**The Test**

# **Unit 14**

What a morning it had been already, Brian thought, and first period hadn’t even started yet. His alarm hadn’t gone off, so he had awoken with exactly five minutes to get dressed, eat breakfast, and catch the bus. He had thrown on the same clothes he had worn the day before (sniffing his T-shirt first, of course), had drunk a big gulp of chocolate milk directly from the carton, and had run outside just in time to chase the bus halfway to school before it stopped for him. Lucky for him, he hadn’t tried to have a **nutritious** breakfast with all of the food groups from the food pyramid like he usually did. You know, some Poptarts or leftover cold pizza.

As if all of that wasn’t bad enough, now he couldn’t seem to open his locker. For his own convenience, Brian never locked his locker. With it unlocked, he could always make “fly-bys” to switch books, even if it wasn’t the prescribed locker times. But, for some reason, his locker was locked today. Brian tried to relax his mind and **meditate** on his combination. After about thirty seconds, the numbers finally entered his mind in the correct order. He flew through the combination and threw the door open when he heard the tell-tale click.

 Brian was in a tremendous rush so he wouldn’t be late for class again. Being late for Ethics class was, well, unethical. But, Brian was stopped cold when he peered into his locker. There, lying on his Ethics notebook, was an I-phone 6. Brian didn’t own a phone. His parents wouldn’t allow him to have a phone until he could actually afford to pay the monthly fees himself. Oh, did he want a phone, though. All of his friends had them, with their **gaudy** cases of multiple colors, odd shapes, and wild designs. Since he seemed to be the only student without a phone, he became the butt of many of their jokes, which did nothing to **inflate** his rather low self-esteem. He already felt as if he were not as smart or as athletic as all of his friends.

Brian closed the locker door and rechecked the number on the locker. It was his locker. Someone must have inadvertently put their phone in the wrong locker, or else this was one big **hoax** being played on him by somebody. But, who would put their phone in the wrong locker? To Brian, that would be **akin** to—well—being the stupidest person in the universe. That would be akin to a guy who sits in the seat right next to his buddy in the movie theater. Everyone knows you always left a seat in between, just like they know that you don’t misplace your phone!

The first period warning bell brought Brian out of his thoughts. He needed to **heed** the warning because he could not afford to be late again. Brian made a decision. He looked up and down the hallway, realized no one was in sight, and stashed the phone in his bookbag. He entered the classroom just as the late bell rang. Everyone, including Mr. Oswald, looked up to watch him enter. As he sauntered to his desk, it felt as if everyone knew his secret. Maybe his body language was **transmitting** signals that he had a phone!

“Is everything okay, Brian?” Mr. Oswald asked.

“Yes, why wouldn’t it be?” Brian snapped back.

“Whoa, calm down. I wasn’t accusing you of anything. I only asked out of concern. You seem a bit off is all,” Mr. Oswald explained.

“Yeah, it’s not like you were almost late because you were texting or anything,” Dave quipped, while jabbing his buddy Ron in the arm. They both stated to laugh.

Brian glared at the two and said, “I am fine.” He then took his seat and tried to look as if everything was normal. He felt like an **impostor**, though, because everything was not normal. He was not behaving like the honest young man he actually was. All of his classmates, along with Mr. Oswald, were looking at him like he had some dire **affliction** or disease.

“Why don’t you all just get to work on your projects and let Brian regroup for a minute,” Mr. Oswald suggested.

Brian gave Mr. Oswald a smile of **gratitude**. He then closed his eyes, took a few deep breaths, and attempted to **vanquish** the feelings of uncertainty and indecision that were weighing on him. What was he supposed to do now, or more importantly, what did he want to do now? He had always wanted a phone; now he had one. It wasn’t really his, though! Should he keep it, or should he try to determine who it actually belonged to?

Or, should he go with the more **pedestrian** idea of turning it into the office like most people would do? Be he felt so **cosmopolitan**, like big stuff, actually having an I-phone in his possession. And, maybe, just maybe, someone had given it to him on purpose, a secret admirer or someone like that. But, who would do that, and how would he know for sure?

It wasn’t like he could show anyone the phone. If it wasn’t from some admirer, everyone would know that he couldn’t afford a phone on his **meager** allowance. He didn’t have a job either. Everyone knew his parents wouldn’t buy him one. What was he to do?

The phone was beginning to feel like a time bomb in his backpack. It was ticking away, and he had no idea when it was set to explode in his face. Just the thought of it was beginning to **oppress** his normally easy-going attitude and was even making him feel physically ill. This worry and indecision were strangling his mind. He could think of nothing else. Each minute seemed to **elongate** itself so that it seemed like an hour, making this time of misery last forever.

“Brian, do you need to see the nurse? I hate to over-react, but your **wan,** pale skin and slouched posture tell me that you may be ill,” Mr. Oswald whispered into Brian’s ear.

Mr. Oswald’s closeness startled Brian. With a flourish that grabbed the attention of every student in the class, he leaped to his feet, grabbed his backpack, and backed as far away from Mr. Oswald as he could. He reached into his backpack and pulled out the phone.

“Please, take this--it isn’t mine--I don’t know how it got in my locker--I wasn’t going to keep it—I’m not even allowed to have a phone—it made me feel good though—it made me feel real bad too—I don’t want it—Please, take it!”

“I know, Brian. I have known all along. You have passed the test. Do you know what I’m talking about?”

Brian just stared at Mr. Oswald blankly. Then slowly it dawned on him. At the beginning of the semester, Mr. Oswald had told the class that there was a huge difference between criminal behavior and unethical behavior. He also told them that one student, selected by an **impartial** teacher (one who didn’t know the students or have any opinions about them), would be tested sometime during the year to demonstrate the difference between the two.

“You see, class,” Mr. Oswald stated, “Brian could have kept the phone. That in itself would not have been criminal. It was in his locker, in his possession, so by law, it was his. However, he knew it was not really his and could have been placed there accidentally. Therefore, for him to keep it would be unethical. I like to think of it as criminal is skin deep, but unethical goes all the way to the soul. In Brian’s case, his soul won out. He made an ethical decision and passed the test.”

The entire class stood up and applauded Brian. They all had known about the test and had been secretly rooting for him. They also knew that at the end of a test, you always receive a prize, and they knew Brian was about to receive a prize he wanted terribly.

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As Brian took the phone, it began to vibrate.

“You might want to answer that,” Dave laughed.

Brian answered, “Hello!”

“Congratulations, Brian! No one deserves this more than you do, and now I can keep track of your every move.”

Brian broke out in a big smile and whispered into the phone, “Thanks, Mom!”

--Ronald Powers

**UNIT 14 VOCABULARY**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **WORD** | **DEFINITION in your own words from context clues** | **MEMORY TRIGGER** |
| nutritious |  |  |
| meditate |  |  |
| gaudy |  |  |
| inflate |  |  |
| hoax |  |  |
| akin |  |  |
| heed |  |  |
| transmit |  |  |
| impostor |  |  |
| affliction |  |  |
| gratitude |  |  |
| vanquish |  |  |
| pedestrian |  |  |
| cosmopolitan |  |  |
| meager |  |  |
| oppress |  |  |
| elongate |  |  |
| wan |  |  |
| impartial |  |  |
| gala |  |  |