

Second College Edition

The
American
Heritage
Dictionary

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**The
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Heritage
Dictionary**

Houghton Mifflin Company BOSTON

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INTRODUCTION

The publication of *The American Heritage Dictionary* in 1969 was a major event in the history of American lexicography. The goal of its editors, expressed by William Morris, was to create a new dictionary that would not only faithfully record our language but also add the sensible dimension of guidance toward grace and precision in the use of our language, which intelligent people seek in a dictionary. The overwhelming critical and popular success of the Dictionary has been testimony to the validity and achievement of that goal.

It is with pride in this tradition that we now offer the *Second College Edition*, the first complete revision of *The American Heritage Dictionary*. It is a book demanded by the profound changes and developments in language that have occurred in the last decade. A major concern has always been to provide users the information they need about language in an accessible and understandable way. This concern has guided the preparation of the new edition.

Like its predecessor, the *Second College Edition* covers the vocabulary ranging from the language of Shakespeare to the idiom of the present day. In order to present the vocabulary required by the well-informed, contemporary adult, the basic lexicon has been thoroughly reviewed, revised, and updated. Language is continually changing, continually being enriched from many sources. Dramatic sociological, cultural, and political developments have had a stunning impact on our language. Politics,

business, various subcultures, and the media have contributed to a new general vocabulary. Thus, more than 10,000 new general vocabulary words and meanings have been carefully selected and meticulously defined by our permanent lexicographic staff and outside authorities from a variety of disciplines.

In recognition of the increased role played by technology and science in daily life, the *Second College Edition* also includes more than 5,000 new scientific and technical terms. The field of computer science exemplifies the unprecedented growth we have witnessed in technology and the sciences in recent years; growth that has produced vast stores of new words and meanings.

The soul of a dictionary, however, is the quality of its definitions. An objective of the *Second College Edition* is to provide the user with understanding, comprehension, and appreciation of the language in a readable manner. Therefore, we have endeavored to present the most prevalent, contemporary sense or meaning of a word first, with the other shades of meaning following logically from this current, central concept. This departure from traditional lexicography, wherein senses are presented chronologically with the oldest meaning first and the most current last, is unique to *The American Heritage Dictionary* and has been highly regarded by its users. Praised for their clarity and precision, the definitions are written in concise, lucid prose and avoid the dictionary shorthand that makes most dictionaries forbid-

ding and confusing. With the exception of one abbreviation (*esp.* for *especially*) the new edition continues the policy of spelling out all words used in defining. The generous use of illustrative examples to clarify meanings and idiomatic usages has been expanded, drawing from the works of those contemporary writers who use the language in an intelligent, expressive, and effective way.

The appreciation of a word is not complete without an understanding of its history. The etymologies in the *Second College Edition* have all been reviewed by both special consultants and our etymological staff. Every effort has been made to provide a complete history of a word from earliest times. A few easily understood abbreviations have been introduced to allow for the inclusion of essential information, and the explanation of the obvious has been minimized in order to allow greater attention to the difficult and the obscure.

Certain changes have been made in the pronunciation system to improve the simplicity and clarity of the pronunciations. American speech takes many forms; the *Second College Edition* provides for each word one or more pronunciations expressed in symbols familiar to the reader untrained in phonetics.

In order to furnish the guidance regarded as an essential responsibility of a good dictionary, we have employed usage-context labels such as *Slang*, *Nonstandard*, and *Regional*. In addition, in an effort to provide practical solutions to usage questions, we have continued to call upon the widely celebrated *American Heritage Dictionary* Usage Panel. The Panel is composed of outstanding writers, speakers, and thinkers. After careful tabulation and analysis of the Panel's responses to usage questions, our special usage consultants and editors have prepared over 400 new usage notes for the *Second College Edition*. As a consequence, the *Second College Edition* can make the same claim as its predecessor: this Dictionary is "more precisely descriptive, in terms of current usage levels, than any heretofore published."

New features of the *Second College Edition* include separate biographical and geographical sections following the dictionary of general vocabulary. Coverage has been greatly expanded with the addition of approximately 5,000 new entries in each of these areas. The entries are presented in a new format that is liberally illustrated. Other new features include a section for

abbreviations, current information on colleges and universities, and a concise style manual.

It will be obvious at a glance that the *Second College Edition* maintains the distinctive graphic design of the original edition. Using recent advances in typography and design, we have sought to produce a dictionary that is unmatched in attractiveness and ease of use. The page, with its readable type and comfortable margins, was designed to invite reading. The inclusion of several thousand illustrations, both line drawings and photographs, is intended to enhance understanding of the subjects they illustrate. The *Second College Edition* contains more than 3,000 new photographs, distinguishing it from any other college-level dictionary. Our aim has been to create a dictionary that engages the reader and provides more comprehensive information than would be possible through conventional design.

We have had the enthusiastic cooperation of many distinguished linguists and writers, several of whom have contributed articles on their areas of special interest. Professor Geoffrey Nunberg presents an insightful and witty perspective on the historical development of the controversy involving usage. In an effort to provide the contemporary views on both sides of this issue, articles by Professor Dwight Bolinger and Mr. William F. Buckley, Jr., are juxtaposed in the form of a debate. Professor Lee Pederson offers a fascinating and informative account of the many regional and social dialects that characterize American English as it is spoken today. Finally, Professor Henry Kučera discusses the mathematical properties and informational structure of language that facilitate its use as a communication code.

A work of the magnitude of the *Second College Edition* requires the cooperation of many hands and minds. We would like to thank the members of the Usage Panel for their generous contribution of time and informed opinions. Thanks, too, are due to our many consultants and advisers in the various scholarly, scientific, and technological disciplines. We also extend our gratitude and appreciation to the many editorial staff associates involved in the day-to-day tasks of revising the Dictionary. We are also grateful to the scores of readers who have forwarded their comments and suggestions, many of which have been incorporated into this new edition. Finally, we wish to acknowledge our debt to

William Morris and the other editors of the First Edition of this book. Without their pioneering work, this new edition clearly would not have been possible.

The editors of the *Second College Edition* have endeavored to produce the most

useful, usable, and attractive dictionary currently available. It is our hope that readers will find this Dictionary a reliable and friendly guide to our language's treasury of words—the tools of communication and understanding.

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LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND THE AMERICAN HERITAGE

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American speech and writing record the transactions of nearly four hundred years of social history. Dialects embody patterns of sound, syntax, and meaning; literature documents those spoken forms in poetry and prose. Through the process of communication a native language becomes the social inheritance of all its speakers. In describing the linguistic resources of American English this Dictionary becomes a property book for the American people.

A century before Noah Webster organized his first American dictionary (1806), Jonathan Edwards defined the materials of inquiry in remarkably modern terms, in words that should appeal to every reader, whether layman, linguist, or lexicographer:

By *conversation*, I mean intelligent beings expressing their minds one to another in words, or other signs intentionally directed to us for our notice, whose immediate and main design is to be signification of the mind of him who gives it.

Defining language as intelligent conversation, Edwards recognized the conceptual, symbolic, and functional aspects of human communication: the engagement of thought, the use of signs, and the transmission of ideas from one mind to another.

Today the English language makes conversation possible among three hundred million native speakers who share its system of symbolic behavior. This number includes speakers of American, Australian, British, Canadian, Irish, New Zealand, and Scottish English as members of the most influential speech community in the history of civilization. Their common cultural heri-

tage makes possible the use of a single language by the members of these different groups, but each national variety with all its regional and social dialects reflects unique social experience.

Such experience makes a national vocabulary the most accessible and productive source of cultural information. Words are the complex linguistic structures that transmit the native lexicon through the systems of sound, grammar, and meaning. Words are also cultural emblems, symbols with social meaning that preserve the experience of human activity. Emerson said that words are signs of natural facts and wrote: "The etymologist finds the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture. Language is fossil poetry." He demonstrated by his own example, moreover, that words are also signs of sociohistorical facts by giving the American meaning to *transcendentalism*. Roger Williams, America's first anthropologist, recorded an Algonquian dialect, provided us with the earliest occurrences in English of *birchen bark* and *squash*, and coined the phrase *Indian affairs*. George Washington furnished the earliest citations for *Democrat* and *Republican* and himself was the first to receive the designation *favorite son*. Noah Webster made the earliest use of the phrase *American English* with characteristic impatience but ultimate accuracy: "In fifty years from this time [1806], the American-English will be spoken by more people than all other dialects of the language." Such thought, conversation, and social interaction shaped the national character and gave substance to the lexicon. Contributions