

Speech styles and Standard English

Dialect dictionary

Do you or people you know speak a local or ethnic dialect? Collect dialect words to make a dictionary. Start by thinking of words which mean 'good' or 'bad', and words connected with food, the weather, children or transport.

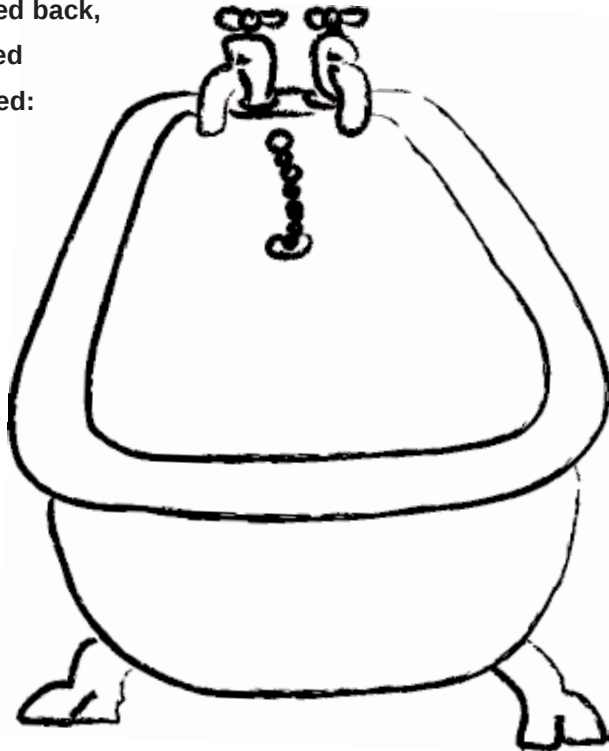
Old people often know many dialect words.

A poem with an accent

This poet has spelled all the words the way they would sound in a strong London accent.

A muvver was barfin' 'er biby one night,
The youngest of ten and a tiny young mite,
The muuver was poor and the biby was thin,
Only a skelington covered in skin:
The muvver turned rahnd for the soap off the rack,
She was but a moment, but when she turned back,
The biby was gorn; and in anguish she cried
"Oh where is my biby?" – The angels replied:

"Your biby 'as fell dahn the plug-'ole,
Your biby 'as gorn dahn the plug;
The poor little fink was so skinny and thin
'E oughter been barfed in a jug;
Your biby is perfeckly 'appy,
'E won't need a barf any more,
Your biby 'as fell dahn the plug-'ole
Not lorst, but gorn before."



What some people do

Jibber, jabber, gabble, babble,
Cackle, clack and prate,
Twiddle, twaddle, mutter, stutter,
Utter, splutter, blate...

Chatter, patter, tattle, prattle,
Chew the rag and crack,
Spiel and spout and spit it out,
Tell the world and quack...

Sniffle, snuffle, drawl and bawl,
Snicker, snort and snap,
Bark and buzz and yap and yelp,
Chin and chirp and chat...

Shout and shoot and gargle,
gasp,
Gab and gag and groan,
Hem and haw and work the jaw,
Grumble, mumble, moan...
Beef and bellyache and bat,
Say a mouthful, squawk,
That is what some people do
When the merely talk.



Anon.

With a group, work out a suitable presentation of this poem (It works well if you use lots of voices, following each other in very rapid succession, to rattle off the lists.)

Cockney rhyming slang

Cockneys are people from the East End of London – to be a Cockney, you must have been born within the sound of the bells of Bow Church.

Long ago the Cockneys developed a special slang, based on rhyme. Some of the best-known examples are given below. Usually Cockneys just use the first part of a rhyme, so non-Cockneys have no idea what they are speaking about!

All afloat – coat
Barnet Fair – hair
Lump of lead – head
Plates of meat – feet
Sugar and honey – money
Mutton pies – eyes
Frog and toad – main road
Hampstead Heath – teeth
Cain and Abel – table
Round the houses – trousers
Trouble and strife – wife
North and south – mouth
Bread and cheese – knees
Rosie Lee – tea

Try using some Cockney rhyming slang with your friends. Make up some rhyming phrases for school lesson plans, places in your area, and games or sports you play.

Just William

Richmal Crompton's character William Brown is an eleven-year-old boy with a very distinctive speech style. In a story from the collection *Just William*, he organises a 'show' for the children in the area. One of the exhibits is his friend's white rat, with pink and blue stripes painted around its body. How many examples of non-standard English can you spot in William's description of this marvel?

"White rat from China, ladies an' gentlemen, pink an' blue striped. All rats is pink and blue striped in China. This is the only genwin China rat in England – brought over from China special last week jus' for the show. It lives on China bread an' butter brought over special, too."

"Wash it!" jeered an unbeliever. "Just' wash it an' let's see it then."

"Wash it?" repeated the showman indignantly. "It's gotter be washed. It's washed every mornin' an' night same as you or me. China rats have gotta be washed or they'd die right off. Washin' 'em don't make no difference to their stripes. Anyone knows that what knows anythin' about China rats, I guess."

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Try turning William's speech into standard English, and reciting it using an appropriate accent.

