



Key Vocabulary: Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens

Vocabulary Word	Definition	Context
Ancestral	Related to or inherited from one's ancestors	"The house was a jewel, box-shaped and perfectly proportioned, painted a dazzling white. The lawn, smooth and vividly green, sloped gently down to the edge of the cliff, and below was the sea, lapping and whispering, but with a blackness that was almost forbidding. The drive curved away towards the north, and, at the turn, a low white lodge, guardant, with two blank windows like sightless eyes, was set back on its own haunches among the trees. Beyond this again lay the downs, bleak now in the autumn haze, and, beyond the downs, the ancestral home, Manderley."
Countenance	A person's face or facial expression	"His dark eyes were lost under thick black eyebrows, his sharp nose was straight and fine, his lips were thin, and his expression was one of distinguished boredom. He was immaculately dressed, but then so were they all, and I had no doubt that he was the Count de Winter, owner of the famous house, who was receiving his guests."
Enigmatic	Mysterious, difficult to understand	"The boat was coming towards us, rocking gently in the moonlight, and as it came closer I saw the vague outline of a man's figure, his head bent forward as he rowed, yet sitting back in his seat. He was close to us now, and I could see him more clearly, but he had passed me before I realized with a start that he was a stranger. A tall man, with a lean brown face, his eyes watching us with an expression at once cynical and enigmatic."
Hysterical	Overwhelmed by emotions to the point of losing control	"I am not hysterical, nor under any stress. My statement is not the result of any mood or phantasy."
Inquisitive	Curious or inquiring	"I looked back at the house as we turned the corner, and from this angle I could see nothing of it but the long facade, broken in the centre by the porte-cochere, and the two wings running back at right angles. The east wing was the domain of Mrs Danvers, and contained the suite of rooms which had been Rebecca's. I wondered which were the windows of the morning-room, and which of the sitting-room where Maxim had his telephone. I looked at Maxim now, aware of his eyes upon me, aware too of the curiosity that was showing plainly in my own face."
Intuition	The ability to understand something instinctively, without the need for conscious reasoning	"I was also aware of a feeling of exultation. I had never felt so sure of myself in my life. Never so certain of success. I was aware of it now, I had no need to prove anything to anyone. I knew, with a conviction beyond words, that something was going to happen, something beyond the ordinary procession of events. My intuition, call it what you will, was telling me that the time had come to move."



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Melancholy	A feeling of sadness, typically with no obvious cause	"I wandered about, an aimless soul in a world gone mad. I could not escape the feeling of sadness that hung over me like a cloud. A melancholy that had grown deeper with each passing day, until it had become a part of me."
Perplexed	Confused or puzzled	"I watched him out of sight, and then, perplexed, turned back into the house."
Porte-cochere	A covered entrance large enough for vehicles to pass through, typically opening into a courtyard	"The east wing was the domain of Mrs Danvers, and contained the suite of rooms which had been Rebecca's. I wondered which were the windows of the morning-room, and which of the sitting-room where Maxim had his telephone. I looked at Maxim now, aware of his eyes upon me, aware too of the curiosity that was showing plainly in my own face. We turned into the porte-cochere, and a footman came forward to open the door."
Precipice	A steep rock face or cliff, typically a tall one	"The drive curved away towards the north, and, at the turn, a low white lodge, guardant, with two blank windows like sightless eyes, was set back on its own haunches among the trees. Beyond this again lay the downs, bleak now in the autumn haze, and, beyond the downs, the ancestral home, Manderley. It was not until we were driving through the lodge gates that I remembered, with a start of surprise, that this was it, the beginning of the estate. All that we had passed was merely a rung on the ladder, a road that led to another road, another precipice."
Quiver	To tremble or shake with a slight rapid motion	"I wondered if he had noticed my hands, and I pulled them hastily into my lap, clasping them together, but they still trembled and quivered. I felt suddenly very small and foolish."
Resentment	A feeling of anger or bitterness towards someone or something perceived as unfair	"But I was conscious of a strange feeling of resentment towards Beatrice, a resentment I could not understand."
Sinister	Giving the impression that something harmful or evil is happening or will happen	"It was a room for secrets and whispers and guilty murmurs, a room that lay on its side and whispered its secrets to the fishes that swam and circled in the green light. It was a room that smelt of dead sea things, and the secrets of the sea, and the lost dreams of people who had drowned. The waves beat continually against its dark side, whispering their secrets to the room beyond. The room was like a tomb. It was like being inside a great, sinister shell."
Surreptitious	Kept secret, especially because it would not be approved of	"The manuscript lay hidden in the secret drawer of the bureau, together with a bundle of letters which had been written to Rebecca by a man called Favell. I glanced at them surreptitiously, wondering who he was, and how he came to write to Rebecca. Then I heard Maxim's footsteps on the stairs and turned quickly away, closing the drawer with a bang."



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Unctuous	Excessively or ingratiatingly flattering; oily	"He was short and fat, with a round, smiling face, and very white teeth. His hair was dark and sleek, brushed smoothly across his scalp, and his manner was unctuous, almost obsequious."
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Historical and political context of the book

While "Where the Crawdads Sing" is a work of fiction, it is set in a specific historical and political context that informs the story and its themes.

The novel takes place primarily in the 1950s and 1960s, a time when the United States was grappling with significant social and political changes. In the South, where the story is set, segregation and racism were still pervasive, despite the gains made by the Civil Rights Movement. The novel touches on issues of racial inequality, particularly through the character of Jumpin', a black man who befriends the protagonist, Kya, and helps her survive in the marsh.

The novel also explores issues related to gender and sexuality. Kya is a young girl who grows up without the guidance of parents, and she must navigate the expectations and limitations placed on her as a woman in a patriarchal society. The novel portrays the limitations placed on women during this time, particularly in terms of their ability to pursue education and careers.

In addition to these social issues, the novel is set against the backdrop of significant environmental changes taking place in the United States during this time. The 1950s and 1960s saw a surge in environmental awareness and activism, in response to the widespread use of pesticides, pollution, and habitat destruction. "Where the Crawdads Sing" reflects this context through its focus on the natural world, particularly the delicate and threatened ecosystem of the marsh.

Overall, "Where the Crawdads Sing" is situated in a complex historical and political context, reflecting the social, environmental, and cultural changes taking place in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. The novel explores issues related to race, gender, and the environment, while also telling a compelling and engaging story of survival and resilience.



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