

Bartleby, the Scrivener

Herman Melville

Why is Bartleby's first refusal more disruptive because of the way he phrases it?

TOTAL TIME	TUMBLETA PASSAGE LOCATION
30 minutes	Office routine - Bartleby's first refusal

TEACHER SETUP

Open the work in the Enhanced Reader and cue the span using the START and END anchors below.

START	In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do-namely, to examine a small paper with me.
END	I would prefer not to.
PASSAGE ID	sec-bartleby-01

THE MOVE

Analyze how diction can resist authority without openly confronting it

WHY THIS PASSAGE

Bartleby does not say “no,” argue, or give a reason. “Prefer” sounds personal and mild, but it treats an employer’s instruction as if it were merely an option. The politeness therefore makes the refusal harder for the lawyer to categorize and answer.

MARK

Underline the lawyer’s description of the task as ordinary or expected. Circle Bartleby’s exact refusal each time it appears. Box the lawyer’s attempts to interpret or respond to it.

NOTICE

- Why does the lawyer expect compliance?
- What is different between “I refuse” and “I would prefer not to”?
- How does the lawyer’s confusion reveal the power of Bartleby’s wording?

THINK

Answer provisionally: Why is Bartleby's first refusal more disruptive because of the way he phrases it? Choose the strongest interpretation you can defend from this passage alone.

WRITE

Write a short evidence-based response. Use at least two details from the assigned passage and explain how they support your interpretation.

CLOSE

Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and say why.

STRONG ANSWER

Bartleby's wording is disruptive because it avoids the language of open rebellion while still withholding obedience. "Prefer" quietly converts a workplace command into a personal choice, leaving the lawyer without the confrontation or explanation he expects.

EVIDENCE

Use Bartleby's exact formula and one reaction from the lawyer showing that he cannot easily classify it.

WATCH FOR

Do not treat "prefer" as merely polite. Explain how its mildness changes the power relationship in the scene.

SOLO

Read independently.

SUPPORTED

Narration + highlighting.

LISTENING

Listen; same evidence task.

STUDENT PAGE · GRADE 11 · LESSON 314

Bartleby, the Scrivener

Herman Melville

Why is Bartleby's first refusal more disruptive because of the way he phrases it?

WORK	Bartleby, the Scrivener
------	-------------------------

TUMBLETA PASSAGE LOCATION	Office routine - Bartleby's first refusal
PASSAGE ID	sec-bartleby-01

Your teacher will open or cue the work in the Enhanced Reader. Use the location and verbatim anchors below to confirm the assigned span.

START

In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do—namely, to examine a small paper with me.

END

I would prefer not to.

READ / LISTEN TO THE ASSIGNED PASSAGE SOLO: read independently. SUPPORTED: use narration and highlighting. LISTENING: listen to the assigned passage. The question and evidence task stay the same.

1. **MARK** Underline the lawyer's description of the task as ordinary or expected. Circle Bartleby's exact refusal each time it appears. Box the lawyer's attempts to interpret or respond to it.
2. **NOTICE** Why does the lawyer expect compliance? What is different between "I refuse" and "I would prefer not to"? How does the lawyer's confusion reveal the power of Bartleby's wording?
3. **THINK** Answer provisionally: Why is Bartleby's first refusal more disruptive because of the way he phrases it?
4. **WRITE** Write a short response using at least two pieces of evidence from this passage.
5. **CLOSE** Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and say why.