

The
Wow

e-newsletter

by Ken and Dahlynn McKowen

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What's in a Word?

Do you ever wonder where words come from? I'm not referring to slang, but to everyday words that have been used in the English language for generations, if not centuries.

Etymology is the study of word origins. Many words have roots, such as Greek or Latin, but many also come from folklore and history. And words have always intrigued me, a wondering my dad instilled in me as early as I can remember. His curiosity on how phrases and words came to become part of the English language intrigued us both. For example, I remember him questioning where the phrase "shiver my timbers" originated. Not having access to a computer and Google (this was a pre-computer days), we did our best to look it up in a phrase book he had. The only part of our investigative work I remember is that the phrase was popularized by author Robert Louis Stevenson in his book *Treasure Island* (1883), where Long John Silver said the phrase seven times.

Flash forward to today: According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the phrase—a mock oath expressing annoyance or surprise—has been attributed to fictional writings having to do specifically with the pirate genre. *Oxford* states that the phrase was first published in the book *Jacob Faithful* (1835), some fifty years before *Treasure Island* was released: "After an argument over grog, Tom's father has his wooden leg trapped between some bricks and was unable to move." The entry goes on to say that Tom agrees to help, as long as he doesn't get a beating from his father. "I won't thrash you, Tom. Shiver my timbers if I do." In overall nautical references, a wooden



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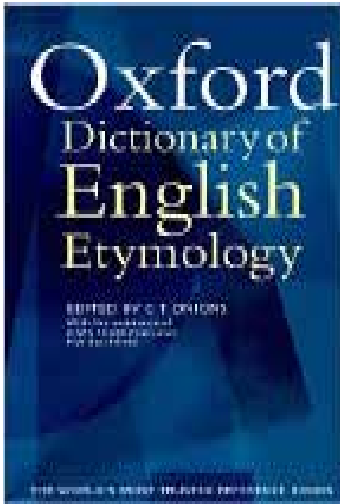


What's in a Word?

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leg was often called a “timber” as it relates to the wooden support frames on a sailing ship and how they would shake or shiver during rough seas.

There are many books on etymology; pop into Amazon, type in the word “etymology” and hundreds of selections are offered. Following are a few of my favorites:



The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology
(Oxford University Press, 1966)

I love old books, especially those that deal with writing and the English language. This book was created by Dr. Charles Talbot “C.T.” Onions—his name alone makes me smile!

Dr. Onions, an English-born lexicographer and grammarian, was hired at the offices of the Oxford English Dictionary in 1895. He worked on many projects, including editing the fourth edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. But his life’s work was creating *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. It took him two decades to complete the reference guide, which covers 38,000 words and their origins. Unfortunately, Dr. Onions passed away when the book was at the printers. He was 91.

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SIDE BAR: *A true story about the importance of understanding the words you use...*

Growing up, the word “dork” was quite common in the teen culture at that time. It wasn’t until 2006—at the age of 43—that I learn what it meant! I had penned the introduction for one of my proudest books—*Chicken Soup for the Soul in Menopause*—when D’ette Corona, associate publisher at Chicken, called me. She was laughing like crazy. Now D’ette and I have an awesome relationship and when I picked up the phone and heard her laughing, I figured it was for any number of things. When she caught her breath and said, “You’re a dork, Dahlynn,” I was confused. Then she explained what a dork was. I was flabbergasted, especially in the context I had written it in: I had used a conversation with one of the nation’s leading entrepreneurs to demonstrate my forgetfulness, calling myself the now-offensive noun! Needless to say, D’ette saved my butt, and I still owe her!



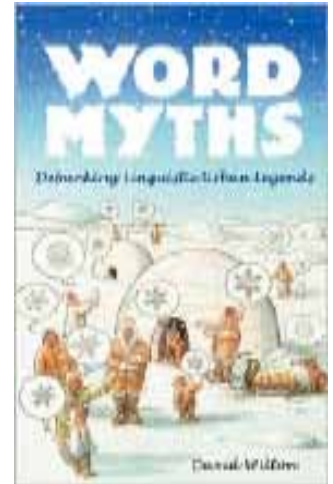
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Word Myths: Debunking Linguistic Urban Legends
(Oxford University Press, 2004)

This book is by California author Dave Wilton. Well written and on the scholarly side (remember, it's an Oxford University Press book), the book is very detailed in its references to words and related urban legends, many of which he cleverly demystifies and deflates.



Wilton also has an extremely popular and informative website on word origins and phrases (www.WordOrigins.org). Click on a desired word or phrase and you're taken to a detailed explanation with examples. I visit this site quite often, especially when I'm writing fiction; finding just the right word or the perfect name for a character is important, and this site has served me well. Check it out, and the book, too.

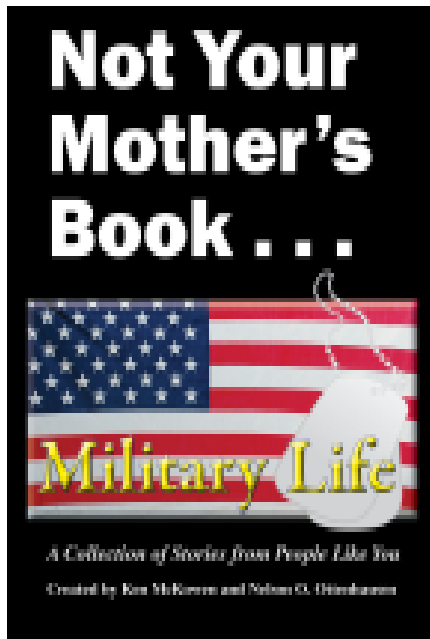


Another fun website regarding word origins is the Online Etymology Dictionary (www.etymonline.com). The website states: "Etymologies are not definitions; they're explanations of what our words meant and how they sounded 600 or 2,000 years ago." Here's a sample listing:

Racy: 1650s, "having a characteristic taste" (of wines, fruits, etc.), from *race* (2) + *-y* (2); meaning "having a quality of vigor" (1660s) led to that of "improper, risqué," first recorded 1901, probably reinforced by phrase *racy of the soil* "earthy" (1870).

What's interesting about this site, created by a very ingenious Douglas Harper, is that it is run based on donations: besides making a monetary donation for any amount, you can "sponsor a word." For \$10, you can select a word in the English language and be its official sponsor for six months. And you can attach a 100-word message and post a photo. What word would you sponsor? Send me your word and tell me why...maybe we'll post a few in December's issue of *Wow* (Dahlynn@PublishingSyndicate.com).

— Dahlynn



Thank you

A huge THANK YOU to all the men and women who are currently serving or have served in our armed forces.

To honor these brave people, we are creating *Not Your Mother's Book...Military Life*. The book's co-creators are Ken McKowen and Nelson O. Ottenhausen. Nelson was featured in the *Wow Principles* newsletter in October 2010 (to read this interview, go to our website and click on "Newsletters," and then find the archived issue). Ken and Nelson are both Army veterans.

We are looking for stories from all military branches, including stories by and about military spouses, their families and supporters. Remember, NYMB books are edgier than other anthologies; we're not interested in preachy, sad or death/dying stories or even eulogies. Check out the submission guidelines for the NYMB series on our website.

HOT STUFF!

Five Points James Dickey Prize for Poetry

www.fivepoints.gsu.edu/contests.html

Five Points: A Journal of Literature and Arts is holding a contest for the best unpublished poem.

Prize is \$1,000, plus publication; entrance fee required

Deadline: December 1, 2011

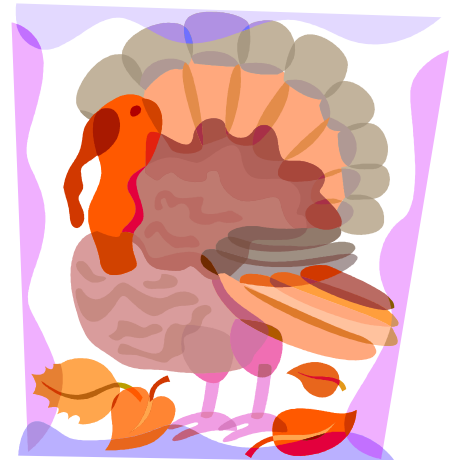
The 76th Annual Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards

www.anisfield-wolf.org

"The Anisfield-Wolf Awards recognize books that have made important contributions to our understanding of racism and our appreciation of the rich diversity of human cultures."

Prize: \$10,000; no entrance fee

Deadline: December 31, 2011



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HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT

As of November 13, 2011

**Not Your
Mother's
Book . . .**

**On
Menopause**

A Collection of Stories from People Like You
Created by Deborah McKenna & Mary Ellen Williams

Not Your Mother's Book & *OMG! My Reality!*

NEWSFLASH! We are now sharing a portion of the royalties from the *Not Your Mother's Book* and *OMG! My Reality!* series with those contributors who make the final cut! More information can be found on our website, along with a listing of 28 *NYMB* titles and 3 *OMG!* titles that need stories NOW! What are you waiting for? Get published!

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My Story is Out: High School Years by Lyndsey D'Arcangelo



Lyndsey

The nation's newest anthology series for the LGBT community!

Attention LGBT teens and college-aged kids! Lyndsey needs stories for her book. And contributors who make the book will be paid! Learn more at www.MyStoryIsOut.com.

Deadline: 1/1/12 (Publisher: Publishing Syndicate)



Dream of Things has a great line-up of anthology books. On the website, click on the "Workshop" tab for a listing of books.

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Chicken Soup for the Soul

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