

Let's Talk

Discussions and reminiscence activities.

Words – They Come and They Go

The words we say, the way in which we say them, and even the meaning of the words we use can change from generation to generation. Think back to when you were growing up and the popular words and phrases of your time. Are they words you still use and hear or have they become obsolete? This activity explores some current “buzz” words and overused phrases, new words, and old words with lots of discussion along the way.

Props, Preparations, & Tips

1. Print a copy of the PICTURES on this page to pass around during the discussion.
2. Check out the links in the article for additional information to bring to the discussion.
3. Use the “Discussion Breaks” as an opportunity to ask questions and generate discussion throughout the activity.



Introduction

Every year words and phrases enter our collective consciousness, with or without our notice. This past year it was words like “going green,” “maverick,” and “bailout.” Most of us probably never give it much thought, but in 1975 Bill Rabe, an English professor at a small college in the Upper Midwest, got annoyed with what he saw as the overuse and in some cases misuse of “the King’s English.” His response to this perceived travesty was to solicit nominees for banishment from folks who were similarly irritated. Since then, the Word Banishment Group of Lake Superior State University, in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, has received thousands of entries from people all over the country. On New Year’s Day, they publish their selected entries. Let’s take a look at the following words and phrases that made the cut this year and a few of the reasons why they were nominated. Are you ready for # 1 on the list?

BEING GREEN - The term “green” and all of its variables, such as “going green,” “building green,” “greening,” “green technology,” “green solutions,” and more, drew the most attention from those who sent in nominations this year.

"This phrase makes me go green every time I hear it." ~ Danielle Brunin, Lawrence, Kansas

"I'm all for being environmentally responsible, but this 'green' needs to be nipped in the bud." ~ Valerie Gilson, Gales Ferry, Connecticut



"Companies are less 'green' than ever, advertising the fact they are 'green.' Is anyone buying this nonsense?" ~ Mark Etchason, Denver, Colorado

"If something is good for the environment, just say so. As Kermit would say, 'It isn't easy being green.'" ~ Kevin Sherlock, Hiawatha, Iowa

"If I see one more corporation declare itself 'green,' I'm going to start burning tires in my backyard." ~ Ed Hardiman, Bristow, Virginia

MAVERICK - A word we have always known and loved for the independent spirit it represents is now a term we heard way too much during the last political election. Here are some thoughts on the subject:

"The constant repetition of this word for months before the U.S. election diluted whatever meaning it previously had. Even the comic offshoot 'mavericky' was terribly overused. A minimum five-year banishment of both words is suggested so they will not be available during the next federal election." ~ Matthew Mattila, Green Bay, Wisconsin

"You know it's time to banish this word when even the Maverick family, who descended from the rancher who inspired the term, says it's being mis-used." ~ Scott Urbanowski, Kentwood, Michigan

"I'm a maverick, he's a maverick, wouldn't you like to be a maverick, too?" ~ Michael Burke, Silver Spring, Maryland

BAILOUT - When it seems as if all of corporate America is being bailed out by the rest of us, is it no wonder the term "bailout" was among the most favored of the banishments?

"Use of emergency funds to remove toxic assets from banks' balance sheets is not a bailout. When your cousin calls you from jail in the middle of the night, he wants a bailout." ~ Ben Green, State College, Pennsylvania

"Is it a loan? Is it a purchase of assets by the government? Is it a gift made by the taxpayers?" ~ Dave Gill, Traverse City, Michigan

"Now it seems as though every sector of the economy wants a bailout. Unfortunately, ordinary workers can't qualify." ~ Tony, McLeansville, North Carolina

WALL STREET AND MAIN STREET - Catchy concept, don't you think? But what does it really mean?

"When this little dyad first came into use at the start of the financial crisis, I thought it was a clever use of parallelism. But it's simply over-used. No 'serious' discussion of the crisis can take place without some political figure lamenting the fact that the trouble on Wall Street is affecting 'folks' on Main Street." ~ Charles Harrison, Aiken, South Carolina

"I am so tired of hearing about everything affecting 'Main Street.' I know that with the 'Wall Street' collapse, the comparison is convenient, but really, let's find another way to talk about everyman or the middle class, or even, heaven forbid, 'Joe the Plumber.'" ~ Stacey, Knoxville, Tennessee

Discussion Break

- What words or phrases would you like to see banished and why?
- If you were to form a club, what would you call it? What would it do? What would be the criteria for membership?
- How important is it, do you think, to maintain the King's English? Or, is it important for language to evolve and change?

Test Your "New" Word Knowledge

On average, it takes about ten years for a new word or phrase to make it into the dictionary. Here are some new words that have crept into our vocabulary and the dictionary over the past 10 years. Have you heard of them and, more importantly, do you know what they mean? (**A suggestion:** Read the terms out loud and have the group guess their meaning.)

CYBERSPACE - The hypothetical environment, which contains all the data stored in computers.

IPOD - A palm-size electronic device primarily developed to play music.

TEXT MESSAGE - The sending of short typed messages from one cell phone to another or, the primary way in which teenagers communicate with each other.

AEROBICIZED - To perform vigorous exercise as part of an overall program to improve fitness.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM - A problem everyone is aware of but no one wants to talk about because it is taboo or embarrassing.

HOODIE - Short for a hooded sweatshirt worn primarily by young people.

SUPERSIZE - Extra-large, excessively large, especially when it comes to servings of food.

SOUL MATE - The finding of your soul's counter part and connecting with a deep bond of true happiness and fulfillment.

SANDWICH GENERATION - The generation caught between caring for aging parents and raising young children. Every generation has a "sandwich generation."



Discussion Break

- Who in the room owns an iPod or knows someone who owns one? How about your grandchildren, do they have an iPod? (A suggestion: Bring in an iPod and demonstrate how it works.)
- Text messaging has its own “language.” For example, BFF means “Best friends forever” and NBD means “No big deal.” What do you think PIR means? (Parents in room.) (**A suggestion:** Click [HERE](#) for some texting abbreviations frequently used. See if the group can guess their meanings.)
- Who is (or was) your soul mate? Why would you describe them in that way?

Test Your “Old” Word Memories

Think back to when you were growing up and the popular words and phrases of the time (known as slang). How many are still popular today? Time to resurrect some of the “oldies but goodies” from the past.

COURTING - A man seeking the affections of a woman.

SWELL - For a time, a slang term used for something very good, enjoyable.

ICEBOX - A way of providing refrigeration for food prior to the refrigerator.

FLUMMOX - To puzzle or confuse.

MOOCH - One who begs; try to get something free of charge.

CAT’S MEOW - Something wonderful.

KEEN - Attractive; Appealing

ANKLE-BITER - A small child

ZOOT SUIT - Popular during the late 1930s and 1940s, this men’s suit had a long coat with wide lapels and padded shoulders along with pants that were high waisted, wide-legged, and tightly cuffed.

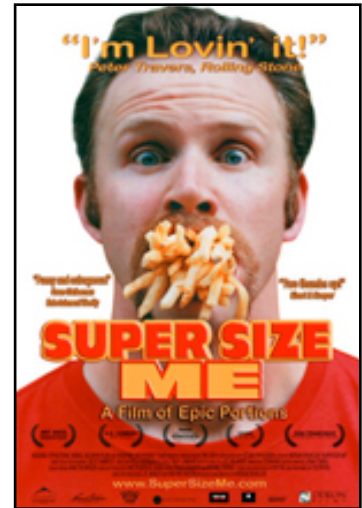


Discussion Break

- How many of these terms did you use in the past?
- Which of them do you still say?
- What additional words would you add to the list? Identify their meanings.

Additional Activities/Discussion

1. Click [HERE](#) for a website listing text message abbreviations. See how many of them your group can guess the meanings to.
2. Check the sites listed below for popular slang terms of the decades and lead a discussion about them. Which ones does your group remember hearing? Which ones did they use? Which were their favorites?
3. Invite a group of teenagers to participate in a “Language Challenge.” Can the kids guess the meaning of some word “oldies”? Can the seniors guess what the kids are saying?
4. Rent the DVD *Super Size Me* and you may never eat fast food again.



Sites to Visit

How to Save Cherished Words
Slang from the 1920s - 1940s
Slang from the 1950s
Slang from the colorful 1960s