AP* Literature: Multiple Choice  
*Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray

**Lesson Introduction**
The excerpt from Thackeray’s 19th century novel *Vanity Fair* is a character study of Sir Pitt Crawley. It offers challenging reading because of the author’s use of irony through understatement and reversal. Students may be asked to read the passage to assess the overall characterization of Sir Pitt and then to respond to the focused questions independently or in small groups. The questions may be used as a springboard to discussion of the passage before students take the multiple choice test. The key to the multiple choice is provided, along with rationales for each question. Students might be asked to write their own rationales for specific questions, independently or in small groups. The percentages noted with each question reveal the number of students who answered the question correctly when it appeared on the national exam. This information provides a picture of the difficulty level of each question.

**LTF® Skill Focus**
The foundation for LTF English lessons is the Skill Progression Chart that identifies key skills for each domain, beginning with grade 6 and adding more complex skills at each subsequent grade level while reinforcing skills introduced at previous grade levels. The Skill Focus for each individual lesson identifies the skills actually addressed in that lesson.

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Teacher Overview—AP Literature: Multiple Choice
Vanity Fair by William Makepeace Thackeray

Materials and Resources

- Copies of passage with focused questions
- Copies of multiple choice questions
- Copies of free response prompts

Answers

Guided Questions

1. Parsimony is extreme economy or stinginess. The word “mere,” meaning nothing more than what is specified, adds ridiculousness to the opening detail of this characterization.

2. It is ironic that a man would be considered unlucky to have a good name and a large estate.

3. A man could rely on his family name and property to bring him success rather than developing his own personal skills and ambitions.

4. He was anything BUT sharp, because he found only bankrupt tenants.

5. He was so stingy with seed that his crops failed, as if Nature herself was taking revenge on him.

6. He was unwise in that his stinginess kept him from hiring good employees, and the employees he did hire stole from him. His contracts with the government failed and his other investments all failed to come to fruition because he was so miserly, he would not support his investments properly.
7. He was dishonest, treating them with sociability one day and cheating them the next.

8. He is rude—joking with farmers’ daughters suggests crudeness—and the hint by Miss Sharp at his “politeness” for the fair sex is stated in a way to suggest the very opposite of politeness.

9. The speaker probably refers to Crawley’s penchant for stealing, as in caught “red-handed” but in the extreme. He uses others’ money but not his own.

10. It is quite ironic. We think of “affections” as being the result of respect and even love, but we find that Sir Pitt only holds regard for his son because he owes him money. His “affections” are really based upon selfishness and self-interest.

11. It is also ironic. We think of the word “delight” as a positive emotional response, but in context it is the result of his refusal to pay his creditors. “Delight” is being used in a way opposite to its meaning.

12. “…not a little useful” actually means “was useful” and by stating it in this way, the focus on the word “little” becomes ironic. The narrator really means that being a senator was VERY useful…MUCH useful…to Sir Pitt.

13. Examples: “unluckily endowed,” “too clever to be robbed,” “sharp landlord,” “satisfaction.”

14. Sir Pitt is a dishonest, selfish, cunning fool who manipulates his family, his employees and tenants, his constituency, and his position in government and society to what he perceives to be self-serving ends. Ironically, in his attempts to serve himself he in fact foolishly cheats himself of the possible wealth and connections he might otherwise possess.

Multiple Choice Questions and Rationales

1. **Correct Answer: A**—“he was unluckily endowed with a good name” (lines 7-8). Rationale: The idea that it would be unlucky to have a good name is the opposite of what we would expect. It is ironic. The rest of the choices relate specific, straightforward behaviors. (87% got it right)

2. **Correct Answer: E**—“invincible repugnance to paying anybody” (line 56). Rationale: Choice E, a repugnance or aversion to repaying his debts, relates directly to Sir Pitt’s stinginess and his tight holding on to his money. Choice C is also related to Sir Pitt’s parsimonious character but is a less direct reference that Choice E. (42% got it right)

3. **Correct Answer: C**—overly cautious in spending. Rationale: Sir Pitt is described as a “close farmer” who was too tight and stingy to put enough seed into the ground to produce good crops. He was overly cautious in spending the money on the seed. (54% got it right)

4. **Correct Answer: B**—An ironic reference to the price Sir Pitt had to pay for his business mismanagement. Rationale: He had the “satisfaction” of having four overseers run away because he was too cheap to pay “honest agents.” It is an ironic use of the word “satisfaction” which usually suggests a positive emotional response. That sentence of the passage is a good example of the narrator’s sarcastic voice. (61% got it right)
5. **Correct Answer: E—duplicity and capacity for treachery.** Rationale: Duplicity and treachery are seen in placing the negative word “sly” between the two positive words “pleasant” and “laughing” and laughing with a poacher one day who he transports (probably to the sheriff) the next with equally “good humour” also suggests that he is not to be trusted. He is capable of betrayal when expedient. Choice A is a close distractor because within the context of the passage, these lines come within a description of Sir Pitt’s socializing with members of the lower class. The stem, however, suggests that we are looking for specific points in Pitt’s character. (44% got it right)

6. **Correct Answer: D—I and II only.** Rationale: The adjective “honourable” is describing the Baronet, Sir Pitt Crawley, in the midst of the description of his foolish, dishonest, self-serving actions. He is anything but honourable. The noun “delight” refers to the act of repaying his debts, and we are told that he would do anything to avoid such an action. To use a very positive word like “delight” to describe the payment of debts (debts which he does NOT want to pay) is ironic. But the word “pleasure” is not ironic. We are told that Sir Pitt took pleasure in making his creditors wait on their money. And that is true. He hated the thought of repaying his debts and enjoyed making his creditors wait. It was a genuine “pleasure.” (44% got it right)

7. **Correct Answer: E—using his position for selfish ends.** Rationale: The final sentence states the idea of Choice E very clearly. His position of Senator was very useful to him. All the other choices are too positive to associate with this character. (88% got it right)

8. **Correct Answer: B—Sir Pitt makes a display of loving his son because of the debt he owes his son.** Rationale: The son has a hold over the “affections” of his father because his father owes him money. This is directly revealed in the second paragraph. Choice C might be a close distractor for readers who “read into” the description too much. (51% got it right)

9. **Correct Answer: A—it illustrates how Sir Pitt’s political and family affairs reflect his character.** Rationale: The last paragraph reveals the relationship Pitt has with his son and the last sentence reveals that he is a member of Parliament. It is a good overall summary of the kind of man he really is. (76% got it right)

10. **Correct Answer: D—Social rank and flawed character.** Rationale: The narrator is quick to judge Sir Pitt’s behavior to be the result of “unluckily endowed with a good name,” suggesting that he has social rank but that it has been unlucky for him. The description of his dealings with people, in business, and especially with his son provides no link to any cause other than that he was a bad man, or had a flawed character. We know nothing about his education, his religion, his ancestors, or his marriage. Choice E might be a close distractor, however, due to the mention of the son’s mother and Sir Pitt’s lack of success in farming and other investments. (79% got it right)
11. Correct Answer: **E—witty and analytical.** Rationale: The narrator’s use of ironic diction and understatement reveal a witty facility with language. The entire characterization is quite analytical: it makes assertions, provides ample evidence to support them, and reaches general conclusions as to Sir Pitt’s character. *(60% got it right)*

12. Correct Answer: **C—sardonic condemnation.** Rationale: It is obvious the narrator does not like or respect Sir Pitt Crawley. In fact, he condemns him for his very bad behavior and flawed character. It is a sardonic – meaning disdainfully humorous, sarcastic, mocking – condemnation, clearly revealed in the ironic use of specific words and phrases and the understatement. The narrator leaves no question that Sir Pitt is a bad man. Choice D might be a close distractor as far as judgment is concerned, but the narrator withholds sharing his own emotion. In fact, the description is relatively dry and logical, rather than emotional. The “disgust” of Choice E makes some sense as well, but “jaded” has no relevance to this narrator. *(54% got it right)*