Retch vs. Wretch

As if the English language has not enough homophones, two words that cause confusion among people are retch and wretch. Although these two terms sound virtually the same, they are very different in terms of their uses and meanings. Let us examine each word:

The word retch is most commonly used as a verb meaning "to make the sound and movement of vomiting." Among its synonyms are throw up, upchuck, and barf.

> Sean Spicer's sight gag at the Emmys enough to make you retch
> MetroNews Canada

> "You don't have to go away to live in a dorm, eat bad food and watch other teenagers retch."
> Forbes

> "It will 'turn some dizzy with delirium while others retch', he says, noting that the Venice audience was divided between cheers and boos."
> The Week UK

On the other hand, the term wretch is used as a noun to refer to "an unfortunate or unhappy person" or sometimes used to refer to "a despicable or contemptible person."

> "Stockjobber: A low wretch who gets money by buying and selling shares in the funds."
> The Independent

> "Kevin" is a fantasy drama starring Jason Ritter as a self-centered, despairing wretch who is visited by a "celestial" who gives him an assignment: get over himself and save the world.
> Reading Eagle

> "Grace that's amazing is the grace that 'saved a wretch like me,' as the hymn says."
> Evening News and Tribune

Note that the word wretched also exists. It is used as an adjective meaning "very unfortunate in

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condition or circumstances" or "characterized by or attended with misery and sorrow."

Halifax hospital rewrites wait-time rules after man's wretched death
National Post

Wretched freakish luck, and agony to behold: QUENTIN LETTS on every cough and spit of game Mrs May's nightmare Tory conference speech
Daily Mail

A nursery rhyme hides the wretched secrets of New England Bank
Hastings and St. Leonards Observer

Now that we've discussed the differences between the uses and meanings of retch and wretch, you will be able to use them correctly in your sentences. Remember that you should use retch if you are referring to the act of vomiting while wretch should be selected if you are pertaining to an unhappy person or someone who is so despicable or contemptible that it makes you retch.