

LESSON 2 - Words: Etymology

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will recognize that the English language is derived from other languages and that the meanings of word often change over time.
- Students will research and analyze different words to identify origin and compare meanings.
- Students will apply the concept of intellectual property and plagiarism in all media by appropriately citing and documenting research sources.

English can be a very complex language in part because it uses words from many other cultures, which were adopted into English very long ago. The history of the English language has a lot to do with the languages of invaders and conquerors since very early times, like the Romans invading England in BC times, or the Anglo-Saxons invading in the 4th century AD, or the Viking raids in the 9th century AD, or the Norman invasion of 1066 AD. This history of invasion helps to explain why English can have words with roots in Latin, German, Norse, and French--and that's only a few examples! The English language has also been exposed to other languages through trade, religion, or technology at many points in its history. With so many contributing languages, this means English speakers usually have several different ways to say almost the same thing: like saying that you feel "**happy**" (coming from the Old Norse word *happ* meaning "lucky") or "**joyful**" (from the Old French *joie* meaning "feeling of pleasure") or "**fortunate**" (from the Latin word *fortunata* meaning "chance or luck"). These three words convey the same general meaning, but come from three different originating sources.

The historical sources I gave for those three words above is part of the etymology for those words. **Etymology** is the study of the origins of a word. Understanding where a word came from, and what the word meant in its original language, can sometimes help you make sense of what the word means now. Most standard dictionaries will try to give an idea of where the word came from as part of the definition, but there are special "etymological dictionaries" that trace the history of a word in more detail, trying to find all its possible origins.

In this lesson we're going to use etymology to try to help us understand the meanings of words. Be sure to read all of the information below before you get started.

This will require use of the internet, and may require use of a search engine, such as Google, Yahoo, Lycos, etc. You will need to find etymological resources online, and do a word analysis on 5 words from a list of words given below. You will need to give four sections of information on each word:

1. Word (This is the word you are analyzing.)
 - a. Short etymology in your own words (the old word, what language it was from, and the meaning of the word in that language).
 - b. Source of the etymology. [Author of the webpage. "Title of Webpage." Title of Website. Editor of website. Publication date or date updated. The sponsoring organization. The date you accessed the site. Webpage URL.] (All information is dependent on what is available.)
 - c. Current definition, in your own words, and connection with the etymology.
 - d. Source of the definition. [Author of the webpage. "Title of Webpage." Title of Website. Editor of website. Publication date or date updated. The sponsoring organization. The date you accessed the site. Webpage URL.] (All information is dependent on what is available.)

Here's the format with a little more explanation to help you:

1. This will be the word you are analyzing.
 - a. First list the etymology (do not cut and paste this, use your own words as much as you can); if the word has many sources try to pick the ones most relevant to the word's meaning today. Be sure to list both the original word and what it meant at the time.
 - b. Next list information on where you found the etymology. (In full correct MLA format, as you were shown in the previous lesson.)
 - c. Third, give the meaning of the word today (in your own words), and an explanation of how you think the etymology is related to its current meaning.
 - d. Fourth, give information on where you found the definition of the word, if you needed to look it up. (In full correct MLA format.)

Detailed Example

Here's what this looks like with a specific example.

Let's do this word analysis on the word "cop".

I use google (a search engine) to search for "word etymology cop" and after looking at many pages I find one I like on word origins. I find the entry for the word "cop" on the site. The first line of the entry says:

So for part a, I know I'm not allowed to just cut and paste that into my answer. So I need to rewrite the information into my own words. There's not a lot there, but I can still reword it:

My next step is to cite the webpage where I found the information (even though I reworded, I still got it from this source, and I need to cite it). At the top of the entry it states the author, and the date the entry was uploaded. The title at the top of the page I am on is "Cop." And I can see the URL in the address bar. The title of the site as a whole happens to be in the browser's title bar at the very top of my screen, but if I was in doubt I could look around more to find it. Editor and sponsoring organization aren't evident, it seems to be a site run by a few individuals, no official backing from a school or organization, and no formal editor. So now I can do part b.

Notice that I only listed the information I had available to me, and skipped the information that wasn't available. You are responsible for citing all the information that's available of those options, but if something is not available then don't worry about it. Make sure the URL you provide goes straight to the information you used, not to the website's main page or, worse yet, to a search engine. When the teacher follows that URL (by copying and pasting it into a web browser), the teacher wants to be able to immediately (or as immediately as possible) see what you referenced.

For the next part of the word analysis I need to define what cop means today. I know that cop is slang for policeman. This part *also* asks me to explain how this is related to the etymology. If you can't see an obvious connection, you may need to think about it creatively, or you may need to look up the definition to help you with clues. I can see the possibility that since police officers "seize" criminals, this may be where the connection will be.

The fourth part asks me to cite the source where I got the definition. Since I don't have one, I will list "none" for this part. This is what my final word analysis would look like:

Next, I would choose another word, label it number "2", and go on from there.

- "This slang word for a policeman most likely comes from *caper*, an Old French word meaning to seize, to take."

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c. "Cop" is a slang term for a police officer. It probably came about because police officers "seize" criminals.

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d. none

Some sites will disagree about the etymology of words, and this is okay. You are not being asked to know which is right or wrong. Choose the answer that you think is most likely to be true, or the answer you think is most interesting.

Grading for this Lesson:

- To get a 10: In the first submission, assignment questions are completed, facts are correct, responses are thoughtful, presentation is clear, grammar and spelling are correct.
- To get a 9: In the first submission, a few assignment questions are incomplete OR a few facts are incorrect OR a few responses are careless OR there are a few grammar and spelling errors. After prompting, all corrections are made in revisions.
- To get an 8: In the first submission, many assignment questions are incomplete OR many facts are incorrect OR many responses are careless OR there are numerous grammar and spelling errors. After prompting, all corrections are made in revisions.
- To get a 7: After prompting, a few assignment questions remain incomplete OR a few facts remain incorrect OR a few responses remain careless OR a few grammar and spelling errors remain.
- To get a 6: This grade is reserved for administrative use.
- To get a 5: Plagiarism, purposeful or mistaken, which will lower your final grade for the course (so be very careful when posting your work!) OR lack of effort, disrespect, or attitude (we are here to communicate with you if you don't understand something). Lesson requirements have been met.

Also be aware that you will have a chance to revise your work. Since revisions result in a lower grade, remember to read the directions carefully and make sure you meet the requirements.

Assignment

Here are 15 words. You need to do a word analysis on 5 of them, based on the directions and example given above.

Do not submit text that you have copied from sources, including websites. All of your work should be in your own words. Using copied

text would be considered plagiarism. For more information, review our page on [Plagiarism and Citation](#)

alleviate	brood	conjure	facade	hero
lazy	kindergarten	mooch	ovation	postern
querulous	savor	scald	traverse	yawn

You can use any etymological site you can find for these problems, but here are a few good links to help get you started. Remember, if a source doesn't give you all the information you need (for example, it lists the original word, but doesn't tell you what the original word meant), then you'll have to find another source.

Links will open in a new window:

<http://www.worldwidewords.org/indexes/index.htm>

<http://www.etymonline.com/>

These are only a few sites; remember you can search the web to find more if you need them. Good search terms include "etymology" and "word origins." Also remember dictionaries often offer etymologies too, as part of the definition.

<http://m-w.com/>

Look for keys to the abbreviations used on these sites. Often language names in etymological entries will be abbreviated, putting *O.Fr.* for "Old French" for example. Each site will have a key (a section listing the abbreviations and their meanings) somewhere on their website to explain the abbreviations. Find the key if you need it--if you misinterpret an abbreviation your answer will be considered incorrect and require revision.

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