

# WHERE DO WORDS COME FROM?

Learning new words by understanding their stories

The English language is made up of words from different places, events, and periods of time. Each of those words has an exciting story to tell us about where, when, how, and why they came about. *Once Upon a Word* is packed with easy-to-understand definitions and awesome word-origin stories. Here, you can understand the history and meaning of English words, improve your vocabulary and spelling, and learn to play with language.

Explore how weird words like *gnome*, fun words like *zombie*, and common words like *caterpillar* came to exist. Discover why some words sound funnier than others (like *cackle*, *sizzle*, and *twang*) and why some groups of words start with the same few letters (like *hydrate*, *hydrogen*, and *fire hydrant*). There's a whole world of English words to uncover!

## ROOTS & BRANCHES

Learn about the building blocks that make up words, called roots, prefixes, and suffixes.

## WORD SNACK

See where your favorite food words got their start, from bacon to marshmallow, spaghetti, yogurt, and beyond.

## KID-FRIENDLY DEFINITIONS

Look up dictionary definitions designed for your reading level and awesome imagination.



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THAT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO BE BORED WITH A GOOD IMAGINATION,  
AND THAT THE HEART SEES BETTER THAN THE EYES.

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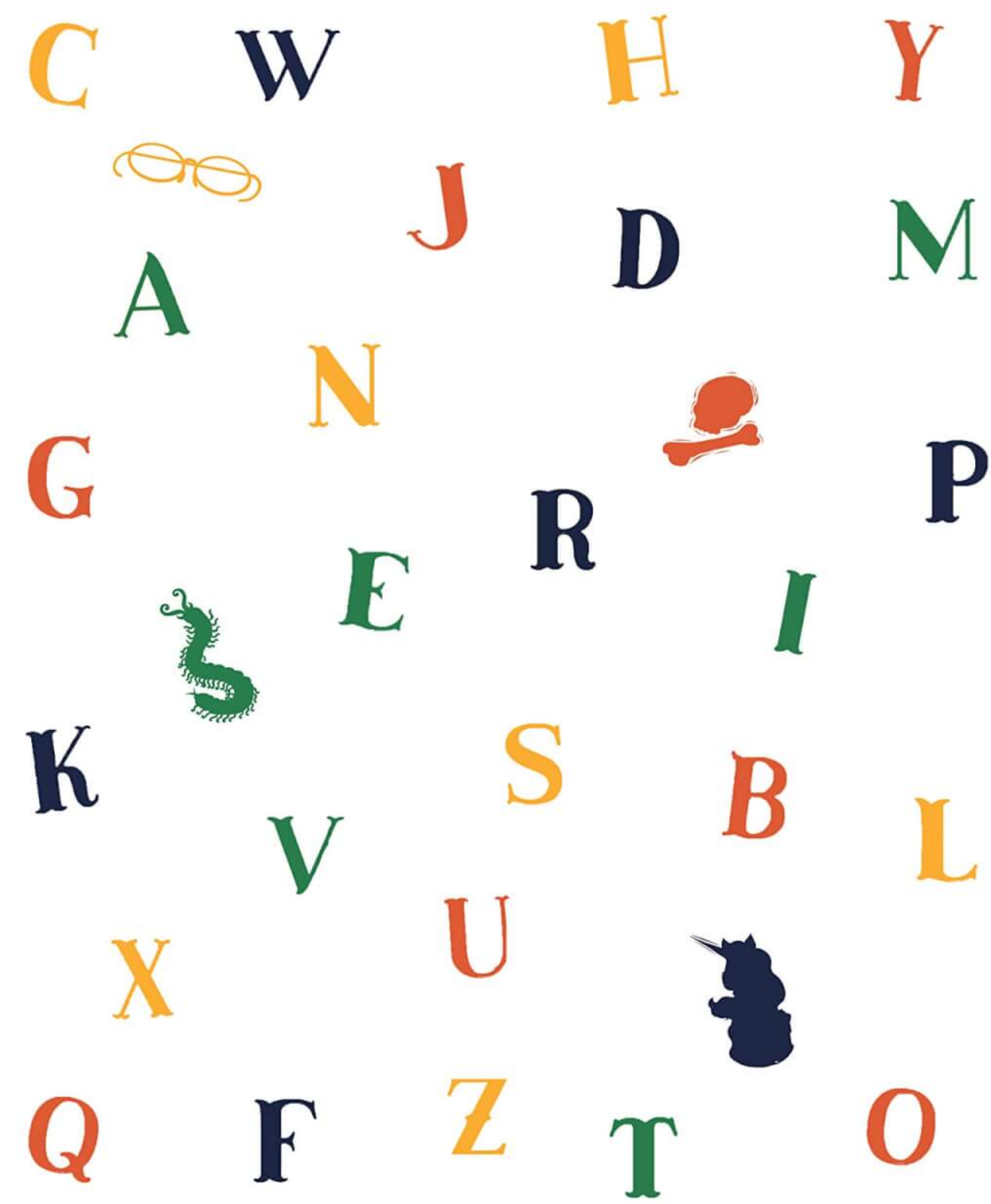
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PART I  
**WORD  
JUNGLE**

## LITERALLY, DEFINED

In this book, you'll see definitions that include "literal" meanings of words. The definition of a word is the way we use it in a sentence. But when we're studying etymology, we discover the literal meanings of words, or what their origins and pieces meant in older languages.

For example, when we use the word "muscle," we're talking about the body parts that make us strong. It comes from the Latin word for muscle, *musculus*, which is also translated as "little mouse" and comes from the Latin base word *mus*, meaning "mouse." Muscles are named after mice because it was thought that flexing your muscles made it look like mice were crawling under your skin. Even though *musculus* also meant "muscle" in Latin, "little mouse" is the literal meaning of the word.

## LATIN-BASED ROOTS

ROOT	LATIN ORIGIN	MEANING	EXAMPLES
AM-	amare, amicus	love, liking, friend	amiable, amateur
AMBI-	ambi	both, on both sides	ambidextrous, ambivalent
ANIM-	anima	breath, life	animal, animation, unanimous
AQU-	aqua	water	aquarium, aquatic

ROOT	LATIN ORIGIN	MEANING	EXAMPLES
BEN-	bene	good, well	benefit, benevolent
CAMP-	campus	field	campaign, champion
CANT-, -CENT-	canere	sing	accent, enchant
CLAM-	clamare	cry out	exclaim, clamor, acclaim
CLAR-	clarus	clear	clarity, declaration
CLUD-, CLAUS-	claudere	close	claustrophobia, include
CREA-	creare	make	create, recreation
CRED-	credere	believe, trust	credible, incredulous
CRUC-	crux	cross	crusade, croissant
CURR-	currere	run, flow	curriculum, currency
DIC-, DICT-	dictare	say, speak	dictator, dictionary
FAC-, FACT-, -FECT-, -FIC-	facere	do, make	perfect, magnificent

PART II

**ETYMOLOGY—  
FROM  
AARDVARK  
TO ZOOLOGY**

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# A

## **AARDVARK**      *ARD-vark*      *noun*

An aardvark is a mammal that eats insects and looks like a pig with a long nose and tail. Its name means “earth-pig,” from the Afrikaans Dutch *aard*, meaning “earth” or “dirt,” and *vark*, meaning “pig,” because this animal burrows into the earth and resembles a pig.

## **ABOLISH**      *uh-BAH-lish*      *verb*

To abolish something means to make it illegal or put an end to it. It comes from the Latin word *abolere*, which means “to grow away from.” The prefix *ab-* means “off, away from,” and the older word *adolere* means “to grow.”

*Example: The fifth-grade student body president helped abolish the use of single-use plastics in her school.*

## **ABSTRACT**      *AB-stract*      *adjective*

Abstract can mean something that you can't experience with your five senses, like the idea of freedom. It can also refer to an art style that doesn't show a recognizable image. Have you ever seen a colorful canvas with shapes, paint splatters, and lines, but without people or objects? That's probably abstract art. The word comes from the Latin *abstractus*, meaning “drawn or moved away,” which is formed of the prefix *ab-*, meaning “off” or “away from,” and *trahere*, meaning “to draw, drag, or move.”

## **ABYSS**      *uh-BISS*      *noun*

An abyss is a deep pit or space that seems to go on forever and you can't see the end. It comes from the Greek word *abyssos*, which combines the prefix *a-*, meaning “without,” and *byssos*, meaning “bottom.”

## **ACADEMIC**      *ak-a-DEM-ic*      *adjective*

Something that is academic involves education, learning, or scholarship. The word comes from the name *Akademeia*, the garden where the famous Greek philosopher Plato taught his students. The Akademeia grove was named after the legendary hero Akademos, who was rumored to be buried there.

## **ACCENT**      *AK-sent*      *noun*

Your accent, or the way you pronounce words, usually depends on where you or your family live or came from. For example, Americans pronounce the English word “clever” differently than people from England and Australia. Even people who live in different regions of the same country might have different accents. Think of the difference between the way people talk in Tennessee and the way they talk in New York.

The word comes from the Latin *accentus*, which means “song added to speech.” It's formed from the prefix *ad-* and *cantus*, or “singing.” But why? After all, accents appear in regular speech, not just songs.

In Ancient Greece and Rome, stories were often told in verse, which means that they were arranged to have rhythm to them, like a chant or a song.

## **ACCIDENT**      *AK-sid-ent*      *noun*

An accident is something that happens by chance, instead of being planned. The Latin word *accidentem* means the same thing. The base word *cadere* means “to fall,” giving the full word the sense of something that “befalls” you, or “falls upon” you.



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## H

**HABITAT** *HAB-eh-tat* *noun*

A habitat is the natural area where animals (including humans) live. It comes from the Latin *habitare*, meaning “to live in.”

**HALLUCINATE** *huh-LOO-sin-ate* *verb*

To hallucinate is to see, hear, smell, taste, or feel something that isn't truly there. It comes from the Latin *alucinari*, meaning “to wander (in the mind)” or “to dream.”

**HALO** *HAY-loh* *noun*

A halo is commonly seen in religious illustrations and artwork, especially around the head of a figure such as the Virgin Mary or an angel. It comes from the Greek *halos*, meaning the circle or disk of light coming from the sun and moon.

**HANGNAIL** *HANG-nale* *noun*

You might think that “hangnail” has an obvious etymology, from “hang” and “nail.” But it's actually from the Middle English *angnail*, meaning “a corn or knot on the foot.” Its literal translation is “painful spike” from the Proto-Indo-European *angh-*, meaning “painful,” and the Old English *nægl*, meaning “iron spike or nail.” The idea was that a hard corn in your foot is rather like standing on the head of an iron nail or spike. *Angh-* is also the root of “anger,” “anxious,” and “anguish.”

**HAPPY** *HAP-ee* *adjective*

If something good happened to you, you'd probably be happy. The words “happen” and “happy” come from the Old Norse *happ*, meaning “luck” or “chance.” To be happy is to feel like you have good luck or good things are happening to you.