NEWS LESSON

Where Do Your Words Actually Come From?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. How does a word get from one group of friends to another country?
2. Can you tell where a word came from just by hearing it?
3. Is slang a problem for people learning a language?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**admitting**	☐	A	able to speak a language easily and well
2	**platform**	☐	B	saying that something is true, often when you do not want to
3	**trail**	☐	C	the words that go with a photo or video
4	**fluent**	☐	D	the signs that show where something has been
5	**assuming**	☐	E	all the people born around the same time
6	**generation**	☐	F	know who or what something is because you have seen it before
7	**recognise**	☐	G	thinking something is true without checking
8	**caption**	☐	H	a website or app where people share things

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A word can go from one group chat to the whole world in a week. Who invented it is a harder question than it looks.

1 For most of a year, saying the numbers six and seven in the right tone of voice was enough to make a classroom laugh. Adults had no idea what was happening. The phrase came out of a rap song, moved into short videos, arrived in schools, and in October 2025 Dictionary.com made it the word of the year, admitting more or less openly that nobody could define it. The impulse behind it, though, is much older than any app.

2 Slang is informal language tied to particular groups and situations. It can make a conversation faster, funnier or more exact. It can also quietly tell everybody who is in and who is out. Psychologists writing for the American Psychological Association describe language as one of the main ways people recognise who belongs with them, and slang is that process running at high speed.

3 What the internet changed is the route a word can take. An expression used in one neighbourhood can appear in a song, get repeated by somebody with a large audience and reach viewers in countries where nobody knows the original joke. A phrase from a game becomes a caption, then turns up in a conversation at a bus stop. Along the way, the meaning often shifts. A word that started as a compliment can end up sarcastic.

4 That journey is usually invisible, and this is where people get it wrong. When an expression becomes huge on one platform, that platform is very rarely where it began. Plenty of English slang travelled out of Black communities long before it reached a wider audience, and the person who made a word famous is almost never the person who made it. Giving credit properly is difficult when the trail has gone cold, but assuming the loudest voice invented it is simply wrong.

5 For anyone learning English, slang can look like a list to memorise. Knowing the definition is only the start. A phrase that sounds natural in a message to a friend can sound strange in a job application, and fluent speakers move between those registers constantly without thinking about it. That switching is a skill, not evidence that one version of your English is fake.

6 There is also plenty of room to get it wrong. A word used warmly inside one group can land as an insult outside it. Asking what somebody meant is not embarrassing. It is usually the fastest way out of an awkward moment, and people generally enjoy explaining.

7 Not every expression will survive, and not everybody your age wants to use the newest one anyway. The bigger story is not a war between proper English and a generation of strange words. It is people using language to experiment, to belong and to be understood, exactly as every generation before them did.

Sources: American Psychological Association, The psychology of why we use slang; European Youth Portal, Gen Z slang words and phrases. Picture: .

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The phrase reached schools before Dictionary.com named it word of the year. T F NG
2. The person who makes an expression famous is usually the person who invented it. T F NG
3. Teachers asked pupils to stop using the phrase in lessons. T F NG
4. Using formal English in an application and slang with friends shows that one of your versions of English is false. T F NG
5. The writer says asking what someone meant is usually the quickest way to deal with a difficult social moment. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

awkward	compliment	experiment	impulse	insult	invisible	route	survive

1. The sudden _____ to repeat a funny word is hard to resist.
2. The editing in a good film is almost _____ : you never notice it.
3. After the argument, the silence in the room was _____ for everyone.
4. He meant it as a joke, but she took the remark as an _____ .
5. Only a few of this year's slang words will _____ long enough to appear in a dictionary.
6. A phrase can take a surprising _____ from a rap song to a classroom.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. The phrase _____ out of a rap song. (COME)
2. The expression _____ by thousands of people since it appeared in the song. (REPEAT)
3. The teachers were confused because they _____ the phrase before. (NEVER HEAR)
4. Fluent speakers move between registers without _____ about it. (THINK)
5. The meaning of a word may _____ completely as it moves from group to group. (CHANGE)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Verbs often choose their partners: you give credit, make a conversation faster, land badly. Learn the whole phrase.

giving	keep	land	large	make	reach	shifts

1. _____ credit to the right person is hard when nobody knows who started a word.
2. A creator with a _____ audience can turn a phrase into a hit quickly.
3. A word used warmly inside one group can _____ badly outside it.
4. The meaning of a slang word often _____ as it moves from group to group.
5. Slang can _____ a conversation faster, funnier or more exact.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Does it matter who invented a word, as long as people enjoy it?
2. Slang can include people and leave others out. Have you seen both?
3. Would you use slang in a job application? Why not?

9 Role-play: slang in a message to a teacher

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the teacher

A student sent you an email full of slang. You did not understand two words and it felt a little rude. Ask what the words mean, explain the problem, and agree a simple rule for messages to you.

Student B · the student

You sent your teacher a friendly message with slang in it. You did not mean it to be rude. Explain what your words mean and why you used them. Ask what is acceptable.

Useful phrases

I didn't mean it to sound rude.

What does that word mean?

That's fine with friends, but it's not right for an email to me.

It's just how we talk.

I'd like us to agree on a simple rule.

Let's use normal English when we write to teachers.

Afterwards, tell the class: what rule did you agree, and is it fair?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 B · 2 H · 3 D · 4 A · 5 G · 6 E · 7 F · 8 C

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 impulse · 2 invisible · 3 awkward · 4 insult · 5 survive · 6 route

6 Verb forms

1 came · 2 has been repeated · 3 had never heard · 4 thinking · 5 change

7 Language focus

1 Giving · 2 large · 3 land · 4 shifts · 5 make

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