

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Know your English – meaning of the word 'lynch'

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What is the meaning of the word 'lynch'?

(Kaustukey Tripathi, Lucknow)

The word rhymes with 'pinch' and 'inch'. We sometimes read in the papers about how people on the streets take law into their own hands and kill someone who they think has committed a serious crime. The poor victim is neither taken to the police station nor given a chance to prove his innocence. When you 'lynch' someone, you hang him. The angry crowd that does this is called a 'lynch mob'.

If it hadn't been for the police, the villagers would have lynched the Minister.

Ram soon realized that the mob had lynched the wrong man.

The word comes from the name of a person who lived in Virginia in the 18th century. Captain William Lynch was a self-appointed judge who sentenced people to die without a proper trial. This method of condemning someone to his death by hanging was called 'Lynch's Law'. Later, the act of hanging was called 'lynching'.

What is the difference between 'wordsmith' and 'wordrobe'?

(J. Vivek, Chennai)

The term 'wordsmith' is usually used with people who are exceptionally good writers; these individuals are highly skilled when it comes to stringing together words and putting together sentences. Prolific writers and professionals who work with words are usually referred to as 'wordsmiths'.

We need to bring out a new brochure. Let's hire a wordsmith for the job.

We know that a person's 'wardrobe' consists of all the clothes that he/she has. Similarly, a person's 'wordrobe' consists of all the words he/she knows. In other words, it is a person's vocabulary. While 'wordsmith' is listed in most standard dictionaries, 'wordrobe' is not. It is mostly used in informal contexts. All of us have a 'wordrobe', but not all of us are 'wordsmiths'.

Rajeev has a limited wordrobe.

THE HINDU

(M. Karthik, Hyderabad)

Whenever we visit a government office, we often become frustrated with the time consuming bureaucratic procedures that have to be followed. We have the feeling that we are stuck in a land where nothing moves - if it does, it does so in slow motion. The term 'red tape' is used to refer to the official rules and regulations that make it impossible for things to get done quickly. The expression has a negative connotation.

Madhu's application for a loan has been held up by red tape.

I need someone who will help me cut through the red tape.

In 17th century England, government officials and lawyers invariably tied all official documents with a ribbon or tape that was red in colour. According to some scholars, it was the novelist Charles Dickens who introduced the term 'red tape'. It was Thomas Carlyle, however, who popularized it through his writings. By the 19th century, 'red tape' began to mean 'official sluggishness'.

Is it all right to say 'commentate'?

(CN Ramamoorthy, Mumbai)

The word is derived from 'commentator' and is frequently used in the world of broadcast journalism to mean 'to provide commentary for' or 'comment on'. When you 'commentate', you report on an event as it occurs. Though there are some people who do not like the use of this word, 'commentate' has been listed in most standard dictionaries.

Surya will be commentating on next week's match.

“It's easy being a humourist when you've got the whole government working for you.” -

Will Rogers

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