

TEXT	THE NAMESAKE
AUTHOR	Willa Cather
THEMES	What are you like? (Unit 1), The bigger the better? (Unit 2), Making your mind up (Unit 4), Looking ahead (Unit 5), Against all odds (Unit 7), Educating generation Z (Unit 9)
VOCABULARY	Useful expressions and adjectives.
WRITING	Students write a letter of application.
SPEAKING	Students give and compare opinions about individual and group activities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Willa Cather (1873–1947) was an American novelist. Though most of her work focused on the ‘Middle West of the great immigrations’, according to writer H. L. Mencken, she also wrote stories with a variety of settings. *The Namesake* is one of her most autobiographical stories as the main character is based on her uncle. Cather’s work was often overlooked as contemporary critics focused on American modernists like F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner and John Dos Passos, but she is now seen as a major literary figure whose novels and stories explore the complex relationship between identity, history and community.

WARMER

Focus on the picture and ask students to describe what is happening. Help with vocabulary as required (*sculptor* is in the glossary but you might want to introduce *sculpture* and *statue*.) Ask for ideas about what time this picture represents, i.e. 18th, 19th 20th century? (*Answer: late 19th century*). Ask which cities are or were famous for being places where people go to study art (elicit Paris as an important choice, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries).



ABOUT YOU

The questions encourage students to talk about their experience or hopes of studying in another country. This can be expanded to talk about where they would like to go, why, and what advantages there are to studying away from home. They also think about being in a group – a topic followed up in later questions and activities.

- 1 It seems a wonderful experience for them – what is happening to their friend makes them appreciate their good fortune even more because they are comparing their opportunities with what he is leaving behind. They also seem to enjoy the place – Paris – and the company of Hartwell.

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Suggested answers

- 1 The question invites students to reflect on who they would like to know more about. It can also be used to highlight how a writer might create a setting but not give us a clear idea of how the story will develop. We often assume the story-teller is the important character, but of course that isn’t always the case. In *The Namesake*, the main character is Lyon Hartwell.
- 2 The question focuses on the way an expression has a literal and metaphorical meaning. Refer students to the glossary and definition of *weigh upon*. Establish that if you have to carry a heavy object it is tiring and difficult. Ask what kind of ‘object’ the people in the extract are carrying and establish that it is the way they feel because their friend is leaving. Elicit the idea that the heavy cases literally have the effect of ‘weight’ on the others.
- 3 Hartwell is from ‘all of America’ whereas the others are from specific places. He comes across as a more established, experienced person – and he is a sculptor with his own studio. The friends appear to admire him and desire his company but there is also a distance between them, he is the ‘host’, rather than one of the group of friends.
- 4 The gardens are a place of natural activity – the autumn trees and colours – and also busy social activity – people meeting and seeing those who have returned from their holidays. France is a country where the new academic year starts in autumn, so perhaps there is a sense of anticipation and excitement.

VOCABULARY

3

Answers

- 1 weighs upon/worries
- 2 a summons / an order
- 3 enchanting/lovely
- 4 for good/forever (*sculptor* not used)

4

Answers

- 1 summons
- 2 intruded
- 3 hospitable
- 4 tanned
- 5 sculptor
- 6 enchanting

WRITING

5

Encourage students to think about what kind of application would make a good impression on the reader. Brainstorm ideas (students might suggest enthusiasm, interest in learning, talking about what kind of photos they like to take, being a good team member, etc.). Talk about register – how should they sound? Suggest aiming for a ‘neutral’ style – neither too formal nor informal. Suggest they use positive adjectives to describe themselves.

SPEAKING

- 6 This kind of speaking activity encourages personal responses, anecdotes and examples. Encourage students to support or illustrate their opinions with specific examples and experiences. If the groups are bigger (six or seven for example), each group can report the ideas they discussed to the rest of the class.

MIXED ABILITY

The writing activity can be extended by creating 'panels' to read and choose the best candidate. Each group of five, for example, can read five texts from another group and choose the best one. Weaker students can be given the task of keeping the voting scores and records, as well as participating in the discussion. Having this extra task gives them a simple but important role in the group and they can announce their group's scores to the rest of the class.