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AMERICAN  
HERITAGE®

dictionary

of the  
English  
Language

  


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**phan·tom**  (făn təm)

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*n.*

1. Something apparently seen, heard, or sensed, but having no physical reality; a ghost or apparition.
2. An image that appears only in the mind; an illusion: *phantoms of a disturbed mind*.
3. *Medicine* A model of a human body or body part.

*adj.*

1. Resembling, characteristic of, or being a phantom: *tales of a phantom ship haunting the bay*.
2. Fictitious or nonexistent, often when intended to deceive: *phantom employees on the payroll; deposits in a phantom bank account*.
3. Believed to be real even though illusory: *a phantom pregnancy*.
4. Being a phantom limb: *a phantom arm*.

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[Middle English *fantom*, from Old French *fantosme*, probably from Vulgar Latin *\*phantauma*, from Greek dialectal *\*phantagma*, from Greek *phantasma*; see [PHANTASM](#).]

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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