

Plateaus Vocabulary Text

Hello, this is AJ, welcome to the vocabulary lesson for “Plateaus.” Let’s get started.

We’ve got a few vocabulary words here in this article. Let’s start with the phrase “scattered among”, scattered among. So George Leonard wrote, he said that he found some good pictures scattered among a big group of pictures. So he said, “I found a few good pictures scattered among a pile of pictures”, so again, scattered among means mixed in with.

So you have a big pile, a big group of pictures, lots and lots of them, let’s say 500 pictures and then in that group of pictures, just mixed in with it are a few good ones. So, oh, over here, ah, there’s one and then somewhere else there’s another good one and then somewhere else there’s another one. So kind of randomly mixed is what that means scattered among.

And he said “They were scattered among the thrill of victory, agony of defeat shots.” So this is a common phrase, it comes from an old sports TV show The Thrill of Victory and the Agony of Defeat. Again, it was an old sports show and they always talked about the thrill of victory. And they showed a picture of an athlete, you know, very happy, smiling, jumping, “Yeah, I won!” That’s the excitement of victory, the excitement of winning. Thrill means excitement.

And then other times they showed pictures or videos of the agony of defeat. Agony means pain. It means strong pain, terrible pain. It’s a very powerful word. So agony is more powerful than just normal pain. It’s terrible, terrible pain, agony. So they showed athletes who were losing or who lost a big game or they lost something. And, of course, they look really unhappy, they’re crying, they look horrible. “Oh, pain”, the agony of defeat, the pain of defeat.

So most of the pictures that George Leonard was looking at were these kinds of pictures, they were pictures either of the thrill of victory or of the agony of defeat. And he did not want that kind of picture. He wanted a different kind of picture. He wanted a picture that showed mastery and so he found a few pictures there were not thrill of victory, not agony of defeat, they were something different.

They showed mastery and they showed athletes with serene faces which, is our next word, serene.

So, he talked about a runner named Stephen Scott, had a picture of Stephen Scott finishing a mile race and his face was serene, serene. Serene means calm, very relaxed and clam. So very serene and calm, not emotional, not “Yeah, I won!” and excited and not in agony “Oh, terrible”, no pain, just calm, very, very calm, serene, serene. So these athletes had serene faces. The masters had serene faces, calm faces.

And then next he uses the word strenuous. So another master, a gymnast, named Peter Vidmar. He found a picture of Peter Vidmar doing floor exercises – gymnastics - - and his body was in an impossibly strenuous position. Strenuous means difficult, very tough something that requires a lot of effort. So it’s the opposite of easy and lazy, right? Strenuous means, “Ah”, you’ve got to work very hard. Usually we’re talking about physically working hard, so we talk about, for example, strenuous exercise.

So, for example, walking slowly is not strenuous exercise, it’s kind of easy exercise. The opposite would be sprinting, running as fast as you can. That’s strenuous. You’re going to sweat and you’re going to “ha-ha-ha-ha” breath hard. It’s very tough exercise, right? It requires a lot of effort, strenuous, meaning very difficult, physically difficult. So strenuous, again, strenuous means physically difficult, strenuous.

So this gymnast, his body was in a strenuous position, a very difficult position, but his face was composed, composed. Now, again, here composed means in control and calm, calm and in control. So it’s the opposite of panic. It’s the opposite of crazy. It’s the opposite of out of control; composed means very calm, controlled and composed.

So this gymnast, his face again, was very calm and controlled. His face did not look like it was in pain. He wasn’t “Oooh”, it was just calm, relaxed, in control, composed. So we can talk about someone’s face being composed. It means their face looks very clam. They look like they’re in control of their emotions.

We can also just talk about someone, in general, being composed. “He’s very composed.” It means he’s very controlled and calm, especially when something is difficult or stressful. So we have a problem, most people, “Oh my God! Oh my God!” they kind of get crazy, they get worried, they get excited, they get upset. But if someone is composed they remain calm, they remain controlled. They don’t get upset, they are composed.

All right, our next word is delight, delight. He described Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who was a basketball player. Not now, but he used to be a basketball player. And when he was playing his face was a picture of delight. It means you could see delight on his face and delight just means happiness, happiness. So delight means happiness, delight, delight, happiness.

Our next word is privilege or privileges. So he said “I’m sure Kareem Abdul-Jabbar loved the money and the privileges of his career.” So in the...I guess it was the ‘80s, maybe...1980s Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was a big famous basketball player and he had a lot of money. He had a lot of privileges. Privileges are benefits, they’re benefits.

So his money gave him a lot of benefits. His fame gave him benefits. Right? He could go to expensive restaurants. He could stay in expensive hotels. He could fly first class. Everybody knew him. He was famous. These are benefits, the benefits of his career, the privileges, and the privileges of his career.

So he’s saying “I know that Abdul-Jabbar loved the benefits of his career.” He loved the privileges. He loved the money, the nice food, the nice hotels, the privileges, the privileges. But Leonard said “He loved playing basketball more.” He did love the money, he did love the fame, he did love the benefits, the privileges, but more than that he just loved playing basketball because when he played you could see on his face he was happy.

All right, our next word is plateau. I explained plateau a little bit, I’ll explain it really quickly again. A plateau has a physical meaning and it has a kind of general meaning. So the physical meaning, it’s an actual place. It’s a flat area on top of a hill or a mountain. So you go up a hill, up a mountain and then you have a big flat area like a table. That’s a plateau.

And plateau also has a very general meaning -- especially in learning -- that means a time of little or no progress. And so you’re learning fast, you’re going up, up, up and then you hit a time where you feel like you’re not making fast progress. That’s a plateau, it feels flat.

All right, our next word is inevitable, in-avoidable. And Leonard says that “Of course you will enjoy the inevitable spurts of progress, but you must also enjoy the plateaus.” Okay, first, inevitable. Inevitable means unavoidable; cannot be avoided. Inevitable means something absolutely will happen, it’s automatic. Can’t be avoided, can’t be stopped.

So what he’s saying here is that fast learning is automatic, you can’t avoid it. So if you’re learning, if you continue trying to learn, if you continue to practice, you absolutely will have progress, it’s inevitable. It’s absolutely, 100%, sure. So, again, inevitable means 100% sure, cannot be avoided, cannot be stopped, will happen automatically. All of those ideas together mean inevitable, inevitable.

Progress is inevitable. It means progress cannot be avoided, progress cannot be stopped, progress absolutely will happen, 100%, definitely, sure, inevitable. Progress is inevitable. And then he says “spurts of progress are inevitable”, so not just progress, but spurts of progress. A spurt is a sudden improvement or a sudden increase.

So, for example, we can use it with running. We say “a spurt of speed.” It means someone’s running slowly, kind of normal rate, da-da-da, they’re running, they’re running, they’re running and then suddenly they run faster for 10 seconds, whoosh, very, very fast and then they slow down back to normal speed again. So it was a short increase in speed. That’s a spurt, a spurt of speed.

We could talk about a spurt of energy. So you have a normal level of energy, normal, normal, normal and then suddenly “Yeah! Woo-who! Yeah, yeah, yeah!” and then back to normal again, back to normal again. Well that was a spurt of energy. It was a sudden increase of energy for a short time. So that’s what spurt means. It’s this idea of a sudden increase for a short time.

So he’s saying you have spurts of progress. You’re learning, learning, learning, kind of normal speed, normal speed, little by little, little by little, then suddenly, boom, a big fast improvement. You learn very quickly, you improve very fast, but it happens for a short time and then you go back to the plateau, back to learning little by little, step by step and then, again, another spurt and then another plateau, another spurt and another plateau. This is the normal process of learning.

Our next word is serenely. We’ve already talked about serene, so serenely obviously means calmly. Leonard says “You need to serenely accept every plateau.” You must calmly accept the plateaus. They are normal, they are inevitable, cannot be avoided. You absolutely will have plateaus in your learning and during the plateaus you’ll learn little by little, step by step. It will feel slow, but actually, subconsciously, you are learning very quickly.

That’s why the spurts will happen. Because your brain is learning, learning, learning subconsciously and suddenly the brain puts everything together and suddenly a big new improvement, a big new understanding and you feel like “Wow! I’m going so fast!” And then back to the plateau that’s serenely. You must calmly accept the plateaus, serenely accept.

And finally, is the word enduring. He says “To love the plateau is to love what is most enduring in your life.” Enduring means lasting. Enduring means happening for a long time, not temporary. It’s the opposite of temporary, right? Temporary is something that happens only for a short time and then it’s gone.

Enduring continues to happen again and again. It stays. It does not disappear. It’s not temporary. It’s similar to permanent. Not quite as strong. Permanent is stronger, permanent means always and forever. Enduring means for a very long time; happening for a very long time.

This process of plateaus and spurts, plateaus and spurts, it's enduring. It means it continues happening for a long time, again and again and again. It's not a temporary situation, it's enduring. It lasts for a long time. It continues happening for a long time. It does not disappear quickly. That is the word enduring.

And that is the end of the vocabulary lesson for "Plateaus."

Next is the mini-story.