



Our First Words

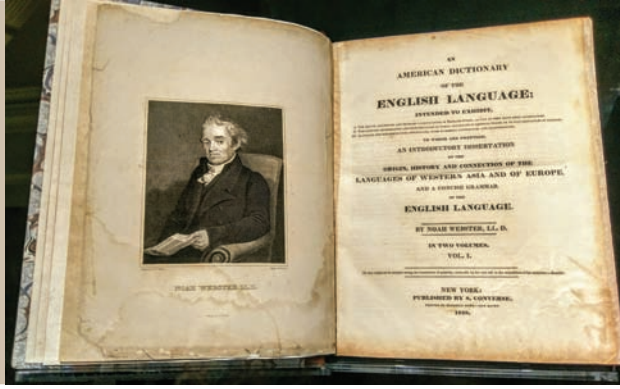


photo by Jim Heaphy

When you don't know a word, a teacher or parent may tell you to "look it up!" And today, that can involve going to a smartphone or computer for the **definition**, or meaning.

Your parents and grandparents looked up words in a **dictionary** (DIK-shuh-nair-ee) — a book that lists in alphabetical order words and their meanings, **origins**, or beginnings, and **pronunciations**, or how to say them.

The first dictionaries were written in the 1500s and 1600s by British writers, clergymen and editors. These **lexicographers*** concentrated on "hard words" and sometimes on translations of foreign words.

New country, new words

Born in Connecticut in 1758, Noah Webster became a teacher. He lived through the American Revolution and was loyal to the United States, and he believed that American subjects and styles should be included in books. He thought this would make America more **independent**, or free, from England.



Noah Webster

photo courtesy Noah Webster House & West Hartford Historical Society

finished "A Grammatical Institute of the English Language," which got the nickname the "Blue-backed Speller." It was a textbook that helped kids learn to read, spell and pronounce words. The "Speller" was the most popular book of its time, selling about 100 million copies.

An American dictionary

While he was working on the "Speller," Noah Webster realized that people in the United States were using different words to describe their new government and laws. He decided to write an American dictionary.

He started his dictionary in 1801 and finished in 1828, 190 years ago. "An American Dictionary of the English Language" gave the meanings of more than 70,000 words! Webster also included the words' pronunciations and histories.

What took so long?

Noah Webster's dictionary took 27 years to write. He had to do a lot of research. Most of the words we use today come from other languages, such as Latin or French. Webster learned 26 languages so that he could figure out the origins of our words.



Mini Page photo

Today, Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary has more than 225,000 definitions — more than three times as many as Webster's original book.

* A **lexicographer** (leks-ih-COG-ruh-fer) is an author or editor of a dictionary.

American spellings

For his American dictionary, Webster changed the spelling of many English words. He wanted to make the spellings simpler.

These are some examples of spellings he changed. Can you think of other words that are still spelled differently in England or Canada than they are in the United States?

The old British way The American way

Kee	Key
Dawter	Daughter
Centre	Center
Flavair	Flavor
Programme	Program
Aluminium	Aluminum
Gaol	Jail
Mould	Mold
Travelled	Traveled
Honour	Honor
Humour	Humor
Masque	Mask
Publick	Public
Defence	Defense
Colour	Color
Musick	Music

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Resources



On the Web:

- bit.ly/MPWebster
- bit.ly/MPNWebster

At the library:

- "Noah Webster's Fighting Words" by Tracy Maurer
- "W Is for Webster" by Tracey E. Fern

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of dictionaries are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



ALPHABETICAL,
AMERICAN, BRITISH,
DEFINITION, DICTIONARY,
ENGLISH, INDEPENDENT,
LEXICOGRAPHER,
LOYAL, NOAH, ORIGIN,
PRONUNCIATION,
RESEARCH, SPELLER,
TEXTBOOK, WEBSTER.

S L E X I C O G R A P H E R G
P R O N U N C I A T I O N E R
E H H A O N B R I T I S H N E
L M S D I C T I O N A R Y G T
L N A C I R E M A L A Y O L S
E I R E S E A R C H J E S I B
R G K N O I T I N I F E D S E
E I K O O B T X E T N Q Y H W
I R N Q T N E D N E P E D N I
P O A L P H A B E T I C A L S

Cook's Corner

White Cheddar Mac 'n' Cheese

You'll need:

- 12 ounces elbow macaroni
- 1 (12-ounce) can evaporated skim milk
- 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg

- 8 ounces sharp white cheddar cheese, shredded
- salt and ground black pepper



* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

What to do:

1. Cook macaroni according to package directions and drain.
2. In a large saucepan, whisk together milk, dry mustard and nutmeg. Set pan over medium heat and, when tiny bubbles appear around edges of pan, gradually stir in cheese.
3. Simmer until cheese melts and mixture is smooth, stirring constantly.
4. Fold in cooked macaroni. Remove from heat and season with salt and pepper. Serves 4.

Adapted from "The Robin Takes 5 Cookbook for Busy Families" with permission from Andrews McMeel Publishing (andrewsmcmeel.com).

Mini Jokes



Ned: Where can you always find happiness?
Nala: In the dictionary!

Eco Note



The population of Florida's iconic pink flamingos is rebounding after the birds were virtually eliminated across the state by hunting in the late 1800s. Since 1950, American flamingos have been seen in greater numbers and more often. But because there were so few of them during most of the 20th century, some had argued flamingos weren't a native species. New research finds that there were probably large flocks of the birds across the state before their colorful feathers and prized eggs led them to be hunted to near oblivion.

adapted with permission from Earthweek.com

For later:

Find a new word in the dictionary and share it with your family or classmates.

Teachers: For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: bit.ly/MPstandards. And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!



ROOTONYM®
by Jan and Carey Orr Cook

1. The letters of a language in order (8 letter noun)

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

2. Set of pages put together with a cover (4 letter noun)

□ □ □ □

3. To spend time reading about a subject (5 letter verb)

□ □ □ □ □

4. To gain information on; to memorize; to discover (5 letter verb)

□ □ □ □ □

1. Bobby recited the _____ starting with letter A, ending in Z.

2. Clara reads a lot and carries a _____ in her backpack.

3. Mark likes to _____ when it is quiet.

4. Judy will _____ about dinosaurs this week in class.

Study the definition. When you know the missing word, fill in the letter boxes and the sentence blanks.

Answers: Alphabet, Book, Study, Learn

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