

Lesson Name : 39

Lesson Title : Meditation XVII

Course Name : English 2 Part 1 [Honors]

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Essential Instruction

Read John Donne's "[Meditations XVII.](#)"

It is a good idea to use your digital notebook to keep notes on new vocabulary and definitions that you may need to reference later.



### Understanding Plot Structure

Most narrative stories have a **plot structure**. **Plot structure** is the path that a story takes to get through its basic elements. There are five basic parts of a **plot structure**: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. You'll notice when reading "Meditation, XVII" that John Donne does not use a **plot structure** because it is not a narrative piece. It is considered an expository text, which is a type of oral or written communication that is used to explain, describe, or give information. As you read "Meditation XVII," look for the information Donne is trying to give to his reader. Note that the text does not follow a **plot structure**.

### Foreshadowing and Flashback

There are specific techniques that narrative writers sometimes use when telling a story: **foreshadowing** and **flashback**. Again, because Donne's meditations are not narrative pieces, you'll notice that Donne does not use either of these techniques.

**Foreshadowing** is a literary technique that authors sometimes use to give the reader clues about what will happen. A famous example of **foreshadowing** occurs in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. As Romeo is leaving Juliet's window, she thinks she sees Romeo dead in the bottom of a tomb. This is **foreshadowing** the

ending of the play, where she does in fact see Romeo dead in the bottom of a tomb.

**Flashback** is another literary technique authors sometimes use in narrative pieces. **Flashbacks** are interruptions in the narrative that take the reader to an earlier time in order to fill in important information for the reader.

### Understanding Conceit

While Donne does not use any foreshadowing or flashbacks in “Meditation XVII,” Donne uses a literary device known as **conceit**. A **conceit** is an extended metaphor that is used through an entire work or passage. As you read “Meditation XVII,” did you notice the information Donne is trying to communicate to his reader? You may have assumed while reading this piece that John Donne wrote this very close to his own death or when he was ill. As he’s lying in his bed, he hears a church bell toll, signifying a death in the parish. Donne does not know if this bell is for another parishioner or for himself, but either way he feels that mankind has lost. When Donne writes “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main,” he is suggesting that no man can exist alone. We are interconnected and a loss of any person is also a loss of part of yourself. This is the **conceit** that runs throughout the work.

### Prefixes

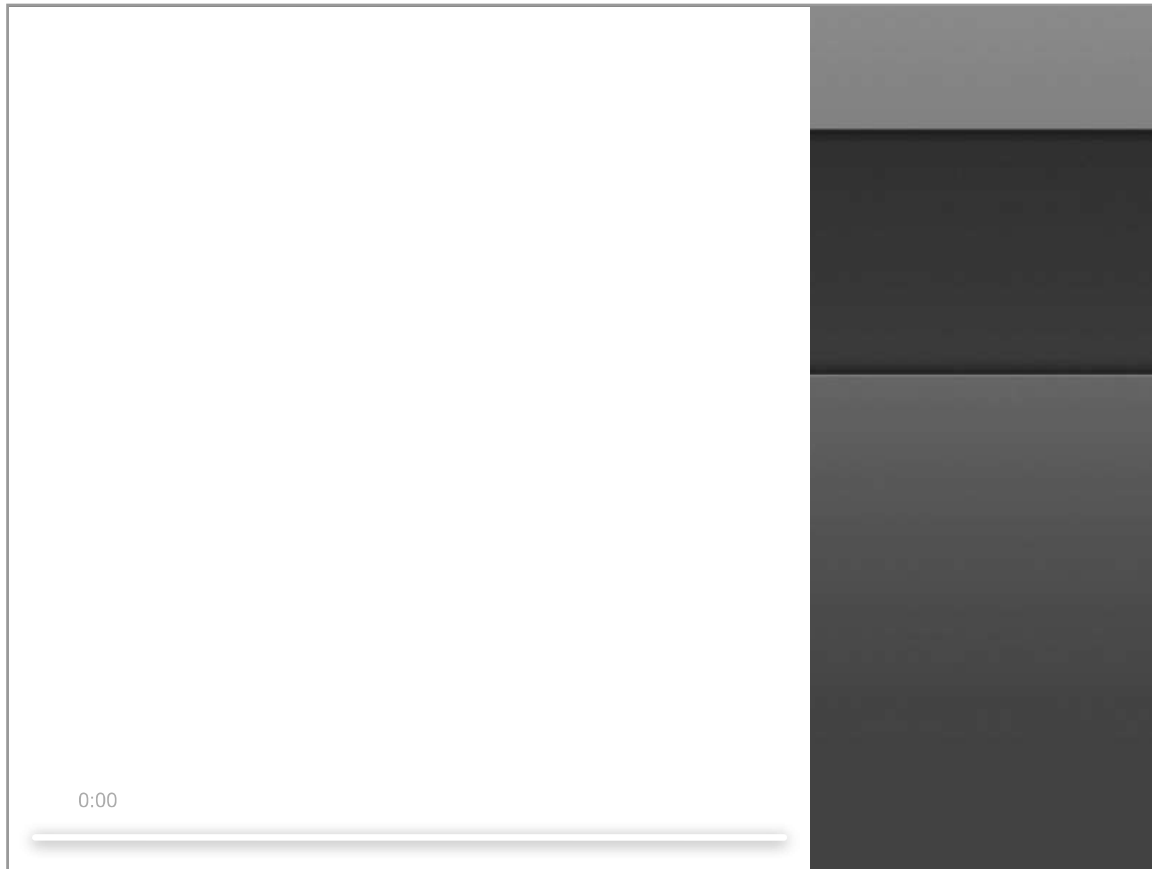
Sometimes, **prefixes** can help us understand word meanings. **Prefixes** are letter combinations that can be applied to the beginning of many words to change their meaning. For example, the **prefix** *anti-* means *against* or *opposite*. This **prefix** can be applied to words such as *antibiotic*, *antisocial*, and *antithesis*. *Antisocial* means the “opposite of being social.” Consider the prefixes on your vocabulary words and any other unfamiliar words you find in Donne’s “Meditation XVII” and decide if any of those prefixes help you to determine the meaning of the word.

### Denotative and Connotative Words

**Denotation** is the literal meaning of a word. **Connotation** is an association (positive or negative) that is carried with a word. For example, *frugal* and *cheap* can both refer to a person’s carefulness with money. However, *frugal* carries a positive **connotation**, and *cheap* generally carries a negative **connotation**. Consider the **denotations** and **connotations** of the vocabulary words in Donne’s “Meditation XVII.”

### Etymology of Words

There are many words from centuries ago in our language that are still used today, but some have changed in meaning over time. Studying **etymologies**, the meanings and pronunciations of words from the past, can be helpful when trying to find the true meaning behind the author’s word choice. Consider researching the **etymologies** of any unfamiliar words found in Donne’s “Meditation XVII.”



[Open Video in New Tab](#)



### Vocabulary

Understanding the words used in a poem can aid your understanding of the poem. Here are some words from John Donne's "Meditation, XVII":

1. **universal** – adj. – applicable or understood everywhere or in all cases
2. **contention** – noun – a heated disagreement
3. **promontory** – noun – a high point of land or rock projecting into the sea or other water
4. **covetousness** – noun – an envious eagerness to possess something
5. **affliction** – noun – a state of pain, distress, or grief; misery
6. **defray** – verb – pay expenses
7. **tribulation** – noun – grievous trouble; severe trial or suffering
8. **contemplation** – noun – thoughtfulness
9. **recourse** – noun – a request for help; a plea or prayer