

Origins: A simple word game for use in human relations trainings.

NOTE TO INSTRUCTOR:

You need an inexpensive kitchen timer for this activity. Copying sheets on colored paper will make it easier for you to keep the question sheets for each round together. After handing out the instructions below to three randomly selected judges, the instructor does not need to do anything.

INSTRUCTIONS TO JUDGES:

1. Put students in groups of 5-6 people.
2. Put questions for Round 1 face down at tables; start the timer with 4 minutes.
3. At the end of 4 minutes, tell the students to put down their pens. Ask each group to read its answer for 1. After each group has answered, read the answer from the definitions sheet. Each judge records the points on her/his score sheet. Continue doing this with each question. No one can challenge the judges' scores or ask to see the score sheets.
4. Repeat #2 with questions for Round 2, etc.
5. Add each judge's points on the board after each round and announce winners.

INSTRUCTION TO GROUPS:

Each group will have 4 minutes for each round. For each round, give the common usage and origin of words or phrases on the sheet. You must come up with something even if you have no idea what it means. There are two possible points for the common usage and three possible points for the origin of the word or phrase. The judges will assign the points for each round.

ORIGINS: What do these words or phrases mean?

1. GYPPE

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

2. JEW YOU DOWN

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

3. MULATTO

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

4. LAME

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

5. PUTZ

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

6. HICK

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

7. EVIL EYE

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

8. IRON MAIDEN

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

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UPPER GRADES HANDOUT

9. INDIAN GIVER

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

10. PADDY WAGON

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

11. RUSSIAN ROULETTE

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

12. HAG

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

13. CHINESE FIRE DRILL

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

14. CHINESE HOME RUN/HARLEM HOME RUN

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

15. JAYWALKING

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

16. BURY THE HATCHET

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

17. BEDLAM

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

18. CORNY

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

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UPPER GRADES HANDOUT

19. HOLD DOWN THE FORT

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

20. WELCH (VERB)

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

21. LOW PERSON ON THE TOTEM POLE

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

22. INDIAN SUMMER

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

23. DUTCH BARGAIN

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

24. DUTCH TREAT

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

25. REDNECK

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

26. GYPSY CAB

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

27. ON THE WARPATH

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

28. SCHMUCK

Common usage: _____

Origin: _____

What do these words or phrases mean

1. GYPED

Common usage: One has been cheated.

Origin: Belief that Gypsies (Hindu people from East India & Balkan states) will cheat you or steal from you.

2. JEW YOU DOWN

Common usage: Hard negotiation to lower a price.

Origin: Belief that Jewish people are cheap and unethical in business. Longstanding literary references promote stereotypes that relate Jewish people to the practices of money changing usury.

3. MULATTO

Common usage: One African American parent and one White parent.

Origin: Spanish word for a mule, which is the sterile offspring of a horse and a donkey. There is some evidence that it is also an Arabic word.

4. LAME

Common usage: A statement or behavior that is foolish or not well reasoned.

Origin: Belief that someone with a disability is incompetent or stupid.

5. PUTZ

Common usage: Someone who is slow to accomplish a task.

Origin: Yiddish word for penis.

6. HICK

Common usage: To describe something that is unsophisticated, outdated or stupid.

Origin: 16th century nickname for the given name Richard. Refers to a person who lives in the country.

7. EVIL EYE

Common usage: Evil or dirty look.

Origin: Belief in Europe and the Middle East that women could possess an evil eye, especially common in European witch trials.

8. IRON MAIDEN

Common usage: Tough, humorless woman.

Origin: Large metal enclosure coffin shaped and lined with iron spikes. Used during witch trials to torture and kill women suspected of being witches.

9. INDIAN GIVER

Common usage: Taking back a gift.

Origin: Indigenous American communities had a different concept of ownership; the focus was on sharing or trading. Things given to the colonists by Native Americans may have been reclaimed from colonists if they did not reciprocate.

10. PADDY WAGON

Common usage: Police van.

Origin: Derogatory term for Irish people based on the Irish name of Paddy. Although, in the past, many police officers on the East Coast were Irish, some also contend that this was a cart used to round up Irish immigrants for disorderly behavior.

11. RUSSIAN ROULETTE

Common usage: Potentially fatal game of dare with a revolver, which applies the concept of roulette.

Origin: Belief that Russian culture is fatalistic.

12. HAG

Common usage: Ugly or old woman.

Origin: Holy woman. Derived from Egyptian heq, meaning matriarchal ruler.

13. CHINESE FIRE DRILL

Common usage: All occupants of a car stopped at a traffic light quickly exit the car, run around the vehicle, and return to the car through the same door.

Origin: Belief that Chinese culture is chaotic and the implication is that Chinese people are stupid and would run back into a burning building.

14. CHINESE HOME RUN/HARLEM HOME RUN

Common usage: Perceived unfair homerun because of a mythical short fence around the field.

Origin: Stereotype originated in California, based on the reality that Chinese labor was cheap and the expression eventually meant “cheap shot.” Sportswriters have also referred to some homeruns as homer foo you, chow mein smash, and egg roll bingle.

15. JAY WALKING

Common usage: Violating pedestrian laws.

Origin: Belief that a jay, a person uneducated about city life, was incapable of crossing the street legally.

16. BURY THE HATCHET

Common usage: To settle one’s differences.

Origin: A 14th century British song titled “Hong up then hatchet ant thi knyf”. No historical usage by Indigenous people of North America.

17. BEDLAM

Common usage: Noise and chaos.

Origin: Term derived from Bethlehem, a London institution for people with mental disabilities.

18. CORNY

Common usage: Stupid or comical ideas or behavior.

Origin: Belief that rural people, particularly people from farms, are foolish and uneducated.

19. HOLD DOWN THE FORT

Common usage: Stay behind and manage the affairs of the office or home.

Origin: Protect the forts (military term for fortifying the building) of European American colonists against attacks by Indigenous people.

20. WELSH (VERB)

Common usage: Renege on an agreement or promise.

Origin: Nursery rhyme “Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief.” Later extended to refer to English bookies who fled to Wales to avoid paying bettors.

21. LOW PERSON ON THE TOTEM POLE

Common usage: Used by non-Indigenous people to indicate that a person is low in seniority or significance in an organization.

Origin: American Indian culture and positions of clan members on a totem, e.g. Bears on the bottom for strength and Eagles on the top for flight. Balance and equality were stressed.

21. INDIAN SUMMER

Common usage: Unusually warm days in the fall.

Origin: Belief that American Indians engage in deceit and trickery in their dealings with British colonists. Indian Summer is a false summer. Indian is used in several contexts to denote something that is cheap or false, witness Indian-giver and Indian-corn. Also supporting this idea is the British phrase St. Martin’s Summer referring to the same meteorological phenomenon. St. Martin suggests something cheap or false, primarily because dealers in cheap jewelry gathered at the location of London’s Church of St. Martin-de-Grand after it was torn down in the 16th century. St. Martin’s day is 11 November, which often corresponds to the spell of warm weather. (From <http://www.wordorigins.org>)

22. DUTCH BARGAIN

Common usage: Appears to be a bargain, but is in fact a bad investment.

Origin: Belief that people from Holland are unethical and will attempt to sell something of little worth to unsuspecting customers.

23. DUTCH TREAT

Common usage: Each person pays for her/himself when out for dinner or entertainment.

Origin: Belief that originated in England and perpetuated the stereotype that people from Holland are uncharitable or cheap.

24. REDNECK

Common usage: A white male who has unenlightened, narrow, and racist views.

Origin: Belief that white men who do day labor (sunburned neck) hold prejudiced views and are uninformed about social issues.

25. GYPSY CAB

Common usage: A taxi cab which picks up illegal fares, i.e. is only licensed to respond to calls but illegally searches the streets for passengers.

Origin: Belief that gypsies (Rumanies – Hindu ethnic group of East Indians living in Balkan states and the U.S.) steal and engage in unlawful activities.

27. ON THE WARPATH

Common usage: Description of someone who is engaging in angry, confrontational behavior.

Origin: Reference to American Indians waging war.

28. SCHMUCK

Common usage: A person who is contemptible or deceitful.

Origin: Yiddish word (shmok) for penis.

Sources:

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www.members.aol.com/morelandc/haveorigins.htm

www.wordorigins.org

The author is interested in any dialogue regarding this exercise. Linguists recognize that words may have multiple origins and this could be true for any of the words used in the exercise. In addition, if you have suggestions for expanding this exercise, please contact the author.