

The Wonder



of Words



❖ Imagine what this world would be like without words. No school books to read.....no compositions to write....no speeches to make.



But also - no television, no football games.... In fact, there would be no civilization as we know it whatsoever.

For practically everything we do in life
is dependent upon words. We'd be in
a pretty awkward fix without them.





Because our words are so essential...and because we hear thousands of them every day.... It's easy to take them for granted. They've always been there.... and always will be, right?



Wrong. “Modern English” - basic English as we know it - has been in existence for only about five hundred years, and during those years thousands of words have been discarded or gone out of use....



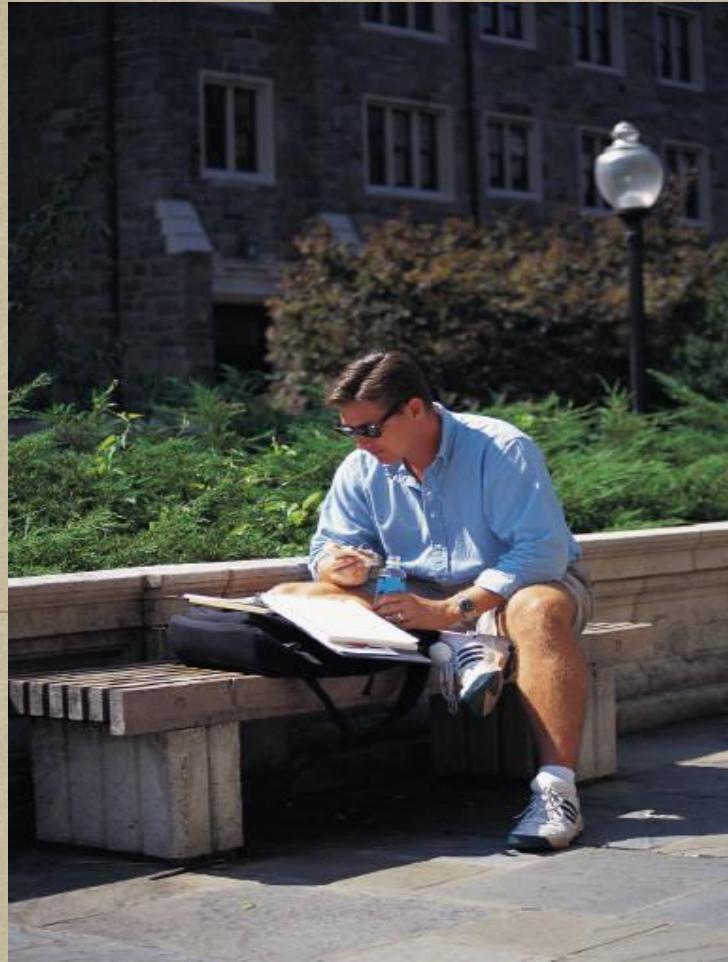
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....and thousands more have
made their appearance.
Words like "cell phone,"
"snowboard," "microwave."



And if we could automatically project ourselves five hundred years into the future, we might very well find that we could hardly understand the conversations or read the news blogs of the day.
Language is constantly changing.



Certainly one of the most fascinating ways to get a real hold on language and to find out what words are all about is to study their origins.



Take the word, "sandwich," for instance.
Obviously everyone knows what a sandwich
is....

....but how many people know that this lunch classic was named after John Montagu, fourth Earl of the town of Sandwich- a gambler who was once too busy with his game to take time out for dinner, so he satisfied his hunger with slabs of cold roast beef between slices of bread?



DIS ASTER



NOT ASTRON



STAR



❖ Or look at the word “disaster.” The first part, “dis-,” is a Latin prefix meaning “not,” or “contrary.” The second part, “aster,” comes from the Greek word, “astron,” which means, “star.”



So “disaster” literally means “contrary to the stars.” An interesting find for astrology buffs.



Incidentally, the root word “astron” has also given us astrology, astronomy – as well as asterisk which literally means “little star” ***.



Etymology



This study of word origins is etymology. The word “etymology” has an interesting origin itself.

ETYMOS



True Meaning

LOGOS

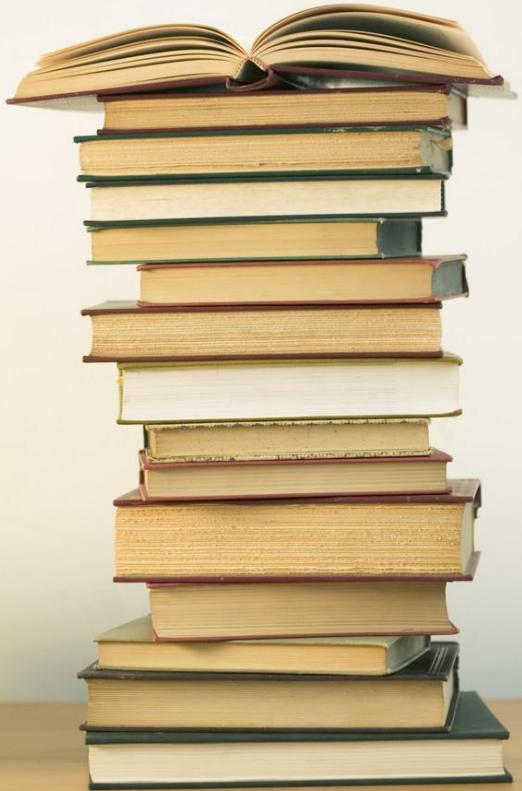


Study or Science

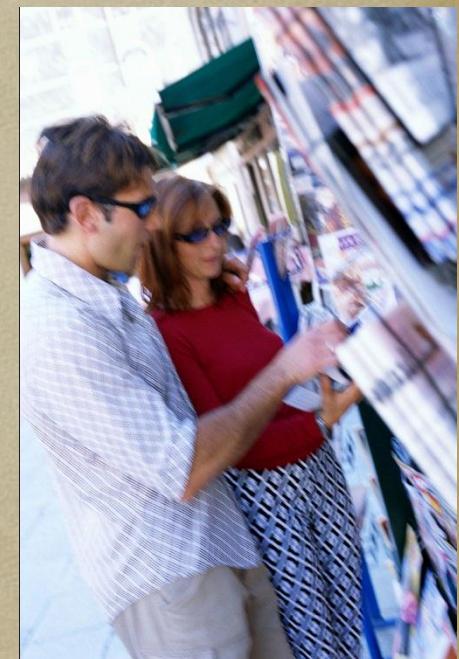
- ☞ The first part, “etymo,” derives from the Greek word, “etymos,” which means “true meaning.”
- ☞ The second part, “L-O-G-Y,” derives from the Greek “logos,” which means study of science. So etymology, literally, is the study of true meaning.

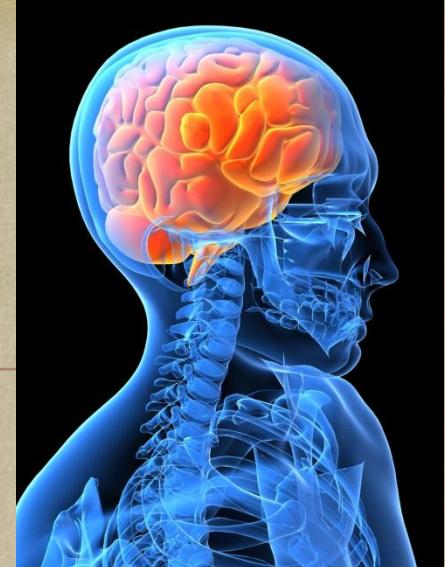
When we see the importance of etymology, and start looking up word origins ourselves, we begin to realize that we've found the key to a whole new understanding and appreciation of the English language.





❖ We'll have a much better grasp of the things we read:
magazines, textbooks,
newspapers, novels.





Biology

Psychology

Neurology

For instance, today, if you come across a word ending in “L-O-G-Y,” you’ll know it means the study of something. And the first part of the word will give you a clue to what it’s a study of.



As you continue to look up word origins, you'll find your vocabulary expanding. You'll find it much easier to express yourself in speaking - to say exactly what you mean in all situations, such as a job interview....



☞and you'll find it easier, and a lot more enjoyable, to write papers for classes or e-mails to friends.



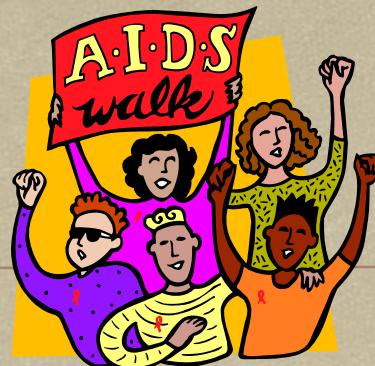
❖ The single most important tool for tracing the etymology of a word is your dictionary. As a rule, the larger the dictionary, the more help it can give you...though even pocket dictionaries usually give some clue to word origins.

We looked up the word “benevolent” on Merriam Webster.com, and the entry looked like this. The last part which is underlined is the etymology of “benevolent.”

- ❖ **Definition of BENEVOLENT**
 - ❖ 1 *a*: marked by or disposed to doing good <a *benevolent* donor>
 - ❖ *b*: organized for the purpose of doing good <a *benevolent* society>
 - ❖ 2: marked by or suggestive of goodwill <*benevolent* smiles>
 - **be *nev o lent* ly** *adverb*
 - **be *nev o lent* ness** *noun*
- ❖ **Examples of BENEVOLENT**
 - ❖ a gift from a *benevolent* donor
 - ❖ He belonged to several *benevolent* societies and charitable organizations.
 - ❖ Trees that size are like whales, sort of *benevolent* in their huge bulk ... —Sebastian Junger, *This Old House*
 - ❖ Grandfather sometimes turned on us like a rigged trap, and of course the *benevolent* gaze of the sage became
 - the glare of the patriarch. —Darryl Pinckney, *High Cotton*, 1992
 - ❖ They tore out the windows of the club's simple storefront and bricked them over and left two much smaller
 - windows ... so that the look of the club changed from that of a *benevolent* neighborhood organization to
 - that of a paramilitary one. —“The Talk of the Town”, *New Yorker* 26 Feb. 1990
 - ❖ A Southern writer is allowed his eccentricities. The prevailing attitude is a kind of *benevolent* neglect. —Walker Percy, “Why I Live Where I Live,” 1980, in *Signposts in a Strange Land*, 1991
- ❖ **Origin/Etymology of BENEVOLENT**
 - ❖ Middle English, from Latin *benevolent-*, *benevolens*, from *bene* + *volent-*, *volens*, present participle of *velle* to wish. First Known Use: 15th century

We can see here that “benevolent” is a Middle English word, which comes from the Latin word “benevolens.” This word, in turn, can be split into “bene,” or “well,” and “volens,” a form of “velle,” to wish.

benediction



benefit

benign



As you can see, once you've traced the etymology of the word, "benevolent," you have a clue to the meaning of such words as "benediction," "benefit," "benign," and so on.



JUGGLE

JOGELEN

JOGLER

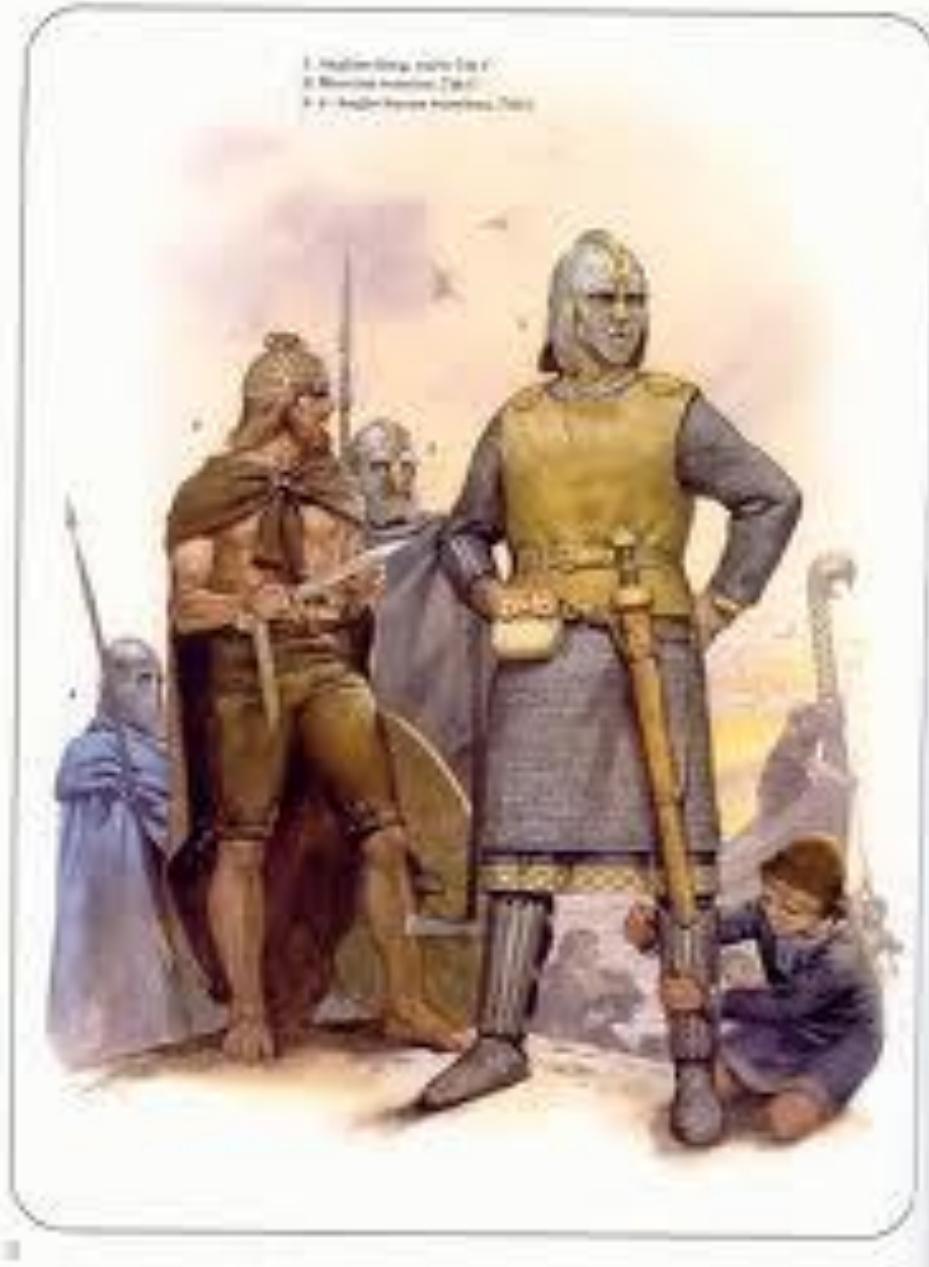
JOCULARI

Often we find that a particular word can be traced through more than one language. The word "juggle," for instance, comes from the Middle English word "jogelen," which comes from the Old French word "jogler," which comes from the Latin word "joculari," which means "to jest."

☞ The reason words can sometimes be traced through more than one foreign language is that, throughout the centuries, as people from different cultures came into contact with one another, they exchanged words and expressions.



English is the world's greatest borrower of words. Only 25% of our commonly used English words are Anglo-Saxon in origin . . . The rest are Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, and so on.



During the Anglo-Saxon period in England, the fifth to the eleventh centuries A.D., the people spoke a language we call Old English. We would not recognize it as English today.



Even during the Anglo-Saxon period, Old English borrowed words from the Danes, who occupied the northeast of England.



❖ Old English also borrowed from the Latin and Greek of the early Christian missionaries who came to convert the Anglo-Saxon tribes.

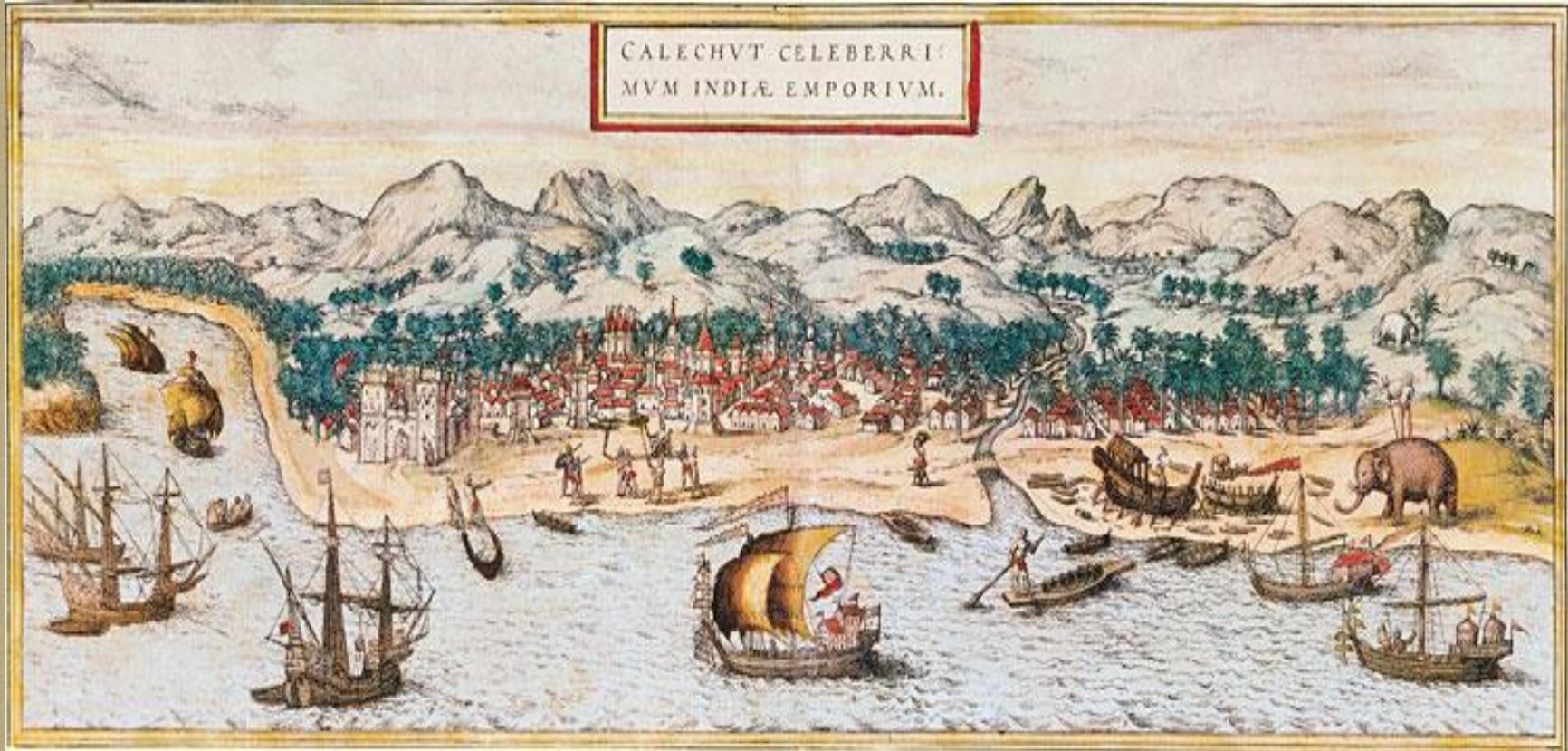




❖ Then, with the Norman Conquest of 1066, William the conqueror brought to England a whole score of French words, many of which had themselves come from Latin, Greek or Germanic dialects similar to the Anglo-Saxon dialect.



❖ The Renaissance, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, brought about another influx of words to the English tongue. Once again many of them were derived from the classical languages of Latin and Greek.



❖ By the seventeenth century, having acquired the habit of borrowing, English-speaking people began to adopt words from all over the globe: Europe, the Orient, India, Africa. The borrowing continues today.



❖ Because so many English words originated in Latin and Greek, we find that some knowledge of these languages is vital to understanding and speaking English well.

PHILANTHROPIST

LOVE

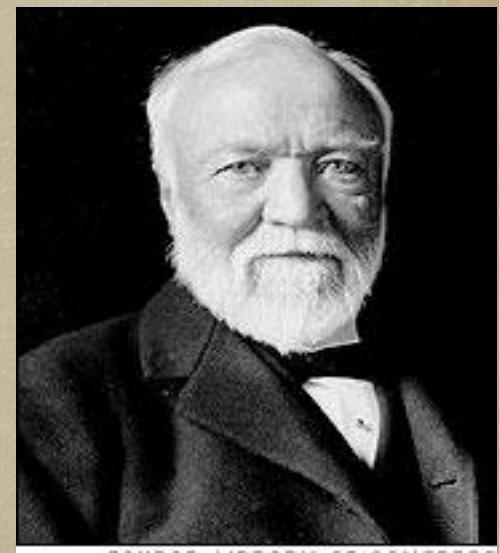
MANKIND

ONE WHO



For instance, take the word "philanthropist." The first part, or prefix of the word, "phil," is a Greek word meaning love. The middle, or root, "anthrop," comes from the Greek word "anthropos," meaning mankind. And the last part, the suffix "-ist," is Greek for "one who."

So a philanthropist is, literally, "one who loves mankind."



SOURCE: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Andrew Carnegie



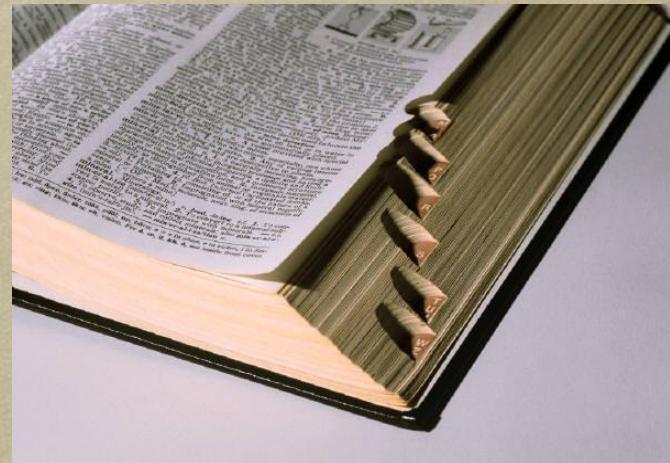
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Because Latin and Greek are the foundation of so many English words, every English-speaking person should learn by memory some of the most commonly used Latin and Greek prefixes and roots.

❖ Knowing the root “dict,” for instance, can give you the clue to the meaning of many words. It comes from the Latin word “dicere,” and means “to say or speak.”



❖ It occurs in words like “**dictator**” and “**dictionary**.”





PREDICT



- ❖ It also occurs in “**predict**.”
“Pre-” means “before” in Latin
... so “predict” is to say
“before,” or foretell.

CONTRADICT



❖ It also occurs in “contradict.” “Contra-” is Latin for against. . . So “contradict” means “to say against,” or oppose.

Or take the word “hydrophobia.” It contains a Greek prefix and a Greek root, both of which are fairly common in English. :Hydr-” indicates water. “Phobia” means “fear of.” **Hydrophobia** is a fear of water.



"Hydr-" indicates water. From this prefix we get the words "**hydroplane**" and "**hydrant**," as well as many scientific words.





acrophobia



coulrophobia

“Phobia” means “fear of.” So “hydrophobia” means “fear of water.” You can probably think of other words ending in “phobia.” They all mean fear of something.



pyrophobia



arachnophobia

Especially helpful to an understanding of words is a knowledge of the combining forms of the Greek and Latin numbers, one through ten. This is just a brief glance.



English	Latin	Greek
One	uni-	mono-
Two	du-, bi-	di-
Three	tri- ter-	tri-
Four	quadr(i)	tetra
Five	quin(t)	penta
Six	sex-	hex-
Seven	sep-	hept-
Eight	oct-	oct-
Nine	nov-, non-	enne-
Ten	dec-	deca-

The Latin word for one is “unus.” So “unity” means to “join together as one”. . . . “unison means “one sound”. . . . And “unique” means “one of its kind.”



unity



unison



unique

The Greek word indicating one or aloneness is "monos." So a monarch is one who rules alone . . . and monocle is an eyeglass for one eye . . . and a monologue is a long speech by one person.



monarch



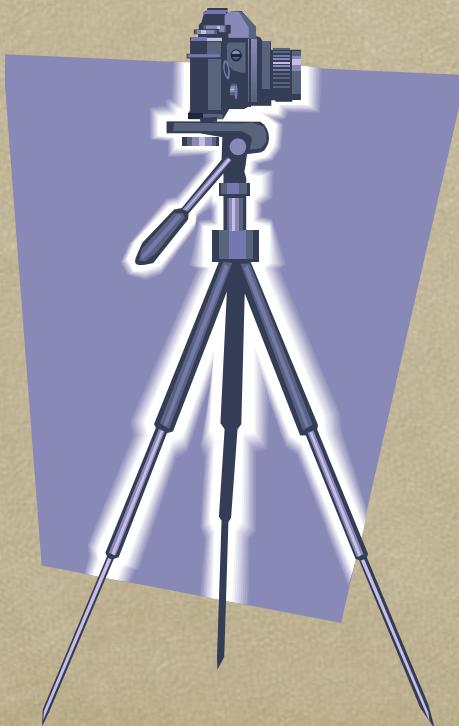
monocle

monologue



NBC

- ❖ Mono-
- ❖ Di-
- ❖ Tri-
- ❖ Tetra-
- ❖ Penta-
- ❖ Hex-
- ❖ Hept-
- ❖ Oct-
- ❖ Enne-
- ❖ Deca-



The same applies for all the other numbers. Now by looking at this list of Greek numerical combining forms, can you tell how many sides are on an octagon? How many legs on a tripod? If you know the Greek numbers, the answers are easy.

Besides knowing basic Latin and Greek prefixes, roots, numbers, it also helps to know the common word endings, or suffixes. While many English suffixes are derived from Greek and Latin, we have many Anglo-Saxon and some French suffixes.

OR Suffixes

OR Latin	Anglo-Saxon
-ate	-ish
-ive	-ward
-ity	-less
-fy	-ly
-able	-er
-esce	-ness

The Anglo-Saxon suffix, “ful,” has an obvious meaning in English. “Beautiful” means “full of beauty”....“deceitful” means “full of deceit”“handful” means “as much as the hand will hold.”



beautiful

deceitful



handful



The Greek suffix “-ist” means “one who.” A biologist is one who specializes in biology, the study of life. A cartoonist is one who draws cartoons. A realist is one who is inclined to literal truth.



biologist

cartoonist

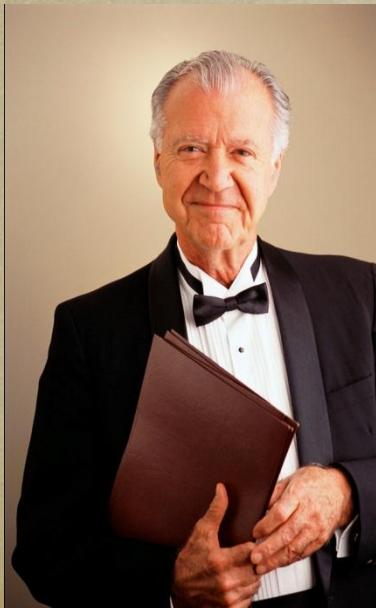


realist artist Gustave Courbet

Many English words are taken directly from other languages. We speak French when we say words like “menu,” “boulevard,” “beret.”



menu



boulevard

beret



We are speaking Spanish when we say “canyon,”
or “mosquito.”



canyon



mosquito

The magician who exclaims “Presto!” is speaking Italian...



presto



kindergarten

☞and when children go to kindergarten they're going to a German-named program, which means literally “children's garden.”

Actually it is the strength of the English language that it derives from so many tongues. In English a person can express nearly any idea with maximum precision... if a word from one language won't say it right, another will!

- ❖ There are a fair number of English words that had their beginnings not directly in Anglo-Saxon or other languages, but in myth, literature, or in the names of people or places.



Atlas

"Jovial," which means "merry," has this dimension. The Roman Father of the gods was called Jove, or Jupiter.



❖ Roman poets and sculptors always depicted Jupiter as smiling merrily on man, and persons born under the planet Jupiter are supposed to be joyful. So "jovial" means "merry."



“Cornucopia” also had its origins in myth. It comes from two Latin words, “cornu,” or “horn,” and “copia,” or “plenty.”



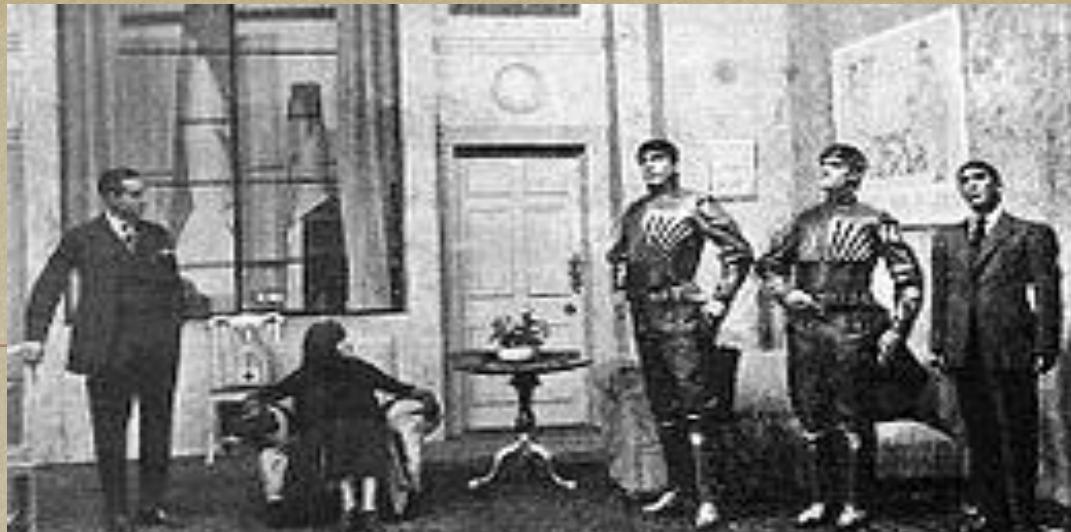
According to the legend, the infant-god Zeus gave a goat's horn to a nymph as a gift. This horn would miraculously be replenished with all the fruits the nymph desired. Therefore, a cornucopia is a “horn of plenty,” or never-ending supply.



The word “mesmerize” comes from a person, Friedrich Anton Mesmer. During the 18th century, Mr. Mesmer claimed that a power which he called animal magnetism existed. The name “mesmerism” was given to this power.

Over the years the word “mesmerize” has acquired a broader meaning, so that today “mesmerize” means to fascinate, or spellbind.





A scene from Čapek's 1920 play

❖ The word “robot” comes from a play, written by the Czechoslovakian playwright, Karel Čapek. In this play mechanical monsters, called robots - from the Czech word “roboťa,” or “work” - turn upon their masters.



“Robot” still means a mechanical monster, a machine with human properties. But today in our age of automation, the word “robot” is often applied, in reverse, to people who behave like machines... human beings so immersed in what they are doing they have more or less lost their souls.

Language is continually changing. The settling of North America brought to the English language a score of new words to fit new situations: words like “sidewalk,” “hotdog,” and “tractor.”



sidewalk



hot dog



tractor

And Indian words like “tepee,” “tomahawk,” and “canoe.”



tepee



canoe

tomahawk

The English language will continue to change as advances in science are made, new inventions are created and new situations arise.



Sometimes we take an older word and assign new meanings to it. For example, if your friend says, "I just bought an apple.", what kind of apple are they talking about?



Sometimes we use Latin, Greek, or other familiar roots to create new words.

"Telephone," for instance, comes from the Greek words "tele," meaning "afar," and "phone," meaning "sound." So "telephone" means, literally, "sound from afar."



Sometimes we even combine two words to make one new, more descriptive word. “Brunch” is a combination of “breakfast” and “lunch.”



❖ “Smog” is a combination of “smoke” and “fog.”



And sometimes we make up new, slang words which eventually become part of our accepted vocabulary: such as



man cave



dude



bucket list

English is an international language. A knowledge of English opens doors to great literature, philosophy, and science. And a sound knowledge of English rests, ultimately, upon an understanding of the origins of words - - ETYMOLOGY!!!

