



Semantic Antics: How and Why Words Change Meaning

Sol Steinmetz

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"My favorite popular word book of the year"

-William Safire, *NY Times* 6/22/2008

A fun, new approach to examining etymology!

Many common English words started out with an entirely different meaning than the one we know today. For example:

The word *adamant* came into English around 855 C.E. as a synonym for 'diamond,' very different from today's meaning of the word: "utterly unyielding in attitude or opinion."

Before the year 1200, the word *silly* meant "blessed," and was derived from Old English *saelig*, meaning "happy." This word went through several incarnations before adopting today's meaning: "stupid or foolish."

In *Semantic Antics*, lexicographer Sol Steinmetz takes readers on an in-depth, fascinating journey to learn how hundreds of words have evolved from their first meaning to the meanings used today.

Semantic Antics: How and Why Words Change Meaning Details

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Author : Sol Steinmetz

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From Reader Review Semantic Antics: How and Why Words Change Meaning for online ebook

Lori says

not what i expected, is just a dictionary of words and their origins. thought it would be more in story format

Colleen says

Semantic Antics: How and Why Words Change Meaning by Sol Steinmetz (2008)

Christina says

was hoping this would be more interesting than it was. turned out, it was a coffee table kind of book...

Tim says

Good book to dip into - I read it during free moments at lunch. It provides a history of individual words and how their meanings have developed over time. My conversation would be so much richer if I could only remember a few of the stories. The author picks interesting words and has good modern and historical/literary examples.

steven says

It's a dictionary.

Okay, so it's not the OED. And it doesn't carry so much as a third of the words in the English language. But it's a dictionary; not exactly something to curl up with and read cover-to-cover, unless you're really into encyclopedic knowledge.

Lauren says

This book is Great! I completely let out my inner nerd when I saw this! It's a book that tells the change in word meanings throughout history.

Kay Hudson says

Interesting book to read in bits and pieces when you have a few minutes free. Follows changes in the meanings of words over the centuries, sometimes logical, sometimes not so much. No wonder Chaucer feels like a foreign language even when the words appear to be familiar.

Jason says

This wasn't exactly what I expected, and at first I found it terribly insulting to anyone's intelligence. Some of the entries (the book is alphabetized in dictionary style) had no justification for being included. I stuck with it, however, and became familiar with the Steinmetz style. I learned about amelioration and pejoration, and appreciated the wealth of quotations exemplifying a given word's change in usage. Being a reference book, it can be a bit tiresome to read a lot of in one sitting, so it became my bathroom reader, which worked rather well.

Cathy Leverkus says

Who would have guessed, that how a word changes over time could be so interesting.

John-Scott says

If you enjoy words - this is a great reference book - although it only explores a limited set of words as they've evolved.

As the Web evolves, semantics will be a factor as in understanding the context; looking for meaning. This topic is of professional interest to me.

Eric says

This is a good little book. Steinmetz takes a collection of words and discusses how the meanings have shifted since they came into the English language. It's also nice, as you can read straight through, or flip about. Steinmetz also uses some excellent examples to illustrate his work. Quite good.

Glenn says

Who new that "yelp" wasn't onomatopoeic but instead had a long history, originally meaning "to speak vainly"? [and do we care?] This is basically a dictionary (highly selective--too selective, really, since Steinmetz's choices seem pretty random). Not a good "beach read" but interesting, and easy to cover the "A" words or "B" words or "C" words (etc) in the 10 mins I have before I fall asleep each night.

Catherine says

I had a lot of fun exploring the shifting meanings of commonly used words.

Rowena says

For a linguistics lover, this is a great book! It gives examples of how many common English words started out with a totally different meaning. I also enjoyed the quotations from novels that were included in the book. The only thing I didn't like very much was the book's organization; the words are listed alphabetically, like in a dictionary. Overall, I really enjoyed reading it.

John says

Interesting idea, but I'm glad I didn't spend money on the book; after a while the words began running together.
