Neologisms lesson plan

What is a neologism?

A neologism is defined in the *OED* as 'A word or phrase which is new to the language; one which is newly coined.'

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Student activity:

Think about why a new word might be needed, or why they might come about.

TIP: it might be helpful if you think of some words you use regularly (for example, *television, Zoom*), and why those words might have entered the English language.

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Teacher notes: why *do* they come about?

The possibilities of what can encourage a neologism are almost limitless, from economic slumps (*hyperinflation* (1930)), the rise of new music (*rock 'n' roll* (1955), *break dancing* (1982), *dubstep* (2002)), fashion trends (*miniskirt* (1962)), environmentalism (*eco-friendly* (1989)), the space race (*blast-off* (1951)), politics (*Brexit* (2012)), and innovations in technology (*artificial intelligence* (1955), *Facebook*, v. (2004)).

Here are some examples:

Wars

All wars tend to speed up technological and organizational innovation, which in turn spawns brand-new words or terminology adapted from existing words. *Shell shock* (1915) is among the new terms which emerged in the First World War. The Second World War gave us *blitz* (1940), *napalm bomb* (1945), and *jeep* (1941).

You can read more about words from this era at: https://public.oed.com/blog/words-from-the-1940s/

And read more about words related to this subject at: https://public.oed.com/blog/june-2014-update-100-words-that-define-world-war-i/

Pandemics and epidemics

It is a rare experience for lexicographers to observe an exponential rise in usage of a single word in a very short period of time, and for that word to come overwhelmingly to dominate global discourse, even to the exclusion of most other topics. **Covid-19**, a shortening of *coronavirus disease 2019*, and its various manifestations did just that. It is a consistent theme of lexicography that great social change brings great linguistic change, and that has never been truer than during the coronavirus pandemic. Other words which became familiar during the pandemic through the news, social media, and government briefings and edicts have been around for years (many date from the nineteenth century), and while they were not neologisms during the coronavirus pandemic, they did achieve new and much wider usage.

Words in the *OED* which have come to prominence through previous pandemics or epidemics include *Ebola*, *SARS*, and the *Black Plague* and *Black Death*. Terms such as *Spanish influenza, yellow fever*, *HIV*, and *AIDS* have all entered the language because of health emergencies. Indeed, the first quotation at *self-quarantined* is a from a historical description of the plight of the English village of Eyam, which cut itself off from the rest of the country to prevent an outbreak of the bubonic plague from spreading.

Find out more about the language of Covid-19 and other pandemic related terms here: https://public.oed.com/blog/the-language-of-covid-19/

Cultural movements

South Korea's popular culture continues to rise in international popularity. South Korean director Bong Joon-ho's film Parasite made history by becoming the first non-English-language film to win a Best Picture Oscar, K-pop acts like BTS and Blackpink are global music superstars with legions of devoted fans, Korean beauty products are flying off the shelves everywhere in the world, and Korean style is now seen as the epitome of cool. We are all riding the crest of the Korean wave, and this can be felt not only in film, music, or fashion, but also in our language.

Words of Korean origin recently recorded or revised in the *OED* include:

- aegyo, n. and adj.

- [chimaek, n.](#)

- [daebak, n., int., and adj.](#)

- [fighting, int.](#)

- [hallyu, n.](#)

- [K-drama, n.](#)

- [kimchi, n.](#)

- [K-pop, n.](#)

Words come into the English language in all manner of ways. The *Oxford English Dictionary's* mission is to record all of these word stories, capturing their development as they continue to unfold.

Interactive guide:

Visit our [interactive OED guide](#) (https://public.oed.com/how-words-enter-the-OED/graphic) to find out how words enter the dictionary, before completing the final activity.

Please note that the interactive feature contains a term which may not be suitable for very young audiences, but you can refer to this page instead if needed: https://public.oed.com/how-words-enter-the-oed/

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Student activity:

Submit a new word that you are using to the *OED*.

The *OED*'s aim is to record all distinctive words that shape the language, old and new, formal and informal. The language of young people today can be particularly elusive and tricky for *OED* editors to track because the terms that are in vogue change so rapidly and newer ephemeral modes of communication (texting, WhatsApp, Snapchat, etc.) make it difficult to monitor and record this kind of vocabulary.

- **Make a list of words which you use on a regular basis, but which you think others outside your friendship group or generation might not use.**
- **Use the *OED*'s Quick Search bar to check if the words are already recorded in the *OED***
- **If they are not, submit a word to the *OED*'s youth words appeal: https://public.oed.com/appeals/youth-words/**

Any new words added to the dictionary each quarter are published on the *OED*'s updates page: https://public.oed.com/updates/

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