and the blue-collar work that they were associated with. Sorting letters and other repetitive manual tasks have always held the stereotype of being futile, depressing work. That Bartleby’s particular task is to deal with “dead letters” only adds to the futility and morbidity of the position.

entry points for teachers

1. Herman Melville
2. The publication process
3. Character creation and description
4. The business of Wall Street
5. Short story format
6. Audio theater
7. Narrative theater
8. Music in a story
9. Sound effects in a story

curriculum connections

English/Language Arts

1. Literary forms—fiction
2. Rhythmic nature of language found in the play
3. Recurring themes
4. Observation
5. Compare and contrast
6. Cause and effect
7. Outcomes, conclusions
8. Figurative Language
9. Make predictions about stories
10. Draw, dictate, or write stories that include settings, characters, problem/solution situations, a series of events, and a sense of sequence
11. Participate in group discussions
12. Express personal opinions about the play/story
13. After reading/hearing the story/play, identify the main idea, describe main characters, re-enact or map major plot elements, draw conclusions, and make inferences
14. Dramatize or re-enact story events
15. Describe the plot, characters, and setting in the play
16. Explain a speaker's message and purpose
17. Speak to express an opinion, persuade, or entertain

Social Studies:

1. Show how the economics of a society drive their business and practices
2. Show how personalities are similar and different
3. Explain and respect the diversity of people and their experiences

Science:

1. Discuss or report on the technical process of recording and reproducing sound
2. Examine the psychological connection between experience and behavior

shorter activities

1. Write short, original narratives that include characters, settings, and a sequence of events.
2. Compare/contrast "Bartleby the Scrivener" with other Melville works and/or character driven stories.
3. Write about or discuss relationships between music, story, and literature.
4. Adapt a familiar story into play form.

longer activities

1. The students will write letters about the play to specific people, depending on the content of your class. Students may write letters to the characters within the stories discussing their choices and motivation, and/or making predictions about what may occur to them in the future. Students may write letters to the actors, discussing choices the actor made in bringing his/her character to life, or techniques used within the play. Other students will also write a letter to a newspaper as a play critic, describing the play he/she heard, the production elements (sound effects, voices, music, etc.) and what he/she thought was effective (or ineffective).

2. The students will write reactions to specific questions and/or prompts relating to the story. Some examples are: "What does Bartleby's phrasing ("I would prefer not to") say about his character? What effect does it have on those around him? Why?" or "How do the themes of charity and/or selfishness manifest themselves throughout the story?" or "One motif that arises throughout the story is the reference to food, especially in the names of Bartleby's fellow scriveners (Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut). Why do you think Melville chose this kind of symbol as a motif?"

3. The students will listen to samples of sound effects used in the audio theater piece. They will discuss the role of sound in audio theater, and in theater in general. Students will speculate on what objects or devices were used to create sound effects in the audio theater piece, and will create their own sound effects using everyday objects.

vocabulary in part one

Avocations. A person's regular activities or occupations. *"The nature of my avocations for the last thirty years..." (00:18)*

Cadaverously. Like a cadaver or corpse. *"The appearance of Bartleby tenanted my chambers on a Sunday morning—with his cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance—had such a strange effect upon me that I slunk away from my own door." (17:01)*

Cicero. Roman orator and writer whose work was once regarded as the best possible model of prose. *"I should have as soon thought of turning my plaster-of-Paris bust of Cicero out of doors!" (09:39)*

Dissipation. A scattering or a wasting, here used in reference to Bartleby's talent or concentration. *"His steadiness, his freedom from all dissipation, his incessant industry..." (15:40)*

Ginger Nut. A small, brittle cookie flavored with ginger and molasses. Also called a "ginger snap." *"Rounding out this cast of characters was Ginger Nut, the office boy, so named for those peculiar cakes—small, flat, round, and very spicy—after which he was repeatedly sent by Turkey and Nippers." (07:02)*

Imprimis. In the first place; above all. From the Latin *in primis*. *"Imprimis: I am a man who, from his youth upwards, has been filled with a profound conviction that the easiest way of life is the best." (01:08)*

Master in Chancery. The New York Court of Chancery was a court of law that decided cases of "equity" or "conscience," where strict application of the law was considered too harsh. A Master in Chancery would take testimony, calculate fees, and assess damages for these courts. *"The good old office, now extinct in the State of New York, of a Master in Chancery had been conferred upon me." (01:49)*

Melancholy. A deep sadness. *"For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering, stinging melancholy seized me." (18:23)*

Moonstruck. Crazy; mentally unstable. From the idea that the phases of the moon could affect one's behavior. *"Prefer not to! What do you mean? Are you moonstruck?" (09:12)*

vocabulary in part one (continued)

Mulish. Stubborn; like a mule. *“Surely you do not mean to persist in that mulish vagary?” (13:54)*

Nonchalance. Lack of concern; indifference. *“The appearance of Bartleby tenanting my chambers on a Sunday morning—with his cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance—had such a strange effect upon me that I slunk away from my own door.” (17:01)*

Paroxysm. A sudden, violent outburst; a fit. *“Because Turkey’s paroxysms only came on at about twelve o’clock, I never had to deal with their eccentricities at the same time.” (06:39)*

Remonstrate. To express complaint or disapproval. *“I was willing to overlook his eccentricities, though indeed occasionally I remonstrated with him.” (03:52)*

Remunerative. Well-paying. The verb form is *remunerate*. *“It was not a very arduous office, but it was pleasantly remunerative.” (01:55)*

Reverie. A daydream; a flight of fancy. *“My mind then ran on in reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts.” (12:27)*

Scrivener. Prior to the invention of copy machines, a scrivener was a person who would copy (by hand) letters, contracts, and other legal documents. *“...a scrivener the strangest I ever saw, or heard of.” (00:50)*

Sedate. Calm; composed; undisturbed. *“...I engaged him, glad to have among my corps of copyists a man of so singularly sedate an aspect...” (07:51)*

Vagary. A surprising or unpredictable action or occurrence. *“Surely you do not mean to persist in that mulish vagary?” (13:54)*

vocabulary in part two

Apparition. A ghost or spirit. *"...as my friends continually intruded their relentless remarks upon the apparition in my room, a great change was wrought in me."* (06:37)

Billet. To be forced provide lodging for. *"...Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom."* (04:29)

Consumption. A progressive wasting away of the body, usually from tuberculosis. *"Did you know Monroe Edwards? He died of consumption at Sing-Sing."* (18:57)

Dead Letter Office. Part of the U.S. Post Office that handles letters that cannot be either delivered or returned. *"The report was this: that Bartleby had been a subordinate clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington..."* (21:30)

Deranged. Insane; mentally unbalanced. *"Deranged, is it? Well now, upon my word, I thought that friend of your'n was a gentleman forger!"* (18:42)

Dilemma. A difficult or perplexing situation. *"I had imagined you of such a gentlemanly disposition that in any delicate dilemma a slight hint would suffice."* (03:29)

Eccentric. Strange or odd. *"He—he is a perfectly honest man, you know, and greatly to be pitied, however unaccountably eccentric."* (16:48)

Incubus. A male demon or nightmare. *"I resolved to gather all of my faculties together, and forever rid myself of this intolerable incubus."* (06:45)

Mason. To construct using masonry or bricklaying. *"Rather would I let him live and die here, and then mason up his remains in the wall."* (07:13)

Millstone. A heavy circular stone used for grinding in a mill; symbolically, a heavy burden, like a millstone around one's neck. *"In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, afflictive to bear."* (00:45)

Perturbed. Disturbed; agitated. *"I thought all was going well, when a perturbed-looking stranger visited me on a certain quiet afternoon..."* (09:50)

vocabulary in part two (continued)

Quiescent. At peace; undisturbed. *"I now strove to be entirely care-free and quiescent, and my conscience justified me in the attempt..." (14:39)*

Upbraid. To find fault with; scold. *"I stood in the entry watching him a moment, while something from within upbraided me." (08:59)*

Vagrant. A person with no permanent home. *"A vagrant, a wanderer, who refuses to budge? Who has heard of such a thing?" (07:43)*