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Close Reading Organizer - Bartleby, the Scrivener **Sample Answers**

Directions: Read each summary entry and think about which themes listed in the Themes Key apply to it, then color in those themes in the Theme Tracker. Next, write a few sentences of Analysis to explain how the themes you chose apply to each summary section.

Note: There is not always a definitive set of “correct” answers for which themes should appear in the Theme Tracker. Answers that differ from the ones we propose below should therefore not automatically be treated as incorrect, and in fact can serve as great discussion starters.

Themes Key

1	Passive Resistance
2	The Disconnected Workplace
3	Isolation and the Unreliability of Language
4	Charity and Its Limits

Summary	Theme Tracker				Your Analysis
The unnamed narrator (who we will refer to as The Lawyer) introduces himself as a “rather elderly man” and establishes that he has had much contact with a set of men that have never before been written about—scriveners, or law-copyists. The Lawyer goes on to say that he’ll forgo telling the biographies of the many scriveners he’s met for the most peculiar of them all: Bartleby , of whom little to nothing is known, except what The Lawyer himself has witnessed (and one vague report he’ll touch on later).	1	2	3	4	Melville lets the reader know immediately that The Lawyer is an unreliable and often unspecific narrator. For example, The Lawyer tells the reader know that the story will focus on Bartleby, and then proceeds to not mention Bartleby until seven pages later. The Lawyer’s storytelling is, in itself, an example of language failing to properly communicate.
The Lawyer then states	1	2	3	4	The Lawyer provides the

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that he is a lawyer, and describes his business as focusing around “rich men’s bonds, and mortgages, and title deeds.” The Lawyer is proud to have worked for the late John Jacob Astor (who was considered one of the richest men in America), and he is also proud to have been bestowed the now defunct title Master Of Chancery. The Lawyer then describes his office. It is bookended by two windows, one that looks upon the white wall of a skylight shaft, and the other that grants an “unobstructed view of a lofty brick wall”.					name of John Jacob Astor, a man who is never referenced again in the story, but fails to provide his own name, another example of unreliable (and unhelpful) narration. Also, the description of the office having a clear view of a brick wall feels like it should be a joke, but The Lawyer truly seems proud of it. In reality, there is little difference between a window with no view and a wall.
The Lawyer goes on to describe his employees before Bartleby’s arrival. First he delves into Turkey , a short, overweight Englishman of elderly age, who is extremely productive before noon. But, like clockwork, after that Turkey ceases to be productive and is instead “altogether too energetic,” creating inkblots on documents, making an unpleasant racket, and becoming easily irritable and prone to fits. The Lawyer recounts having tried to suggest that Turkey go home for the latter half of the day due to his old age, but Turkey had rebuffed him, arguing	1	2	3	4	The concept of an employee only being productive for one half of the day, every day, is a prime example of how disconnected The Lawyer’s office is—not only do walls separate people, but so do temperaments. Also, The Lawyer doesn’t overtly say it, but he implies that Turkey’s problems stem from his heavy drinking. The Lawyer not being entirely upfront about Turkey’s issues is an example of language failing to reveal the whole truth, as is the fact that The Lawyer doesn’t call Turkey by his real name.

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that to work during old age is honorable. And so, The Lawyer resolves to keep Turkey on as an employee, mostly for his good work during the first half of the day.					
Next, The Lawyer details his employee Nippers , who is also a scrivener. Nippers is about twenty-five years old, has yellow complexion, wears a mustache, and, in The Lawyer's view, is "victim of two evil powers—ambition and indigestion." Nippers's ambition and indigestion lead him to grind his teeth over copying mistakes, become impatient with his duties as a copyist, and continually express dissatisfaction with the height of his desk so that he incessantly fidgets with it. Nippers also receives visits from men in "seedy coats" whom he calls his clients. The Lawyer notes that Nippers does business at the Justices' courts, and also at the local prison, The Tombs.	1	2	3	4	Again, The Lawyer not using Nippers' real name is an example of language not communicating fully. Also, The Lawyer's description of Nippers being victim of ambition and indigestion is most likely not the whole truth: critics have argued that this description is a thinly veiled way to say that Nippers is a drug addict. Therefore, his irritability is caused by not having had his fix, and his visits to the court and prison are likely the sites of drug deals.
However, despite these issues, The Lawyer considers Nippers a useful employee as a scrivener, as he is a good dresser, which adds an air of formality and importance to the image of the office, and he also writes in a neat, swift hand. Like Turkey , Nippers	1	2	3	4	The Lawyer is more concerned with the image of his office than the reality—he is paying two men to do good work for half a day each, and yet he still considers both of them "useful." However, rather than Turkey and Nippers being useful for the same half of the day, the fact that

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is only really useful for half of the day, as before lunch Nippers is prone to fits of irritability and nervousness, whereas in the afternoon he is calm and professional. So, The Lawyer notes, Turkey and Nippers's fits "relieved each other, like guards" so that neither is unproductive (nor productive) at the same time.					they switch off at noon is a chief example of the office being a disconnected, disjointed space.
The last of The Lawyer's employees is Ginger Nut , a twelve-year-old office helper being paid one dollar per week. Ginger Nut has a desk that he rarely uses, instead being employed mostly as a gopher, fetching cakes and other items for The Lawyer and his two scriveners. The Lawyer then recounts a time when Turkey clapped a ginger-cake onto a mortgage as a seal, which infuriated The Lawyer to the point of nearly firing Turkey, who apologized to The Lawyer and told him it was his own stationery that he ruined, not The Lawyer's. Done with his descriptions, The Lawyer then states that his Master of Chancery title led to more business, and so he posted an ad for a new scrivener, which is how Bartleby entered his life.	1	2	3	4	Even though he is essentially an intern, Ginger Nut is given a desk in the office that he basically never uses, leaving an empty, useless space in an already-crowded office. The story of Turkey using a cake as a seal and somehow talking his way out of getting reprimanded or fired is an example of language serving to obscure the truth rather than reveal it. Also, The Lawyer using a written ad to find Bartleby hints at language's connective power, but the rest of the narrative entirely undercuts that possibility.
After exchanging words	1	2	3	4	The Lawyer learns some of

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<p>about his qualifications, The Lawyer is happy to hire Bartleby, because he hopes that Bartleby's "singularly sedate" nature might help calm the erratic natures of Turkey and Nippers. The Lawyer then describes the layout of his workplace, stating that glass doors (which The Lawyer opens and closes whenever he wants to) separate his own office from the area where the other scriveners and Ginger Nut work. However, The Lawyer decides to place Bartleby in a corner on <i>his</i> side of the folding doors, away from the other scriveners, but near a window that looks out onto the walls of two tall buildings. The Lawyer also puts up a "high green folding screen" that serves to "entirely isolate" Bartleby from his sight, but keeps him within earshot.</p>					<p>Bartleby's qualifications—the most he learns about Bartleby in the entire story—and he fails to share it with the reader (another example of language being unreliable). The layout of the office is a clear example of the disconnected modern workplace: the boss sits in a separate room from his employees, and even when he places Bartleby near him, The Lawyer puts a screen around the scrivener so that he cannot see his employee.</p>
<p>At first, Bartleby provides The Lawyer with an enormous quantity of writing, working nonstop all day and not pausing for lunch. The Lawyer notes that he would have been quite delighted by this, if not for the fact that Bartleby writes "silently, palely, mechanically" rather than with any delight. The Lawyer then mentions that an important part of a</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>Even before his usefulness wanes, The Lawyer is already skeptical of Bartleby because he doesn't take joy in his work. However, because the office is so personally disconnected, he chooses not to discuss this with Bartleby at all. Additionally, The Lawyer stating that an important part of a scrivener's job is to correct copies is in itself an example of the imperfection</p>

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<p>scrivener's job is to re-read what they have written in order to check for mistakes. Traditionally, when there is more than one scrivener present, they help each other with their corrections, and, because it's tedious, The Lawyer believes this is not work that someone like "the mettlesome poet, Byron," would be willing to do.</p>					<p>of language: even those whose job it is to write exact copies all day often make mistakes.</p>
<p>In the past, The Lawyer says that he has helped with correcting copy himself, and one of the reasons he placed Bartleby so close by was so that he could easily call him over to go through this correcting process. However, on the third day (The Lawyer thinks) of Bartleby's employment, The Lawyer hastily calls Bartleby over to correct a paper he is holding. He holds the copy out for Bartleby to take, but Bartleby never comes to his desk, instead calling out from behind the screen, "I would prefer not to."</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>In an attempt to make the office more spatially efficient and connected, The Lawyer places Bartleby close by so they can save time in reviewing copies together. However, he just assumes Bartleby will comply, never asking the scrivener if it's okay. Here The Lawyer is alerted to the first signs of Bartleby's deep-seated passive resistance.</p>
<p>The Lawyer stewes in silence, and initially thinks he has misheard Bartleby. He repeats the request, and Bartleby again responds with, "I would prefer not to." After questioning what Bartleby means by this phrase, The</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>The Lawyer's first assumption is that language, or his capacity to understand it, has failed him. But when he asks again, The Lawyer must confront the reality that Bartleby is, in fact, resisting him, not by overtly refusing,</p>

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<p>Lawyer gets up, walks over to Bartleby, and again tells his employee to come and compare the sheet with him for errors, thrusting the sheet over the screen towards his employee. But Bartleby doesn't take it, and instead repeats that he "would prefer not to." The Lawyer examines Bartleby's features, and says that if he could have seen <i>any</i> glimmer of agitation, "uneasiness, anger, impatience" or any other negative intentions, he would have fired Bartleby on the spot.</p>					<p>but by stating his preferences. Bartleby leaves how to react to his preferences entirely up to The Lawyer and, rather than assume Bartleby is being insolent, The Lawyer tries to read the features of a man he barely knows, trying to connect with someone who doesn't care to connect with him.</p>
<p>However, after staring at Bartleby and watching him write for a while, The Lawyer can detect no such intention, and so, though he finds Bartleby's behavior "very strange," he becomes busy with work and resolves to deal with it in the future. He then calls Nippers into his office, and the two of them correct the copy together.</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>Rather than deal with Bartleby immediately, The Lawyer decides to leave him in his corner and call Nippers from farther away to help—an example of Bartleby's passive resistance being entirely successful in achieving what he wants.</p>
<p>A few days later, The Lawyer convenes a meeting in his office, calling in Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut, as Bartleby has just finished writing out four lengthy copies of a week's testimony that The Lawyer presided over in the High Court of Chancery. Intending to read from the original while his four</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>As the saying goes, doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result is one definition of insanity. Yet The Lawyer attempts the same oral exchange with Bartleby, expecting him to comply. Of course, Bartleby passively resists, and in escaping behind his screen (a make-shift wall), he disconnects himself, at</p>

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employees examine the copies, The Lawyer calls to Bartleby that the rest of them are waiting for him. Bartleby comes out from behind the screen, and then he again states that he “would prefer not to” participate. He goes back behind his screen.					least momentarily, from the rest of the office.
<p>The Lawyer stands there, unsure what to do. Finally he advances toward the screen, and asks Bartleby <i>why</i> he refuses. Bartleby again responds simply that he “would prefer not to.” The Lawyer says that if he were dealing with anyone else, he would have them thrown out of his office—but in that moment something about Bartleby disarms The Lawyer, so he tries to reason with Bartleby, arguing that because these are Bartleby’s own copies that they are all examining, this process will be labor-saving to him. And, further, correcting copy is a common job requirement of being a scrivener. The Lawyer demands, “is it not so? Will you not speak? Answer!” To which Bartleby replies, “I prefer not to.”</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>The Lawyer is lying to the reader (an example of unreliable language) when he says that if any of his other employees acted this way he would throw them out of the office—yet earlier in the story, Turkey puts a ginger-cake onto an envelope as a seal, and The Lawyer lets him weasel his way out of it, just as he makes exceptions for Bartleby’s peculiar habits. Also, The Lawyer and Bartleby are on separate sides of the screen, making them physically disconnected.</p>
<p>The Lawyer feels as if Bartleby is not being curt with him. He feels that Bartleby has listened to his argument, and still prefers not to. After The Lawyer</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>Common sense is only an effective tool when both parties agree with what is sensible. Though The Lawyer clearly knows he is in the right, Bartleby and he</p>

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asks Bartleby whether he has indeed decided not to comply with The Lawyer's request to review the papers although it is "a request made according to common usage and common sense," Bartleby confirms that his decision is irreversible.					are disconnected in their understanding of the scrivener's job requirements.
<p>The Lawyer asks Turkey what he thinks of the situation, and Turkey says that he believes The Lawyer to be correct in the fairness of his request. The Lawyer asks Nippers what he thinks, and Nippers says that The Lawyer should kick Bartleby out of the office. The Lawyer then notes that, since it is the morning, this is the time when Nippers is ill tempered and Turkey is mild. Finally, The Lawyer asks Ginger Nut what he thinks, and Ginger Nut replies that Bartleby is a "luny." So, The Lawyer again turns toward Bartleby's screen, and urges Bartleby to come out and do his "duty." However, Bartleby neither replies nor emerges from his desk. The Lawyer states that business then hurried him, so he vowed to deal with this problem at a later date.</p>	1	2	3	4	Turkey and Nippers are, as always, disconnected in their attitudes, but still there emerges a unanimous consensus in the office that Bartleby is in the wrong. However, despite this conclusion between the other four members of the office, Bartleby remains hiding behind his screen, and though The Lawyer verbally urges him to do his duty, Bartleby passively abstains, until The Lawyer gives up and decides to do it on his own. This is an example of language failing and passive resistance winning out.
The Lawyer notes that they managed to correct the papers without Bartleby's help, with	1	2	3	4	If these jibes from his coworkers bother Bartleby, he shows no indication. As with any insult or

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<p>Turkey commenting on how unusual the situation was, and Nippers cursing at Bartleby between grinding his teeth, and ending with saying that he'll never again do another man's work without compensation. However, Bartleby does not reply, staying in his corner out of sight.</p>					<p>complaint, if the words don't mean anything to you, they won't be offensive or demeaning, as Nippers intends them to be. Rather than respond, Bartleby hides behind his screen and passively ignores the scene entirely.</p>
<p>Some days pass, and The Lawyer says that due to Bartleby's odd behavior, he has started watching Bartleby's habits more closely. The Lawyer notes that Bartleby never leaves for dinner, and, indeed, never leaves the office at all. Around 11 A.M., though, Ginger Nut walks over to the opening in Bartleby's screen, runs out of the office with his pockets jingling with coins, and reappears with a handful of gingernut cakes which he brings to Bartleby, receiving two of the cakes for having run the errand. The Lawyer then wonders whether gingernut cakes are all that Bartleby eats, and he ponders the effect of what an all-gingernut-cake diet might do to the human constitution. "Now, what was ginger?" The Lawyer wonders—hot and spicy, he determines. Does that make Bartleby hot and spicy? Of course not, The Lawyer concludes, he's</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>Although Bartleby spends <i>literally</i> all of his time in the office, The Lawyer is unable to get to know him better, and the only member of the office Bartleby interacts with is Ginger Nut, a twelve-year-old boy. Though The Lawyer could potentially learn about Bartleby from his young employee, he never ventures to ask Ginger Nut about his elusive scrivener. The Lawyer's strange thought-process about Bartleby's diet is derived from the Theory of Humorism, and its nonsensical conclusion is another example of language (and logic) failing to illuminate the truth.</p>

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just the opposite.					
<p>The Lawyer then delves into Bartleby's attitude, which he refers to as "passive resistance," saying that nothing can so aggravate an honest person as being passively resisted by another, as the honest person will give the passive one the benefit of the doubt in charitable good conscious, as The Lawyer is doing with Bartleby. The Lawyer then decides he has pity for Bartleby, as he means no mischief or insolence with his attitude; it is simply how he is. So, The Lawyer reckons that if he were to turn Bartleby away, another employer would probably not be so willing to accept his eccentricities. Here is a situation, The Lawyer decides, where he can "cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval," as keeping Bartleby on will cost him little, but it will make him feel good about himself as a charitable Christian man.</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>The Lawyer decides that Bartleby's resistance to his authority is not a choice that Bartleby is making, but rather a condition of his personality, like a disability. So, rather than be angry, The Lawyer justifies his acceptance of Bartleby as <i>charitable</i> rather than a compromise he accepts because of business interests, as he's done with Turkey and Nippers. However, The Lawyer is somewhat self-aware about this feelings, as can be seen when he calls his good feelings "cheaply purchase[d]," as true charity, it could be argued, might require real work or suffering.</p>
<p>However, despite The Lawyer's resolve to accept Bartleby as he is, one day The Lawyer is overtaken by what he deems an "evil impulse," and he decides to again ask Bartleby to compare papers with him. Bartleby once more says he would</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>This urge by The Lawyer to test Bartleby's passively resistant attitude is an example of the promises we break to ourselves—and how language, even when constructed with completely honest intent in our own minds, can be unreliable. Turkey and</p>

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<p>“prefer not to,” and again The Lawyer walks over to Turkey to ask him what he thinks of Bartleby’s behavior. It being the afternoon, Turkey, in his drunken state, says that he should step back behind Bartleby’s “screen and black his eyes for him!” Turkey approaches Bartleby’s desk, until The Lawyer orders him to sit back down. The Lawyer then asks Nippers his opinion on whether he should dismiss Bartleby. Nippers calmly says that Bartleby’s behavior is unusual and unjust, and that The Lawyer might be justified in that action, but what to do is ultimately for The Lawyer to decide.</p>					<p>Nippers swapping responses about Bartleby (Turkey being incensed this time and Nippers being reasonable) because of the time of day is another example of the absurd disconnection at play in this office.</p>
<p>The Lawyer states that Nippers has changed his opinion since the last time he asked about Bartleby, and Turkey exclaims that Nippers’s “gentleness is the effects of beer,” and then again asks if The Lawyer would like Turkey to take a swing at Bartleby. The Lawyer tells Turkey to put his fists down, and again walks over to speak with Bartleby. This time, The Lawyer requests that Bartleby to go out to the post office and pick something up for him, because Ginger Nut is out today. Bartleby states once more that he would “prefer not to.” The Lawyer asks if</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>Although alcohol is what makes Turkey upset, he argues that Nippers’ calm attitude is the result of beer, which is linguistically nonsensical. Additionally, The Lawyer requesting Bartleby go to the Post Office must be especially off-putting to Bartleby, as he used to work in the Dead Letter Office (as we learn later). This is another example of language failing to connect people, as The Lawyer learns of Bartleby’s past occupation only after he is already dead.</p>

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he “ <i>will not</i> ,” but Bartleby again states that he’d “ <i>prefer not</i> .”					
<p>The Lawyer then sits at his desk, and after some thought, calls out for Bartleby, who doesn’t respond. The Lawyer calls again. Still nothing. On the third time The Lawyer yells, and this time Bartleby emerges “like a very ghost” and stands at the entrance of his screened-in area. The Lawyer asks Bartleby to go to the next room and summon Nippers for him. Bartleby, in a respectful tone, says that he would “prefer not to,” and disappears behind his screen. The Lawyer says, “Very good, Bartleby.” The Lawyer sits there pondering what to do, and in the end he decides to keep Bartleby on, so that an unspoken agreement emerges as the new status quo: Bartleby is technically in The Lawyer’s employment as a scrivener, but he is exempt (or has exempted himself) from any of the duties of the job aside from writing down copy.</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>The Lawyer is speaking metaphorically when he says Bartleby emerged from his screened-in area like a ghost, but it is a poignant metaphor: although The Lawyer and Bartleby are physically in the same space, ideologically they’re in two very different planes of existence. So, when The Lawyer’s final attempt to assert his control over Bartleby’s working habits fails, The Lawyer allows Bartleby’s resistant nature to become the status quo, and he works around Bartleby’s preferences rather than the other way around, an upside-down construction of how the boss-employee relationship is supposed to function.</p>
As days pass, The Lawyer becomes increasingly accepting of Bartleby ’s habits. He enjoys Bartleby’s work ethic (aside from the occasional times when he stands	1	2	3	4	<p>The Lawyer trusts Bartleby fully despite not knowing anything about him, and he cannot figure out that the fact that Bartleby arrives early to and leaves late from the office is caused by</p>

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<p>silently behind the screen doing nothing), his stillness, and his consistency, always being the first one there in the morning and the last still in the office at night. The Lawyer feels that he entirely trusts Bartleby with his valuable papers. The Lawyer states that, once in a while, out of habit, he will summon Bartleby to do a simple task for him, and each time the reply comes from Bartleby that he would “prefer not to.” However, rather than get fed up with Bartleby, The Lawyer simply begins to alter his habits so that Bartleby refuses him less and less often.</p>					<p>his condition of living there. This epitomizes how disconnected the office is, as well as how sharing language has failed to create a close-knit bond in the office. Additionally, Bartleby’s passive resistance becomes even more controlling of the office, changing The Lawyer’s habits and leaving Bartleby’s unchanged.</p>
<p>The Lawyer notes that, as is customary, there are several keys to the door that opens his office. A cleaning person has one, Turkey has the second, and The Lawyer himself has the third, but The Lawyer is unaware who has the fourth key. One Sunday morning, The Lawyer is heading to church and decides to stop by the office on the way. When he tries to unlock the door, he finds another key already in the lock, blocking his so that he cannot open the door. The Lawyer calls out, and none other than Bartleby answers the door, dressed</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>Bartleby’s passive resistance has evolved a step further: rather than simply refusing his boss and causing The Lawyer to change his habits, Bartleby effectively refuses The Lawyer entry to a place that he is legally entitled to reside in. Rather than yell at Bartleby and seize back control of the office in some way, The Lawyer accepts Bartleby’s wishes and leaves, showing that The Lawyer is no longer in control of their relationship. Also, this conversation happens with Bartleby inside and The Lawyer outside, symbolizing their disconnected ideologies via</p>

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in unprofessional, disheveled clothing. Bartleby tells The Lawyer that he is “deeply engaged” at that moment, and would prefer not to admit The Lawyer into his office at present. He suggests that perhaps The Lawyer should walk around the block a few times until Bartleby concludes his activities.					physical separation.
The Lawyer , though frustrated, follows Bartleby ’s request and walks around the block, noting that it is Bartleby’s “wonderful mildness” that compels him to follow his employee’s requests. The Lawyer then wonders what Bartleby could possibly be doing in his office in informal dress on a Sunday morning. He contemplates whether something could be amiss, then dismisses that thought, instead wondering whether Bartleby could be doing work at this hour, but The Lawyer dismisses that, too, as he’s never known Bartleby to work in informal clothing. When The Lawyer returns, he inserts his key in the lock, finds it vacated, and enters the office to find Bartleby gone.	1	2	3	4	Although his words are mild, Bartleby’s attitude is quite rigid, showcasing the separation between the literal definitions of the words Bartleby uses and the meaning that he intends. Also, while The Lawyer does speculate about what Bartleby could be doing at the office, by the time he returns Bartleby is gone, so their physical disconnection leaves The Lawyer unable to discover Bartleby’s purpose through asking him, though that likely would’ve proved ineffective as well.
Once he’s alone in the office, The Lawyer determines that Bartleby must be eating, dressing,	1	2	3	4	It is only once Bartleby is gone that The Lawyer learns anything of substance about his

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and even sleeping in the office. The Lawyer finds a blanket under Bartleby's desk as well as some toiletries and a stash of food. The Lawyer then ponders how great Bartleby's poverty and solitude must be, living in a place that is usually thrumming with industry during the workweek, but so empty that it echoes at night and on weekends.					employee and begins to empathize with Bartleby. This is indicative of the failure of language to connect The Lawyer to Bartleby, and also how isolated and disconnected the workers in The Lawyer's office are from each other.
The Lawyer is suddenly struck with a deep melancholy, causing him to ponder the nature of happiness and loneliness. He notes that "happiness courts the light," and that it is easy to see on people's faces, whereas "misery hides" so we deem that "there is none." As he is thinking about Bartleby , The Lawyer is suddenly attracted to Bartleby's closed desk, which has its key sticking out of the lock. The Lawyer searches the desk, and finds that Bartleby's papers are neatly laid out. However, beneath the papers, The Lawyer finds an old knotted handkerchief. He opens it, and finds that within is Bartleby's savings bank, filled with coins.	1	2	3	4	The Lawyer is basically arguing that language is an ineffective tool for communicating misery, as it is easy to lie and hide it. The Lawyer proves his own point by finding Bartleby's savings in his desk, learning of his deep poverty and isolation in the office not through communicating, but through a physical investigation of a space (his office) that he <i>should</i> know everything about, but obviously does not.
The Lawyer recalls all of Bartleby's curious habits and mysteries—his lack of speaking except to	1	2	3	4	Here is a striking example of the limits of charity in the modern Wall Street world: The Lawyer has just

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<p>answer, the fact that he stands looking out his window (with a view of a brick wall) for long periods, that he never drinks beer, never leaves the office to eat or go for a walk (unless that is what he's doing right now), that he has never said a word about his past or family, and his overall reserved manner, which has "awed" The Lawyer into his "tame compliance." These reminiscences turn The Lawyer's initial feeling of melancholy and pity for Bartleby into fear and repulsion, as he feels that Bartleby is so far beyond the point of being helped that there is nothing to be done, as it is Bartleby's soul, not his body, that is suffering and beyond The Lawyer's reach.</p>					<p>learned his employee is homeless and alone, and after reviewing all he knows of Bartleby, The Lawyer determines that Bartleby's soul is too far gone to be helped, which enrages and scares The Lawyer. The Lawyer, then, only wants to be charitable if he can see the rewards of his efforts and feel good about himself. If a charity case becomes too much of an effort, then, it becomes a burden The Lawyer is unwilling to bear.</p>
<p>Rather than going to church as he had intended, The Lawyer decides to head home, and on the way he resolves to ask Bartleby about his history tomorrow morning. If he declines to answer, The Lawyer states that he will give Bartleby a 20-dollar bonus on top of whatever he owes him and send him on his way, with the promise that if Bartleby is ever in need, he can write to The Lawyer and expect a reply. The next morning arrives, and The Lawyer asks Bartleby where he</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>To be charitable is to be compassionate, empathetic, and do what you can to help those in need; at this point in the narrative, The Lawyer wants to connect with Bartleby solely to be able to rid himself of the responsibility of his employee. The \$20 severance check is generous, but it is not wholly charitable, as The Lawyer gives it partially to absolve his own guilt, not to help Bartleby. But, despite his best efforts to connect with Bartleby through</p>

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was born, to which Bartleby replies that he'd prefer not to say. The Lawyer asks if Bartleby will tell the lawyer " <i>anything</i> " about himself and Bartleby gives the same reply. When The Lawyer asks what Bartleby's reasonable objection is to answering, Bartleby says he would "prefer to give no answer."					questions, Bartleby's passive preference to reveal nothing about himself beats The Lawyer's resolve to find out.
The Lawyer ruminates on how he should handle this situation. Despite his resolution to dismiss Bartleby should this problem arise, The Lawyer feels a "superstitious knocking" at his heart that makes him feel like a bad person if he is to go through with dismissing Bartleby. The Lawyer approaches Bartleby's desk and says that it's okay if Bartleby doesn't want to discuss his past, but from now on he must comply with the full range of his duties as a scrivener, including correcting copy. He urges Bartleby to say that in a day or two he will begin being "a little reasonable." To all of this Bartleby replies that he "would prefer not to be a little reasonable."	1	2	3	4	The Lawyer decides once again that keeping Bartleby on is the best thing to do, but he tries to push back against Bartleby's passive resistance so that Bartleby will comply with the full range of the duties of a scrivener. However, Bartleby resists once more, even resisting to be reasonable, so that The Lawyer has no way to gain authority over Bartleby through an oral request, as Bartleby will not accept the parameters of reasonable logic, nor accept The Lawyer's power as his boss.
Nippers enters the office, overhears Bartleby's words, and calls him a stubborn mule. The Lawyer says he would	1	2	3	4	Although Bartleby isn't forcing the other members of the office to change their vernacular, his passive resistance has spread into

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<p>“prefer” that Nippers withdraw from the room, which he does. The Lawyer notes that, somehow, he’s taken on the habit of using the phrase “prefer” in all kinds of “not exactly suitable occasions.”</p> <p>Turkey then suggests that if Bartleby would “but prefer” to drink alcohol, his problems would go away. When The Lawyer asks why Turkey is using the word “prefer,” Turkey says he never uses that word himself, and when The Lawyer asks Turkey to leave the room, he replies that he will if The Lawyer “prefer” that he should.</p> <p>Nippers then asks if The Lawyer would prefer he use blue or white paper, and, as this phrase has overtaken his whole office, The Lawyer resolves to dismiss Bartleby shortly before his effects on the office worsen.</p>					<p>their speech. This would indicate that the group is somehow connected, even though Turkey’s denial of his use of the word “prefer” as he uses it shows the inability of language—especially if improperly used—to connect people. So, finally, The Lawyer again decides it is time to fire Bartleby, because of his effect on the attitudes of the others in the office. In the one moment in the story that hints at the connection of his employees, The Lawyer resolves to pull them apart.</p>
<p>The next day, The Lawyer notices that Bartleby has done “nothing but stand at his window in his dead-wall reverie.” When The Lawyer asks him why, Bartleby replies that he has decided on no more writing. The Lawyer asks what his reason is, and Bartleby replies, “Do you not see the reason for yourself?” providing no further information. It then occurs to The Lawyer that perhaps Bartleby’s vision</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>Reason, logic, and language can only connect people if both parties understand the rules and choose to follow them. Bartleby stares out a viewless window doing nothing, and rather than tell his boss why, he implies that The Lawyer already knows. So, Bartleby’s miscommunication leads The Lawyer to assume Bartleby has lost his sight due to the dark walled-off layout of the office, and Bartleby neither confirms</p>

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has become impaired from the little light that emanates from the window near his desk that is right up against a brick wall, and that is why he won't write anymore. The Lawyer accepts Bartleby's wishes, and urges him to go out in the daylight to get his sight back, but Bartleby simply stays in the office.					nor denies his assumption.
A few days later, with the other employees absent, The Lawyer asks Bartleby to carry letters to the Post Office, but Bartleby declines, forcing The Lawyer to go himself. As days go by, The Lawyer thinks Bartleby's eyes are getting better, but when he asks Bartleby about it, Bartleby gives no answer. Further, Bartleby continues to do no copying at all, informing The Lawyer that he has given up copying permanently. Still, Bartleby remains a "fixture" in The Lawyer's chamber, becoming not only useless, but "afflictive" to have around. However, The Lawyer feels "sorry" for Bartleby, as he seems "absolutely alone in the universe." The Lawyer states that if he knew a single one of Bartleby's relatives or friends, he would feel comfortable urging them to take Bartleby, but he knows of none. Still, The Lawyer informs Bartleby that in six	1	2	3	4	Again, The Lawyer asking Bartleby to go to the Post Office is likely psychologically off-putting to Bartleby due to his time spent working at the Dead Letter Office, but The Lawyer only finds that out after Bartleby is dead. Additionally, when Bartleby's presence transitions from neutral to "afflictive," The Lawyer, despite feeling bad about Bartleby's isolation, decides that his charitable gesture of keeping Bartleby around has reached a breaking point. Thus The Lawyer decides that, whether he can locate Bartleby's family or not, their time together must end.

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days time he must leave the office.					
<p>Six days later, Bartleby remains in the office. The Lawyer offers Bartleby the 20-dollar bonus and tells him he must go. Bartleby replies that he would prefer not to. The Lawyer tells him he <i>must</i>, but Bartleby sits there silently. The Lawyer gives Bartleby all the money the scrivener is owed, plus the 20-dollar bonus. He tells Bartleby that he wishes him well, and that if he can be of service to the scrivener, Bartleby shouldn't hesitate to contact The Lawyer. Bartleby doesn't respond. The Lawyer leaves, confident that Bartleby will listen to him and vacate the premises.</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>The difference between a preference and a command is that a command, in general, is never supposed to be disobeyed. Unlike earlier, when Bartleby at least acknowledges The Lawyer's commands with a response, Bartleby's passive resistance has evolved one stage further, so that his resting state is now total noncompliance, and Bartleby seems almost more like a zombie than a man.</p>
<p>As The Lawyer walks home, he becomes more and more confident that Bartleby will comply with his order to leave. He calls his own handling of the situation "masterly," as he "assumed the ground" that Bartleby must depart, so Bartleby has no choice but to do so. However, when he wakes the next morning, doubts flood The Lawyer's mind. He worries that the assumption was simply his "own, and none of Bartleby's," as Bartleby is "more a man of preferences than</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>The Lawyer's initial triumphant feelings are an example of how disconnected he is from Bartleby. This is undercut by The Lawyer's realization that his assumption of authority and Bartleby's "preferences" may not line up. Ironically, as The Lawyer distances himself from his office, his thoughts about the office's dynamics become clearer.</p>

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assumptions.”					
<p>On his way to the office, The Lawyer debates back and forth in his head whether Bartleby has stayed or left the office. He passes someone on the street who says, “I’ll take odds he doesn’t,” to which The Lawyer agrees to take the other side of the bet, telling the other man, “put up your money.” However, The Lawyer realizes that today is election day, and the man must have been talking about some candidate, not Bartleby. The Lawyer reaches the office, fumbles under the door for the key where he hopes Bartleby will have put it, and accidentally bumps his knee against the door. To this noise, there is a reply from within, “Not yet; I am occupied.” Of course, it is Bartleby.</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>The dialogue between The Lawyer and a passerby is a tongue-in-cheek comment on the unreliability of language and how isolated The Lawyer is from those around him. Although The Lawyer and this passerby speak the same language, without a common context their brief exchange means two very different things to the two parties. (This type of sequence is continually repeated whenever The Lawyer and Bartleby speak to each other—though they understand each other’s words, nothing gets communicated.)</p>
<p>The Lawyer is somewhat shocked that Bartleby is still there, and mutters to himself on the street. He walks around the block, pondering what to do about Bartleby—he does not want to forcibly remove the scrivener from the building, and calling the police seems like “an unpleasant idea.” Still, The Lawyer doesn’t want to let Bartleby stay and be victorious, but the plan he comes up with to simply</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>The door, a physical symbol of The Lawyer and Bartleby’s ideological isolation from one another, disconnects the employer from his employee. Additionally, The Lawyer tries to use logic to come up with any way to break through Bartleby’s passively resistant demeanor <i>without</i> resorting to calling in higher authorities, but after brainstorming, his only solution is to once more try</p>

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ignore Bartleby's presence and act as if he has left seems unlikely to succeed. The Lawyer decides to simply argue the matter with Bartleby once more, and so he returns to the office.					a tool that hasn't worked at all in their shared past: language.
The Lawyer asks Bartleby if Bartleby will leave, to which Bartleby replies that he'd prefer not to. The Lawyer asks what right Bartleby has to stay, as he doesn't pay rent, taxes, or own the property. Bartleby says nothing. The Lawyer asks if Bartleby is ready to write again, or go to the post office, or do anything to be useful to The Lawyer. Rather than respond, Bartleby retreats to his area behind the screen. The Lawyer recalls the story of Samuel Adams and John C. Colt: Colt was convicted of murdering Adams when they were alone in the office together. The Lawyer notes that he'd often thought about the fact that, had Colt and Adams's disagreement happened in public, or even at a private residence rather than an office, it might have been resolved differently, as offices are entirely without "humanizing domestic associations" that one's own home might be filled with.	1	2	3	4	The Lawyer's attempts to use language to show Bartleby the illogical and illegal nature of his behavior prove futile, as Bartleby first passively resists by again stating his preferences, and then shuts down into silence. The case of Colt and Adams is a colorful example of language and the workplace both serving to disconnect rather than connect people: Colt murdered Adams over a dispute about a <i>bookkeeping textbook</i> in Adams' office. So, the creation of a text meant to share wisdom and ideas through language leads both men to destruction—Adams to his death, and Colt to prison.
Sitting at his desk, The	1	2	3	4	The Lawyer's line of logic

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<p>Lawyer's resentment of Bartleby grows, but a Christian impulse overtakes him, reminding him that it his duty as a Christian to "love one another." So, feeling this charitable impulse, The Lawyer decides not to reprimand Bartleby or throw him out on the street, instead thinking of how pitiable Bartleby's situation is. Secretly, The Lawyer hopes Bartleby will still leave of his own accord, but as the day progresses and the rest of the employees arrive, Bartleby stays at his desk, unmoving.</p>					<p>keeps switching back and forth: though his practical side resents Bartleby for taking advantage of the situation and believes that ridding himself of Bartleby would make his life easier, his moralistic Christian side urges him to be charitable and accept Bartleby as he is. Language, even in our own minds, can be tricky and often unreliable.</p>
<p>Some days later, after reading two religious texts, The Lawyer decides that Bartleby has been thrust into his life via predestination from eternity, and God's intention regarding Bartleby's influence on his life will remain mysterious to him. So, The Lawyer is content to allow Bartleby to remain behind his screen. That is, until a while later, when The Lawyer has a meeting in his office with many colleagues. One of the visiting lawyers asks Bartleby to run an errand for him, and Bartleby refuses, preferring to stand next to the wall doing nothing. The news of this refusal spreads "all</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>Even after The Lawyer delves fully into the religious line of logic that Bartleby has been brought into his life via predestination, The Lawyer still cannot stick to his charitable intentions toward Bartleby once his presence begins to negatively impact The Lawyer's business. So, it seems, The Lawyer's charitable inclinations reach their limit when they begin to have negative consequences on the comfort of his own life. In other words, The Lawyer isn't willing to truly suffer for his sins as Jesus did, or make any kind of real sacrifice to help his fellow man..</p>

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through the circle” of The Lawyer’s profession, causing much speculation as to the nature of The Lawyer and Bartleby’s relationship. So, as Bartleby’s presence has begun to impact The Lawyer’s professional reputation, The Lawyer resolves to rid himself of Bartleby, who he now refers to as an “intolerable incubus.”					
First, The Lawyer simply suggests to Bartleby that he leave. After he thinks about it for three days, Bartleby tells The Lawyer that he would still prefer not to go. The Lawyer considers what to do, and resolves once more not to throw Bartleby out of the office, nor call the police. So, The Lawyer decides that since Bartleby will not quit, The Lawyer “must quit him.” He plans to find a new office, and then tell Bartleby that if he finds him at this new location he will have to treat him as a “common trespasser.” The next day, The Lawyer tells Bartleby that he will be moving offices next week, and Bartleby should seek out a new place to be. Bartleby does not respond.	1	2	3	4	When language and logic fail to connect The Lawyer and Bartleby, The Lawyer finally uses the scrivener’s tool of passive resistance against him. The Lawyer manages to feel good about his charitable dealings (by not calling the police on Bartleby) while still placing a limit on how much he’s willing to take; so, in The Lawyer’s mind, changing offices is a middle-ground between being wholly and sacrificially charitable and simply treating Bartleby as a criminal and having him arrested.
The Lawyer moves offices the next week, emptying the office of furniture. When everything is gone, The Lawyer says goodbye	1	2	3	4	The Lawyer telling Bartleby he hopes God blesses him directly conflicts with his earlier feelings that Bartleby was brought into

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<p>to Bartleby, and tells him that he hopes God blesses him. Despite The Lawyer's fears, Bartleby never shows up at the new office. All is going smoothly, until a different lawyer (The Other Lawyer) arrives to ask whether The Lawyer has recently vacated an office on Wall Street. The Lawyer replies that he has, and this Other Lawyer says that The Lawyer is responsible for the man (Bartleby) who has been left there. The Lawyer says that Bartleby is "nothing" to him—no apprentice or relation, so someone else must deal with him. This other lawyer asks who Bartleby is, and The Lawyer replies that he does not know—just someone he used to employ. The Other Lawyer leaves, saying he'll take care of the problem.</p>					<p>his life via predestination—if The Lawyer wanted God to bless Bartleby, he <i>could</i> bless Bartleby himself by continuing to care for him. When The Lawyer is called on by The Other Lawyer to claim responsibility for Bartleby, The Lawyer does not abide by his charitable urges and instead claims Bartleby is "nothing" to him, which, in one sense, is true, as The Lawyer knows essentially nothing about Bartleby's personal life or past.</p>
<p>Several days pass, and The Lawyer thinks he has finally been ridded of Bartleby. However, a week or so later, The Other Lawyer returns to the office to tell The Lawyer that he must take Bartleby away from his old office at once, informing him that Bartleby is now haunting the whole building, not just The Lawyer's former office space. Reluctantly, The Lawyer agrees to return to</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>Here The Lawyer—no doubt partially motivated by guilt—is once again charitable to Bartleby, going above and beyond what he's offered before. However, when The Lawyer speaks to Bartleby and his former scrivener passively resists all of The Lawyer's job offers as well as his offer to take Bartleby into his own home, The Lawyer once more reaches his limit of what he is willing to sacrifice for Bartleby.</p>

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his old office to try to reason with Bartleby. Once there, The Lawyer explains that Bartleby has two options—he “must do something” or something must be done to him. The Lawyer offers to give him his old copying job back, or to get him any number of new jobs, all of which Bartleby says he would prefer not to do. The Lawyer then offers to take Bartleby to his own home where they can figure out an arrangement, and Bartleby says he would “prefer not to make any change at all.”					
The Lawyer rushes out of the building, ignoring anyone who tries to stop him. He decides that he has done all that he possibly could for Bartleby , and, “so fearful” of being “hunted out by the incensed landlord” and his tenants, The Lawyer lets Nippers run the business for a few days while he spends some time in the suburbs. When The Lawyer returns to his office, he finds a note from the landlord, informing him that the police were called and Bartleby has been taken to the Tombs, a local prison, for being a vagrant, and that, since The Lawyer knows more about Bartleby than anyone else, his presence is requested at the Tombs to make a	1	2	3	4	After abandoning Bartleby for the second time (the first being changing offices), The Lawyer physically disconnects himself from Bartleby by literally leaving the city, and he justifies that he has done all he possibly could for Bartleby, which is blatantly untrue. Yes, The Lawyer has been reasonably charitable toward Bartleby, but there is no question that The Lawyer had the power to do more (for example, he could have remained in his old office).

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statement about the facts of Bartleby's life.					
<p>That day, The Lawyer heads to the prison to attest to the fact that Bartleby is an honest, but eccentric, man. The Lawyer then requests to visit Bartleby and speak with him. Because Bartleby is non-violent, the court has permitted him to wander freely around the prison, "especially in the inclosed grass-platted yards." When The Lawyer finds Bartleby, he is standing alone in the quietest yard, "his face towards a high wall," while the eyes of murderers and thieves peer down on him from the slits in the jail cells. When Bartleby recognizes The Lawyer, he says he has "nothing to say" to his former boss. The Lawyer says that he isn't the one who brought Bartleby to prison, and that it isn't so bad here after all. Bartleby says "I know where I am," but will say nothing more to The Lawyer.</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>The Lawyer likely knows deep down that he did <i>not</i> do all he could for Bartleby, which might be why he goes to see Bartleby once more when he could easily leave the prison without seeing his former employee. Bartleby facing a wall is a direct parallel to the "dead-wall reveries" he would have at The Lawyer's office, implicitly comparing Wall Street offices to prisons. Though The Lawyer tries to talk to Bartleby, and Bartleby doesn't ignore him, Bartleby states that he has no intention of engaging with The Lawyer whatsoever.</p>
<p>On his way out, a man (The Grubman) stops The Lawyer and asks if Bartleby is his friend. The Lawyer says "yes," and the man says that if The Lawyer wants him to starve, he'll allow him to eat the prison food. The man, who now says that</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>The Lawyer tells The Grubman that Bartleby is his "friend," even though just a little while earlier he told The Other Lawyer that Bartleby was "nothing" to him. Here, it seems The Lawyer is aware that his charity towards Bartleby has been fickle and</p>

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<p>he is a “grubman” of the prison, offers to provide Bartleby with good food, for a fee. The Lawyer pays The Grubman to provide Bartleby with food, asking him to give him “the best dinner” The Grubman can make. Then, The Lawyer brings The Grubman over to Bartleby, and tells him that The Grubman will be his friend. The Grubman says he is a servant, and offers to make Bartleby dinner. Bartleby replies that he would “prefer not to dine today,” as it would disagree with him. Then Bartleby walks over to a “dead-wall” and stands in front of it.</p>					<p>somewhat limited, so he tries to make up for it with a last-ditch effort of paying The Grubman to provide Bartleby with food. However, Bartleby resists this charitable gesture, preferring not to eat, and instead “preferring” to stare at the wall. In prison, The Lawyer and Bartleby are as disconnected as they were in the office.</p>
<p>The Lawyer and The Grubman chat about Bartleby being odd, and The Lawyer says he is somewhat “deranged.” The Grubman says he initially thought Bartleby was a forger, and asks if The Lawyer knows Monroe Edwards, a notorious forger who used to be at this same prison Bartleby is being held at. The Lawyer says no, he’s never known any forgers.</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>We learn the name of Monroe Edwards, a figure irrelevant to the story, but not to that of The Grubman or The Lawyer. Also, The Lawyer calls Bartleby “deranged” despite just having called him his friend. Language is subjective, especially when combined with The Lawyer’s fickle thought processes.</p>
<p>Some days later, The Lawyer returns to the prison, and finds Bartleby asleep in the yard, surrounded by walls “of amazing thickness.” Bartleby is huddled at the base of a wall, his knees</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>For the first time in the story, The Lawyer physically touches Bartleby. So, when The Lawyer and Bartleby are the most physically connected is also when they are spiritually the furthest apart—</p>

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<p>drawn up, and his body looking “wasted.” His “dim eyes” are open but his body appears to be asleep. The Lawyer touches Bartleby’s hand, causing a shiver to run up and down his spine. The Grubman appears, saying that Bartleby’s dinner is ready. “Won’t he dine today either? Or does he live without dining?” the Grubman asks. The Lawyer replies, “Lives without dining.” The Grubman comments that Bartleby’s asleep, and The Lawyer replies, “With kings and counselors.”</p>					<p>Bartleby’s passive resistance has driven him into some kind of coma or stupor, so that despite his eyes being open it is as if his soul has vacated his body. He “lives without dining,” but as The Lawyer implies, Bartleby isn’t far from passing on into heaven, hell, or nonexistence.</p>
<p>The Lawyer cuts off his narration, saying that there is “little need for proceeding further,” as the reader can easily imagine Bartleby’s fate. Then, The Lawyer decides to “divulge one little item of rumor” he has heard since Bartleby’s death. He isn’t sure how true it is, but The Lawyer has heard that, before working for The Lawyer, Bartleby worked as a clerk in the “Dead Letter Office” in Washington, and had been abruptly fired in a change of administration. When The Lawyer ponders the rumor, he can’t help but become emotional, as dead letters sounds much “like dead men” to him. He notes that this business of burning dead letters,</p>	1	2	3	4	<p>It has been argued by critics that this story itself is a “Dead Letter” from The Lawyer to Bartleby—it is only after Bartleby’s death that The Lawyer is able to understand even a little bit about his former employee’s history and mentality. Also, The Lawyer shows by far the most emotion he has in the entire story in this final passage, empathizing with Bartleby more after his death than he ever could in life. The Lawyer feels for Bartleby having had to witness so many failures by words to connect people, but, further than that, he comes to see Bartleby as a proxy for all humanity, as we all have handicaps and weaknesses that separate us, so perhaps we should try to be</p>

carrying with them “pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping” could turn any man into a hopeless one. “On errands of life,” The Lawyer notes, these letters sped to death. He ends the story, “Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!”					more connected to—and more charitable towards— each other.
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