

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – Sweets referred to as 'sweetmeat'

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Why do some people refer to sweets as 'sweetmeat'?

(D. Vrinda, Coimbatore)

The word 'sweetmeat' is considered to be old fashioned; some dictionaries label it as being 'archaic'. In the past, any sweet delicacy – candy, a piece of fruit coated with sugar, etc. – was called sweetmeat. The word 'meat' in 'sweetmeat' has nothing to do with animal flesh. In Old **English**, the word 'mete', from which we get the modern 'meat', meant 'food'. All items of food, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian, were called 'meat'. The original meaning of 'sweetmeat' was 'sweet food'.

Why are lefthanders frequently referred to as 'southpaws'?

(M. Akilesh, Bangalore)

The word 'southpaw' comes from the game that is considered by many to be America's favourite pastime – baseball. The newspaper columnist, Finley Peter Dunne, coined the word in the 19th century to refer to left-handers. The 'paw' in 'southpaw' refers to the hand of the pitcher. In the United States, baseball is usually played in the summer; games between professional teams are either played in the afternoon or in the evening. To ensure that the batter doesn't have to look directly into the afternoon/evening sun, the 'batter's box' or the 'home plate' faces east. The pitcher, on the other hand, throws the ball facing west. This being the case, when a left-handed pitcher winds up for his delivery, his throwing arm always faces south. Hence the term 'southpaw' for lefthanders.

What is the meaning and origin of 'turn turtle'?

(V. Ganga, Chennai)

A turtle is a reptile like a tortoise; it has a very hard shell to protect it from its enemies and from the elements. The expression 'turn turtle' was first used by sailors with reference to a ship or a boat. When a ship or a boat capsized, it was said to have turned turtle. Nowadays, the expression is used with all modes of transportation, not just ships and boats. Cars, trucks, and buses can turn turtle as well. Anything that flips over or turns upside down is said to have 'turned turtle'.

*Several boats turned turtle during the violent storm.

*Raj was killed when his car hit the divider and turned turtle.

According to one theory, when British sailors visited the Caribbean islands, they found that the natives caught huge sea turtles quite easily by turning them upside down. Once a turtle was on its back, it was totally helpless – just like the crew of a ship that has capsized. This explains why another meaning of the idiom is ‘vulnerable’

How is the word ‘logorrhea’ pronounced?

(Kiran Kumar, Nagpur)

The first syllable is pronounced like the word ‘log’ and the ‘o’ in the second and the ‘a’ in the final syllables are pronounced like the ‘a’ in ‘china’. The ‘e’ is pronounced like the ‘ee’ in ‘need’, ‘feed’, and ‘seed’. The word is pronounced ‘log-e-REE-e’ with the stress on the third syllable. It comes from the Greek ‘logos’ meaning ‘word’ and ‘rhia’ meaning ‘flow’. ‘Logorrhea’ literally means the excessive flow of words. The term is normally used to refer to a communication disorder in which an individual talks for a long time, but rather incoherently. He may talk to himself or to others, but much of what he says will be incomprehensible. Dictionaries define it as ‘incoherent talkativeness’.

“The closest to perfection a person ever comes is when he fills out a job application form.” –

Stanley J Randall

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