

All About English





This painting shows people from France coming to England in 1066.

English Roots

Hundreds of years ago, the language that became English was spoken by groups of people who lived in the area that today is called England. One group was the Angles. The name England comes from a word meaning “land of the Angles.”

Some words, like man and sun, were already part of the Angles’ language. However, this language evolved as it became English. As English evolved, words were picked up from other languages. History, for example, was picked up from Greek.

During the late 800s, people from northern Europe called the Vikings invaded England. Then, words from the Vikings’ languages became part of English. In 1606, a group from France conquered England. Once the English nobles learned French, French words also became part of English.

Many English words come from Latin and Greek. Bio is from a Greek word meaning “life.” English words containing bio, such as biology, have to do with living things.

Key Notes:

How did the English language evolve?



Words from Latin are found in English and Spanish languages.

English and Spanish Words

Some languages, such as Spanish, have words that closely resemble English words. In fact, some Spanish words resemble English so closely that it is easy to know what they mean even if you don't speak Spanish.

For example, look at the Spanish word *artista* and *fantastico*. It is not hard to see what they mean in English, *artist* and *fantastic*. Both of these examples are altered only at the end of the word.

Sometimes words are altered in the middle. If you look at the Spanish word *nacion*, it is hard to figure out that the word means *nation* in English.

The reason that English and Spanish words can be so similar is that both languages have many words that come from Latin. Each language has altered the words a little. However, because the words have not changed completely, you can still recognize them.

Key Notes:

Why do some English and Spanish words look similar?



To 'let the cat out of the bag' is an English idiom for telling a secret.

Idioms

Has anyone ever told you to “keep your shirt on” or asked you not to “beat around the bush”? Did you ever think that some things are as “easy as pie”? Did you ever “learn something by heart”? These expressions are called idioms. An idiom is an expression that means something other than what the words actually mean.

Every language has idioms. People who speak that language know what these expressions mean. However, idioms don't always translate well into other languages. The English idiom “let the cat out of the bag” means “reveal a secret.” Spanish has an idiom that means the same thing. When you translate it into English, it means “the cake was discovered.” If a Spanish-speaking person said that to nonspeakers, they might ask, “What cake?”

Idioms can be hard to understand when you don't know a language. However, they make language interesting because they paint pictures with words.

Key Notes:

What are idioms?



Cell phone entered the language in 1984.

New English Words

English is always changing. One way it changes is by adding new words. These words are created in several ways. Some words come from words we already have. Splashdown is a combination of splash and down. Smog is a combination of smoke and fog.

Some words come from the names of people or places. Before 1762, the word sandwich didn't refer to food. At that time, a British noble, the Earl of Sandwich, asked for some meat between two slices of bread. This type of food became known as a sandwich.

Many new words come from science because we need to name new things. After a way was created to send mail through commuters, the new mail needed a name. That is how the word e-mail, or electronic mail, became an English word. The word smog was created to name a problem that happened when fog mixed with smoky fumes.

Key Notes:

Why are words added to English?

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