



How Can Word Origins Help English Learners Remember Vocabulary?

S06E04 | For teachers to adapt to their learners

Teaching focus

A surprising history can give a useful word a memorable image. We can ask learners to predict the connection, check the explanation and then return to present-day meaning, pronunciation and use.

Our suggested routine

1. How could we adapt the prediction format? Classroom adaptation: choose one useful word and prepare a checked explanation. Ask learners what they think its parts or history might suggest. Let them compare ideas before showing the reference. Separate a modern definition from a historical explanation. Ask what the word means in a current example, then investigate the history. That preserves Em's distinction instead of treating the two as interchangeable. Keep the language of the explanation manageable. If understanding the origin needs ten unfamiliar words, the history may take over the lesson. This proposed activity extends the conversation. It is not a classroom trial described in the recording. How can we return to present-day vocabulary? Classroom adaptation: after the history, give learners a phrase or sentence where the word is useful. With clue , they could ask for a clue in a small guessing task and then respond to one. Check pronunciation and meaning in that context. Ask learners to create another example or identify a situation where the word would fit. An origin supplies an extra connection, while current use gives the vocabulary a practical purpose. For an unusual word such as discombobulate , we can discuss when it might be worth recognising without making it required everyday vocabulary.

After the attempt

What could learners do? What needed another model or a smaller step? Choose one useful adjustment and try the task again.

Notes for our next lesson

Read the full teaching article and listen to the episode at howtoenglishpod.com