

SUBTERRANEAN ENGLISH

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Unbeknownst to most of its users, the English language has always existed on two levels: (1) the surface level, with words and names possessing those meanings graciously conferred upon them by dictionaries, and (2) a subterranean level where words and names are used with their real meanings. This article presents a short glossary of English on the subterranean level: 56 undergrounders, as the terms are familiarly called. Readers are invited to add to this collection of real word meanings.

AGATE. A movable barrier closing an opening in a fence or a wall. Such barriers are, occasionally, adorned with a variegated chalcedony regarded as a precious stone.

BARBER. A professional who furnishes fishhooks with sharp projections preventing the easy extraction of the fishhooks from whatever material they may become embedded in. See your barber before you go fishing!

BEER. An apiarist: someone who, having given up on humans, busies himself with bees.

BITTERNESS. A female heron, nocturnal in habits, that utters a booming cry, said by some to resemble the words plum pudd'n. Thoreau characterized the bird as "the genius of the bog."

CARMEN. Male humans seated in automotive vehicles.

CARPET. To fondle or caress a member of the opposite sex, in an automobile parked on some lonely country road - an ideal location for a UFO visitation.

CARROT. The decay that overcomes automobiles as they age, fueling the demand for continued car production.

CATHAY. Mowed and cured grass fed to felines, particularly when they tire of store-purchased, tinned cat food.

CLANKING. The royal ruler of a group of humans joined closely by some common trait or interest, or claiming to be descended from a common ancestor.

COMEDIAN. Either of two different numbers both of which represent the middle of a given number sequence: a statistical concept whose time is almost at hand.

COPIER. One of two associated breakwaters, constructed to prevent ocean waters from overwhelming the land and reclaiming all of the life that originally came from the ocean waters.

COUP. To join in lifting, as in the sentence, "Sheila and Cathy will coup the two-ton elephant onto the platform."

DELIVER. To remove someone's jecur or hepar, a gland typically weighing between 42 and 56 ounces (Anatomy of the Human Body by Henry Gray; 28th Edition edited by Charles Mayo Goss; 1966), surgically or otherwise.

DENMARK. A conspicuous sign used by its denizen in finding his or her way to a cave serving as a place of shelter or concealment.

EARLY. Swarming with earls and counts, as a ball held in the royal palace.

FANFARE. The pop and popcorn consumed by spectators during the course of a major-league baseball game.

FORTY. Marked by the presence of, or teeming with, forts, as was colonial America.

GARBAGE. Outward semblances or forms, considered collectively - if with a certain degree of distaste.

GOBLET. A diminutive sailor - not the type of seaman for which the United States Navy is really looking.

HAMLET. A particularly small thigh of a hog. Considered as possible food, it is anathema to religious Jews.

HAMSTER. Someone occupationally associated with hams: a butcher specializing in pork meat of a certain kind. Hamsters are examples of specialization run amok in today's world.

HANDSOME. Possessing one or more hands. The word places no upper limit on the number of hands an individual may have, but nature tends to impose a limit of two.

HASHISH. Characteristic of a mess, jumble, or muddle. Quite obviously, one does not wish to become involved with this.

IMPLORE. Information about the Satanic imps now terrorizing our countryside. If you have such information, I beseech you to get in touch with the authorities at once.

IRELAND. India immediately after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in November 1984; a land seething with anger. Its location in northwesternmost Europe has astonished some observers.

IRAN. The self went around, rambled, or roved without restraint. An introspective type, the self asked: Why?

LOWER. A cow, certainly one of the lower creatures, compared with man. By extension, the word has also come to designate a human who chooses to moo like a bovine.

MANAGER. A biological or genetic factor causing a man to become older with the passage of time. Scientists are trying to identify and overcome managers.

MAXIMUM. A very large chrysanthemum, a plant notable for the

diversity of its colors and the size of its autumnal flowers. The kikumon, a Japanese imperial crest, resembles the chrysanthemum.

MEDICAID. A medical corpsman's assistant. As members of the nation's armed forces, such assistants receive free medical care.

MILLICENT. One millionth of a ten-dollar bill. Though it is no longer the fortune that it once was, you are still better off with a millicent than without one.

MOTHER. Someone occupationally involved with clothes moths. A tailor, perhaps, or a haberdasher?

NEONATE. A chemical compound of the element neon; especially, a salt or ester of neonic acid. For more information on the subject, consult any 22nd-century text on inorganic chemistry.

OUIJA. Aye, aye! The expression is common among both goblets and medicaid (see above).

POLAND. Sunny Italy, the land of the river Po. Poland is a non-communist nation in the Western camp.

PONDER. Someone living in or around a pond; and, no doubt, stagnating as does pond life in general.

PREACHING. Hurting in mere anticipation of subsequently suffering a persistent physical pain. Such admirable sensitivity!

PREFERMENT. To be in a state of agitation or intense activity, ahead of time. Such advance dedication to one's job sometimes leads to advancement or promotion in rank.

PROVISION. Supportive of a vivid, imaginative conception or anticipation: a term descriptive of poets.

RAVENOUS. Possessing the qualities of a glossy corvine bird of northern Europe, known more interestingly as the divine culture hero and trickster of the North Pacific coast Indians.

REPAIR. To cause animals to mate again; pandas, for example.

REPULSE. To vibrate or undulate once again, as do the waves of the sea or the resonators of a marimba.

RUTHLESS. Bereft of Ruth's companionship - as were the members of the Biblical Ruth's family after her death. The name Ruth happens to mean companion.

SCARLET. A small, submerged rock in the sea. I visualize waves pulsing and repulsing o'er that scarlet.

SIGNIFY. To invest with the attributes of a mark representing a complex notion. This definition is going to require some double-dome thinking on your part, so I won't distract you with chitchat.

SUBTRACT. A subdivision of a wooden region not yet definitely bounded. The absence of a boundary tends to diminish its value.

SUMMERY. Like, or appropriate to, someone whose occupation or hobby is adding numbers to determine their totals. The activity

is best pursued during the cooler seasons of the year.

SUPERVISOR. A disguise surpassing most others of its kind - a superb means of concealment.

TABLET. A small restaurant bill, before it is paid - nothing to give you a headache, so that you won't need an aspirin.

TEAPOT. Marijuana? Marijuana, Mary Jane!

TERRIFY. To convert into soil. For a human being so to be transformed is a frightening experience, indeed.

TOBIAS. To influence, especially unfairly. The practice was common in Apocryphal (Biblical) times.

VAMPIRE. The wrath of a woman who normally uses her charms or wiles to seduce and exploit men - carmen in particular.

VASELINE. An ornamental line on an ancient Greek pelike, lecythus, or prochoös. If you happen not to have any pelikes, lecythi or prochoöi at home, get some at your neighborhood drug store!

WHISTLING. Someone addicted to playing the game of whist - an old-fashioned type, no doubt.

WLNTRY. An attempt to finish first in a race or contest. Olympic athletes are notorious for engaging in such shenanigans, irrespective of whether it is the Winter or the Summer Olympics that are at stake.

Editor's Note: Readers who are interested in 63 more specimens, cleverly illustrated, should consult David Diefendorf's \$6.95 paperback, Word Warps: A Glossary of Unfamiliar Terms (Williamson Publishing, Charlotte VT; 1984).