“My Furthest-Back Person” by Alex Haley

Build Vocabulary

Using the Prefix un-
Adding the prefix un- to a word creates an antonym, or word that is opposite in meaning.

Example: attractive unattractive

A. DIRECTIONS: Rewrite the following sentences, adding un- to the words in italics.

1. Alex Haley wondered whether the written stories of his grandmother could be proved authentic.

2. Haley was astonished because the results of his research had been expected.

3. The writer made progress on his book because he was interrupted for long periods of time.

Using the Word Bank

B. DIRECTIONS: Use a word from the Word Bank to complete each of the following sentences.

1. The book that made Alex Haley _____________________________ as a writer is Roots: The Saga of an American Family.

2. Haley’s investigations in the National Archives gave him a sense of _______________________.

3. To Haley, it was _____________________________ seeing in print the names of people mentioned by his grandmother.

4. Haley _____________________________ the stories of his family history.

5. The African linguistic scholar _____________________________ Haley about the handing down of the story through many generations.

6. Haley’s travel _____________________________ was the Gambia River in Africa.

C. DIRECTIONS: Circle the letter of the word that is the best antonym for the underlined word in each of the following sentences.

1. The girls were uncertain about what time the television miniseries would start.
   a. worried b. sure c. ignorant d. particular

2. Unfortunately, they would not be home in time to see the first episode in its entirety.
   a. probably b. rarely c. luckily d. cleverly
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Build Spelling Skills: Adding Prefixes

Spelling Strategy

The word uncanny is formed by adding the prefix un- to the word canny. Notice that the addition of the prefix un- does not change the spelling of the original word canny.

• Whenever you add a prefix to a word, don’t change the spelling of the base word. Notice the following examples:
  un- + afraid = unafraid  re- + invent = reinvent.

A. Practice: Add the prefix to each word. Write the new word on the line.

1. re- + arrange ___________________________
2. mis- + spell ____________________________
3. un- + interested ________________________
4. re- + educate __________________________
5. team- + mate __________________________
6. un- + believable ________________________
7. re- + build _____________________________
8. un- + necessary ________________________

B. Practice: Complete each sentence by adding the prefix to the word in parentheses and writing each new word on the line.

1. One day an (un- + fortunate) _____________________________ boy of the Kinte clan went to chop wood.
2. His relatives were (un- + able) _____________________________ to find him after that.
3. Some (un- + kind) _____________________________ traders had captured him and sold him into slavery.
4. His masters tried to (re- + name) _____________________________ him.
5. At one point Kinte escaped but was (re- + captured) _____________________________.
6. Alex Haley (re- + traced) _____________________________ Kinte’s steps from Africa to America.

Challenge: Some words, such as the word uncanny, are formed by adding prefixes to words that may be unfamiliar. For each item below, add the prefix re- to the given word. Then, write a sentence using the new word. Look up the word in a dictionary if you don’t know its meaning.

1. re- + cite ______________________________________________________________________________
2. re- + cycle ______________________________________________________________________________
3. re- + kindle ______________________________________________________________________________
4. re- + sketch ______________________________________________________________________________
5. re- + submit ______________________________________________________________________________
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Build Grammar Skills: Collective Nouns

A collective noun is a noun that in its singular form names a group of individual persons, animals, or things. For example, in “My Furthest-Back Person,” Alex Haley talks with an African language scholar who says the following:

“These sounds your family has kept sound very probably of the tongue called ‘Mandinka.’”

The singular noun family is a collective noun because it names a group of individual persons, namely relatives.

A. Practice: Each of the following sentences contains a collective noun. Identify the collective nouns. Write the collective nouns, and the type of person, animal, or thing they include in the context of the sentence. The first item has been completed for you.

1. The class of history students began to study Roots by Alex Haley.
   Collective noun: ___________ Type of person, animal, or object: _________
2. Haley did not know the tribe to which his ancestors belonged or where in Africa they lived.
   Collective noun: ______________ Type of person, animal, or object: ______________
3. He spoke to a number of African language scholars about the words and sounds he had heard.
   Collective noun: ______________ Type of person, animal, or object: ______________
4. A couple of scholars recognized the sounds.
   Collective noun: ______________ Type of person, animal, or object: ______________
5. Dr. Jan Vansina told Haley the name of his ancestors was the name of a very old clan in Gambia.
   Collective noun: ______________ Type of person, animal, or object: ______________
6. In Gambia, Haley met with a group of officials.
   Collective noun: ______________ Type of person, animal, or object: ______________
7. A trio of interpreters accompanied him.
   Collective noun: ______________ Type of person, animal, or object: ______________
8. He was greeted by the villagers and a herd of goats.
   Collective noun: ______________ Type of person, animal, or object: ______________
9. They listened quietly to the history of the clan.
   Collective noun: ______________ Type of person, animal, or object: ______________
10. After Haley told the story of his ancestor Kinte, he was welcomed by a throng of villagers.
    Collective noun: ______________ Type of person, animal, or object: ______________

B. Writing Application: Write a sentence for each of the following collective nouns. In your sentences, be sure to identify the individuals that make up the groups.

1. team ____________________________________________________________________________________
2. bunch ___________________________________________________________________________________
3. flock ____________________________________________________________________________________
4. crew ____________________________________________________________________________________
**Reading Strategy: Breaking Down Long Sentences**

Sometimes it is difficult to understand the meaning of a long sentence. However, a sentence that seems unmanageable can become easier if you break it into smaller parts. One way to break down a long sentence is to identify the subject of the sentence and then find what the sentence is saying about the subject. The sentence may have words and phrases that describe the subject or tell what the subject did. They may also tell where, when, and how the subject did it.

**A. Directions:** When you identify the subject of a long sentence, rethink the sentence with the subject as the first word. Use the chart below to find out what meaning is contained in each numbered sentence. Next to the number of the sentence, write the subject in the left column. In the other columns, write what the sentence tells you about the subject. You will not fill every column for every sentence. The first item is done for you.

1. During the next several months I was back in Washington whenever possible, in the Archives, the Library of Congress, the Daughters of the American Revolution Library.

2. Walking on, I kept wishing that Grandma could hear how her stories had led me to the “Kamby Bolong.”

3. So Kunta Kinte was down in some ship probably sailing later that summer from the Gambia River to Annapolis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>What Subject Did</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>was back in Washington, in the Archives, the Library of Congress, the Daughters of the American Revolution Library</td>
<td>during the next several months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B. Directions:** Sometimes writers use semicolons (;) to combine two or more sentences into one long sentence. Break the sentence below into three separate sentences. Write the sentences on the lines.

Now flat broke, I went to some editors I knew, describing the Gambian miracle, and my desire to pursue the research; Doubleday contracted to publish, and Reader’s Digest to condense the projected book; then I had advances to travel further.

1. ____________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________
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Literary Analysis: Personal Essay

An essay is a short composition on a single topic. A personal essay, unlike other types of essays or nonfiction accounts, contains intimate and detailed descriptions of the writer’s feelings and experiences. It also explains the meaning of the experiences for the writer. In reading a personal essay, the reader receives a personal portrait of the writer, often including the writer’s innermost thoughts.

DIRECTIONS: Eight of the excerpts below share the personal experience that characterizes a personal essay. The others could appear in any first-person nonfiction account. Write the word yes next to each excerpt that relates personal experience typical of a personal essay. Write no next to the others.

___ 1. And when a main reading room desk attendant asked if he could help me, I wouldn’t have dreamed of admitting to him some curiosity hanging on from boyhood about my slave forebears.

___ 2. After about a dozen microfilmed rolls, I was beginning to tire, when in utter astonishment I looked upon the names of Grandma’s parents: Tom Murray, Irene Murray . . . older sisters of Grandma’s as well—every one of them a name that I’d heard countless times on her front porch.

___ 3. Dr. Vansina telephoned an eminent Africanist colleague, Dr. Philip Curtin. He said that the phonetic “Kin-tay” was correctly spelled “Kinte,” a very old clan that had originated in Old Mali.

___ 4. The Kinte men traditionally were blacksmiths, and the women were potters and weavers.

___ 5. The first native Gambian I could locate in the U.S. was named Ebou Manga, then a junior attending Hamilton College in upstate Clinton, N.Y.

___ 6. He and I flew to Dakar, Senegal, then took a smaller plane to Yundum Airport, and rode in a van to Gambia’s capital, Bathurst.

___ 7. Ebou and his father assembled eight Gambia government officials.

___ 8. Walking on, I kept wishing that Grandma could hear how her stories had led me to the “Kamby Bolong.”

___ 9. Goose-pimplles the size of lemons seemed to pop all over me.

___ 10. They were all—little naked ones to wizened elders—waving, beaming; amid a cacophony of crying out; and then my ears identified their words: “Meester Kinte! Meester Kinte!”

___ 11. But I remember the sob surging up from my feet, flinging up my hands before my face and bawling as I had not done since I was a baby.

___ 12. Back home, I knew that what I must write, really, was our black saga, where any individual’s past is the essence of the millions’.

___ 13. Now flat broke, I went to some editors I knew, describing the Gambian miracle, and my desire to pursue the research.

___ 14. Doubleday contracted to publish, and Reader’s Digest to condense the projected book; then I had advances to travel further.