



SCRIPPS NATIONAL SPELLING BEE

1920S WORD LIST

To celebrate the 90th Scripps National Spelling Bee, we're looking back to the first ever National Spelling Bee, held in 1925. For your enjoyment, we've assembled a list of 30 slang words from the 1920s. We encourage you to have a spell-off with your friends during commercial breaks of the competition (flapper costumes encouraged!). The finals will be broadcast live on ESPN on Thursday, June 1st at 8:30pm.

1. bangtails (BANG-taylz)

The first part of this word is probably of Scandinavian origin, and the second part is originally English. (plural noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: racehorses.

Definition used in the 1920s: racing horses.

*Daisy and Leo decided to spend their Sunday at the tracks watching the **bangtails**.*

2. bruno (BROO-noh)

This word is from a brand name.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: a worker who uses a hand shovel to move loose ore (as to an ore car).

Definition used in the 1920s: a rough and tough man.

*Thad considered his dad to be a **bruno** because he worked in the coal mines.*

3. cat's pajamas (CATS puh-JAM-uhz)

The first part of this word is English in origin, and the second part is from a Persian word that passed into Hindi before becoming English.

(plural noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: a highly admired or exceptionally excellent person or thing.

Definition used in the 1920s: something that is super-awesome.

*Gina thought that polka dot dresses she saw at the mall were the **cat's pajamas**.*

4. dames (DAIMZ)

This originally Latin word passed through French before becoming English.

(plural noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: women of rank, station or authority.

Definition used in the 1920s: women.

*The bathrooms at the restaurants were labeled "**Dames**" and "Gentlemen."*

5. getaway sticks (GET-uh-way STIKS)

All three parts of this word are originally English.

(plural noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: getaway: escape; sticks: woody pieces or parts of a tree.

Definition used in the 1920s: legs.

*Hannah thought her **getaway sticks** would give out as she sprinted toward the finish line of the 5K.*

6. newsie (NOOZ-ee)

This word consists of an originally English part plus an English combining form.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: a person that delivers or sells newspapers at retail.

Definition used in the 1920s: a news reporter.

*The **newsie** anxiously waited in the ballroom to see who would win the 90th Scripps National Spelling Bee.*

7. oyster fruit (OY-stur FROOT)

The first part of this word passed from Greek to Latin to French to English, and the second part passed from Latin to French to English.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: oyster: a marine bivalve mollusk; fruit: a product of plant growth having an edible more or less sweet pulp.

Definition used in the 1920s: pearl necklace.

*Henry bought his wife a beautiful **oyster fruit** for her birthday.*

8. bee's knees (BEEZ NEEZ)

Both of these words are originally English.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: a highly admired or exceptionally excellent person or thing.

Definition used in the 1920s: something that is super-awesome.

*Dr. Bailly exclaimed that the speller's t-shirt was the **bee's knees**.*

9. big cheese (BIG CHEEZ)

The first part of this word is probably of Scandinavian origin, and the second part is originally English.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: a person of consequence.

Definition used in the 1920s: an important person.

*We all know that _____ is the **big cheese** at this party.*

10. dapper (DA-pur)

This word is Dutch in origin.

(adjective; noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: neat and trim in appearance.

Definition used in the 1920s: the father of a flapper.

*Nico was afraid to ask the **dapper** if he could marry his daughter because Nico thought he would say no.*

11. ducky (DUH-kee)

This word consists of an originally English part plus an English combining form.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: darling - usually used as a term of address.

Definition used in the 1920s: term of approval.

*"That's just **ducky**!" the speller exclaimed after learning everyone would be getting candy for spelling correctly.*

12. fire extinguisher (FIE-ur ik-STING-gwih-shur)

The first part of this word is originally English, and the second part consists of an originally Latin part plus an English combining form.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: a portable apparatus for putting out small fires by ejecting fire-extinguishing agents.

Definition used in the 1920s: a chaperone.

*Mary's mother told her that she simply must take a **fire extinguisher** with her on her date with Harold, for propriety's sake.*

13. fluky (FLOO-kee)

This word consists of an originally English part plus an English combining form.

(adjective)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: happening or depending on chance rather than skill.

Definition used in the 1920s: funny, different, odd.

*Something about that word seems a little bit **fluky** to me, don't you agree?*

14. sharpshooter (SHARP-shoo-tur)

This word is originally German in origin.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: one skilled in shooting : a good marksman.

Definition used in the 1920s: a good dancer who does not hold back when spending money.

*Bruno Mars is the modern day version of a 1920s **sharpshooter**. Man, can he dance.*

15. whangdoodle (WANG-doo-duhl)

This word is of unknown origin.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: a person who loudly and angrily complains about things.

Definition used in the 1920s: jazz music, jazz band.

*Hadley loved visiting her local club in the summer and swaying to the **whangdoodle** while enjoying a sweet iced tea.*

16. whiskbroom (WISK-broom)

The first part of this word is probably of Scandinavian origin, and the second part is originally English.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: a small broom with a short handle used especially as a clothes brush or for light cleaning chores.

Definition used in the 1920s: a man with whiskers.

*"It was him! It was the **whiskbroom!**" the woman told the detective.*

17. bearcat (BAIR-kat)

Both parts of this word are originally English.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: a person or thing that is marked by especial power or force.

Definition used in the 1920s: a lively, spirited woman, possibly with a fiery streak.

*The horoscope reading told _____ what she already knew: that she was a **bearcat** who delighted in creative pursuits.*

18. bluenose (BLOO-noze)

The first part is Germanic in origin and passed through French before becoming English, and the second part is originally English.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: one who advocates a rigorous moral code especially in matters of individual conscience or personal conduct.

Definition used in the 1920s: a prude or individual deemed to be a killjoy.

*Everyone called _____ a **bluenose** because he was rooting for the kids on the TV to misspell their words.*

19. dewdropper (DOO-drah-pur)

This word consists of two originally English parts plus an English combining form.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: dew: moisture condensed upon the surfaces of cool bodies especially at night; dropper: a short glass tube with one end constricted and the other fitter with a small rubber bulb used to measure liquids by drops.

Definition used in the 1920s: a slacker who sits around all day and does nothing.

*The speller onstage was the furthest thing from a **dewdropper** Michael had ever seen.*

20. hayburner (HAY-bur-nur)

This word consists of two originally English parts plus an English combining form.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: horse; especially : a second-rate racehorse.

Definition used in the 1920s: a car with poor gas-mileage, a guzzler.

*Ashley decided to it was finally time to trade-in her **hayburner** for electric car.*

21. sockdolager (sahk-DAHL-uh-juhr)

The first part of this word went from Latin to English, and the second part is perhaps from a Greek word that passed into Latin.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: something or someone outstanding or exceptional.

Definition used in the 1920s: an event or action of great importance.

*The 90th Scripps National Spelling Bee is a **sockdolager** that will go down as one of finest events in the 21st century.*

22. hokum (HO-kuhm)

The first part of this word was probably invented by jugglers in imitation of Latin and the second part is perhaps from Canadian French.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: pretentious nonsense.

Definition used in the 1920s: nonsense.

*The party-goers thought that every word coming out of Dr. Bailly's mouth was total **hokum**.*

23. hotsy-totsy (HAHT-see-TAHT-see)

This word was coined by an American cartoonist in 1926.

(adjective)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: comfortably stable or secure.

Definition used in the 1920s: perfect.

*Let us extend our deepest congratulations to the host, _____, this spelling bee party is **hotsy-totsy!***

24. let's blouse (LETS BLAUS)

The first word is originally English, and the second word is originally French.

(verb)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: blouse: to fall in folds like those of a loose blouse when closely belted.

Definition used in the 1920s: let's get out of here.

"Let's blouse!" Marty yelled, once the spelling bee champion had been declared.

25. noodle juice (NOO-duhl joos)

The first word is German in origin, and the second word passed from Latin to French before becoming English.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: noodle: a food paste made with egg and shaped typically in ribbon form; juice: the extractable fluid contents or plant cells or plant structures.

Definition used in the 1920s: tea.

*Helga never ordered **noodle juice** from restaurants because it could never compare to her grandmother's signature blend.*

26. phonus bolonus (FOHN-uhs buh-LOH-nuhs)

The first word is of unknown origin and the second word is a variant of an originally Italian word.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: pretentious falsity.

Definition used in the 1920s: nonsense.

*Declan declared that the rules of the competition were **phonus bolonus** after the judge instructed the child to spell his word while performing jumping jacks.*

27. floorflusher (FLOHR-fluh-shur)

The first part of this word is originally English, and the second part consists of a word that is perhaps imitative in origin plus an English combining form.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: floor: the part of a room upon which one stands; flusher: one that flushes something.

Definition used in the 1920s: an insatiable dancer.

*I'm only a **floorflusher** when I'm cooking dinner alone in my kitchen, and I refuse to perform for you all right now.*

28. rag-a-muffin (RAG-uh-muh-fin)

This word is from an English literary name.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: a ragged dirty man or boy.

Definition used in the 1920s: a dirty or disheveled individual.

*Georgette's mother called her a **rag-a-muffin** and wouldn't let her in the house after Georgette had spent the day in the woods with her sister.*

29. ritzy (RITZ-ee)

This word consists of a word that came from an American name, plus an English combining form.

(adjective)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: ostentatiously smart in appearance or manner.

Definition used in the 1920s: elegant, high style.

*The ballroom where the Scripps National Spelling Bee is held is often described as being **ritzy**.*

30. yap (YAP)

This word is imitative in origin.

(noun)

Definition from Merriam-Webster Unabridged: mouth.

Definition used in the 1920s: mouth.

*"_____, please shut your **yap** so I can hear the next kid spell!"*

Tweet us who won your 1920s spelling contest [@ScrippsBee](https://twitter.com/ScrippsBee). Be sure to use #spellingbee and #beewatchparty.

Merriam-Webster Unabridged can be accessed at <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/>.