

Words with a story

This word, beginning with the letter **A**, comes from a Latin word meaning *sand* or *sandy place*. The word was used to name the sandy place where gladiators fought in the Roman amphitheatres. It is now often used to mean any area given over to entertainment, sport or music.

Arena From the Latin *harena*

This word, beginning with the letter **B**, is often used when speaking about gold. It comes from the idea of melting gold down into bars, by turning it into a very hot bubbling liquid. It is related to the French word *bouillon* which means soup, broth or bubble. The original Latin word meant *to bubble*.

Bullion From the Latin *bullion*

This word, beginning with the letter **C**, comes from the Old English word *cerr* (pronounced *cherr*) which means *a turn*. The word then changed to *chare* and then *char*. Some people used to have a charlady who would come in, and do a turn of cleaning the house. You might have to do this word before you are allowed out or given your pocket money.

Chore (plural *chores*)

This word, beginning with the letter **D**, is used when talking about the two of Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds or Spades in a deck of cards, or the number two on a die (plural *dice*). In many gambling games, the ace and the one are highest, so the two was the lowest score available. This word is used in tennis, to show that a player has to take a clear lead of two points to win a game.

Deuce

This word, beginning with the letter **E**, comes from a Greek word meaning *"I have found it."* This was shouted by the Greek scientist Archimedes when he was in the bath and discovered a test for working out the purity of gold through water displacement.

Eureka From the Greek *heureka*

This word, beginning with the letter **F**, is something tasty to eat. It comes to us from a Spanish word meaning *small bandage* or *wrapper*. To work this one out, you will have to think about rolling your food up in a wee wrap before you put it in your mouth.

Fajita From the Spanish *fajita* or *faja*

This word, beginning with the letter **G**, comes from a French word meaning *glove*. It comes down to us in English from the medieval period and is often used in the sense of a *challenge*.

Gauntlet From the French *gant*

This word, beginning with the letter **H**, is thought by some to come from an old Viking word *hoggva*, meaning *to chop*. Scottish people also used the word *hag* meaning *to hack*. There is a similar word in French, *hachis*, which means *hash* or **mince**. We, in Scotland, use this word to mean a kind of chopped-up mince-type dish that we eat.

Haggis

This word, beginning with the letter **I**, comes to us from a Greek word meaning *burnt in*. The word was transferred into the Latin language, where it was the name of a reddish coloured fluid used by Emperors for signing documents.

Ink From the Greek and Latin *encaustum*, where we also get our word **caustic** meaning **burning**

This word, beginning with the letter **J**, means *to press*. Have you ever had *champit tatties*? Potatoes that are pressed and mashed together? Well, *champit* is related to this word. What do we get when cars are pressed closely together? What do we get when we press lots of fruit together with sugar and heat them up?

Jam

This word, beginning with the letter **K**, comes from a Hindu word meaning dust-coloured. It was given to describe the colour of uniforms worn by soldiers. This colour is a sort of greenish, yellowish, hue and is used because it creates good camouflage.

Khaki From the Hindu *khak* meaning *dust*

This word, beginning with the letter **L**, comes from a Latin word meaning *moon*. Many years ago, people thought that the changes in the moon's cycle could affect the human mind and in some cases, drive people crazy. This word was applied to someone who behaved as if they were insane.

Lunatic From the Latin *luna*

This word, beginning with the letter **M**, comes from two Greek words that, together, mean *little life*. We use this word in science, when we are describing a microscopic organism or a very *little life*.

Microbe From the Greek *mikros* and *bios*

This word, beginning with the letter **N**, comes from the Old English word *eke* (pronounced *ache* as in *toothache*) which meant **also**. Did you know that the word **orange** used to be written and spoken *norange*? That the word **apron** used to be *napron*? Now we say *an orange* and *an apron*. The same principle is at work here, with this word meaning an *also name* or a name that someone is also known by.

Nickname (or an *eke name*)

This word, beginning with the letter **O**, is the name of an animal, comes from the Malayan language and means *man of the woods*. The first part of the word we use has nothing to do with this animal's colour.

Orangutan From the Malayan *orang* meaning **man** and *hutan* meaning **woods**

This word, beginning with the letter **P**, is, some people wrongly think, used because this is the place in the kitchen where some people store their pots and pans for cooking. In actual fact, the word is associated with the Latin and French words for *bread* and means a place where bread is stored. The word **larder** is a similar word and it is associated with being a storeroom for bacon and this can be seen in the French word *lard* meaning *bacon*.

Pantry From the Latin *panis* and the French *pain*, both meaning *bread*

This word, beginning with the letter **Q**, comes from a Latin word meaning *forty*. In days gone by, if a ship came into a port and was suspected of harbouring an infectious disease, the people on board the ship had to stay there for a period of forty days, to ensure the infection was not passed on to those on shore.

Quarantine From Latin *quadraginta* meaning *forty*

This word, beginning with the letter **R**, has close associations with the word **river**. In many lands throughout Europe and beyond, rivers were often used to mark borders between countries and provinces. People would then face off against each other, to decide who had the rights to take drinking water and fish from the river, and this would often end up in serious conflict.

Rivals

This word, beginning with the letter **S**, is used to mean *a payment for work undertaken*. It has its origins in the Latin word *sal* meaning *salt*. During Roman times, salt was very precious because it was used to cure meat, to ensure that it did not go off for long periods. Because of this, salt was given to Roman soldiers as part of their payment.

Salary

This word, beginning with the letter **T**, comes from a Greek word meaning *turning back*. In ancient times, after a battle, soldiers would collect all the armour and swords of their defeated enemies and turn back home to show off and prove that they had won. This **T** is still used to show off that you have won something.

Trophy From Greek *trope*

This **phrase**, beginning with the letter **U**, has its origins in the medieval period and relates to the fact that the Lords and the Ladies would sit at one end of the dining table, and eat the best part of the dead animal. The poor servants would have to sit at the other end of the table and eat the entrails of the animal, which were often baked in pastry to make them a little less disgusting to eat. Nowadays, we put the letter H at the beginning of the first of the two words, and it means *to suffer humiliation*. I am sure the poor servants would have felt humiliation having to eat the entrails of the dead animals, whilst their masters tucked into the more succulent, tender cuts of meat.

Umble-pie (Humble-pie) from the Old English words *umbles* or *numbles* meaning *entrails of a deer*

This word, beginning with the letter **V**, is taken from the Roman god of fire Vulcan and was first applied to Mount Etna, near Naples, in Italy, where the ancient Romans believed Vulcan had his forge.

Volcano

This word, beginning with the letter **W**, is the name of a country and gets its title from Old German *walh* and Middle English *wealh* and means *foreigner* or *outsider*. In ancient times, after battles, it was often customary for the losers to be rounded up and forced to live in very remote areas, often on the edge of land. Thus we have *Cornwall* in England and *Wallachia* in Romania. Can you work out which country this is?

Wales

This word, beginning with the letter **X**, is used to make music by hitting hammers off little wooden blocks and has its origins in two Greek words.

Xylophone From Greek *xulon* meaning *wood*, and *phone* meaning *voice* Can you work out what **telephone** might mean?

This word, beginning with the letter **Y**, comes from a word in the Dutch language that means *to hunt* or *to chase*. We actually use this word now to mean a boat that people would go on, not for hunting but for pleasure.

Yacht From the Dutch *jagt*

This word, beginning with the letter **Z**, is used today to mean *energy*, *enthusiasm*, *eagerness* or *relish*. It comes from taking a little part of the peel of a fruit (or less often a scraping of a nut) and using it to give a drink a little bit of a kick.

Zest
