

The Stories of English

David Crystal

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"Simply the best introductory history of the English language family that we have. The plan of the book is ingenious, the writing lively, the exposition clear, and the scholarly standard uncompromisingly high."
—J.M. COETZEE, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature



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David Crystal : The Stories of English before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Stories of English:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. liked this library book so much I bought my own copyBy MaddalenaThis book is wonderful. If you love language, you need to read this book. The author did an immense amount of research and put it together in a clear and enjoyable way. From the deep past to the most recent, he

describes how English grew and developed. One of the most amusing passages is where he quoted a serious poem written before "fart" was considered a word not suited for literature. I am reading it again and find that it helps me understand my own mother tongue...1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A pleasant read and a great resource

By Kristina PCrystal avoids the academic language of many books and articles on the history of the English language, and approaches the topic with an open mind, as the title suggest -- in other words, there are multiple stories of English, and it's difficult, if not impossible, to credit any one event with shaping the language. The chapters are relatively brief and manageable, and he includes even briefer interludes devoted to targeted, interesting topics.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. **HIGHLY READABLE AND INFORMATIVE**

By William ColemanTeaching college English, I always include a brief overview of the roots of English, to help my students understand the importance of our Latin and Greek derivative words, as well as our Anglo-Saxon and French heritage. This is a coherent, comprehensive text for language teachers, as well as the general reader....

The groundbreaking history of the English language, fusing chronological with anecdotal and etymological accounts of individual word-histories, to create not one story, but many stories. The English language is now accepted as the global lingua franca of the modern age, spoken or written in by over a quarter of the human race. But how did it evolve? How did a language spoken originally by a few thousand Anglo-Saxons become one used by more than 1,500 million? What developments can be seen as we move from Beowulf to Chaucer to Shakespeare to Dickens and the present day? A host of fascinating questions are answered in *The Stories of English*, a groundbreaking history of the language by David Crystal, the world-renowned writer and commentator on English. Many books have been written about English, but they have all focused on a single variety: the educated, printed language called standard English. David Crystal turns the history of English on its head and instead provides a startlingly original view of where the richness, creativity and diversity of the language truly lies in the accents and dialects of nonstandard English users all over the world. Whatever their regional, social or ethnic background, each group has a story worth telling, whether it is in Scotland or Somerset, South Africa or Singapore. Interweaved within this central chronological story are accounts of uses of dialect around the world as well as in literary classics from *The Canterbury Tales* to *The Lord of the Rings*. For the first time, regional speech and writing is placed center stage, giving a sense of the social realities behind the development of English. This significant shift in perspective enables the reader to understand for the first time the importance of everyday, previously marginalized, voices in our language and provides an argument too for the way English should be taught in the future.

From Publishers WeeklyLeading British linguist Crystal (*Shakespeare's Words*) immediately distinguishes his pluralistic study of English's evolution from the standard, narrowly focused histories by describing not only how it evolved on an isolated island example from a Germanic language to the standard English we know today., but also on marginalized regional dialects, vernaculars and other "nonstandard" examples, beginning with the origins of Old English. He shows, for example, how even Chaucer and Shakespeare embraced dialects in *The Canterbury Tales* and *Henry V*. There are also lighter moments, such as Crystal's examination of the Anglo-Saxon intonations of Yoda in *Star Wars* and of Tolkien's Middle Earth idioms. Writing of the 18th century, the author contrasts the proscriptions of Dr. Johnson and others regarding spelling, grammar and pronunciation with the efforts of Americans such as Noah Webster to differentiate American from British English. (Regional and ethnic variations elsewhere in the British Empire receive more cursory treatment.) However, Crystal glosses over the current status struggle in the U.K. between more "authentic" dialects, such as the northern Liverpoolian, and newer ones, such as the suburban Estuary English. As for the language's future, Crystal wishes to see Standard English taught alongside familiarization with the varieties of dialects. Although he doesn't spell out how to accomplish this, his well-informed and appealing book makes a good case for the importance of dialects. 9 bw illus., 12 maps. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From Booklist*Starred * For at least 200 years, the story of English has been the story of Standard English triumphant. But now, in a work of unprecedented scope and range, a distinguished linguist challenges that deceptive hegemony, showing with piquant detail and lively anecdote that no standards of correctness have ever really contained the surging energy of English, in all its multiform varieties. From the syntactical inventiveness of tenth-century Norse invaders to the lexical ecumenism of twenty-first-century Tex-Mex ranch hands, Crystal traces the diverse and unpredictable influences that have shaped English into an unruly family of dialects, creoles, and patois. To be sure, Crystal acknowledges the emergence during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of a prestigious standard version of English. Yet he shows in instance after instance that the tempests of linguistic change have often overwhelmed the custodians of the King's English, compelling them to accommodate forces they could not control. And though he never loses his focus on language, Crystal allows some of its more colorful users--including Chaucer, Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson, and Thomas Jefferson--to bring their personalities and voices into the chronicle. Accessible to the nonspecialist, Crystal's rich chronicle still presses deeply enough into key episodes (the Great Vowel Shift and the Elizabethan effervescence, for instance) to entice even casual readers into the more scholarly sources listed at the end of the book. Why, after all, should professional philologists hog all the fun? Bryce

Christensen Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "This new history of the English language in all its manifestations is among the best ever written, and is both entertaining and informative."