Unit 12 - Clowns Can’t Dance

12A Introduction

This is the story of Kim, a girl who has made too many commitments for the same night. But Kim doesn’t get discouraged. She gets creative.

12B Song Lyrics

Here’s what you need to know: Kim is filled with happiness when she’s asked to the big dance by Devon, a boy she likes. But, later that afternoon, her mother reminds her that on the same night, Kim has promised to dress up like a clown for her brother’s 4th birthday. Thus, we begin.

Kim’s sitting in the kitchen and she can’t believe, Instead of the dance, she has to go to Chuck E. Cheese? Kim says, “Mom, this is akin to ruining my life, It’s the same thing; can’t I have this one night?” Kim’s mom says, “Nah, you promised, You like dressing like a clown, c’mon be honest.” That’s true; it’s not like she wanted it to be her vocation, Her job, her occupation. But she had dressed like a clown on vacation, And she kind of liked making kids laugh, You know, the big red nose and all of that. But now she’s feeling melancholy and sad. But when she looks at the dance ticket, her face changes, The party and the dance are at adjacent places, Right next to each other on the same block, And now her brain starts to work and it doesn’t stop. She mulls it over, thinks it through, She’s like, “Why choose one, when I can do two?” She says, “Mom, I won’t shirk the work, Or try to avoid the job like a jerk. I’ll be a clown like I told you, Mom.” And then Kim walks away to use her mobile phone. She calls up Devon to say, “Yo, it’s on. I’ll be at the dance, boy, with you on my arm.”

Wow! Look at that clown dance, With the big red nose and those brown pants. She’s got crazy moves, like, “Wow, man,” She’s like, “Bozo and Crusty can’t even touch me.” (x2)

It’s the night of the dance, and it’s cool, Kim’s wearing a dress underneath the clown suit. A red nose made by Hasbro, And she’s rocking a rainbow Afro. At Chuck E. Cheese, yeah the kids are enthralled, Charmed by the clown who is dancing and all.
Yeah, Kim *pampers* her brother, gives him care,
Even though not too long ago, dude was in Pampers.
Kim goes to the bathroom,
Washes off her makeup, slips out of that suit.
Sneaks to the back, *nimble* as can be,
Light on her feet, yeah, she’s moving with ease.
Goes to the dance where she *yearns* to be,
Wants to be so bad, she’s like, “Pardon me.”
She sees Devon, and now they’re laughing and stuff,
They dance a little bit, yeah, they’re having some fun.
Kim doesn’t want to go, she’s *loath* to leave,
But she tells Devon, “Yo, I’ll B.R.B.”
Sneaks back into Chuck E. Cheese,
Gets dressed with a pig nose and funny teeth.
Her mom asks if she’s feeling bad,
“You were gone a while there in the back.”
Kim says, “To be *candid* and honest,
I was feeling a little sick to my stomach.”
She goes back to goofing for her brother and his friends,
But now her night starts to feel like a *sham*.
A fraud, a hoax, like she’s tricking them.
She’s feeling *overwhelmed*, like it’s all too much,
But she’s like, “I can’t stop now and give this up,
I got myself into this mess, I need to keep it up.”
Back to the bathroom, switches clothes quickly,
Out of breath, running to the dance in a jiffy.
She shows up, and her friends all stop;
Her friend Alisha is like, “Yo, Kim, what’s up?
Why is your face blue, you’re wearing a wig?
Is that a fake nose, girl? You look like a pig!”
Oh snap! Kim had made a mistake;
Now she’s wearing her dress with a clown face.
She feels all her happiness *erode*,
Get eaten away; she’s like, “Yo, I’m leaving, okay?”
Just then, up comes Devon,
Looking at Kim like, What’s going on?
She’s tired of the lies, so she describes
How she had been a clown for her brother that night.
All the kids laugh, except Devon;
He steps right up, takes her on his arm.
“You got an extra clown nose?” he asks.
“C’mon, girl, let’s go make your brother laugh.”

*Hook*
12C Words Defined

Below you’ll find each vocabulary word that was used in the song. Each word is followed by the part of speech, a simple definition and a meaningful sentence. Some words will also have synonyms, antonyms and other forms of the word listed.

1. **adjacent (adj)** near, next to
   The new Yankee Stadium was built adjacent to the old one.
   Synonyms: adjoining, close
   Antonyms: distant

2. **akin (adj)** sharing the same properties
   Betty got so upset that night—it was akin to going crazy.
   Synonyms: similar, related
   Antonyms: different

3. **candid (adj)**
   1. honest and straightforward, without holding back unpleasant truths
   2. informal; unposed
   1. The movie critic was so candid she sometimes made actors cry. 2. US Monthly magazine recently bought a series of candid photos, showing two popular young stars running on the beach.

4. **enthrall (verb)**
   to hold the attention of as though under a spell
   The audience was enthralled by the magician’s tricks, especially when he made his head drop down to his stomach.
   Synonyms: enchant, entrance
   Antonyms: bore
   Other forms: The children especially found the magician’s show enthralling (adj).

5. **erode (verb)**
   to wear away gradually; to eat away
   A few months into Dwayne’s drug addiction, his health and happiness began to erode.
   Antonyms: strengthen, reinforce
   Other forms: Because of erosion (noun), it was hard to even tell that the heap of wood and dust on the bottom of the ocean had once been a pirate ship.

6. **loath (adj)**
   unwilling, reluctant
   Tricia was loath to admit her mistake, preferring to think that everything was just fine.
   Antonyms: willing, eager

7. **melancholy (adj)**
   sad, gloomy, unhappy;
   Harvey was so melancholy that he stopped making eye contact with anyone.
   Synonyms: glum, miserable
   Other forms: Melancholy can also be a noun, as in: Falling into a terrible melancholy, the dog refused to eat.
8. **mull** (verb) to think about something carefully; to consider

Rachel *mulled* over her options for college.

Synonyms: ponder, contemplate

Usage note: *Mull* is often followed by the word over, but it doesn’t have to be: Rachel *mulled* her options for college.

9. **nimble** (adj) able to move easily and quickly

Sreng wasn’t the strongest soccer player, but he was by far the most *nimble*.

Synonyms: agile, swift

Antonyms: clumsy

10. **overwhelm** (verb) 1. to overcome completely in mind or feeling 2. to defeat completely

1. Maria was overwhelmed by the number of choices at the breakfast buffet. 2. On their march back to Boston, the British troops were overwhelmed by American minutemen.

Synonyms: 1. bewilder, stun 2. conquer

11. **pamper** (verb) to treat with extreme kindness or generosity

Having been pampered her whole life, the princess was shocked to learn that she would have to brush her own teeth at her new school.

Synonyms: spoil

12. **sham** (noun) something fake or false

By reading notes that had been left in his locker, Julio thought that Jenny had a crush on him, but it turned out that the whole thing was a sham.

Synonyms: hoax, falsehood

Antonyms: truth, reality

Other forms: Sham can also be an adjective, as in: The sham ads promised a free blender with each order, but the company never sent me anything.

13. **shirk** (verb) to avoid or get out of doing work

Shirking his responsibilities, Leonard skipped school and rode his bike to the beach instead.

Synonyms: sneak, slack, cheat

14. **vocation** (noun) a person’s employment, job, or calling

It’s never too early to think about what vocation you might like once you get older.

Synonyms: occupation

15. **yearn** (verb) to have a strong and earnest desire

Having spent 15 years in jail, Brandon *yearned* for the simple pleasure of walking through a park.

Synonyms: be passionate, hunger, long

Antonyms: dislike
12D Fix the Mistake

Each of the sentences below has a mistake. The wrong vocabulary words have been used, so the sentences don’t make sense. Rewrite each sentence using the correct vocabulary word from this unit.

1. Kwame hated that movie so much, he said it was adjacent to being punched in the face repeatedly for two hours straight.

2. The judge shirked over her decision while the accused waited nervously in the courtroom.

3. The art collector was shocked to learn that the painting he thought was authentic was nothing but a vocation.

4. Although he may not look fast, Koji is surprisingly melancholy on the football field.

5. Tricia's confidence in her singing abilities completely pampered when the judges on American Idol laughed at her.

6. Mr. Danvers is nimble to acknowledge when he’s wrong; he usually tries to convince us we just misheard him.

7. Brendan got in trouble for yearning his homework to play Halo instead.

8. I think my parents mull my sister way too much; she’s going to freak out when she learns what a cold, cruel place the world really is.

9. The bathroom is overwhelmed to the kitchen; just turn right next to the refrigerator and it’s right there.

10. Oh my darling, how I enthrall to be back in your arms; to see your face again is my fondest wish.
11. Melis has the coolest **sham** I've ever heard of: She teaches penguins how to sing for a living!

12. Pedro was **loath** by the monster truck rally; he stared at the giant trucks as if hypnotized.

13. I don’t mean to **erode** you with too much information, but I just learned that your dad’s a Martian, your mom has the power to breathe fire, and your siblings are all actually baboons.

14. Take this camera and try to get an **akin** photo of Brad Pitt as he enters the club.

15. A **candid** feeling overcame me as I realized I would probably never see my best friend again.

**12E Pick the Winner**

*Circle the word that best fits into the sentence. Then write a sentence below that uses the word you didn’t pick in a meaningful way.*

1. I thought the principal might not answer my tough questions honestly, but he was remarkably **(candid OR loath)**.

2. _________________________________________________________________________________________

3. When Valerie broke up with Bill, he sat around for days listening to **(nimble OR melancholy)** songs while crying.

4. _________________________________________________________________________________________

5. Allan is a reliable employee; I've never known him to **(yearn OR shirk)** his duties.

6. _________________________________________________________________________________________

7. Ms. Blake enjoys volunteering at the fire department, but she wouldn’t want to make it her **(vocation OR erosion)**.

8. _________________________________________________________________________________________
9. My mom’s dog is a real (pampered OR enthralled) pooch; sometimes he eats better meals than we do!

10. _________________________________________________________________________________________

12F Draw the Relationships

In each grouping of eight words below, draw straight lines between the synonyms (words that mean similar things) and squiggly lines between any antonyms (words that mean nearly opposite things). Every word should have at least one line connected to it. Some may have more.

bewilder

enthrall

shirk

to slack

overwhelm

bore

willing

loath

mull

different

sham

akin

swift

authentic

nimble

consider

formal

adjacent

vocation

melancholy

miserable

job

clumsy

wear away

erode

nimble

dislike

pamper

spoil

yearn
The Origins of Clown Dancing

Thomas Johnson, a. k. a. Tommy the Clown, never yearned to create a worldwide dance movement. In fact, he never even really wanted to be a clown. But one day in 1992, Johnson’s coworker asked him to play a clown at a child’s birthday party. Johnson didn’t have to mull the request over for long; he loved kids and thought it would be a lot of fun. He didn’t know it at the time, but clowning would soon become his full-time vocation.

As Tommy the Clown, Johnson became a popular fixture at birthday parties in his home neighborhood of Compton, Los Angeles. His outgoing personality and sense of humor could liven up even the most melancholy event. Most of all, children were enthralled by Tommy’s nimble dance moves. His combination of break dancing and goofy clowning caught on. Kids all over Compton began to imitate Tommy’s moves, calling the style “clown dancing.”

In short time, Johnson became overwhelmed by work. He needed help. He began hiring local children to join his dance crew and help him run the parties. He called his crew “The Hip-Hop Clowns.” Johnson expected his Hip-Hop Clowns to follow certain rules: They could not do drugs or be in gangs; they needed to work hard in school and be good role models in their community. Anyone who shirked these rules would be kicked out of the crew.

The Hip-Hop Clowns were proud to be in Tommy’s crew. They showed other kids that they didn’t have to get involved with gangs or drugs. The gangs, meanwhile, respected the clowns and left them alone. Clown crews began sprouting up all over Compton.

In 2005, a movie called Rize introduced clown dancing to the rest of America. The movie was a documentary about Tommy the Clown and his dancers. It also followed another type of dancing called krumping that is akin to clown dancing, but is more wild and aggressive. After the movie was released, Thomas Johnson became known all over the world for his unique contribution to dance and his community. And to think it all started with a simple request from a coworker!

1. Based on information in the passage, you can tell that Thomas Johnson
   (A) Makes his living as a clown
   (B) Moved away from Compton
   (C) Studied to be a professional dancer
   (D) Is upset that other people started clown dancing

2. Why did Johnson start his Hip-Hop Clowns crew?
   (A) He needed dancers for the movie he was making.
   (B) He wanted to make his dance moves popular.
   (C) He was getting more work than he could handle.
   (D) He was getting threatened by people in gangs.

3. How is this passage organized?
   (A) Cause and effect
   (B) Question and answer
   (C) Order of importance
   (D) Chronological order
4. What type of passage is this?
(A) Historical fiction
(B) Interview
(C) Persuasive essay
(D) Biography

5. According to the passage, what’s the difference between clown dancing and krumping?
(A) Krumping is sillier than clown dancing.
(B) Krumping is more aggressive than clown dancing.
(C) Clown dancing is more similar to break dancing than krumping.
(D) Clown dancing is more popular than krumping.

12H Thinking Creatively

Answer each question below. Don’t be afraid to think creatively.

1. What vocation would you like to have when you get older?

2. What do you yearn to change about the world?

3. What is your opinion of pampered children?

4. What animal do you think is the most nimble?

5. What kind of power might a supervillain called “The Great Shirk” have?

Word Breakdown

The word akin can mean either “sharing the same properties” or “related to.” For example, you would be akin to your mother. The word comes from the ancient word kin, which means “family.”

Today, melancholy is an emotional state. But there was a time, long ago, when melancholy was considered a physical medical disease. Ancient doctors thought there were four basic body fluids that were responsible for health—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. People who suffered from melancholia were thought to have too much black bile in their bodies.