

“Discovering Words on Mondays” – Words and idioms explored on 18/11/24

Theme: Free Choice

This is a summary of the words and idioms discovered, mostly notes sent by those present.

1. “What Shakespeare Said”

Green-eyed monster

The brilliant image of the ‘green-eyed monster’ makes its first appearance in Othello, when the character Iago says:

“O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!

It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock

The meat it feeds on.”

(Act III, Scene III)

In Elizabethan times, people believed that the colour green symbolised jealousy. In The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare uses the phrase ‘green-eyed jealousy’, but in Othello, he makes the image more powerful: he turns jealousy into a monster that will eat away at you and send you mad.

Wear your heart on your sleeve

The phrase ‘heart on my sleeve’ - to show your feelings openly - also comes from Othello. In the play, Iago says:

“For when my outward action doth demonstrate

The native act and figure of my heart

In complement extern, ’tis not long after

But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve

For daws to peck at.”

(Act I, Scene I)

Iago decides to keep his real feelings hidden.

Shakespeare was probably inspired by the medieval sport of jousting when knights would often fight on behalf of a lady they admired and tie one of her personal items like a scarf around their sleeve. So, when defending the lady’s honour, he would wear his ‘heart on his sleeve’.

What the dickens

Shakespeare uses the phrase as an intensifier once, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, when it's used by a character called Mistress Page.

*"I cannot tell what the dickens his name
is my husband had him of."*

(Act II, Scene II)

In other words, she has no idea what his name is. As for the word 'dickens', it's an old euphemism for the devil.

Heart of Gold

If you have a heart of gold, you are very kind to other people. In Shakespeare's *Henry V*, the character Pistol says:

"The King's a bawcock, and a heart of gold."

(Act IV, Scene I)

A 'bawcock' is an old word that means a 'fine fellow'. Pistol is saying that the King is a good man with a kind heart. Gold being valuable, to have a heart of gold could be considered rare.

There are many more. Take for example a poster used in many English literature classrooms, devised by famous English journalist, Bernard Levin some years ago.

It reads:

If you cannot understand my argument and declare 'it's Greek to me', you are quoting Shakespeare. If you claim to be more sinned against than sinning, you are quoting Shakespeare. If you act more in sorrow than in anger, if your wish is father to the thought, if your lost property has vanished into thin air, you are quoting Shakespeare. If you have ever refused to budge an inch or suffered from green-eyed jealousy, if you have played fast and loose, if you have been tongue-tied – a tower of strength – hoodwinked or been in a pickle, if you have knitted your brows – made a virtue of necessity, insisted on fair play – slept not one wink – stood on ceremony – danced attendance on your lord and master – laughed yourself into stitches, had short shrift – cold comfort, or too much of a good thing, if you have seen better days, or lived in a fool's paradise, why, be that as it may, the more fool you, for it is a foregone conclusion that you are as good luck would have it, quoting Shakespeare. If you think it is high time, and that that is the long and the short of it, if you believe that the game is up, and that the truth will out, even if involves your own flesh and blood, if you lie low – till the crack of doom because you suspect foul play, if you have your teeth set on edge at one fell swoop – without rhyme or reason, then to give the devil his due if the truth were known for surely you have a tongue in your head, you are quoting Shakespeare. Even if you bid me good riddance and send me packing, if you wish I was dead as a doornail, if you think I am an eyesore – a laughing stock – the devil incarnate – a stony-hearted villain – bloody-minded, or a blinking idiot, then by jove – o lord – tut, tut! – For goodness sake – what the dickens! – but me no buts – it is all one to me, for you are quoting Shakespeare.

2. REDUPLICATIVES - means repeating a part of a word, often with a slight change, to create a new word

Can be put in three main forms: **i. Repetitive.** Examples - goody-goody, hush-hush, chop chop.

ii. Rhyming. Examples - airy-fairy, super duper, okey dokey.

iii. Vowel change. Examples- dilly dally, tittle tattle, criss-cross.

The second part is usually emphatic of the meaning of the first. Coining often jocular. Found in great majority of languages. First records in English end 15th century. ("So-so" 1530s).

Easy-peasy: quite recent example (1953). Now sometimes itself coupled with a second term e.g "lemon squeezy".

Mumbo-jumbo: probably from Mandinka language "maamajombo", a masked dancer in a ritual. Used in 18th C to mean an idol or deity, now most often means complicated procedure or incomprehensible language.

Hanky-panky: "The constable produced a wooden doll, some cups and balls and the defendant said: Them's the things we perform with, just a bit of the hanky panky business at public houses" (Morning Chronicle 1834). Generally underhanded activity. Perhaps an altered form of hokey-pokey.

Shilly-shally/willy-nilly. former indecisive, mid-18th c, probably from Shall I, shall I not? Latter having no firm plan. OED citation from 1608.

Namby-pamby: term invented by Henry Carey in mockery of the sentimental versifier Ambrose Phillips (1733). Feeble, insipid, Term also used by Pope in The Dunciad and became general term for affected weak speech or verse.

Hoity-toity: First part presumed from "haughty". Alternative theory French "hauts toits". Someone considering themselves elevated, snobbish. But also had earlier meaning mid-17th C of boisterous.

Higgledy-piggledy: confused, disordered. Found in an English-Italian dictionary of 1598.

Hocus pocus: 1694 parody of religious Latin. Cod phrase used by magicians. Thought to be origin of "hoax".

Knick-knack (or nick-nack): "Knacke" found in Chaucer, a small item of little value. But originally an underhand trick or ingenious method. This meaning re-emerged in 20th C. (Note substantive part of term comes second here.)

3. FIDGET

1 comes from the now obsolete verb fidge – to move restlessly. The earliest known use of the adjective fidgeting was in 1637 by archbishop of York John Williams.

2 comes from the Old Norse word fijka, which means move briskly, be restless or eager

The earliest known use of the

1 fidgeting was in 1672 by playwright William Wycherley. **Fidgeting** is the act of making small movements with your hands or feet without realizing it. Some examples of fidgeting include tapping your foot, drumming your fingers, or shifting in your seat. Fidgeting can be a physical reaction to stress or concentration.

2 noun fidget was first used in 1674 by physician and antiquary Nathaniel Fairfax

FIDGET TOYS

BAODING BALLS

One of the earliest examples of fidget toys are the Baoding balls. They originated in Baoding, a city in northern China, around 3,500 years ago during the Ming dynasty. They were originally used in traditional Chinese medicine to stimulate the acupuncture points in the hands.

WORRY STONES

Worry stones are smooth, flat stones that are rubbed between the fingers to relieve stress and anxiety. They have been found in cultures as far back as ancient Greece. Worry stones have also been found in Ireland, Tibet, and with Native American tribes

PRAYER BEADS

Prayer beads are used in many religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. They are held and manipulated as a form of meditation or contemplative prayer, with each bead representing a prayer or mantra. In the Middle East known as worry beads.

JACOB'S LADDER

Jacob's ladder is a toy consisting of a chain of wooden blocks that can be flipped back and forth to create an undulating visual effect. Though the toy itself is named after a biblical event, it's believed to have originated in the 1800s.

RUBIK'S CUBE

The Rubik's Cube is a classic puzzle toy that was invented in the 1970s by Hungarian sculptor Ernő Rubik.

THE FIDGET CUBE

Fidget Cube is the modern fidget toy, which was invented and launched in 2016. It is a small, cube-shaped device that has a variety of buttons, switches, and other tactile features that can be clicked, flipped, rolled, and spun with the fingers.

THE FIDGET SPINNER

The fidget spinner is a modern fidget toy, which became available in the early 2010s.

A typical fidget spinner consists of a central ball bearing that is held between two or three prongs, which can be spun around with the fingers. Following in the footsteps of Fidget Cube, fidget spinners have been marketed as a stress-relieving toy for people with ADHD and anxiety.

4. GENERATION - Inherited from Middle English generacioun, from Anglo-Norman generacioun, Middle French generacion, and their source, Latin - mid-15c., ``capable of being begotten, that may be produced," from Latin generabilis, from generare ``to bring forth". In the word 'genesis,' *gen* refers to the 'birth' or beginning of something.

The Bible defines a biblical generation as “about thirty years, as one generation will be parents to the next.

How many generations until you are no longer related? A good estimate is that on average, in about 10 to 12 generations, there usually won't be any of the original DNA left.

The concept of social generations originated in the mid-1800s, but it wasn't until 1952 that the modern understanding of social generations came into being.

What are the generation age ranges?

- **Lost Generation** – 1883-1900. The term "Lost Generation" was coined by American author Gertrude Stein and popularized by Ernest Hemingway: Stein heard the term "génération perdue" from a mechanic in Paris, who used it to refer to young people. Stein later used the term to describe the generation of people who lost their youth in WW1. Everyone from the lost generation is now dead. At least no one has a verified birth before 1900.
- **Greatest Generation** – 1901-1927. born and come of age in the American Century of economic growth, technological progress, and mostly military triumph.
- **Silent Generation** – 1928-1945. who came of age during the Great Depression and the 1940s, many of whom fought in World War II. Their “Silent” label refers to their conformist and civic instincts.
- **Baby Boomers** – 1946-1964. The term was first used in 1963. It refers to the generation of people born after World War II, when the birth rate in the United States increased dramatically. Reasons: a desire to start families that were put off during the Great Depression and World War II; a sense of confidence that the future would be prosperous and peaceful; the GI Bill, which allowed many veterans to buy homes near cities
- **Generation X** – 1965-1980. Originated from a 1983 book by US author Paul Fussell, *Class: A Guide Through the American Status System*. Fussell used the letter "X" in his book to describe people who didn't want to be concerned with societal pressures, money, or status. The term "Generation X" has also been used to describe alienated youth. They came of age on the cusp of the internet, cell phones, and social media.
- **Generation Y** – 1981-1996. This generation is also known as Millennials, the Internet generation, iGen, and the Net generation.

Some characteristics:

Digital natives - They came of age with the internet and smartphones, and are comfortable with communicating through text and social media.

Education - They are the most educated generation in history, with 36% having at least a bachelor's degree.

World events - They were impacted by world events like the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Dot-com Boom, and the Great Recession of 2008.

Open-minded and tolerant - They are often characterized as being more open-minded and tolerant than previous generations.

Individualistic - They are more likely to believe that they can achieve anything they set their mind to, and they are more likely to prioritize their own needs and wants over the needs of others.

- **Generation Z** – 1997-2012. An informal term is zoomer. Gen Z is known for being digital natives who have almost always been exposed to mobile devices, high speed Wi-Fi, and social media. They are also known for being ambitious, confident, and open to emerging trends.

- **Generation Alpha** – 2013-present. The term "Generation Alpha" originated from a 2008 survey conducted by Australian social researcher Mark McCrindle when he asked people what they thought the generation after Generation Z should be called. McCrindle chose "Generation Alpha" because it followed the scientific convention of using the Greek alphabet instead of the Latin alphabet. He also felt that the name "Generation A" was too similar to the previous generation, and that the new generation was the start of something new, not a return to the old.

Some characteristics

Digital natives - they've never lived without the internet and social media. They're experts at using technology for learning and exploration.

Diverse and inclusive - they have diverse perspective and that is shaped by a world that celebrates different cultures and perspectives.

Self-aware and socially conscious - they're aware of their place in the world and how they can make an impact. They're also concerned about social and environmental issues like sustainability, diversity, and inclusion.

Value mental health - 59% of Gen Alpha say mental health is a "big issue" and 62% say their schools should focus more on mental health education.

Creative - they're highly competent at playing digital games, which requires creativity and cognitive thinking skills.

5. THE WILLIES

Noun used in the plural. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines the willies as "**a strong feeling of nervous discomfort.**" Identified as an Americanism, the first recorded instance, from 1896, reads: 'The glaring colours would be likely to give the dear child the "willies."

Having the willies could happen for any number of reasons. Maybe you notice a big **spider** crawling out of your empty shoe, hear an unexpected noise in the middle of the night. Whatever the cause, when your **skin** starts to crawl, your **heart** begins to pound and your senses go on full alert, you might say that you have a case of "the willies." This uncomfortable, frightened, jittery feeling is probably a familiar one. The willies seems to be a universal sensation.

The **origins** of the term, however, might be foreign. How did "the willies" get its name?

1 Some historians point to productions of the ballet "Giselle," which debuted in Paris in the 1840s. In it, a young heroine falls in love with a man pretending to be someone else. In reality, he's a scoundrel who's already engaged to another woman. When the heroine discovers the betrayal during a passionate dance scene, she dies of a broken heart and joins the Queen of the Wilis, who is accompanied by a host of female spirits who have also been scorned. Together, these ghosts -- known collectively as the Wilis -- seek revenge upon men they encounter in the haunted woods by dancing them to death. To see the Wilis appear as apparitions on stage probably was enough to give viewers a little fright, something that eventually led to the common term "the willies"

2 Some suspect it was derived from early American name-calling. Children once called other children "willie-boy" instead of "sissy," and the concept was eventually applied to having "the willies."

3 Other experts point to a Slavic sprite known as a *vili* or *wili*

4 Another speculative explanation stems from the long woollen underwear worn by American frontiersmen. These undergarments, called "woollies," were often scratchy and irritating to the skin. This may be why we associate a jittery, prickly, "goosebumps" feeling with "the willies"

6. SKIED

The word comes from a book entitled *The Dictionary People* which tells the story of how the Oxford English Dictionary was first compiled. The book is a fascinating read if a bit dense.

Three women editorial assistants of the Dictionary were denied places beside the men at a meeting, because of the segregation rules of the Hall. Agnes Carswell was told that they would be 'skied' if they wanted to come 'that being explained that women could sit in the balcony above the hall if they wanted to see the men converse.'

Agnes Carswell would have none of it! The word did not get put in the OED. (about 1928.)

7. SPHAIRISTIKE

Ancient Greek term, meaning **skill in playing at ball**, which Major Walter Clopton Wingfield borrowed for the recreation he patented in 1874, and **later called "lawn tennis"** to distinguish it from the older indoor game of "real" tennis - also easier to pronounce!

8. AFTERCLAP

An unwelcome surprise - an unexpected event happening after an affair is supposed to be at an end.

9. FLOCCINAUCINIHIPIPILIFICATION

The act of considering something worthless. MP Jacob Rees-Mogg's use of 29-letter floccinaucinihilipilification in 2012 remains the longest recorded in Hansard.

10. JERRY – use in various words

World War I British Army slang for "a German; the Germans," 1919, could be a variation on "German" based on the male nickname Jerry, the popular form of Jeremy. But it also is said to be **from the shape of the German helmet**, which was thought to **resemble a jerry**, **British slang for "chamber pot, toilet" (1850)**, this being probably an **abbreviation of A JEROBOAM**, which is attested in this sense from 1827.

A JEROBOAM is a large wine bottle – it was common to name wine bottles **after ancient kings**, in this case, from the Biblical name Jeroboam, "a mighty man of valour" (I Kings xi.28) "who made Israel to sin" (xiv.16)

JERRYCAN "5-gallon metal container," 1943, from **"Jerry" "a German."** It was first used by German troops in World War II and later adopted by the Allies because the better design made it more leak-proof.

JERRYBUILT -

Meaning shoddy construction: mid 19th century - origin unknown; sometimes said to be from the **name of a firm of builders in Liverpool**, who may have been the inspiration for a well-known music hall act, or to allude to the walls of Jericho, which fell down at the sound of Joshua's trumpets (Josh. 6:20).

TO GERRYMANDER – GERRYMANDERING

The division of a state or county into election districts so as to give one political party a majority in many districts e.g.in Massachusetts in 1812

Word coined from : Governor Elbridge **GERRY** + sala **MANDER**

In 1812, Elbridge Gerry, the Governor of Massachusetts signed a bill which created a district in the Boston area likely to benefit the Democratic-Republican Party.

Long and thin, the redrawn state senate district in Massachusetts sliced up Essex County, a political stronghold for the Federalist Party – so that the **Federalists were split into different districts and so lost their majority**. The **freakishly shaped district elected three Democratic-Republicans** that year, 1812, breaking up the county's previous delegation of five Federalist senators.

When mapped, this district was thought to **resemble the shape of a mythological salamander or lizard with claws**. An artist, probably Elkanah Tisdale, produced a cartoon portraying this salamander. Then the term "gerrymander" was invented, probably by a couple of newspaper editors

The term, **originally written as "Gerry-mander,"** at first was used on **March 26, 1812, in the Boston Gazette**. Although he personally disapproved of it, Governor Elbridge Gerry's name was used to describe what is regarded as vote-rigging.



What a salamander really looks like:



Every 10 years, US states redraw their legislative and congressional district lines following the census. This is to ensure that districts are equally populated, and reasonably representative of a state's population. Today, intricate computer algorithms and sophisticated data about voters allow map drawers to work on a large scale with "surgical" precision. **If one political party is allowed to control the process, it can produce maps which guarantee a particular result: rather than voters choosing their representatives, gerrymandering empowers politicians to choose their voters.** There are many legal disputes over gerrymandering, which is on the increase, and has certainly influenced the outcome of the 2024 election.

The process may involve "**cracking**" or splitting groups of people with similar characteristics across several districts, so their voting strength is weakened or "**packing**" or concentrating the voting strength of another party into as few districts as possible. This "vote-rigging" is deeply undemocratic.

However, it can be beneficial if it gives a minority group a majority in a particular area.

For instance, a District of Illinois, commonly known as "the earmuffs," is a perfect example of a strangely-shaped "majority-minority" district. The earmuffs have given a voice to the large population of Latino voters in and around Chicago. If the districts were drawn differently, the Latino voters might never be able to vote in the candidates of their choice.

