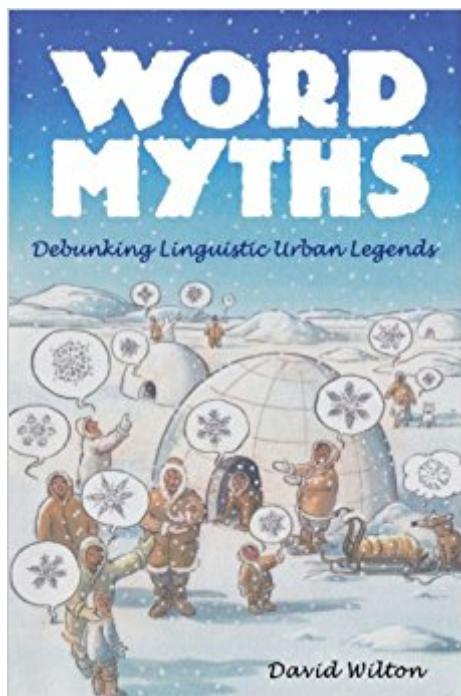The book was found

Word Myths: Debunking Linguistic Urban Legends

Synopsis

Do you believe that Ring Around the Rosie refers to the Black Death? Or that Eskimos have 50 (or 500) words for "snow"? Or that "Posh" is an acronym for "Port Out, Starboard Home"? If so, you badly need this book. In Word Myths, David Wilton debunks some of the most spectacularly wrong word histories in common usage, giving us the real stories behind many linguistic urban legends. Readers will discover the true history behind such popular words and expressions such as "rule of thumb," "the whole nine yards," "hot dog," "raining cats and dogs," "chew the fat," "AWOL," "under the weather," "in like Flynn," "Dixie," "son of a gun," "tinker's damn," and many more. We learn that SOS was not originally an acronym for "Save Our Ship" or "Save Our Souls," but was chosen because the morse code signal (3 dots, 3 dashes, 3 dots) was easy to send and recognize. Also, "let the cat out of the bag" does not refer to the whip (the "cat") used to punish sailors aboard ship. The term "upset" (to defeat unexpectedly) does not date from the horse race when the heavily favored Man O' War was beaten by a nag named Upset (Upset was the only horse ever to defeat Man O' War, but the word predates the race by half a century). And Thomas Crapper did not invent the flush toilet, nor do the words "crap" or "crapper" derive from his name. As Wilton quashes these word myths, he offers us the best of both worlds: not only do we learn the many wrong stories behind these words, we also learn why and how they were created--and what the real story is. "Think 'hot dog' was coined by a New York baseball vendor, or that a certain vulgarity originated as an acronym? Then you need to read this book, which shows that some of the best etymological stories are just tall tales." --Chicago Tribune (10 Best Books About Language, 2004)"Most everything you know about word and phrase origins is likely to be wrong, and David Wilton proves it with a light touch and a wealth of fascinating case histories. Absolutely everyone with an interest in language will love this book." --J.E. Lighter, Editor, Historical Dictionary of American Slang

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Customer Reviews

"Think "hot dog" was coined by a New York baseball vendor, or that a certain vulgarity originated as an acronym? Then you need to read this book, which shows that some of the best etymological stories are just tall tales."--Chicago Tribune (10 Best Books About Language, 2004) "Think "hot dog" was coined by a New York baseball vendor, or that a certain vulgarity originated as an acronym? Then you need to read this book, which shows that some of the best etymological stories are just tall tales."--Chicago Tribune (10 Best Books About Language, 2004) "Think "hot dog" was coined by a New York baseball vendor, or that a certain vulgarity originated as an acronym? Then you need to read this book, which shows that some of the best etymological stories are just tall tales."--Chicago Tribune (10 Best Books About Language, 2004)

David Wilton is the creator and editor of wordorigins.org, since 1997 a leading Internet site for word and phrase origins. He has served as a journalist, Army officer, defense contractor, chemical and biological arms control negotiator, and software marketing executive. He lives in California.

Starts off interesting, but eventually grows boring, as he shoots down word-myth after word-myth using essentially the same argument each time -- the word appears in the record before the story in the myth allegedly took place. Even more disappointing is the realization that over half of his supporting citations are to the Oxford English Dictionary, which seems rather lazy.

It was okay. Often the explanations of why the source of a word was a myth was flimsier than the myth.

Have you heard that Eskimos have 500 words for "snow"? What does the international distress signal "SOS" mean? Do you know what an "aptronym" is? Have you noticed that some nautical enthusiasts attribute a maritime origin to nearly every word or phrase? This observation prompted one participant of an online discussion group to use the acronym "CANOE" to mean the "Conspiracy to Attribute Nautical Origins to Everything"! You'll discover that many etymologies you

thought you "knew," you really didn't know at all. This little 200-page book was just great fun and most enlightening to read. I've referred to it often in my university communication classes -- a great resource for anyone interested in the origins and use of English words and phrases -- well researched and well written. Kudos to author David Wilton!

Got this as the Kindle sample, and became so hooked I went for the whole thing. After the second time I brought up something explored in this book in everyday conversation, I knew it was worth buying.The most interesting aspect, to me, was seeing how having old media (and especially newspapers) digitized into searchable format has significantly changed the currently accepted origins of words and phrases.Easy to pick up and put down as a background book, while maintaining overall themes through the chapters.

I admit to being a word geek. I love the picky nonsense of grammar (and the huge fights that result from it) but most of all, I love a good etymology. Mr. Wilton has done his homework here and it shows. His history is good and his reasoning quite persuasive. I don't know that I've stayed up til the wee smalls reading the origins of common words and phrases very often, but it was definitely worth it for this book. Great fun even for the non-geeky and the simply curious.

I sent copies to each of my many grandchildren - and then I actually read it and discovered that I could do as well on my own.

The book is engaging reading if you are interested in words and their origins. I am not familiar with all of the "urban legends" and enjoy learning new ones is fun. Thanks to the author for his detail and easy to read writing style.Word Myths: Debunking Linguistic Urban Legends

Oddly dull for such a fascinating subject. Not really well put together. Seems cheap and unreliable. Poor print job. Okay.

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