

ORIGINS OF WORDS & SAYINGS - ANSWERS

A quiz from Madeley & District u3a

The origins of words and sayings are sometimes lost in the sands of time, based on apocryphal stories or are just suggestions. There are plenty of alternative theories to those here.

Origins of words

1. Roald Dahl wrote a children's book about the antics of mischievous creatures causing mayhem. Their name was based on a word used in the RAF during WWII to describe mysterious faults occurring in aircraft. What is this name, the title of the book and a later film? **Gremlins**
2. In Florence, Venice and other areas during the Black Death in the 1340's boats were required to moor offshore for 40 days. The maximum time for the plague to kill you was 37 days, so if anyone survived on board after that period they could be assumed free of the disease and allowed onshore. What word meaning "*a period of isolation*" is derived from the Italian for forty days?
Quarantine from *quarantena*, meaning "forty days". It's a better word than "*trentino*", for the alternative 30 day isolation period in some areas. Imagine having to "*trentine*" during this lockdown!
3. Which word, commonly used in regard to exploiting laws for tax avoidance, is derived from the figurative meaning of a 17th century word for a small opening used for firing arrows or as an outlet of escape.
Loophole
4. What word meaning "*acting in an uncontrolled and aggressive manner*" derives from the Old Norse description of a warrior who wore a shirt of bearskin rather than armour to go into battle on the basis this would make him more fearsome. **Berserk**. The Old Norse form of the word was *berserkr* meaning "bear-shirt"
5. What 4 letter word describing well-to-do people allegedly derives from an abbreviation on tickets for passengers on ships travelling between England and India who chose the more desirable cabins on the shady side

of the ship for the outward and return journey. **Posh:** Port Out, Starboard Home. However, researchers for the 20-volume historical *Oxford English Dictionary* have found no supporting evidence for this explanation of the origins of this word from enquiries, including interviews with former travellers and inspection of shipping company documents.

6. What word is attributed to a Lord who devised a way of making portable food so he didn't have to leave his beloved gambling table to go to eat? Others believe he ate food in this fashion only so he could stay at his desk and attend to his political commitments. (Yeah, right!)
Sandwich

7. In the days before phones and computers, politicians who required feedback from the public to determine what the people considered important sent their assistants to local taverns, pubs, and bars. They were told to '*go sip some ale*' and listen to people's conversations and political concerns. Which single word based on this is now used when referring to local opinion? **Gossip**

8. What word describing a form of employment derives from mercenary knights who would fight for any side willing to pay them for the use of their bodies and spears or swords, i.e. owed no particular allegiance.
Freelance

9. What word meaning to make, carry, or sell illicit goods, comes from the practice of 19th-century alcohol smugglers hiding bottles in their boots?
Bootleg

10. What word describing a method of finance is from the French for "*death contract*". **Mortgage**

Origins of expressions

11. "*Larger than life*" refers to a flamboyant, gregarious person whose mannerisms or appearance are considered more outlandish than those of other people. Its first recorded use was in the mid-20th century by The

New Yorker magazine to describe which English person? **Winston Churchill**

12. A pretty 8 year old girl was murdered in Hampshire in 1867. Her psychopathic killer claimed she was "*worth nothing at all*". In 1869 rations of poor quality tinned mutton were introduced for British seamen. They cynically suggested it might be her rotted remains. They used a phrase, based on her name, to describe these rations. What is the phrase, now used to mean "*nothing at all*"? **Sweet Fanny Adams**
13. Which expression meaning "*to pretend not to notice*" is based on an event during the naval Battle of Copenhagen in 1801? **Turn a blind eye**. Horatio Nelson famously put his telescope to his blind eye so he couldn't see any order to withdraw from the battle
14. During the 18th-century if you wanted someone to paint your portrait it was cheaper to have just the head and shoulders without other limbs showing. Having a full body portrait gave rise to what expression meaning "*very expensive*"? **Costing an arm and a leg**
15. Britain's 20th Prime Minister Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, had a reputation for nepotism, including appointing his favourite nephew, Arthur Balfour, to several political posts. What phrase meaning "*everything's worked out alright*" is based on this? **Bob's your uncle**
16. To train young hunting dogs to follow a scent, a smoked fish would be dragged along the ground. What expression meaning "*a false scent*" or "*totally irrelevant*" is based on this? **A red herring**
17. Oliver Cromwell's face was disfigured but when he had his portrait painted by Sir Peter Lely he ordered the artist not to flatter him. His insistence gave rise to which phrase meaning "*take me as I am*"? **Take me warts and all**
18. The Parthians were a warlike race. To confuse their enemies they would pretend to flee a battle on their horses, get the enemy to chase them, then turn around in their saddles and fire their arrows, which often proved an effective tactic to win the battle. What expression meaning

“to have the last word”, often a cutting or derogatory remark, is based on this? **A parting shot**

19. What expression meaning that something is heading into a failure is based on the unsuccessful attempts of trainee RAF pilots in the 1940s to fly a perfect circular aerial route? **Going pear shaped**

20. Wounded sailors during Nelson’s time were taken by ships which docked in the Solent. Then they were transported up a muddy tidal waterway to a secure naval hospital from which they could not easily desert. What phrase meaning *“in a hopeless situation”* did this give rise to? **Up a creek without a paddle** (or for those who tried to escape via the sewers maybe it’s **up **** creek**)

21. Pubs in Bristol used to have sand on the floor, collected from local beaches. The lads who collected the sand were not paid in money, but in beer, which kept them merry. What phrase did this give rise to? **As happy as a sandboy**

22. In 1837 the Marquis of Waterford had a wild night out in Melton Mowbray with his group of friends, during which they knocked over flower pots, broke windows and splashed the doors of several homes with paint. What expression meaning *“Go out and enjoy oneself flamboyantly”* did this give rise to? **Painting the town red**

23. What expression meaning *“to betray someone, especially so as to benefit oneself”* originates from 19th century, in the Southern states of America? During this period it was already illegal to import slaves, so there would be internal trades where people would ship slaves down the Mississippi river and sell them at the market. **Sell down the river**

24. What expression meaning *“to make a very great effort to achieve something”* originates from organists using devices on the instrument to play at a much higher volume. **Pull out all the stops**

25. During the middle ages, the condemned ones were taken through what today is known as Oxford Street to their execution. During this final trip, the cart would stop and they would be allowed to have one final drink before their death. What expression did this give rise to? **One for the road**

26. What expression meaning “*pursuing a mistaken or misguided line of thought or course of action*” originates from dogs chasing animals up a tree, but who would sometimes continue barking even if the prey was no longer there? **Barking up the wrong tree**
27. There was an old law stating that if someone butchered an animal that didn’t belong to him, he would only be punished if he was found with blood on his hands. If one was found with the meat but his hands were clean, he would not be punished. What expression did this give rise to? **Caught red handed**
28. What expression said to someone who remains silent when they are expected to speak originates from a whip called “Cat-o’-nine-tails” that was used by the English Navy for flogging and often left the victims speechless. **Has a cat got your tongue**
29. At local taverns, pubs, and bars, people drank from pint and quart-sized containers. A barmaid's job was to keep an eye on the customers and keep the drinks coming. She had to pay close attention and remember who was drinking in pints and who was drinking in quarts. What expression did this give rise to? **Mind your P’s and Q’s**
30. For ships with cannons it was necessary to keep a good supply of cannon balls nearby. The best storage method devised was a square-based pyramid with 1 ball on top, resting on 4 resting on 9 on 16. But how to prevent the bottom layer from sliding or rolling from under the others? The solution was a metal plate called a 'monkey' with 16 round indentations. However, if this plate were made of iron, the iron balls would quickly rust to it. The solution was to make the monkey out of brass, but this still caused a problem because brass contracts much more than iron when chilled. Consequently, when the temperature dropped too far, the brass indentations would shrink so much that the cannonballs would roll off. What expression meaning “*very cold*” derives from this? **Cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey.**

Misquotes. Which stars reputedly said these lines, but never actually did:

31. “Not a lot of people know that” Sir Michael Caine never said this. Peter Sellers once did an impersonation of him on Parkinson's BBC chat show,

in which he used the now legendary phrase which has wrongly been attributed to Sir Michael ever since.

32. "You dirty rat". James Cagney never said this, though everyone who impersonates him thinks he did. However, in *Blonde Crazy*, he *did* say, **"That dirty, double-crossing rat!"** Which is close enough.
33. "A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do" ". Reputedly John Wayne in *Stagecoach*, but he actually said **"Well, there's some things a man just can't run away from."**
34. "Is that a gun in your pocket, or are you just glad to see me?" usually attributed to Mae West. What she did say with a leer in *Catherine Was Great* was **"Lieutenant, is that your sword or are you just glad to see me?"**
35. "Play it again, Sam." In *Casablanca* Ingrid Bergman (as Ilsa Lund) requested of Sam: **"Play it once, Sam, for old time's sake...Play it, Sam. Play 'As Time Goes By'."** The closest Humphrey Bogart (as Rick Blaine) came to the phrase was his angry command to Sam: **"You played it for her, you can play it for me...If she can stand it, I can. Play it!"**
36. "It's life, Jim, but not as we know it" allegedly said by Spock (Leonard Nimoy) or McCoy (DeForest Kelley) in *Star Trek*, but neither did. The line is in *"Star Trekkin"* a 1987 song by British band The Firm. It features comical voice caricatures of the original *Trek* characters:
37. "Mrs Robinson, are you trying to seduce me?" The line in *The Graduate* is actually **"Mrs Robinson, you're trying to seduce me. Aren't you?"** A crucial difference, as Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman) in the misquote appears as if he genuinely doesn't know whether the older woman is trying to seduce him or not, whereas the actual line suggests he is fully aware. (Sue and I went to see *The Graduate* at the Odeon, Hanley, in 1968 on our first date. A memorable film!)
38. "Do ya feel lucky, punk?" Not quite accurate. In *Dirty Harry* the cop (Clint Eastwood) says after losing count of how many bullets he's fired **"...this is a .44 Magnum, the most powerful handgun in the world, and would blow your head clean off, you've got to ask yourself one question: 'Do I feel lucky? 'Well do ya, punk?"**

39. "I did everything Fred Astaire did, but backwards and in high heels". Ginger Rogers never said this about dance partner Fred Astaire. In her autobiography *My Story*, she writes that the quotation actually came from a newspaper comic.

40. "Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy ride." Bette Davies as aging, jealous stage actress Margo Channing in *All About Eve* took another stiff drink during a birthday party. She walked over to the staircase, turned, and told everyone to buckle up their *airplane* seatbelts (cars didn't have seatbelts in the 1950s!) and said **"Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy night."** (not ride)

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The weekly "lockdown quizzes" started last April to provide a bit of entertainment for members. We optimistically thought that 6 would be enough for the expected lockdown period! We're now up to 35 and I hope to be able to continue them until the lockdown eases, but I'm running out of inspiration. If you can contribute questions, or complete quizzes, that would be very much appreciated.