



The  
AMERICAN  
HERITAGE®

dictionary

of the  
English  
Language

  


## HOW TO USE THE DICTIONARY

To look up an entry in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, use the search window above. For best results, after typing in the word, click on the “Search” button instead of using the “enter” key.

Some compound words (like *bus rapid transit*, *dog whistle*, or *identity theft*) don’t appear on the drop-down list when you type them in the search bar. For best results with compound words, place a quotation mark before the compound word in the search window.

[guide to the dictionary](#)



## THE USAGE PANEL

The Usage Panel is a group of nearly 200 prominent scholars, creative writers, journalists, diplomats, and others in occupations requiring mastery of language. Annual surveys have gauged the acceptability of particular usages and grammatical constructions.

[The Panelists](#)



## AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY APP

The new American Heritage Dictionary app is now available for [iOS](#) and [Android](#).



## THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY BLOG

The articles in our [blog](#) examine new words, revised definitions, interesting images from the fifth edition, discussions of usage, and more.

**THE 100 WORDS®**

See word lists from the best-selling 100 Words Series!

[Find out more!](#)



## INTERESTED IN DICTIONARIES?

Check out the Dictionary Society of North America at <http://www.dictionariesociety.com>

**bless**  (blēs)

Share: [Tweet](#)

*tr.v.* **blessed** or **blest** (blĕst), **bless·ing**, **bless·es**

1. To make holy by religious rite; sanctify: *The clergy blessed the site for the new monastery.*
2. To invoke divine favor upon: *The bishop blessed the fishing fleet.*
3. To make the sign of the cross over: *She knelt and blessed herself.*
4. To honor as holy; glorify: *Bless the Lord.*
5. To confer well-being or prosperity on: *They were blessed with a baby girl.*
6. To endow, as with talent: *He was blessed with a photographic memory.*

**Idiom:**

**bless you**

Used to wish good health to a person who has just sneezed.

---

[Middle English *blessen*, from Old English *blĕtsian*, to consecrate; see **bhel**-<sup>3</sup> [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

---

**bless** *er n.*

---

**Word History:** The verb *bless* comes from Old English *blĕdsian*, *blēdsian*, *blĕtsian*, "to bless, wish happiness, consecrate." Although the Old English verb has no cognates in any other Germanic language, it can be shown to derive from the Germanic noun *\*blōdan*, "blood." *Blĕdsian* therefore originally meant "to consecrate with blood, sprinkle with blood." In many cultures, the blood of a sacrificed animal is thought to hallow and bring blessings upon the people and places that it touches. In the Biblical book of Exodus, for example, God punishes the Egyptians by killing the first-born son in every family, but the Israelites are able to protect their own houses from divine wrath by sprinkling the blood of a sacrificed lamb on their lintels and doorposts. The Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, the early Germanic migrants to Britain, would have originally used the verb *blĕdsian* for the consecrations effected by their own pagan sacrifices. After they converted to Christianity, however, *blĕdsian* acquired new meanings when it was used to translate the verb *benedicere*, "to bless" in the Latin Bible.

---

The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition copyright ©2022 by HarperCollins Publishers. All rights reserved.

## Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[Indo-European Roots](#)

[Semitic Roots](#)

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](#).

## American Heritage Dictionary Products



[The American Heritage Dictionary, 5th Edition](#)   [The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms](#)   [The American Heritage Roget's Thesaurus](#)   [Curious George's Dictionary](#)   [The American Heritage Children's Dictionary](#)

- **CONTACT US**
- [Customer Service](#)
- [Make Me An Author](#)
- [Ebooks Help with Glose Reader](#)
- **ABOUT US**
- [Company Profile](#)
- [Leadership Team](#)
- [Corporate Social Responsibility](#)
- [HarperCollins Careers](#)
- [HarperCollins Imprints](#)
- [HarperGreen](#)
- [Social Media Directory](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- **FOR READERS**
- [Browse Reading Guides](#)
- **FOR AUTHORS**
- [Submit a Manuscript](#)
- [Report Piracy](#)
- [Agent Portal](#)
- **MEDIA**

- [Publicity Contacts](#)
- [Press Room](#)
- **SERVICES**
- [HarperCollins Speakers Bureau](#)
- [Library Services](#)
- [Academic Services](#)
- [Desk & Exam Copies](#)
- [Review Copies](#)
- [OpenBook API](#)
- [Marketing Partnerships](#)
- **COVID-19 RESOURCES & PERMISSIONS**
- [Permissions for Adult Online Readings](#)
- [Permissions for Kids Online Readings](#)
- **SALES & RIGHTS**
- [Booksellers & Retailer Ordering](#)
- [HarperCollins Catalogs](#)
- [Permissions](#)
- [Subsidiary Rights](#)

- [Media Rights and Content Development](#)
- **GLOSE APP**
- [iPhone](#)
- [Android](#)
- 
- 
- 
- 
- **GLOBAL DIVISIONS**
- [HarperCollins US](#)
- [HarperCollins Canada](#)
- [HarperCollins Christian](#)
- [HarperCollins Australia](#)
- [HarperCollins India](#)
- [HarperCollins UK](#)
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- 



[Terms of Use](#) • [Terms of Sale](#) • [Your Ad Choices](#) • [Privacy Policy](#) • [California Privacy Policy](#) • [Do Not Sell My Personal Information](#)

Copyright 2022 HarperCollins Publishers All rights reserved.

\*This website is best viewed in Chrome, Firefox, Microsoft Edge, or Safari. Some characters in pronunciations and etymologies cannot be displayed properly in Internet Explorer.