40 Weird Word Origins - mental_floss on YouTube (Ep.46)

List Show
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Hi, I'm John Green, welcome to my salon, this is mental_floss on YouTube, and did you know that

1. The word Lemur comes from a Latin word meaning "spirits of the dead"? Carl Linnaeus, who named the animal, said "I called them Lemurs because they go around mainly by night in a certain way similar to humans, and roam with a slow pace". So they're basically zombies then. And that's the first of many world origins I'm going to share with you today.

(Intro music)

2. 'Muscle' comes from the Latin root for "little mouse", because back in the 14th century people thought that muscles looked like mice living under their skin. Pfff, obviously they never saw my guns, how do you say fat honey badger in Latin?

3. In the 12th century, a Latin love poem became very popular in Europe, it was copied many times and passed from person to person. The poem was titled "Pamphilus", giving us the word for 'Pamphlet'.

4. 'Yankee' started with the Dutch who lived in New York during the 1600s, when it was called New Amsterdam. Though the details can't be confirmed, the word is probably a combination of two Dutch names, Jan and Kees. This was either an insult that the English colonists called the Dutch, or the other way around. The meaning switched and became a positive word for 'American', I mean unless you're a southerner.

5. 'Hippocampus' is the Greek word for a horse-fish hybrid. In classic mythology, these monsters were associated with Neptune. The Hippocampus in your brain apparently looks like those sea creatures, which I guess means the Hippocampus looks something like this.

6. The word 'Berserk' comes from ancient Norse warriors, also known as "berserkers". The original term came from the Norse words "bear" and "shirt", which is what the berserkers wore.

7. 'Salmon' comes from the Latin "salmo", or "to leap".

8. The origin of 'Ketchup' is hotly debated, but many people believe it came from China. The ancient Chinese used a similar word for the brine that they used to pickle fish. Which is connected to Ketchup in that they are both liquid-like, food-like phenomena.

9. Another controversial term is 'Kibosh', though most claim it can be traced back to Ireland, where a similar sounding term referred to the so-called "cap of death", the hat that a judge would wear when sentencing someone to death.

10. In the 13th century, the French used the expression of "Mortgage", meaning "death pledge". This term gave us the word 'Mortgage'.

11. 'Aloof' came from an English term in the 1500s for weather gage, the English borrowed this root from the Dutch word "luff", which meant the windward side of a ship. What does any of that have to do with being aloof?

12. Ever wonder why English is the only language in the world that uses 'Pineapple' rather than some form of 'Ananas'? 'Pineapple' used to be a word for "pine cone" which is what the fruit looked like to early explorers, you know who were apparently blind.

13. While we're talking about fruit, the word 'Cantaloupe' emerged in the 18th century, it's named after its place of origin, Cantalupo, Italy. The town's name literally translates to "singing wolf".

14. 'Mayonnaise' is another food named after a place. The French captured the island of Minorca in the Seven Years War, a victory that was apparently celebrated with the condiment. The island's capital is Port Mahon, and the suffix '-aise' means "native to". But of course the joke was on the French, sure they won Minorca, but then they had to have Mayonnaise.

15. 'War' has been in the English language since the 11th century, it actually comes from a Germanic root that means "to confuse". Which is kinda confusing.

16. In Greek 'kunikos' was a term for followers of the philosopher Antisthenes, but the literal translation is "dog like". Anyway, that gave us the word 'cynic'.

17. The word 'dunce' is also a reference to philosophy, John Duns Scotus was a philosopher whose teachings were largely religious and influenced the Catholic church. His followers were called 'dunces'. Later philosophers weren't so impressed with his work, so 'dunce' took on a negative connotation.

18. 'Lukewarm' is a tautology. "Luke" meant "warm" in Middle English, so when we say 'lukewarm' we're saying warmwarm.

19. 'Heresy' comes from Greek, it meant "choice".

20. 'Apprehend' emerged in the 1300s from the Latin word 'apprehendere', which meant "to grasp". So when you apprehend, you are grasping meaning, or grasping someone in arrest.

21. 'Jumbo' probably was originally the word for "elephant" in a West African language, the word took on the meaning of "large" when an elephant in the London Zoo was named Jumbo in the 1860s. Which makes me dream of a world in which we actually had jumbo shrimp.

22. In Old English "wyrd" meant "fate". Weirdly that gave us the term 'weird'.

23. Ancient romans who were running for office wore white, so the Latin word for "white-robed" gave us the term 'candidate'.

24. The fabric denim originally appeared in Nimes, France, so it was first called "serge de Nimes" or "fabric from Nimes", but the "serge" soon disappeared leaving us just with 'denim'.

25. Similarly, jeans were named after their place of origin, Genoa, Italy. The French word for Genoa is "Gênes", or possibly "Jennes", as you might have guessed I don't speak French.

26. 'Nice' comes from the Latin word for "ignorant". So maybe that's why nice guys finish last.

27. 'Curfew' is a combination of two French words, "cuvrir", "to cover", and "feu", "fire". So 'curfew' literally means "to cover fire".

28. 'Noon' comes from the Latin "nona hora" meaning "ninth hour". In Ancient Rome, noon was actually around 3pm. During the 12th and 13th centuries noon slowly moved back to, y'know, noon. Presumably this change was driven by people wanting to eat lunch earlier.

29. 'Bankrupt' is from the Italian term "banca rotta", literally meaning "broken bench".

30. In Old English "knight" originally meant "boy" or "servant". Now of course it means a bad pun in a Tom Cruise movie title. Knight and Day, anybody? Nope? I'm the only person who saw that? I think I might literally be the only person who saw that. Let's face it,

Tom Cruise didn't even see that Tom Cruise movie.

31. Anyway, the Old English word for 'worm', spelled 'wyrm' gave us the word 'worm', but that word came from another Old English word meaning "serpent" or "dragon", which makes me wonder how big were worms in medieval Europe?

32. The word 'money' emerged in Rome because the temple of Juno Moneta which reminds me there's a link in the description so you can redeem your Schrute Bucks for Mental Floss t-shirts. Schrute Bucks the only currency that Mark and Meredith are ever paid in. Anyway, the ancient Romans used that temple as a Mint because she was a goddess associated with money, "moneta" came to mean "mint", and then "money".

33. 'Escape' came from the Latin "ex" meaning "out" and "cappa" meaning "cloak". The literal meaning probably comes from the idea that if a person was being pursued they would disappear leaving only their cloak behind.

34. The Latin word for "walking" is "ambulant" which resulted in "ambulance". 'Ambulance' first meant like a moving hospital before it became a specific term. The word didn't refer to an actual wagon carrying the wounded until the Crimean War in the 1850s.

35. Also in the 19th century, Americans borrowed the term "promenade" which referred to a formal walk that would occur at Balls, and was shortened to 'Prom'.

36. 'Lobster' comes from a Latin word that also means "locust". That is disgusting.

37. 'Nostril' is a combination of the Old English words for "nose" and "hole".

38. In the 13th century the French gave us the meaning of 'Cider' that we use, but the original term that it derived from meant "strong or alcoholic drink".

39. Ancient Romans gave us 'senator' but before the word got its current meaning it came from a word for "old", and in fact is a relative of the word "senile". I'm not surprised.

Thanks for watching mental_floss here on YouTube, which is made with the help of these nice people; every week, we endeavor to answer to answer one of your mind-blowing questions. This week's comes from Ross Montgomery, who asks, "Where does the term 'Hearse' as in, y'know, funerals come from?" Thanks Ross, now I get to talk about another word origin!

40. 'Hearse' comes from the Oscan term for "wolf" but by the 13th century it had become a term for decorative candles or a canopy over a coffin. How? I dunno, maybe people draped wolves over their coffins. Anyway, eventually the meaning transformed into the hearse that we know today.

Thanks again for watching mental_floss which by the way is not just a youtube series but also a real life magazine and a store where you can buy great t-shirts like this one and if you use the code "youtubeflossers" you get 15% off!

As we say in my home town, Don't Forget To Be Awesome.