

# What's the Good Word? Etymology Project Guidelines

Word sleuths, get your dictionaries ready! Choose a topic from the next page to learn more about how words become part of the English language. (If you want a topic that isn't on the list, speak to your teacher about another topic.) Research your topic. The Internet is probably the best place to find resources, however you may also want to look in a dictionary or other reference books as well. **Etymology projects are due on \_\_\_\_\_**, and you will present in class about your topic that week.

**Step 1:** Choose an etymology topic to research or come up with your own topic.

**Step 2:** Do research and take notes about what you learn. For this project, please write down the name/title of whatever websites or books you use on the "Works Cited" page.

**Step 3:** Work on a presentation for the class:

- a) You need to create a visual project (poster, sign, report, pamphlet, etc.) Your project will be displayed in our classroom or hallway. Please make sure that your project includes a title, your name, and information about your topic.
- b) You will also teach our class about the topic with a 1-minute presentation. You should not write your oral presentation; you simply need to tell the class about what you learned from your project. You may want to practice telling a family member about your project, but you should not spend a lot of time practicing a "speech." This is just an informal discussion.

## Project Rubric:

\_\_\_\_\_ My project includes detailed information about the etymology topic I chose. My information is accurate and in my own words. (Do not copy sentences directly from websites or books; this will result in a score of zero.) *3 points*

\_\_\_\_\_ My project is creative and organized. My work is neat. You can tell I worked my hardest and that I am proud of my work. *2 points*

\_\_\_\_\_ Words are spelled correctly, and I use correct capitalization and punctuation. *2 points*

\_\_\_\_\_ I include a "Works Cited" page that lists the websites and books I used. *1 point*

\_\_\_\_\_ I completed my project on time. *1 point*

\_\_\_\_\_ I presented about my topic to the class. I spoke clearly, and included the most important facts that I learned about my topic. *1 point*

**Total Score: \_\_\_\_/10**

# What's the Good Word? Etymology Project Topics

- 1) How do dictionaries decide what new words to add to the dictionary each year?
- 2) Choose a new word (or several new words) that has been added to the dictionary recently, and research the new word. How did this word get “invented”? What does it mean? Why was it added to the dictionary?
- 3) Merriam Webster (a dictionary publisher) posts words on their website that people submit to be included in the dictionary. These are words that are not yet included in the dictionary. You can see the list at [http://nws.merriam-webster.com/pendictionary/newword\\_display\\_recent.php](http://nws.merriam-webster.com/pendictionary/newword_display_recent.php). Choose some of these new words and write about why you think that these words should or shouldn't be added to the dictionary.
- 4) “Britishisms” – Research words that are different in British English and American English (like lift/elevator.) You may also want to look at how words are spelled differently in England and the United States. (color/colour) Why are there these differences?
- 5) Pick some words and learn about the origin of your words. Words have some interesting stories behind them! Some sample words: ok, quiz, snob, cotton, nocturnal/diurnal, alphabet, jeopardy
- 6) When describing order, we use the words primary (first level,) secondary (second level,) and tertiary (third level.) Research these words. What comes after tertiary for the fourth level? How about after that? Where do these words come from?
- 7) Extreme Words! Explore the longest words, words that have the most vowels, words with the most syllables, etc.
- 8) Research words for very large numbers. Millions, billions, trillions ... then what? How did these words come to be?
- 9) How many words are there in English? Why is this a problematic question?
- 10) Why is the letter “W” called “double-u” and not “double-v”?
- 11) Just as words are added to the dictionary every year, some words are considered to old-fashioned and are deleted. See this article about obsolete words:  
[www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/aug/21/endangered-words-collins-dictionary](http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/aug/21/endangered-words-collins-dictionary). Research about obsolete (old) words. What do you think? Should words be removed from dictionaries? Choose an obsolete word that you think should be brought back into use.

- 12) What is slang? Is slang good or bad? Are there slang words that should be permitted in school or in formal settings?
- 13) How did we get the names for the days of the week?
- 14) How did we get the names for our months?
- 15) Why does the number 2 have a “w” in its spelling? (two)
- 16) How did shapes get their names?
- 17) “-ology” means “the study of.” Explore various -ologies at [www.amnh.org/ology/](http://www.amnh.org/ology/), and meet over 100 different Ologists, from Arachnology to Ornithology. Write about the different –ologies you explore.
- 18) Synonyms are words that mean the same thing. Antonyms are words that are opposites. What are antagonisms? Explore antagonisms and give plenty of examples.
- 19) Explore palindromes, words that are the same read forwards and backwards.
- 20) Acronyms are words made from other word parts. What are some acronyms that you hear a lot? Explore common and uncommon acronyms.

*Or come up with your own topic about words! What are you curious about?*

(For inspiration, or just to listen to a great program about word histories, check out the NPR radio program online, *A Way With Words* at [www.waywordradio.org](http://www.waywordradio.org).)

# What's the Good Word? Works Cited in my Research

Here is a list of books and/or websites I used for my research:

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(\*\*You just need to write the title of the books you use, or the name of the websites you use. You do not need to include the web address.)