

Vanity Fair

William Makepeace Thackeray

A Before Reading

- 1 Decide if these statements about Thackeray are true or false. Then check your answers on pages 4–6 of the book and correct the false statements.
 - a William Makepeace Thackeray was born in Calcutta, India.
 - b His life was difficult because his family was not very rich.
 - c Thackeray went to a famous but bad school.
 - d He graduated from Cambridge University.
 - e He became a very respectable young man.
 - f He edited a newspaper and became an artist in Paris.
 - g Thackeray and his wife, Isabella, didn't have any children.
 - h Isabella suffered from mental illness.
 - i Thackeray was overweight and he had poor health.
 - j He became a very successful politician.

- 2 *Vanity Fair* is set in nineteenth-century England and focuses on 'high society'. Read the introductory note about high society in nineteenth-century Europe on pages 7–8 of the book and complete the table. Can you compare it with 'high society' in the twenty-first century?




| | Nineteenth-century Europe | Twenty-first-century Europe |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| How they spent money | | |
| Family background | | |
| Employment | | |
| Men | | |
| Women | | |
| Reputation | | |
| How they addressed each other | | |

- 3 *Vanity Fair* is set against the background of the Napoleonic wars. Read about this on pages 8–9. Then look at the map of Europe in 1815 and write the sites of Napoleon's battles in the correct places next to the sword symbols. Then check your answers on the map on page 10.



B While Reading

- 4 Look at the pictures of Becky Sharp with the men who fall in love with her. Say who they are, describe them physically and mentally and explain how the relationship started and why it ended.

| | Description | Start of relationship | End of relationship |
|---|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|  | | | |
|  | | | |
|  | | | |

- 5 Thackeray uses a lot of adjectives to describe his characters. Play this word game in small groups. Read your instructions and try to move across the board. Don't cheat by looking at the words if you are guessing.

Guessers

Look at the board below with the first letters of adjectives from *Vanity Fair*. Chose a starting point. You have one minute to guess as many adjectives as you can as described by your teammates and create five in a row, vertically, diagonally or horizontally.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| p | j | s | c | s |
| s | v | w | i | c |
| b | i | h | f | c |
| a | f | u | w | p |
| o | w | k | c | b |
| u | c | b | e | b |

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Describers

Help your teammate move across the board by describing the adjective they choose. You must not use gestures or translation or say the word or part of the word. You have one minute to help them create five in a row, vertically, diagonally or horizontally.

| | | | | |
|---------------|----------|---------------------|-------------|-----------|
| proud | jealous | sly | charming | sweet |
| shy | vain | witty | intelligent | clever |
| boring | innocent | honest | false | cruel |
| awkward | foolish | unkind | well-bred | penniless |
| old-fashioned | wicked | kind-hearted | cheerful | brave |
| unsuitable | confused | beautifully dressed | elegant | bitter |

C After Reading

- 6 There are many moral dilemmas in *Vanity Fair*. Read the following ones and discuss what you might do in the same situation and why.
- Would you consider marrying a person who is fat, vain and foolish if they are rich and you are not, as Becky does with Jos?
 - Would you marry your childhood sweetheart against your parents' wishes, especially considering they have no money, as George Osborne does with Amelia?
 - Would you leave a close friend or family member in a dangerous situation such as war, as Jos does with Amelia?
 - Would you take a lot of money from a friend through gambling if you knew you could beat them every time, as Rawdon does with George Osborne?
 - Would you do everything in your power to make someone you love think well of the person they love, even if that person is no good, as Dobbin does with Amelia about George?
 - Would you give up your child to their grandparents if you knew that they would have a better upbringing, as Amelia does with Georgy?
- 7 *Vanity Fair* has been made into a film. Imagine you are the director of a new film version. Look at the list of characters on pages 11–12 and choose the actors who you think would best play the main roles and decide what modern setting you would choose for your film.