



Maggie's Activity Pack

Name _____

Date _____

Where Did We First Hear That?

Today there are many ways to say a phrase or sentence in a short way. People text one another. They can only use so many letters to do this. That is why there are shortcuts like writing LOL for laugh out loud. Some people think these shortcuts are hurting the language. But did you know word shortcuts and phrases have been around for a long time? In this article you will read about one common shortcut and then you will read how two other phrases came to be commonly used. As you read, think about how common practices today might change the language in the future.

OK

Over one hundred years ago, people in the Boston, Massachusetts area began using letters to stand for common phrases. They said OK for *oll korrekt* (all correct). Other abbreviations were also used like NG for No Go. But this did not stay in the language. Why did people keep saying OK? The answer can be found in the presidential election of 1840. Martin Van Buren who was from Kinderhook, New York, was running for president. His nickname was Old Kinderhook. This was shortened to OK. This meant the short version of a phrase stayed in the language.

Red Tape

Many times people use the phrase "cut through the red tape" when they are trying to deal with a lot of paperwork and rules. If someone needs to get the OK to put a new green energy system in their school or if you need permission to go on a class field trip, there might be a lot of forms to fill out. If you are attempting to find a quicker way to get permission, you need to "cut through the red tape."

Long ago lawyers kept all the papers about a client in one place tied with...you guessed it...a red ribbon! When the lawyer needed to look at even just one of these papers, he had to cut the ribbon. Thus, this saying was a quick way of describing this action.

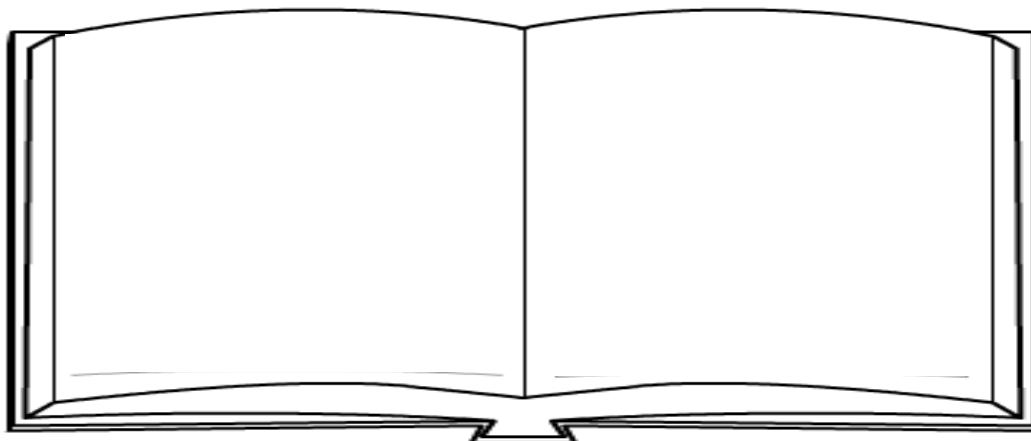
Just in the Nick of Time!

Have you ever said that something happened just in the nick of time? If you have you know that you were talking about something that happened at the last minute – just in time! This phrase came from a sport like soccer. The scorekeeper would make a nick on a piece of wood when a team scored a goal. If a goal was scored just as the game was ending, people said it was a "nick" in time!

Some people do not like language shortcuts. But can they be helpful? Let's find out. One of the tasks many students have trouble with is writing a summary of a story, video, article, etc. See if you can come up with shortcut language for retelling the plot of one of Maggie's adventures. Log onto www.missmaggie.org. Watch one of the cartoons. Then write your summary on the "computer screen" below. Make a guide for your language shortcuts. Choose two or three of your best shortcuts to share with the class.

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Here is a guide to some of the language shortcuts used in this retelling.



Dear Colleague,

I have been thinking about changes in language for a long time now. Many, many years ago, I remember my daughter picking up a rotary phone at a church dinner. She kept trying to punch the numbers rather than use her finger to circle the dial. She looked at me and said, "This phone is broken!" After I was finished laughing, I thought about language. We still say, "Dial the phone" even though no one really dials a phone anymore. The other day I rolled down the window on the driver's side of my car to get the mail. Wait – I didn't roll down the window with a handle, as I did when I was 5 years old....I pressed a button. These are just some examples of phrases that have changed in my lifetime (am I dating myself!?) I think it is helpful to get children thinking and considering the constant evolution of our language. Nowhere is this more evident than in the rapidly changing technological world. While we may debate the advantages and disadvantages of text messaging and Twitter, we cannot deny their popularity. I sat in a doctoral class last fall where some teachers were adamant that we encourage students *not* to use these prevalent methods of communication. I thought this was a bit naïve. Kids are going to use them and we, as the adults, have to figure out ways to make this world, safe for personal use and even helpful in our curriculum. While this may not be as essential for elementary school teachers as it is for middle school and high school teachers, we still can draw our students' attention to this need. We do this for reading as we encourage changes in how children read depending on their purpose; we now need to do the same for writing. And...I have often wondered if we could use the language of "text speak" and now Twitter to help children understand the necessity of using as few words as possible to summarize something and to identify the important material. You know the "syndrome" - many times children highlight nearly everything. Some have little understanding of how to find only the key concepts. Perhaps relating the strategies of highlighting and summarizing to texting would help set the stage for a clearer understanding. Let me know what you think!

Now onto extending this activity...perhaps you could even have children cut out a "screen" and ask them to view other Maggie cartoons and use as few words as possible to write, using glitter pens or some other motivating writing utensil to do this. I often hear from teachers that using multi-colored pens and fun instruments such as glitter can motivate even your most reluctant readers and writers. You can display these works of art/language arts on a bulletin board for all to see and try their hand at understanding.

For those of you serving on committees, I would love to hear what your colleagues and supervisors think about trying to use new language in the curriculum rather than ignoring it (Ah...guess you can see where I "fall" on the issue!).

Happy teaching,

Kathy

Answers will vary. Have students share with one another.

Goals:

Students will read how three phrases came into the English language. The activity helps children and teachers to consider how language changes over time. Follow-up activities encourage children to summarize and to think about the use of technology's new language "shortcuts" to help them as they read and write. This activity correlates with the IRA/NCTE Standard, "Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works."