

Reading to Comprehend

Using a Dictionary

In this lesson we learn how to use dictionaries and thesauruses for different purposes such as researching meanings and pronunciation.

 Lesson Outcomes

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- identify abbreviations and symbols used in dictionary definitions
- extract information from a dictionary

 Curriculum Links

LO 4: Language

- identify and explain the meanings of words and use them correctly in a range of texts

 Lesson notes

To learn about some of the features of a dictionary, here is an extract for the word 'cheese'

cheese (-z) *n.* 1. Food made of pressed curds; complete cake etc. of this within rind; *bread and cheese*; CHALK¹ and *cheese*; GREEN¹ *cheese* **hard cheese**, (sl.) bad luck.

~**board** (from which cheese is served) ; ~**burger**, hamburger with cheese in or on it; ~**cake**, tart(let) of pastry filled with sweetened curds, (sl.) display of shapely female body in advertisement etc. ; ~**cloth**, BUTTER¹ muslin; ~**cutter**, knife with broad curved blade...

[OE *c_se* etc., OHG *ch_si*, WG **k_sif*. L *caseus*]

Dictionary term	Definition of term	Example from 'cheese' entry
Headword	The word that is being defined	Cheese
Phonetic spelling	Shows how the word is meant to pronounced	(-z) shows us that the word should be pronounced "cheez" A short vertical line is used after the syllable that is meant to be stressed. In the case of "chee'sy", it is the "chee" that is to be stressed.
Abbreviations	Shortened versions of words are used regularly in dictionary entries to save both time and money	<i>n.</i> tells us that cheese is a noun. Further down the entry we can see that cheese can also function as a verb (<i>v.</i>) and an adjective (<i>a.</i>) (<i>sl.</i>) is short for 'slang', which is an informal word or phrase. In this case, 'hard cheese' is an informal expression.
Definitions	The actual meaning of the word	1. Food made of pressed curds, complete cake etc. of this within rind. The 1. tells us that this definition is the first of more than one meaning.
Expression	A phrase that people commonly use	" <i>bread and cheese</i> " is in italics because it is an expression. For example, "he lives on a diet of bread and cheese."
Cross-referencing	Reference is often made in one entry to another entry in the same dictionary	CHALK and GREEN are in capital letters because they can be looked up in the dictionary as well.
Symbols	Symbols are types of pictures that are used to represent a point. They are often used in dictionary extracts	~ tells us that the word cheese is missing in each case.
Etymology	The history or origin of a word	OE tells us that the word cheese comes from Old English, and before that it came from Old High German (OHG).

 TASK

Look up the word 'chalk' in your dictionary and then answer the following questions:

1. What part shows how to pronounce the word?
2. What part of speech is chalk?
3. Use 'chalk' as a verb in a sentence which clearly shows its meaning.