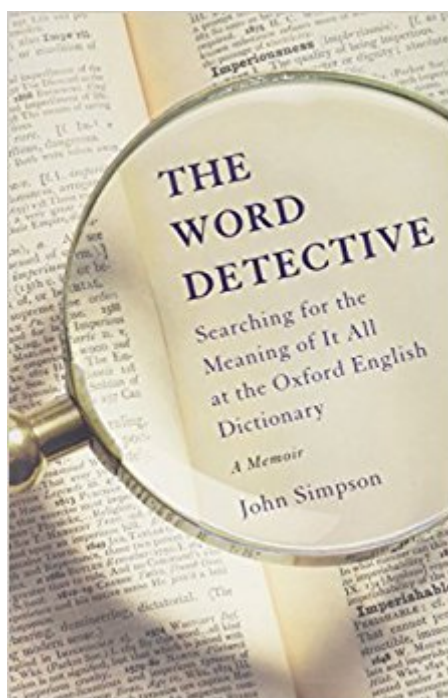


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# The Word Detective: Searching For The Meaning Of It All At The Oxford English Dictionary



## Synopsis

Can you drink a glass of balderdash? What do you call the part of a dog's back it can't scratch? And if, serendipitously, you find yourself in Serendip, then where exactly are you? The answers to all of these questions—and a great many more—can be found in the pages of the Oxford English Dictionary, the definitive record of the English language. And there is no better guide to the dictionary's many wonderments than the former chief editor of the OED, John Simpson. Simpson spent almost four decades of his life immersed in the intricacies of our language, and guides us through its history with charmingly laconic wit. In *The Word Detective*, an intensely personal memoir and a joyful celebration of English, he weaves a story of how words come into being (and sometimes disappear), how culture shapes the language we use, and how technology has transformed not only the way we speak and write but also how words are made. Throughout, he enlivens his narrative with lively excavations and investigations of individual words—from deadline to online and back to 101 (yes, it's a word)—all the while reminding us that the seemingly mundane words (can you name the four different meanings of ma?) are often the most interesting ones. But Simpson also reminds us of the limitations of language: spending his days in the OED's house of words, his family at home is forced to confront the challenges of wordlessness. A brilliant and deeply humane expedition through the world of words, *The Word Detective* will delight and inspire any lover of language.

## Customer Reviews

Booklist, starred review; Simpson's memoir features entertaining, culturally revealing stories of many curious words, phrases, and roots.... Although scholars and librarians will be particularly interested in the OED history, all readers can enjoy Simpson's sincere and lively memoir. •Publishers Weekly; Simpson gracefully weaves into his memoir little definitions of words, providing examples of the work of a lexicographer.... Simpson's vibrant and inspiring memoir gives us a glimpse into life as detective in the realm of words. •Kirkus Reviews

John Simpson is the former chief editor of the Oxford English Dictionary, where he helped take the dictionary online. John is an emeritus fellow of Kellogg College, Oxford, and writes and researches widely on lexical, literary, and historical issues. He now lives in Gloucestershire, United Kingdom.

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