

# IT DOESN'T PAY TO ENRICH YOUR WORD POWER

BY PETER FUNK

Today, the editors of Reader's Digest informed me that my services will no longer be needed, making this my final Word Power column. Does it really "pay" to enrich your word power? No. Writing this section the past twenty years, I've learned a plethora of words, but I still make almost nothing, my only payment consisting of a free subscription to Reader's Digest and an invitation to the yearly Christmas party. Now that I'm free, maybe I'll finally earn something for my retirement. Perhaps enriching your word power would "pay" if you were asked about one of these words on a game show called "Define this Word for Money," but otherwise, no.



1. **Penury** (PEN ye REE) n.—A: lack of pens.  
B: abundance of pens. C: pin the tail on the donkey.  
D: desire for bananas.
2. **Futility** n.—A: no money. B: just a big vocabulary.  
C: the epitome of. D: uselessness.
3. **Down-and-out** (DOWN and OUT) adj.—  
A: Australian homosexual. B: inadequate as both a  
football and baseball player. C: inadequate in so many  
ways. D: poor as a poor poor man.
4. **Sisyphean** adj.—A: Hey, sexy. B: You're stunning—  
such pulchritude! C: Oww. Why did you slap me?  
D: I said 'pulchritude,' not 'porky too.'
5. **On the dole** adj.—A: sex with the former majority  
leader. B: sitting on a banana. C: slipping on a banana  
peel. D: Poor as a banana.
6. **Impoverished** (NO mon EE) adj.—A: Maybe  
William Safire needs help B: with his On Language  
column? C: I should have gone into advice columns.  
D: I could have been the next Ann Landers!
7. **Indigent** adj.—A: indigestible. B: out of digent.  
C: digentiful. D: digentilicious.
8. **Pariah** n.—A: So you're not hiring, you mean?  
B: They called me a what? C: A persona non grata?  
D: Of course I know what that means.
9. **Retribution** n.—A: revenge. B: like of the nerds.  
C: like Montezuma's. D: Count of Monte Cristo style.
10. **Reader's Digest** (reed erz DIE gest) n.—  
A: popular magazine. B: rehasher of other magazines.  
C: unrewarding employer. D: my first victim.

# ANSWERS:

1. **penury**—[D] hunger for the plantain; as, Can you give me a banana? My penury has forced me to beg you for nourishment. Latin penuria (want a banana).
2. **futility**—[D] Uselessness, quality of having no useful result, my life apparently; as, Why does everything I do embody futility? Latin futilis (screwedoverness).
3. **down-and-out**—[D] Poor, making as much money as a writer; as, The down-and-out Ivy League graduate had foolishly assumed that he could be successful pursuing writing as a career.
4. **Sisyphean**—[E] Sisyphean; as, My life is so Sisyphean. Latin Sisyphus (Sisyphus).
5. **on the dole**—[A] Makin' whoopee with Bob Dole; as, The passersby were disgusted by the man in the alleyway on the dole. Origin uncertain.
6. **impoverished**—[C] Not poverished; as, I do not like being impoverished. Middle English, empoverishen.
7. **indigent**—[B] With no digent remaining; as, The indigent woman only had indigestible digent. Latin, indigens.
8. **pariah**—[A] A social outcast; as, He had no idea how a stupid small-dimensioned magazine had blacklisted him as a pariah. Tamil, paraiyar.
9. **retribution**—[A] Revenge, retaliation, vengeance, comeuppance, justice; as, Mortally wounding an enemy is perhaps the most satisfying retribution. Latin, retribuere.
10. **Reader's Digest**—[D] Victim number one; as, Dear Reader's Digest, I am about to kill you. Signed, Your Murderer. French, redersdiget (table of contents on cover).

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## VOCABULARY RATINGS

- 5-6 correct.....*Good, your mediocre vocabulary will lead you to success.*  
 7-8 correct.....*A bit overachieving, be careful.*  
 9-10 correct.....*Hired to replace me, I pity you.*

—LIPOFF  
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