HOW TO MAKE SENSE OF 19TH CENTURY LANGUAGE FOR STUDENTS AROUND THE WORLD
INTRODUCTION

This dictionary will help you to understand meanings of the words and language used in 19th century novels and other writing of the period. With over 3000 words from aback to zoophagus and panels, notes, and illustrated thematic pages to browse through, you will quickly be able to get the most out of your reading.

In this dictionary you will find explanations for:

- unusual words such as mort and fratch
- words and senses that are used differently from modern English such as disgusting and hardy (note that we have only included the 19th century and unusual senses of these words)
- difficult words or words which are less familiar or less frequently used in modern English such as abode, changeling, ire, or coeval
- words which reflect 19th century life such as poorhouse and inkstand.

You will find words from these titles and many more:

- A Christmas Carol
- The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde
- Frankenstein
- Great Expectations
- Jane Eyre
- Silas Marner
- Pride and Prejudice
- The Sign of Four
- The War of the Worlds
- Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde
- A Christmas Carol
- Pride and Prejudice
- Great Expectations
- Silas Marner
- Jane Eyre
- Frankenstein
- The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde
- The War of the Worlds

Alphabetical letter openers

These contain information on a specific person, place, object, or event. For instance, you can find out about the beginnings of antiseptic at A. Charles Darwin at D, the invention of Morse code at M, the Penny Black at P, and the ending of slavery at S.

Language and culture panels

Understand more about vocabulary, language, and culture with these panels. At the headwords below, learn about familiar words with unfamiliar meanings, foreign languages, local accents, exclamations, and expressing emphasis.

You will also find information on different spellings, capital letters, past tenses, similes, sentence structure, nouns, prefixes and suffixes, thou and thine, and wast and wert.

abroad
amour propre
balk
Barmecide
broder
brooklet

Language and culture panels

Understand more about vocabulary, language, and culture with these panels. At the headwords below, learn about familiar words with unfamiliar meanings, foreign languages, local accents, exclamations, and expressing emphasis.

You will also find information on different spellings, capital letters, past tenses, similes, sentence structure, nouns, prefixes and suffixes, thou and thine, and wast and wert.

abroad
amour propre
balk
Barmecide
broder
brooklet

Illustrated themes

Visit the centre section to build a picture of world events and the people and language around them. Topics include Transport, the kinds of jobs people did for a living at Working Life, and the ways people spent their spare time at Sport and entertainment.

Usage notes help you to understand the differences between the modern and 19th century usage and meanings.

Untold Vocabulary provides more words linked to the word you are looking up.

Word origins tell you where the word came from.

TIMELINE

The Jacquard Loom is first demonstrated.

Count Alessandro Volta invents the battery.

Napoleon Bonaparte becomes Emperor of France; Richard Trevithick builds the first steam locomotive.

George Stephenson designs his first steam locomotive.

Louis Braille invents his system of printing for blind people.

Sir Robert Peel forms the first police force (with officers known as ‘bobbies’ or ‘peelers’).

Michael Faraday invents an electric dynamo.

Slavery abolished in the British Empire; Factory Acts improve conditions for children.

William IV is made King.

Great Reform Act

Victoria is crowned Queen.

Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre invents Daguerreotype, a type of early photograph.

Irish potato famine begins. It lasts several years.

Pennsylvania Turnpike is implemented.

Pre-Raphaelite art movement is founded.
Why is 19th Century writing different from modern writing?

The more you read from this period, the more you get used to the ways in which writing is different. Think of these differences as part of setting the scene of the story, along with the clothes that people wore, or the ways that people travelled.

Some examples of differences include:

**Sentences**
Compared with modern writing, the style may seem laborious, with very long sentences and unusual grammar and punctuation.

- Not so much in obedience, as in surprise and fear: for on the raising of the hand, he became sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory.—A CHRISTMAS CAROL, CHARLES DICKENS

This sentence has no main verb, repeated semicolons, and the phrase describing the ‘wailings’ (not normally a plural noun) does not use typical word order. However, if you find the natural breaks, re-read some parts, and look up words which seem to carry important meaning, you can start to understand it. The word ‘sensible’, for example, is not used with the modern sense and you can look it up in this dictionary to find its meaning.

**Formal or odd vocabulary**
The vocabulary may seem formal and sometimes the words are used in odd combinations compared to modern English.

- Let us not dispute about our views.—THE WOMAN IN WHITE, WILKIE COLLINS

Some 19th century titles contain language from an even earlier period, or references to things that were common in an earlier period.

- The Knight undid the clasp of the baldric.—VANNOISE, WALTER SCOTT
- an old gentleman with a powdered head—DOMBEY AND SON, CHARLES DICKENS

Some examples of differences include:

**Punctuation**
Punctuation may be different from the punctuation that you use in your own writing. For example, in this extract we would not expect to use a full stop with a dash.

- For you were not brought up in that strange house from a mere baby,—I was.—GREAT EXPECTATIONS, CHARLES DICKENS

In the following extract, the commas are not used to enclose information that could be omitted and would not be used in modern English.

- It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.—PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, JANE AUSTEN

**Different spellings**
Many words may be spelled differently from modern Standard British English. For example, you may see -or instead of -our endings (such as favor instead of favour).

- I have a favor to ask of you.—THE MILL ON THE FLOSS, GEORGE ELIOT

You will also see the endings -ise and -isation as well as -ize and -ization.

**Different punctuation**
In modern British English, fewer words are hyphenated, such as dining room, or are written as one word, such as watercolours.

- These pictures were in water-colours. The first represented clouds . . . over a swollen sea.—JANE EVRE, CHARLOTTE BONTÉ

Some characters speak with a dialect which may look strange. The easiest way to understand this is to say it aloud.

- They aren’t worried wi’ thinking what’s the rights and wrongs o’ things.—SILAS MARNER, GEORGE ELIOT

**Important to know**
As far as possible, examples are faithful to the original texts. Some have been shortened so that they are easier to read. If you are quoting in an essay, ensure you use the version in your exam text, with the spelling and punctuation as they appear there.

Language reflects attitudes and habits of the time which may now be considered stereotypical or inappropriate. We have tried to avoid giving examples which, particularly out of the context of the story, are likely to cause offence today.

---

**Timeline**

1851-1853
- Great Exhibition is in Crystal Palace, London.
- Indian mutiny against the British; work begins on the Oxford English Dictionary.
- Charles Darwin’s Origin of the Species is published.
- First steam-driven underground train in London.
- Education Act provides state education for 5-13 year-olds.
- Alexander Graham Bell patents the telephone.
- Karl Benz invents the first practical automobile powered by an internal combustion engine.
- Gottlieb Daimler invents the first four-wheeled motor vehicle.
- George Eastman patents paper-strip photographic film.
- Women’s suffrage gains momentum; Guglielmo Marconi patents radio communication.

1856-1857
- Crimean War
- Louis Pasteur invents pasteurization.
- Joseph Lister invents antiseptic surgery; Alfred Nobel invents dynamite.
- Voting by secret ballot is introduced.
- Free education is compulsory for children under ten.
- John Dunlop patents the pneumatic tyre.
- Lumière brothers invent the cinematograph projector.
- The second Boer war in South Africa begins.

1859
- The second Boer war in South Africa begins.

1862-1863
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1867
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1869
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1870
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1872
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1876
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1880
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1884
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1885
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1886
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1888
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1892
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1895
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1897
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1899
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

1901
- Crimean War
- Crimean War
- Crimean War

---
been lovely people to be photographed. In 1888, George Eastman developed the daguerreotype, a process which In the 1830s, the Frenchman Louis Daguerre a kind of photograph daguerreotype a demon or devil; a supernatural spirit or godlike being On the Origin of Species by Means birds and animals he observed in the Galapagos Islands, Darwin published On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection in 1859 which set out his theory of evolution. Darwin’s theories were controversial but they gave a scientific basis to our understanding of the natural world.

damask NOUN a type of heavy patterned fabric • heavy damask curtains—TENNIS OF THE D’URBERVILLES, THOMAS HARDY

darkling ADJECTIVE dark or growing dark • The Martians seemed in solitary possession of the darkling night.—THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, H. G. WELLS

dastard (also dastardly) ADJECTIVE wicked and cruel • the treachery of this dastard scheme.—LOVEN DOONE, R. D. BLACKMORE
dawl NOUN a jacksaw • the circling flocks of rooks and daws—OTTO OF THE SILVER HAND, HOWARD PYLE
deacon NOUN a church official or an assistant priest • The second day ... the minister and one of the deacons came.—SILAS MARNER, GEORGE ELIOT
deal NOUN fir or pine wood • the old deal table—GREAT EXPECTATIONS, CHARLES DICKENS

death (rhymes with birth) NOUN a loss of quality, dignity, or virtue • Mr Nightley and Harriet Smith!—such an elevation on her side! such a debasement on him.—EMMA, JANE AUSTEN
debauch NOUN an instance of immoral behaviour, for example, involving alcohol, other drugs, or overeating • a debauch of opium—THE MOODSTONE, WILKIE COLLINS
decease NOUN a person’s death • the expected decease of her mother.—CHARLOTTE BRONTÉ

decension NOUN a decline; a reduction • Bob has ‘a sudden declension in his high spirits’ when he thinks that Martha is not coming.—A CHRISTMAS CAROL, CHARLES DICKENS
decline VERB 1 (said about a day) to draw to an end • But, what with listening on the way ... the day had quite declined when I came to the place. —GREAT EXPECTATIONS, CHARLES DICKENS

2 be declined (said about the sun) to go down or start to go down • The sun is already far declined.—FRANKENSTEIN, MARY SHELLEY
decorum NOUN what is appropriate in terms of rank, situation, or behaviour • Elizabeth is told that ‘honour [and] decorum ... forbid’ her marriage to Darcy.—PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, JANE AUSTEN
deed NOUN a thing done • I look on the hands which executed the deed.—FRANKENSTEIN, MARY SHELLEY

2 a legal document showing ownership or other rights • [Marley’s] chain ... was made ... of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel.—A CHRISTMAS CAROL, CHARLES DICKENS
deep ADJECTIVE cunning; sly • ‘You’re a deep little puss, you are,’ said Silas. —SILAS MARNER, GEORGE ELIOT
defect NOUN a character flaw; a fault • I am perfectly convinced ... that Mr Darcy has no defect.—PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, JANE AUSTEN

defication NOUN the act of abandoning someone or something for another person, place, etc. • Elizabeth says she is not too upset by Wickham pursuing another woman: ‘Kitty and Lydia take his defection much more to heart than I do.’—PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, JANE AUSTEN
defective ADJECTIVE faulty; flawed • I am a defective being, with many faults and few redeeming points.—JANE EYRE, CHARLOTTE BRONTÉ

defile VERB to move along a narrow track or passage; to move in single file • Instantly the regiments began to defile through the ... gateway.—KING SOLomon’S MINes, H. RIDER HAGGARD

defile NOUN a narrow track or passage • All night their course lay through intricate defiles and over ... rock-strewn paths.—A STUDY IN SCARLET, ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Photography

In the 1830s, the Frenchman Louis Daguerre developed the daguerreotype, a process which captured images on a silvered copper plate. Each one was unique, but in 1841 the British scientist and inventor Henry Fox Talbot patented the process of developing multiple prints from a single negative. Photographic studios sprang up allowing ordinary people to be photographed. In 1888, George Eastman introduced the Kodak box camera, which turned photography into a leisure activity accessible to all.
In 1815, Parliament passed the Corn Laws to protect British farmers from cheaper imports of grain from overseas. This pushed up the prices of staple foods like bread and led to food shortages and outbreaks of starvation. The 1840s became known as the ‘Hungry Forties’. In Ireland between 1845 and 1852, failures of the potato crop and poor management led to the death from starvation of more than one million people. This period is now known as the Great Famine.
Large leaps in scientific knowledge were made in the 19th century. From Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution to the discovery of X-rays by the German physicist Wilhelm Röntgen, scientific achievements transformed people’s lives and changed the way they looked at the world. The invention of the electric telegraph meant that people could communicate information almost instantly across vast distances. Alexander Graham Bell’s telephone enabled people in different places to speak to each other directly in person. In offices and homes, the invention of the electric light bulb meant people could work and entertain late into the night, and electric street lighting illuminated great cities such as Paris and New York. The 1800s was a period of great scientific change, in particular in the fields of light, heat, electricity, and magnetism. There was a fascination with life and nature: how was life created? Could the power of nature be harnessed? What exactly did death mean and what happened to people’s spirits after they died? In medicine, hospitals began to be used to study and research disease. Medical students could dissect a patient’s corpse to find out causes and effects of different illnesses. It was mainly the bodies of criminals that were dissected but, as fewer criminals faced the death penalty, bodies were in short supply. Cadavers became valuable and body snatchers dug up graves to sell the dead to doctors for medical research. Laboratories were set up, often in universities, where chemists and physicists could experiment in order to understand anatomy. Improvements to scientific instruments, such as the microscope and thermometer, enabled scientists to piece together how the body worked. Certain poisons were believed to have healing effects and they were taken for a range of medical ailments. However, the Pharmacy Act of 1868 regulated the selling of poisons such as strychnine and potassium cyanide. Opium and forms of it such as laudanum were in common use until they too were eventually regulated.

In physics, James Clerk Maxwell’s theory of electromagnetic radiation and Joseph Thomson’s discovery of the electron in 1897 gave the world the first understanding of the subatomic world of particles and waves that underpinned the universe.

In the field of biology, the French scientist Louis Pasteur’s discovery that microscopic organisms caused disease led to the development of treatments and vaccines. The use of aspirin as a treatment for pain relief was pioneered by a German chemist named Felix Hoffman and this wonder drug was patented in 1899. In physics, James Clerk Maxwell’s theory of electromagnetic radiation and Joseph Thomson’s discovery of the electron in 1897 gave the world the first understanding of the subatomic world of particles and waves that underpinned the universe.

In 1800, the Italian scientist Alessandro Volta introduced the first battery. In the early part of the century, the British chemist Humphry Davy began working in what became known as the field of electrochemistry. He isolated substances such as potassium, calcium, and magnesium, and also discovered iodine. His other work led to the creation of the Davy lamp which helped reduce the number of mine explosions caused by the gas methane which was found deep in the pits. Davy’s assistant, Michael Faraday, went on to discover the principle behind the electric transformer and generator. The terms he used such as electrode, cathode, and ion, are still used today when talking about generating electricity.
Baby farming was the taking of unwanted babies in return for payment. One notorious person who took in babies and then murdered them was Margaret Waters, who lived in Brixton, London and who was executed in 1870.

A flash house was a pub where stolen goods were fenced or sold.

Garrotting was the seizing a person from behind in a stranglehold in order for a companion to steal money and possessions.

The jug was an informal word for prison.

As the population in towns and cities grew, so did public fears about crime. The Illustrated Police News and other newspapers were filled with lurid reports of robberies and murders. In 1888 the violent crimes carried out in London’s East End by a serial killer nicknamed ‘Jack the Ripper’ held the world spellbound.

Police forces were established to combat crime. The Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 brought a full-time police force to the streets of London, and ten years later every county in Britain could establish its own constabulary. Police officers in uniform had truncheons and rattles to raise the alarm, and in 1842, the first plainclothes detectives were introduced to investigate serious crimes.

The weekly newspaper The Illustrated Police News was published from the mid-19th century. The public had an appetite for gruesome crime stories.

One report in The Illustrated Police News in 1897 tells the tale of Mr J. Mitchell who was walking down the Mile End Road in London and was garrotted from behind and had his trousers ripped off his body!

One of the most common items stolen was the silk handkerchief, which would often be put up for sale by being hung on a pole.

The introduction of police officers patrolling the streets led to a general decline in crime through the 19th century. The phrase ‘recommended to mercy on account of their youth’ was the phrase used in court to let juveniles off the death penalty.

Transportation was the process of sending convicted criminals to Australia. There they were put to work building roads and bridges, labouring in quarries, and helping farmers on the land. The journey there took six months in degrading conditions in ships. Both men and women were transported either for a set number of years or for life. The policy ended in 1857 and many people remained in Australia.

Elizabeth Fry campaigned for the improvement of the squalid conditions suffered by women and children in prison. Her work in Newgate Prison, and then across Britain, changed the way prisoners were treated and influenced modern thinking.
This dictionary unravels the intriguing, fascinating and rich language of the most-studied 19th century texts with clear explanations for unusual words, unfamiliar spellings, dialect and expressions.

An ideal support for all students, this dictionary helps to grow understanding of writing styles and culture, while illustrations and early photographs bring the 1800s to life.

- Size: 234mm x 171mm
- Format: flexi, spot UV cover
- Extent: 240 pages
- Price: £12.99
- Pub date: May 2018
- 24 colour illustrated thematic pages in the centre of the dictionary

To order, contact your local OUP sales representative or:
- Email: trade.orders.uk@oup.com
- Telephone: 01536 452640