

English Online  
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# “Why is English So Weird?” Looking to History to Answer Tough Learner Questions

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**Activity #1**

**How do you think these words were spelled before silent consonants were added?**

doubt

island

ache

friend

against

yield

build

court

delight

entice

ghost

rhyme

some

tongue

## Activity #2:

A List of some of Noah Webster’s proposed spelling changes that never caught on. Use it to “correct” the following text into the version of English that Noah Webster would have liked to see:

- |                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Cloke — cloak        | 12. Thum — thumb         |
| 2. Soop — soup          | 13. Spunge — sponge      |
| 3. Masheen — machine    | 14. Ake — ache           |
| 4. Tung — tongue        | 15. Wimmin — women       |
| 5. Greef — grief        | 16. Determin — determine |
| 6. Dawter — daughter    | 17. Giv — give           |
| 7. Korus — chorus       | 18. Bilt — built         |
| 8. Nightmar — nightmare | 19. Beleev — believe     |
| 9. Turnep — turnip      | 20. Stile — style        |
| 10. Iland — island      | 21. Soop - soup          |
| 11. Steddy — steady     | 22. Neer — near          |

Once upon a time, there was ship that set out from England to cross the Atlantic. Built from the finest of English timber, it was full of dozens of women and men who were setting off, determined to begin a new life on a new continent. At first, the trip was pleasant—they were given bountiful meals of French-style turnip and soup, and the ship sailed smoothly on the calm and steady seas as they left the islands of Britain. The voyage eventually turned into a nightmare. As the food ran out, the passengers’ stomachs began to ache and their tongues became dry and pasty as a sponge. The sons and daughters of the travellers huddled shivering each night as their cloaks simply didn’t provide enough warmth, their voices coming together into a chorus of complaints and grief. They didn’t believe they’d ever make it!

## Activity #3

Rewrite the following, using **Latinate verbs** to replace the underlined phrasal verbs in the text.

**FACTS Ltd**, which has been trading for three years, turns over about £400,000 annually. The acronym stands for Fish And Chip Technical Supplies. The business is jointly owned by two brothers, Don and Rick Stark. Don failed most of his school examinations and his Careers Guidance Officer told him he was not cut out for any job which involved simple Arithmetic. However, he was not put off. He put down a lump sum, which included all the money his grandparents had left him, into a business account and persuaded his younger brother Rick to lay out nearly all his savings to support the launch of their new company. Rick lay a small proportion of his savings by to finance his Open University degree in Digital Electronics. Their joint capital did not come to very much, but the performance of **FACTS** in its first year of operation came up to the targets that they had been advised to go for.

When the two brothers brought out their first set of accounts, it seemed that the profitability of **FACTS Ltd** depended on sales of their **computerized chipping machine**, a revolutionary device for cutting potatoes into exact shapes and sizes. When the next set of figures came out, it was clear that the same *masterpiece of digital technology, robotics and razor sharp cutting equipment* was making all the money. Sales of "**Macrofish**" and "**Microfish**", their twin high speed ovens for baking large and small fish, had fallen off. Customers preferred their fish fried and medium-sized. The brothers now plan to cut out these items to cut down on their losses. They will also pull back from areas of Britain where there are few Fish and Chip shops to cut back on transport costs.

## Activity #4:

### Modern English in Evolution:

Observe the following:

OLD USAGE:

He laughs.	I hug him.	His hair grows.	I use his.
She laughs.	I hug her.	Her hair grows.	I use hers.

When I tell someone a joke he laughs.	When I greet a friend I hug him.	When someone does not get a haircut, his hair grows long.	If my mobile phone runs out of power, a friend lets me borrow his.
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When I tell my children a joke they laugh.	Whether they win or lose, I hug them.	As long as people live, their hair grows.	Most of my friends have cell phones, so I use theirs.
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## New USAGE

- "Everyone returned to their seats."
- "Somebody left their umbrella in the office. Would they please collect it."
- "If a person doesn't want to go on living, they are often very difficult to help."
- "The patient should be told at the outset how much they will be required to pay."
- "But a journalist should not be forced to reveal their sources."

When I tell someone a joke they laugh.	When I greet a friend I hug them.	When someone does not get a haircut, their hair grows long.	If my mobile phone runs out of power, a friend lets me borrow theirs.
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## Observe:

What is the change that is happening? How would you describe it?

## TEACHER’S Resources

### Answers to Activity #1:

dout became doubt  
iland became island  
ake became ache  
frend for friend  
agenst for against  
yeeld for yield  
bild for build  
cort for court  
delite for delight  
entise for entice  
gost for ghost  
rime for rhyme  
sum for some  
tung for tongue

## Answers to Activity #3

Activity sources from: <http://www.tedpower.co.uk/phb7.html>

Rewrite the text, using PHRASAL VERBS to replace the underlined words:

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Handle (+ value in business)	turn over	Aim at	go for
Spend or invest (money)	lay out	Be as good as to	Come up
Pay (money) in a lump sum	put down	Deter	Put off
Put aside	lay by	Decline in numbers	Fall off
Amount to	come to	Reduce	Cut down on
Mean	stand for	Eliminate	Cut out
Publish	bring out	Economize	Cut back on
Appear in print	come out	Withdraw	Pull back
Suited to	cut out for	Withdraw	Pull out of