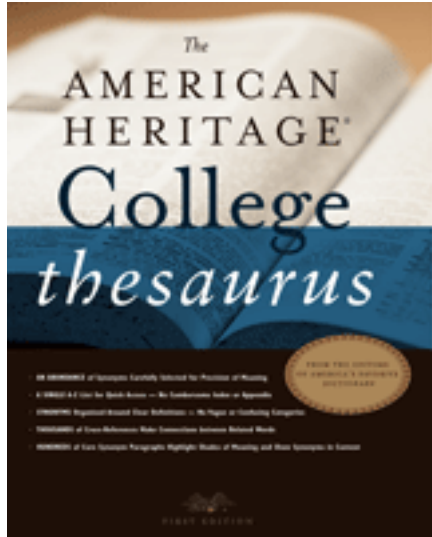


Quiz



The American Heritage® College Thesaurus, First Edition

by Editors of The American Heritage Dictionaries

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The Editors of the American Heritage® College Thesaurus have put together a little quiz to test your synonym savvy. Are you up for the challenge?

1. Name three synonyms of "trivial" beginning with the letter p.

You'd be right if you said:

Paltry, petty, picayune, piddling

Did you know?

When the word picayune first appeared in English during the early nineteenth century, picayune referred to a coin of low value, such as a five-cent piece. Its meaning was soon extended to "a thing of little value," and from there it became an adjective meaning "paltry, petty." In origin, Picayune was probably a borrowing from Louisiana French, the French spoken by the original French settlers of Louisiana. In Louisiana French, the word picaillon referred to another small coin, the Spanish half-real, that circulated in the area during colonial times. The word picaillon is in turn a borrowing of Provençal picaïoun, a copper coin of Piedmont and Savoy, historical regions in the southeast of France. (Provençal is a language closely related to French spoken in the south of France.) Picaïoun is ultimately derived from Old Provençal piquar "to jingle, clink."

2. Name three synonyms of "ill-tempered" that begin with the letter c.

You'd be right if you said:

Cantankerous, churlish, crabbed, cranky, cross, curmudgeonly

The word churl comes almost unchanged in meaning and pronunciation, though not in spelling, from Old English ceorl, "freeman of the lowest class." An Anglo-Saxon ceorl had a social position above a slave but below a thegn, "thane." Ceorl comes from Proto-Germanic *karilaz, whose basic meaning is "old man." (Proto-Germanic is the name given to the language that was the common ancestor of all the Germanic languages, such as English,

Dutch, German, the Scandinavian languages, and extinct languages like Gothic. We have no written records of this language, but linguists can reconstruct it by comparing words in the Germanic languages and their relatives, the other Indo-European languages.) In Finnish, which is not a Germanic language, the Proto-Germanic word was borrowed and survives almost unchanged as *karilas*, "old man." The Old Norse descendant of the Proto-Germanic word, *karl*, means "old man, servant." The Old High German equivalent, *karal*, meaning "man, lover, husband," has become the name Karl. The French adopted the Germanic name in the form Charles, from which the English name Charles derives. The Medieval Latin form of the name, *Carolus*, is based on the Old High German *karal*. The fame of *Carolus Magnus*, "Charles the Great," or Charlemagne, added luster to the name *Carolus*. Slavic languages borrowed the name as their general word for "king," *korol'* in Russian. This goes to show that etymology is no sure guide to the actual meaning of word. English *churl* means "peasant," and Russian *korol'* means "king," but both are ultimately derived from the same prehistoric word meaning "old man."

3. Name five synonyms of "various" that also have an s in them.

You'd be right if you said:

Assorted, disparate, divers, diverse, diversified, heterogenous, miscellaneous, multifarious, sundry

4. Identify idioms meaning "criticize someone harshly" that have a body part in them.

You'd be right if you said:

Burn someone's ears
Jump down someone's throat
Pin someone's ears back

5. Identify idioms meaning "criticize someone harshly" that have to do with heat.

You'd be right if you said:

Put someone on the griddle
Put someone on the hot seat
Rake someone over the coals

6. Name three idioms meaning "become angry" that use the word "blow":

You'd be right if you said:

Blow a fuse, Blow a gasket, blow one's stack (or top)

7. Name three other words ending in -ism that are synonyms of egotism:

You'd be right if you said:

Egocentricism, egoism, narcissism

Did you know?

Narcissism, "excessive love or admiration of oneself," is a fairly new word in English. An early use of the word is known from letter written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1822. It reappears only in 1905, as a translation of the German term *Narcissismus*. The German word had been had coined or reinvented in 1899 by the researcher Paul Näcke as a technical

term meaning "pleasure derived from contemplation or admiration of one's own body or self," in reference to Narcissus, the figure of Greek legend who was transformed into the flower that bears his name.

The Roman poet Ovid tells the story of Narcissus in his work *Metamorphoses*. Narcissus, the son of a nymph and a river-god, had many admirers, but he spurned them all. Among the many lovers that he pushed away was the nymph Echo. Echo could not form her own words, but had been condemned to repeat the speech of others. (When the queen of the gods, Hera, had gone out in search of her errant husband Zeus, Echo had often waylaid her with idle chatter while the other nymphs, who had been disporting themselves with Zeus, made their escape. Hera therefore cursed her, so that Echo could utter only words that she had just heard.)

In the end, one of Narcissus' spurned lovers cursed him for his hard-heartedness. "Let him love too, and be unable to obtain the one he loves!" And so it happened. While hunting, Narcissus came to a lovely pool of water shaded by a little wood. He leant down to drink and saw the image of a beautiful young man reflected in the water. Instantly he fell in love with the handsome face he saw, and he remained rooted to the banks of the pool, contemplating his own image. Narcissus tried to kiss the object of his desire, but it always eluded his embrace. He addressed loving words to the face he saw, and Echo, who took pity on him, repeated them so that Narcissus thought his lover was answering him. Eventually he pined away and died of his unfulfilled love, and when the nymphs came to give him a proper funeral, they found the narcissus flower growing in place of his body.

8. Name three more synonyms of egotism beginning with self-

You'd be right if you said:

Self-absorption, self-centeredness, self-importance, self-involvement, selfishness

9. Name three words beginning with un- that mean "resolute, determined"

You'd be right if you said:

Unbending, uncompromising, unflinching, unwavering, unyielding

10. Name as many synonyms as you can for "dullard" that end with the word -head or a related word:

You'd be right if you said:

Blockhead, (dummkopf), numskull, softhead, thickhead, woodenhead

Informal: bonehead, knucklehead, lamebrain, muttonhead,

Slang: airhead, lunkhead, pinhead

Did you know?

Despite the lack of a b in the usual spelling, a numskull is just that, a numb skull, or "dull head." In fact, num is the spelling we expect when we consider the origins of the word numb. Old English had a number of strong verbs that did not survive into Modern English. (Strong verbs, often loosely called "irregular" verbs, are those such as swim, swam, swum, or ride, rode, ridden, that make their different tenses by changing their vowel, rather than adding the ending -ed, like walk, walked, walked.) One such Old English strong verb was niman, "to take," later replaced by take, a borrowing from Old Norse. The verb had a past

tense nam and a past participle numen; if the verb had survived, it would likely have become nim, nam, num, like swim, swam, swum. Although we do not have the verb as such anymore, its past participle is alive and well, now spelled numb, literally "taken, seized," as by cold or grief. The older spelling without the b is still seen in the compound numskull. The verb also lives on indirectly in the word nimble, which used to mean "quick to take," and then later "light, quick on one's feet."

11. Name three animal words that mean "a person who is easily deceived":

You'd be right if you said:

Cat's-paw, lamb, monkey, pigeon

Did you know?

Cat's paw, "a person used by another as a dupe or tool," has its origin in a fable known in many different versions and still told by American storytellers today. A monkey discovered some chestnuts roasting on a fire. He had no means of retrieving them from the coals, and he certainly couldn't reach in and grab them with his bare hands. So he convinced a cat to get them for him. In one version, the monkey flatters the cat and says that his beautiful paws are exactly the thing to get chestnuts out of a fire. In another, the cat is too stupid to realize he is being tricked, and he simply reaches in upon being asked. In yet another version, the cat is asleep near the fire, and the monkey holds the cat's paw and uses it to rake the chestnuts from the coals.