

The Story of English: Companion to the PBS TV Series

Robert McCrum , Robert MacNeil , William Cran

The Story of English: Companion to the PBS TV Series Robert McCrum , Robert MacNeil , William Cran

Now revised, *The Story of English* is the first book to tell the whole story of the English language. Originally paired with a major PBS miniseries, this book presents a stimulating and comprehensive record of spoken and written English—from its Anglo-Saxon origins some two thousand years ago to the present day, when English is the dominant language of commerce and culture with more than one billion English speakers around the world. From Cockney, Scouse, and Scots to Gullah, Singlish, Franglais, and the latest African American slang, this sweeping history of the English language is the essential introduction for anyone who wants to know more about our common tongue.

The Story of English: Companion to the PBS TV Series Details

Date : Published September 1st 1987 by Penguin Books (first published January 1st 1986)

ISBN : 9780140094350

Author : Robert McCrum , Robert MacNeil , William Cran

Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Humanities, Language, Linguistics

 [Download The Story of English: Companion to the PBS TV Series ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Story of English: Companion to the PBS TV Series ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Story of English: Companion to the PBS TV Series Robert McCrum , Robert MacNeil , William Cran

From Reader Review The Story of English: Companion to the PBS TV Series for online ebook

Hanna says

Easter - from Eostre, the pagan goddess of dawn

Scandinavian origin: get, hit, leg, low, root, skin, same, want, wrong. Words beginning with sk, like sky and skein, are Norse.

English spelling was in large decided by the printer Caxton.

Spanish - barbecue, chocolate, tomato

Dutch - cookie, waffle, landscape, sleigh, boss, snooping, Yankee

German - bumper, check, cookbook, ecology, fresh, rifle, no way, will do, let it be

Yiddish - kosher, schmuck

Romany - pal

California surfers - awesome, outstanding, for sure

The famous Southern you-all is a Scots-Irish translation of the plural yous.

In Gaelic there are no specific terms for "yes" and "no".

In the 16th century, Cockney was simply the language of all Londoners who were not part of the court

Mate - used in Britain and Australia is originally Cockney

Shakespeare would have sounded slightly Irish.

New Zealand English has more in common with the English of the Falkland Islands than of Australia.

There are now more speakers of English in India than in Britain.

When a "pidgin" (English, French or Portuguese) becomes the principal language of a speech community - it evolves into a creole.

Jazz talk - jive talk: "hip talk" or "hip", the language of hipsters. Hip - wise, sophisticated. White "hippies" (from "hip").

"Rap" - a rebuke/blame (England, 1733)

Benjamin Franklin - honor for honour, theater for theatre, plow for plough

Webster - color for colour, wagon for waggon, fiber for fibre, defense for defence

Tait Jensen says

A delightful overview of the English language, including its origins, transmission, evolution, and a bit of speculation on its future. I found the authors' decision to grant extensive discussion to pidgins and creoles particularly refreshing as they are one of the more fascinating objects of linguistic study.

Amy Shannon says

Great information and provided a lot of inspiration.

Rachel says

Enjoyed! Adult mainly because it would not interest a child and would need more of a background of general history and life experience before appreciating it.

Kris says

Finally finished trudging through this monstrosity, cover to cover. It's an excellent textbook, chock full of history, politics, and specific examples. History and linguistics come together! How exciting!

I especially loved the fact that specific words are used within the broader storyline. The author will be talking about how one people group moved and their vocab changed, and will throw in pronunciations of specific words and their meanings as proof of that. Just a sampling among many cases, but it makes the history really come alive in modern speech.

Christina Dawn says

A MUSE OF FIRE

“There were few other joys. The Indians were hostile from the beginning. When they killed one of the colonists ‘wading in the water alone, almost naked, without any weapon saue onely a smal forked sticke, catching Crabs’, the situation became desperate. White was prevailed upon by the other colonists to return to England for help, mainly food and supplies.

What took place after White’s departure is a mystery. He was, as it happened, unable to return as quickly as he would have liked - it was now the year of the Armada, 1588, and all ships were needed for the defence of the realm. Finally, after many delays and crises, White set sail in March 1590, about two and a half years after he had left the Roanoke colony. Arriving on the coast of North Carolina, he and his men first anchored off Roanoke Island. They blew a trumpet and sang familiar English songs to the silent landscape. There was

no answer. The next day they landed. All the houses had disappeared. A palisade had been built but there was no sign of any defenders, alive or dead. White found three letters, CRO, carved on a tree, but to this day their meaning remains a mystery.

((The 'Lost Colony'))”

Joann says

One of my all time favorites!

David R. says

A fascinating survey of English, with special focus on variants in such places as Australia, Ireland, Canada, Jamaica, and India. McCrum satisfactorily explains how English moved from a marginal tongue to a world-class language of commerce in barely five centuries. What is more, he provides evidence for the marvelous inventive and absorbent qualities of English that give some hints of its future.

Brian says

This is an excellent historical exploration of the development and spread of the English language (or perhaps, as the authors suggest, languages). Not surprisingly, as the book is thirty years old, the later sections could use an update. I would especially like to read more about English in South Africa after the end of apartheid, and also to hear the authors' thoughts about the impact on English of globalization and the Internet. But even without the last three decades of the story of English, this book is well worth reading for anyone who loves language and history.

Erik Graff says

I believe this was found amongst the books in the now-defunct Ennui Cafe on Sheridan and Lunt in Chicago's Rogers Park neighborhood. Since about half of the volumes there were my contributions I felt free to walk with it.

The Story of English came out in 1986 linked with a PBS/BBC 9-part series of the same title. I never saw the show, but my appreciation for the book didn't seem to depend on that. As someone who had never before read a book-length history of the language, I found the text to be clear, accessible and quite interesting, particularly as regards the modern dialects of English and their origins. Such prejudices as I'd held as regards supposedly inferior versions of the language have been moderated by reading this work.

Pierre says

A fascinating and thorough book. I also had the pleasure of watching the BBC series when it came out. The two together made a singularly enlightening experience.

Toti says

Outdated in some parts, but still really interesting. It gives a good insight on the history of the English language and its influence around the world. I learned some cool facts.

Jeremy says

This was an interesting read, full of fun facts about my native tongue, and an easy-to-read style. It managed to touch on plenty of things regarding a topic that is, admittedly, a massive one; but sometimes left me wanting more.

The structure was open and intuitive, but prone to repetition, or perhaps a strange kind of literary *déjà vu* where repetition wasn't actually present.

Barbara says

This was a thorough, informative and entertaining view of how the English language developed. It is still very current in its info. It is amazing to realize how very differently people speak this language, even in the USA.

Jenny says

As a graduate student, I took a class called The Development of Modern English. I believe my professor used this book as her inspiration even if it wasn't the text book for the course because the course followed this same order and covered most of the same information with additions reflecting the 25 or so years between the book's publication and the year I took the class. I understand why my professor used this book, if she did, because it's extremely thorough, well-written, and engaging.

As the title claims, this is a story, not a history. The book details the progression of English and moves forward steadily, ending with a question mark since language is ever-evolving. I found each of the chapters fascinating, but my favorites were on the earliest periods of English and the ways that other cultures and peoples use and influence English (like the chapter on Black English). I find it ironic, which is the case for any book of this type, that the chapters most out of date are those about contemporary times. The book was published in 1986, so everything up until the book's genesis is still relevant. However, there are so many references to statistics and to changes in the cultures around the world, population counts, estimates, etc. that are clearly no longer valid. I would love to see an edition that discusses social media language and all the new words it's engendered. Yet, I was surprised by how much is still relevant and accurate, thirty-one years later.

My dad and I read this book together. We both enjoyed it, and it led to good discussions. I love that language has power, and I'm a proud native English speaker. I feel weird saying that, in a way, because my mom is Puerto Rican, and while she doesn't speak Spanish (her dad didn't want his children learning Spanish since they were all born in the States--he wanted them to speak English and English only), Spanish is a part of my heritage, and I grew up hearing my grandmother speak it. I took Spanish in school, and I feel connected to it in a way. People always assume I speak Spanish when they see me, and when they hear that I speak broken Spanish and speak it like a *gringa*, they are surprised. I feel like claiming English as *my* language is strange and almost wrong. Add to that the fact that I'm American, so my English is American English. I don't even come from the place where English originated. But I feel like my story is the story of English. It's a language that so many people claim as theirs, most of whom have no connection to England whatsoever. As McCrum quotes in the section on the "New Englishes," "English is not my mother's tongue, but it is my mother tongue." I enjoyed the story of *my* language, and I enjoyed McCrum's detailing of that story. I know some Spanish, I know basic Italian, and I'm teaching myself French. I recognize the value and beauty in other languages, but I love my own.

Because the way in which languages work has always fascinated me, a scientific/linguistic approach draws me in. I feel like McCrum was the same way--he wanted to meet people who spoke varieties of English, to highlight and emphasize the language's versatility, to recognize the validity behind the various versions of English spoken all over the world, to discuss the oddity of people speaking the language of a conquering nation and making it their own, and to correlate English's ancient history with its current movement.

I highly recommend this book. Whether you're a native English speaker, or English is your second (or third or fourth) language, if you're interested in studying a language's history and place in history, this book will definitely interest and appeal to you.

Jun says

See review from my blog: <http://liketoread.wordpress.com/2012/...>

The Story of English is a classic case of "don't judge a book by its cover". English and history are two of my least favorite subjects and so naturally I should be repelled by a book containing the history of the English language. But, I gave it the benefit of the doubt and to my surprise I'm enjoying it.

I haven't finished this book yet, but I'm writing this review cause I think it requires a progressive review. There is just too much information to fill this in a single review.

Chapter 1: An English-Speaking World

The book begins with how the English language became globalized during the recent past. Not starting the book with mundane ancient-anthropological history lesson on the language helped with making me want to read on.

This chapter colorfully illustrates how proper English became globalized with the influences of social classes, world wars, development of radios and motion pictures, popular cultures, and economical globalization.

Interesting facts from Ch 1:

- “Today, English is used by at least 750 million people, and barely half of those speak it as a mother tongue.” pg 9

- “Of all the world’s languages (which now number some 2,700), it is arguably the richest in vocabulary. The compendious Oxford English Dictionary lists about 500,000 words... neighboring German has vocabulary of about 185,000 words and the French 100,000...” pg 10

-”A Dutch poet is read by a few thousands. Translated into English, he can be read by hundreds of thousands.” pg. 11

- “Non-standard English was now seriously stigmatized as the mark of the under-educated.” pg. 14

- “An accent has two vital functions: first, it gives us a clue about the speaker’s life and career; second, an accent will give a good indication of the speaker’s community values, and what he or she identifies with.” pg. 20

-”Throughout the 1950s , American television and movies combined to bring American English and the American way of life- as interpreted by – to a world audience.” pg. 25

-”American broadcasting, of course, had long been the most potent medium of the English language.” pg. 27

-”It is the non-linguistic forces – cultural, social, economical and political – that have made English the first work language in human history and instilled its driving force. ” pg. 41

Chapter 2: The Mother Tongue

The second chapter is where the book begins to chronicle the development of the English from the very beginning. The development of the language includes the origination of the Indo-European language with the influence of the Celtic, Anglo-Saxons, Latin and Greek (through Christianity), Danes, and the French speaking Normans.

Despite how this may sound boring, the authors do a pretty good job in keeping the stories entertaining.

Interesting facts from Ch. 2

- “... the language was brought to Britain by Germanic tribes, the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, influenced by Latin and Greek when St. Augustine and his followers converted England to Christianity, subtly enriched by the Danes, and finally transformed by the French-speaking Normans.” pg. 46

- “... about 1/3 of the human race come from this Indo-European ‘common source’. These include the European descendants of Latin, French, and Spanish, a great Slavic language, Russian, the Celtic language, Irish and Scots Gaelic, and the offshoots of German – Dutch and English.” pg. 47

- “... the first invaders of the British Isles – the Angles, Saxons and Jute... The English language arrived in Britain on the point of a sword.” pg. 55

-”...100 most common words in English are all of Anglo-Saxon origin.” pg. 58

Carol says

For anyone who speaks English, or has tried to master its unruly spelling and grammar this book is a must. It explains WHY the English language is a linguistic hodgepodge as we know it today, and why we still use those crazy silent "gh"s as in laugh, taught, etc., and other assorted spellings and pronunciations that frustrate even native speakers. If you're interested in word origins & idioms, you'll learn about the many authors writing in English who "invented " thousands of new words over the past 500 years words and expressions we use every day. There is even a chapter on American English which clears up the mystery: "Why don't we sound British?" Why does English in Boston sound so different in Dallas or New Orleans? Yet, with hundreds facts, you don't have to be a history or linguistics scholar to make this a good read.

I was especially caught up with the fact that the U.S. southern accent was derived from Africa! The people in the south who had slaves picked up their African accent which became our own "southern" accent and that accent can still be heard in parts of Africa today.

The English language has been on a remarkable journey, and that's the subject of this remarkable book. It's not a book one can breeze through. To get the most out of it requires careful reading. Read this book. You'll learn things about the English language you never knew.

Hannah Gordon says

Really very interesting, jam-packed with information, and can be hard to focus/digest it all at once

Anna says

One could call this awesome book... the grand and unarguable defense of quaint southern-isms.

Jan says

Enlightening. Enjoyed it.
