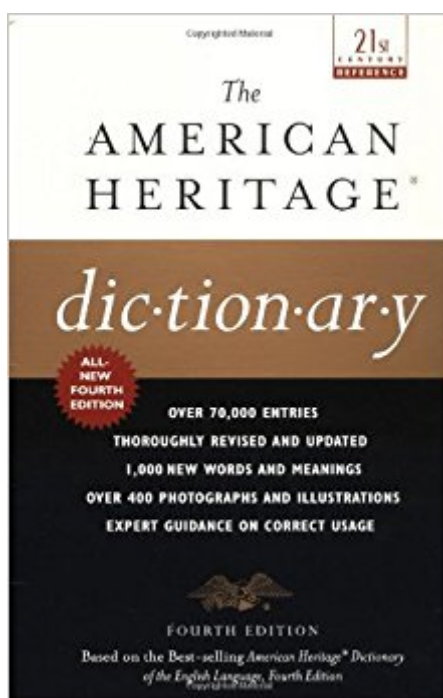


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The American Heritage Dictionary: Fourth Edition (American Heritage Dictionary Of The English Language)



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Customer Reviews

The latest edition of the American Heritage Dictionary is out, and that's hot news--not just for the resolute followers of lexicographical minutiae, but for the general reading and writing public as well. Why? Because the American Heritage is a long-standing favorite family dictionary (never

underestimate the value of pictures) and one of the prime dictionary references for magazines, newspapers, and dot.com content providers. For scads of writers and editors across the U.S., it sets the standard on matters of style and lexicographical authority. So this new edition is exciting and noteworthy, but how good is it? In its favor, the fourth edition is as current a dictionary as you can get. It's six years fresher than the 1994 version, with 10,000 words and definitions you won't find in the still venerable but now slightly dated third edition. For example, unlike its predecessor (and also unlike the 1996 Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary), this fourth edition covers dot-com, e-commerce, and soccer mom, Ebonics, Viagra, and a surf definition for cruising television channels and the Internet. Its panel of special consultants includes authorities on anthropology, architecture, cinema, and law, plus military science, music, religion, and sports, and that is reflected in an impressively comprehensive coverage of the arts, culture, and technology. Sadly, however, there are no medical consultants on the panel, and that loss is felt in some substandard medical definitions. Other flaws: there's a greater than usual tendency to define a word with a form of the same word--for example, fuzzy, whose first two definitions are "1. covered with fuzz." and "2. of or resembling fuzz." And some definitions seem needlessly wordy, such as the entry for furious, which is "full of or characterized by extreme anger; raging." Compare that with the more succinct Oxford Encyclopedic entry: "1. extremely angry. 2. full of fury." On the other hand, there are valuable entries throughout the dictionary supplying additional information on synonyms, usage, or word history, and these extras, such as the history of diatribe and the usage notes on discomfit, are interesting. The layout is easy on the eyes, with dark blue/green bold type setting the words apart from their definitions, and 4,000 color photographs, maps, and illustrations that are both useful and delightful. On one page, the margin provides color depictions of Francis Bacon, bacterium, and a Bactrian camel. Theodore Roosevelt and a rooster share another margin, while a third page offers Isak Dinesen, a dingo, and dinoflagellate. It is a fascinating book to peruse, and a compellingly scholarly addition to the American Heritage Dictionary line. --Stephanie Gold --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Ever since the furor in the U.S. that greeted Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1961) faded, it has become a given that dictionaries should be descriptive rather than prescriptive, a principle sanctified in Britain in the 1850s in Herbert Coleridge's original plan for the monumental project that eventually produced the Oxford English Dictionary. That dictionaries grow by gradual accretion of new words and new senses characterizes the latest edition of the American Heritage Dictionary (AHD), even if it, more than any other contemporary English-language dictionary, flirts

with prescriptiveness in some of its usage notes. Reflecting trends in society since publication of the third edition (1992), the most visible additions to the lexicon come from technology. Hence AHD now includes the sense of dot as a synonym for period in computer jargon; a new techie sense for geek; and new entries for dot-com, e-commerce, HTML, HTTP, and URL. These are but a few of the 10,000 new senses or terms incorporated into this edition. Others (e.g., goth, personal watercraft, transgendered) come from the fields of pop culture, entertainment, sports, and business, to name a few. AHD shows two other, much more visible signs of its times. First, the thumbnail marginal illustrations have been transformed from black-and-white to color. This increases their clarity, their utility, and the value they add to definitions. Second, it comes in both print and CD-ROM formats. The CD-ROM (for Windows 95 through 2000 and NT and available for \$24.95 if purchased alone) offers content almost identical to that of the print volume and many added features. Some of the illustrations in the print edition are absent from the CD (e.g., mackinaw). This is a small sacrifice for the far greater gains, one of which relates to illustrations. A search feature allows users to display only those terms that contain illustrations, and when any of these is displayed, its thumbnail illustration can be enlarged, offering even greater clarity than the color thumbnails on paper. Other features of the CD-ROM make it an attractive alternative to print, especially for personal use in situations in which it can reside more or less permanently on a PC's CD-ROM drive. A running list of entries in a frame to the left of the display window provides, with much greater precision than the printed dictionary's thumb indexing, quick access to a letter's section. In addition to the word search and A-Z scrolling display of all entries in that left-side window, the window's contents can be limited to display usage notes (usage, synonym, word histories, regional notes), Indo-European roots, Semitic roots, or (as noted) entries containing images. Most entries on the CD-ROM also include an audio icon that, when clicked, plays the word's pronunciation in an audible voice (for some words that of a male, for others that of a female). Just as the Webster's Tenth Collegiate Dictionary allows a toolbar link from Microsoft Word to the dictionary's contents, AHD provides this linkage through a right-mouse click. One other feature demonstrates the dictionary's sense of its times in the age of Internet filters and Dr. Laura controversies: when loading the CD-ROM, the user is asked whether to load the dictionary to include or exclude access to "vulgar" words. This is a latter-day sign of AHD's long willingness to apply usage labels more freely than most of its competitors. Taken by themselves, its usage labels (e.g., "slang," "vulgar") unquestionably appear to be prescriptive. However, when viewed in the context of the dictionary's usage notes, they soften and take on nuance. The usage notes depend heavily upon a large panel of writers and commentators representing diverse views. (What other group can claim both Harold Bloom and Roy Blount Jr and

both Antonin Scalia and David Sedaris as members?) The notes convey the panel's uncertainties, disagreements, and qualifiers about how the words are and ought to be used. On the whole, AHD takes an old, inherently prescriptive dictionary device and uses it to describe the majority and minority opinions of a group of facile users of the language. A new category of notes, "Our Living Language," explains how language changes, for example, the reasons why the Ocracoke Island brogue is fading and the attempts to come up with euphemisms for the euphemism downsize. Approximately 1,800 notes of various sorts provide more context and more description than mere labels. When it comes to the things that users turn to a dictionary for most often--definitions, confirmation of spelling, pronunciation--AHD delivers as well as any other respected, respectable desk dictionary. Its definitions are clear and succinct, and they differentiate among senses of a word. Illustrations of words in sentences enhance selected definitions. A pronunciation key on every two-page spread of the print version is the next best thing to the audio on the CD-ROM. AHD long ago established itself as one of the standard American English dictionaries. Its improvements through expansion, refinement, and extension to the CD-ROM medium ensure its vitality and its value to a broad audience, from junior high on. RBBCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In a time we now live when almost all things are digital, including books. The physical aspect of a book is being pushed aside for the most efficient digital version. It is true digital is more efficient, but the foundation and effect a physical book has on the mind is still by far the best approach to learning. A good dictionary is more than looking up a word meaning. It can be an avenue of great learning and the building of one speech and oratorical abilities. This is one thing a typical search on the internet to find a word meaning cannot offer. Secondly, the reliability of a good physical dictionary is far dependable than that of most digital dictionaries. Searching for a word meaning on the web is faster but in most cases, the definition is laced with bias point of views. Now looking at the many unique features of this dictionary, THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY. Other than words definition, the dictionary would make a good tool for learning improvement and even home schooling. At the beginning of each alphabet. There is a unique insight. The letter is presented in six different alphabets, namely, Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Medieval and Modern (English). On the top of these alphabets are the written illustration of how it is written in Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Medieval and of course English. The English letter is displayed in its capital letter form, in print, in small letter (lower case) and cursive. A form of writing most adults and grownups, no longer know how to write or read. This is important because most of our historical documents are written in

cursive letters. Below all that is the historical account of the letter and how it came into being and its uses over the years. Another feature is the integration of a lot of ILLUSTRATED PICTURES throughout the dictionary. Then there is a separate entry called the BIOGRAPHICAL ENTRIES, this includes pictures and biographical entries of individuals throughout history, from Andrew Jackson to Leonardo Da Vinci, Douglas MacArthur, Jesse Owens, Isaac Newton, Geronimo, Golda Meir, Billy Graham, Martin Luther King Jr, Mick Jagger, yep Mick Jagger. And many more. Also following the biographical entries is the GEOGRAPHICAL ENTRIES, within this section are countries, cities, states and locations from around the world. This could be a great learning tool for children as well. There is also a page dedicated to the Bible (The Bible table and the Books of the Bible) Over 1500+ of excellent thin-papers, the dictionary would make a good collection to any library and a personal study material. Blue hardcover with gold letterings and letter tab for easy navigation.

I chose the 4th edition over the 5th based on the reviews. I have a 1976 printing that is so mangled, well, I had to purchase another. As compared to other dictionaries, I can find the words here that aren't present in the others. Since I'm a creative writer, being able to verify my understanding of a "current society" word is important. There is something special about having a bound book in hand that an internet search just can't duplicate. Perhaps it's because a search tends to draw my brain into jaunting off in other directions. (Which can be a good thing at times.) Seeing exactly what I am looking for keeps me focused.

When this first arrived, I thought it would be awkward to use because of its weight and overall size. It is not. I placed it on an end table next to my reading chair, rather than on the floor next to me. It's a beautiful dictionary, and I don't have to use a magnifying glass in order to read it. That makes it better than my Webster's dictionary.

I enjoyed the author's account of the formative events that helped shape current day America. The struggles, challenges, disagreements and shifting themes made me realize how our country evolved, and how some of those conflicts are as yet unresolved. I was also really impressed with the role that dissension played during these times. The author presents an even handed account, giving balance and context to the differing attitudes, positions and personalities that permeated the times. This provides the reader with background and perspective. I also appreciated the way in which the author weaves his opinion throughout the narrative. He presents his case firmly, but unobtrusively, respecting the readers' ability to consider his position, while encouraging

independent thought. Overall, an informative, well written book.

Except for the OED, this is the best dictionary of English. As a teacher of high school English, I install a copy under the desk of every student and insist on its daily use. An outstanding feature is the presentation of verbs. Main entries are infinitives (without the "to"), followed by the four principal parts, including variants. Principal parts (which all readers encounter in text) also have independent entries, leading the reader back to the infinitive, and therefore the essential meanings of the verb. Except for primary sources of literature, THIS IS MY TEXTBOOK. I leave "adopted textbooks" on the shelf.

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