

Classic Words

Michael Clay Thompson

What words do students really need to know if they are to read comfortably in the classics of English and American literature? My ten-year study of 35,000 examples from 130 different works indicates that the following words appear with high frequency. They are the top 100 words in my *Classic Words* database, in descending order of frequency, and they appear even in so-called children's classics, such as *Tom Sawyer*, *Peter Pan*, *The Wind in the Willows*, and *The Call of the Wild*.

countenance
profound
manifest
serene
sublime
prodigious
singular
clamor
visage
abate
allude
grotesque
undulate
acute
vivid
venerate
exquisite
melancholy
incredulous

traverse
repose
lurid
languid
superfluous
sagacity
vulgar
placid
tremulous
odious
pallor
abyss
stolid
condescend
wistful
prostrate
remonstrate
palpable
vex
amiable
perplex
portent
peremptory
somber
importune
audible
expostulate
subtle
tangible
vivacious
despond
doleful
pervade
pensive
apprehension
procure
abject
austere
magnanimous
oppress
oblique
sallow

ignominy
eccentric
resolute
articulate
furtive
fain
genial
mien
affect
billow
confound
wan
indolent
maxim
reproach
morose
latter
conjure
retort
antipathy
alacrity
animated
vestige
verdure
adjacent
rebuke
zenith
inexorable
livid
dilate
fortnight
din
abash
profane
imperious
conjecture
swarthy
impute
appellation