

Assignment #1: Practice Etymology

The 'lexicon' of a language is the whole storehouse of its words and phrases -- including, theoretically, any intelligible utterance or scrawl of any of its users, past or present, "standard" or "non-standard." Yet words, like people, suffer alteration, reversal, decay, and (sometimes) death, and the history of each word, although unknown to most of its users, is an important element of understanding its lexical situation. Etymology is the study of the history and pre-history of words, phrases, and other lexical items.

For this assignment, each of you will receive one word. Your mission is to find out everything that you can about that word, including but not limited to the answers to the following questions: 1) What does the word mean today, if it is still in use?; 2) If the word has changed in meaning over time, what was/were its earlier meaning(s), and *when* did the current meaning come into use?; 3) When did the word enter the lexicon? (be as precise as possible) and from what other language?; and 4) What are the social connotations of this word (i.e., who tends to use it, and in what social context is it used?)

For each word, you should turn first to the *Oxford English Dictionary* online, which although not without its biases is the best historical dictionary of the language available; the OED will give you all past forms & meanings of the word, with examples from context (be sure to select "full entry") In addition, use at least one dictionary or online resource besides the OED to verify and cross-reference your findings. Your results should be written in essay form, not simply quotations from dictionaries.

Print Resources (at Adams Library)

Skeat, Walter W. *A concise etymological dictionary of the English language*. (New York : Capricorn Books, 1963). RIC Reference **REF PE1580.S5 1963**

Johnson, Samuel, 1709-1784. *A dictionary of the English language: in which the words are deduced from their originals and illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best ...* (London, Printed by W. Strahan, 1755). RIC Reference **REF PE1620.J6 1967**

Partridge, Eric. *A dictionary of slang and unconventional English : colloquialisms and catch-phrases, solecisms and catachreses, nicknames, and vulgarisms*. (New York : Macmillan, 1984). RIC Reference **REF PE3721.P3 1984**

Major, Clarence. *Juba to jive : a dictionary of African-American slang*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1994). RIC Reference **REF PE3727.N4 M34 1994**

Robinson, Mairi. *The Concise Scots dictionary*. (Aberdeen : Aberdeen University Press, 1985). RIC Reference **REF PE2106.C66 1985**

Online Resources

Google nGram Viewer <http://books.google.com/ngrams>

Urban Dictionary <http://www.urbandictionary.com>

Online Etymology Dictionary <http://www.etymonline.com>

English Wiktionary: http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Wiktionary:Main_Page

Word Spy <http://www.wordspy.com>