

WOW Activities

from chapters 1-5 of *Britt-Marie Was Here* by Fredrik Backman

ACTIVITY 1: PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

Write one sentence about YOUR life for each word.

maintain - What opinion do you maintain strongly

Example: I maintain that children need to read books, not just watch videos.

Your sentence: _____

eligible - What are you eligible for? (library card, driver's license, health benefits, etc.)

Your sentence: _____

distinguish - What two things can you distinguish between easily?

Your sentence: _____

observe - What have you observed about life in your neighborhood or community?

Your sentence: _____

adjust - What have you had to adjust since coming to the United States?

Your sentence: _____

genuine - Describe someone's genuine quality (concern, kindness, interest, etc.)

Your sentence: _____

emphasize - What do you emphasize to your children or family member?

Your sentence: _____

resist - What do you find hard to resist?

Your sentence: _____

reluctantly - What is something you did reluctantly recently?

Your sentence: _____

defend - What or whom have you defended recently?

Your sentence: _____

ACTIVITY 2: SCENARIO RESPONSES

Read each situation. Write what you would say using the vocabulary word.

(maintain) Your friend says learning English after 40 is impossible. You disagree strongly.

You say: _____

(eligible) You're at the library and want to know if you can get a free museum pass.

You say: _____

(distinguish) Your neighbor asks how you can tell if produce at the market is fresh.

You say: _____

(observe) At a parent coffee, you want to comment on how the school has changed.

You say: _____

(adjust) A new friend asks how you've adapted to American culture.

You say: _____

(genuine) Your child asks if their teacher really cares about them.

You say: _____

(emphasize) You're talking to your teenager about college. What's most important?

You say: _____

(resist) Your friend asks why you bought something you didn't need.

You say: _____

(reluctantly) Your friend asks why you look unhappy about going to an event.

You say: _____

(defend) Someone criticizes your decision to focus on your English studies. You say:

ACTIVITY 3: REAL-LIFE APPLICATIONS

Match each situation with the best vocabulary word.

Situations:

- A. You finally stopped yourself from buying expensive coffee every day.
- B. The doctor's office staff seems truly concerned about your health.
- C. You tell your child that honesty matters more than grades.
- D. You went to a party you didn't want to attend.
- E. You explain to someone that there's a difference between being polite and being friendly.
- F. You found out you can get free English classes at the community center.
- G. You tell your book club that you believe the author's message is still relevant today.
- H. You speak up when someone says something unfair about immigrants.
- I. You changed your approach to disciplining your children after talking with their teacher.
- J. You noticed that your neighborhood has become quieter over the past year.

1. maintain: _____

2. eligible: _____

3. distinguish: _____

4. observe: _____

5. adjust: _____

6. genuine: _____

7. emphasize: _____

8. resist: _____

9. reluctantly: _____

10. defend: _____

ACTIVITY 4: DISCUSSION TOPICS

Choose one topic. Create a brief speech that incorporates at least 3 of the vocabulary words. Make an audio recording of your speech. Listen to the recording to evaluate your pronunciation and correct use of vocabulary. Optional: send your recording to Lori for her feedback.

Topic 1: Adjusting to Life in America

Talk about the biggest adjustments you've made since arriving. What was hardest? What did you resist changing? What have you observed about American culture?

Topic 2: Parenting in Two Cultures

Discuss how you balance your home culture with American culture in raising your children. What values do you emphasize? What opinions do you maintain strongly? Have you had to defend your choices?

Topic 3: Community Resources

Talk about services and programs in your community. What are residents eligible for? How can you distinguish between helpful and unhelpful programs? What have you observed about how people use these resources?

Topic 4: Genuine Connections

Discuss how you make real friendships in a new country. How do you distinguish between genuine and superficial relationships? What makes it hard to resist staying isolated? What have you had to adjust in how you make friends?

ACTIVITY 5: WORD COLLOCATIONS

Learn these common word combinations. Then write your own sentence.

1. maintain that + [statement]

Example: I maintain that reading is more important than screen time.

Your sentence: _____

2. eligible for + [benefit/program]

Example: Are you eligible for reduced-price lunch at school?

Your sentence: _____

3. distinguish between + [thing 1] and + [thing 2]

Example: Children need to distinguish between truth and lies.

Your sentence: _____

4. observe that + [statement]

Example: I observed that Americans smile at strangers more than we do.

Your sentence: _____

5. adjust to + [new situation]

Example: It took me years to adjust to the American education system.

Your sentence: _____

6. genuine + [feeling/quality]

Example: Common: genuine concern, genuine interest, genuine smile

Your sentence: _____

7. emphasize the importance of + [something]

Example: I emphasize the importance of respecting elders to my children.

Your sentence: _____

8. resist the temptation to + [verb]

Example: I couldn't resist the temptation to call my mother every day.

Your sentence: _____

9. reluctantly + [agreed/accepted/admitted/decided]

Example: I reluctantly agreed to let my teenager get a phone.

Your sentence: _____

10. defend + [person/idea/choice/decision]

Example: I had to defend my decision to keep speaking my language at home.

Your sentence: _____

ACTIVITY 6: SYNONYM EXPLORATION

For each vocabulary word, circle which synonym is closest in meaning in the given context.

1. maintain (in "I maintain that...")
a) keep b) insist c) repair d) continue
2. eligible (in "eligible for benefits")
a) qualified b) suitable c) ready d) chosen
3. distinguish (in "distinguish between right and wrong")
a) separate b) recognize c) different d) special
4. observe (in "I observed that...")
a) watch b) notice c) remark d) celebrate
5. adjust (in "adjust to new life")
a) change b) adapt c) fix d) modify
6. genuine (in "genuine concern")
a) pretend b) nice c) original d) sincere
7. emphasize (in "emphasize the importance")
a) stress b) repeat c) explain d) teach
8. resist (in "resist the temptation")
a) fight b) refuse c) stop yourself d) give up
9. reluctantly (in "reluctantly agreed")
a) slowly b) sadly c) unwillingly d) carefully
10. defend (in "defend your opinion")
a) protect b) support c) disagree d) fight

ACTIVITY 7: ERROR CORRECTION

Each sentence has a mistake with the vocabulary word. Find and correct it.

1. I am maintain that children need to learn multiple languages.

Correction: _____

2. Are you eligible to free English classes?

Correction: _____

3. Can you distinguish among fresh and frozen vegetables?

Correction: _____

4. I observed about Americans eat dinner very early.

Correction: _____

5. It's hard to adjust with the weather here.

Correction: _____

6. She has genuine of interest in learning about my culture.

Correction: _____

7. I emphasize for the importance of respect to my children.

Correction: _____

8. I couldn't resist to buying the dress on sale.

Correction: _____

9. She reluctantly about agreed to come to the party.

Correction: _____

10. I defended for my decision to study English.

Correction: _____

ANSWER KEYS

Activity 1: Personal Connections (possible answers)

(eligible) "I am eligible for health benefits through my employer, which was a concern when I first arrived and had to settle into my new job."

(distinguish) "I can easily distinguish between when my children have genuine interest in something versus when they just want to charge ahead without thinking."

(observe) "I've observed that my neighbors have faith in each other and will slip over to help without being asked, which concerns me less about safety now."

(adjust) "I've had to adjust my expectations about work-life balance—I assumed Americans would settle down earlier in the evening with their families."

(genuine) "My son's teacher shows genuine concern for his progress and always collects information about what might help him at home."

(emphasize) "I emphasize to my children that they should have faith in themselves and not let negative comments slip out about their abilities or background."

(resist) "I find it hard to resist correcting my children's English pronunciation, even though my associates propose that I should let them settle into their own way of speaking."

(reluctantly) "I reluctantly agreed to let my teenager charge their phone in their bedroom at night, a decision that still concerns me."

(defend) "I had to defend my conviction that it's important for my children to remember our home language when my neighbor maintained would confuse them."

Activity 2: Scenario Responses (possible answers)

(maintain) "I don't agree at all—I maintain that you can learn English at any age if you keep practicing."

(eligible) "Am I eligible to check out a free museum pass with my library card?"

(distinguish) "I distinguish between fresh and spoiled produce by checking the color, smell, and firmness."

(observe) "I've observed a lot of positive changes at this school, especially in communication with parents."

(adjust) "It took time, but I adjusted by asking questions, watching how people interact, and learning the customs."

(genuine) "Yes—your teacher's concern is genuine. She really wants you to do well."

(emphasize) "I want to emphasize that choosing a good fit and building strong study habits matter more than going to a lot of social events."

(resist) "Honestly, I saw it and couldn't resist, even though I didn't need it."

(reluctantly) "I'm going reluctantly because I'm tired, but I don't want to disappoint anyone."

(defend) "I'm going to defend my choice—improving my English is important for my future and my confidence."

Activity 3: Real-Life Applications

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. maintain: G | 6. genuine: B |
| 2. eligible: F | 7. emphasize: C |
| 3. distinguish: E | 8. resist: A |
| 4. observe: J | 9. reluctantly: D |
| 5. adjust: I | 10. defend: H |

Activity 6: Synonym Exploration

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| 1. b) insist | 6. d) sincere |
| 2. a) qualified | 7. c) highlight |
| 3. b) recognize | 8. c) stop yourself |
| 4. c) remark | 9. c) unwillingly |
| 5. b) adapt | 10. b) support |

Activity 7: Error Correction

1. I maintain that children need both languages.
2. Are you eligible for free English classes?
3. Can you distinguish between fresh and frozen vegetables?
4. I observed / I have observed that Americans eat dinner very early.
5. It's hard to adjust to the weather here.
6. She has genuine interest in learning about my culture.
7. I emphasize the importance of respect to my children.
8. I couldn't resist buying the dress on sale.
9. She reluctantly agreed to come to the party.
10. I defended my decision to study English.