



# Stories of Words: Food

By: Elfrieda H. Hiebert  
& Andrew G. Funk



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# Learning About Words

Every word has a history. Some of these histories, or origins, are quite surprising. Because people have come to the United States from countries around the world, many English words come from other languages. That is especially true for words about foods.





People who come from other countries bring both their language and their food with them. Many of these foods are quite different from the foods that English settlers brought to the United States.

Some foods from other countries have kept their original names. For example, pizza, which came from Italy, is called *pizza* in Italy and in the United States. In Italian, *pizza* means “pie.” Other foods have different names in different countries. For example, what we call “French fries” in the United States are called “chips” in England.

Learning a word's history can give you clues to its meaning.

A popular dish in England is deep fried fish and french fries. The dish is called fish and chips.





Even the names of meals have stories. The word *breakfast* is two words joined: *break* and *fast*. You probably know that *break* means: “to divide or split something.” The word *fast*, though has different meanings. In this word, it means “to eat very little or nothing.” When people awake from sleeping, they “break their fast,” or eat *breakfast*.







*Lunch* is a shortened form of luncheon, which originally meant “a thick piece of something.” Working people often had quick meals in the middle of the day with thick pieces of bread or cheese. Eating this way meant people could get back to work more quickly.

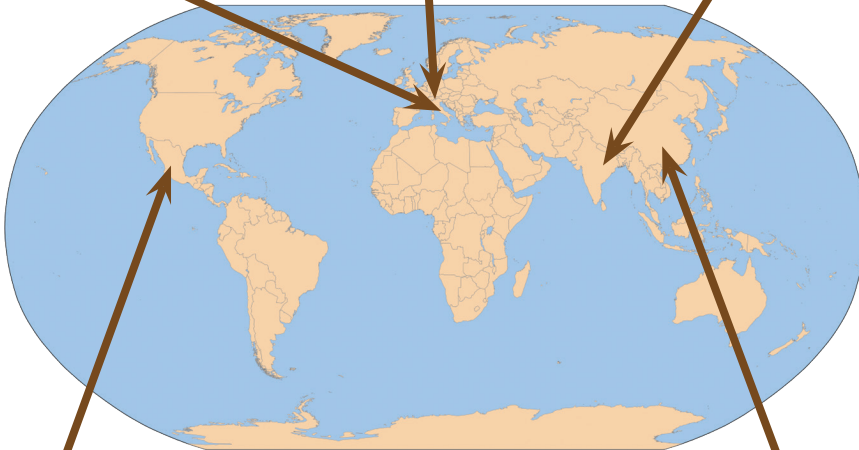
Some people call the evening meal *supper*, while others call it *dinner*. *Supper* came from the French word *soper*, which means “the last meal of the day.” *Dinner* also came from a French word, *disner*. In France, it first meant “breakfast,” but after the word came to England, it changed meaning. It now means “a meal eaten in the evening.”



# 1

# BREAD

Bread is a popular food in many countries because it can be made with only a few things, and those things don't cost a lot. Some breads look like the bread you use in a sandwich, but some breads look like cake. Some cakes even have the word *bread* in their names, such as *gingerbread*. Most breads, however, are of three kinds.





## Loaves of Bread

A loaf is a mass of dough that is usually baked in a rectangular or round shape. Before the word bread was used commonly for this food, it was called a *hlaf*, which became our word *loaf*.

Most of the breads eaten in the United States are named for the flours used to make them. White, whole wheat, and rye are examples. These breads usually have thinner crusts than the typical breads made in other countries. The *baguette*, which means “little rod” in French, is such a bread. It has a hard, thick crust that the French people prefer to be crisp.



## Flatbreads

As the name says, flatbreads are flat. The most popular flatbreads in the United States come from Italy. One thick flatbread with a light topping is called *focaccia*, which means “fireplace” in Italian. It got that name because that’s where people first made this bread.

When flatbread is round and topped with things like sauce and cheese, it may be called *pizza*. When it is filled with meat or cheese, it may be called *calzone*, which means “stocking” in Italian.







Some flatbreads are flat because they do not use yeast or baking powder. These products leaven the bread, or make it rise. Leavened breads have lots of little holes that make them airy, while unleavened breads do not. One kind of unleavened bread, matzoh, is eaten by Jewish people during a holiday called Passover.





Tortillas, which mean “tart” or “little cake” in Spanish, are another kind of *unleavened* bread. Fried pieces of this flatbread are popular as a snack: tortilla chips!







## Quickbreads

Quickbreads can be made quickly because they don't use yeast, which needs time to rise before baking. Many of the breads in this group have names that describe them. Examples include cornbread, which is made with ground corn, and pancakes, which are made in a pan.

This kind of bread looks and tastes more like a cake than a bread. That is because it is made with more sugar than bread, and it is often served as a dessert.

# 2

## NOODLES

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Thousands of years ago, people in different parts of the world figured out that a mixture of ground grains and water could be dried and stored safely. When food was needed, these dried materials could be boiled and eaten. In some countries, noodle flour is made from rice. In other countries, it is made from wheat, corn, and other grains. But the idea is the same. Ground grain is mixed with a liquid, such as water, then dried. Before eating, it is boiled.





Spaghetti



The English word *noodle* came from the German word *Nudel*. However, many of the noodles eaten in the United States are called by the Italian word for noodles: pasta. Pasta comes in many shapes, sizes, and lengths. Some pastas are smooth, while others

have ridges. Some have a filling, while others are hollow or solid.

Macaroni



Rotini



Raviloi



Lasagna





# Italian Noodles

The names of most pastas describe how they look. Here are some examples.

| Name for Pasta | How the Pasta Looks     | The Word's Meaning in Italian   |
|----------------|-------------------------|---|
| farfalle       | bow ties or butterflies | <i>farfalle</i> : butterflies   |
| linguini       | flat, narrow strips     | <i>linguini</i> : little tongues  |
| penne          | medium-sized tubes      | <i>penne</i> : feathers or quills   |
| spaghetti      | long, rod-like strands  | <i>spago</i> : a thin string or cord<br>( <i>spaghetti</i> : little strings or cords) |
| vermicelli     | long, very thin strands | <i>vermicelli</i> : little worms  |



Farfalle



Penne





## Chinese Noodles

Noodles have long been part of the diet in China. The oldest noodles were found in 2005 in northwest China. Scientists believe that they were made as long as 4,000 years ago.

Like pasta, Asian noodles can be thick or thin. Unlike Italian pasta, though, Asian noodles are often served long. In China, long noodles are a sign of a long life. They are often served at New Year celebrations and at special events, such as birthdays.



The Chinese call wheat noodles *mein*. When *mein* noodles are combined with other foods, another word is added, such as *chow mein*, which means “fried wheat noodles.” When noodles are made of rice, they are called *fen* or *fun*, such as *chow fun*, which means “fried rice noodles.”



# 3

## HOT DOGS

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Many people and cultures claim to have invented what today is called a hot dog. One popular story is that a worker in a meat market in Germany more than 100 years ago made a sausage that looked like his dog. The dog was a breed called a dachshund. Dachshunds are long and round, and they have a curve in their back. People who came to the meat market began calling it a dachshund sausage.





Since that time, as the story goes, a sausage in a bun has been called a hot dog, at least in the United States.

This certainly wasn't the first sausage, though. In fact, sausages were described as long ago as the ninth century BCE.

Hot dogs and sausages may not have a clear history, but one thing is sure. When they were put in a bun as a kind of sandwich, hot dogs became easy to eat. People no longer had to use plates; they could just hold the hot dog in a bun and eat it at a picnic, a ball game, or anywhere.





## Get Your Hot Dogs!

The invention of hot dogs has led to some fun stories, too. In the early 1900s, a man who drew cartoons for a newspaper was watching a baseball game. Someone was selling dachshund sausages at the game. The seller was calling out, “Get your red-hot dachshund sausages!”

Cartoonist Tad Dorgan thought that sounded funny, so he made a cartoon of a real dachshund in a bun. The story says that he didn’t know how to spell *dachshund*, so he changed the word *dachshund* sausage to “hot dog.”

## More About Hot Dogs

A hot dog is a kind of sausage. What is a sausage? A sausage contains ground meat that is packed into a casing or tube. The sausage is then salted, dried, or smoked. The word sausage is from a Latin word that means “salted.”

## Other Names for Hot Dogs

**Wieners:** from the German word Wien, meaning the city of Vienna. Vienna claims to have invented hot dogs.

**Frankfurters:** from the city of Frankfurt, Germany. This German city also claims to have invented hot dogs.





# Sausages

Many kinds of sausages are made in countries around the world. Here are some examples.



| Name for Sausage | Where It Was First Made | Word Story  |
|------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Bologna          | Bologna, Italy          | This sausage is sometimes called “baloney” in the United States.                    |
| Salami           | Italy                   | The name means “spiced pork sausage” in Italian.                                    |
| Bratwurst        | Germany                 | The name has two parts: brat means “lean meat” and wurst means “sausage” in German. |
| Chorizo          | Spain                   | The name means “spiced pork sausage” in Spanish.                                    |



# 4

## SANDWICHES

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Like hot dogs, many stories have been told about the invention of sandwiches. One is about the fourth Earl of Sandwich, in England. About 300 years ago, wealthy people often spent hours at dinner. The earl did not want to waste his time at long dinners. He preferred to play games. So, when he was hungry, he asked for a meal of meat served between two pieces of bread. The earl was not the first to make a sandwich, but the food was named for him.

People began putting meat between two pieces of bread many hundreds of years earlier. In fact, the sandwich was first described in the first century BCE. It was made from nuts, apples, spices, and wine that were mixed and put between two matzohs.







## Hamburgers

Today, many Americans say that hamburgers are their favorite sandwich. In fact, Americans eat an average of three hamburgers each week. That amounts to about 50 billion hamburgers each year! That's a lot of hamburgers.

The word *hamburger* comes from the German city of Hamburg. About 150 years ago, people living in Hamburg liked to eat beef that had been ground before it was cooked. This dish became known as Hamburger steak.

As time passed, *Hamburger steak* was shortened to *hamburger*, then to just *burger*. The sandwich we know as a hamburger, with grilled ground beef, was first recorded in 1885 in the United States.

Some Americans, though, don't eat hamburgers or any other kind of meat. Instead, they might eat burgers made from soy beans, mushrooms, or vegetables. Like burgers made from meat, these foods are formed into round shapes, cooked, and often served on bread or a bun.

## Other Kinds of Sandwiches

**Hoagies:** Hoagies were first made in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. People don't know how meat and cheese on rolls



came to be called “hoagies,” though. One story says that the people who worked on ships on Hog Island brought these sandwiches to work. The sandwich was named after the workers, who were called “hoggies.” Over time, the name changed to *hoagies*. This type of sandwich has many other names, too, including *heroes* and *subs*.

**Po' Boy** (also called Poor-Boy or Po-Boy): Almost 100 years ago in New Orleans, two brothers gave sandwiches to men who were on strike. Whenever one of these men came into their



restaurant, someone called out “Here comes another poor boy.” Then the cook would make this type of sandwich, which is like a hero. It was made with a loaf of crisp bread filled with crabs, ham, cheese, or even French fries. Later, *Poor Boy* was shortened to “po' boy.” The most popular type of po' boy is filled with fried oysters.





Another American sandwich does not need a story to explain its name: the peanut butter and jelly sandwich. These are eaten by children around the country—and adults, too!

# 5

# COOKIES

Cookies, biscuits, cake, crackers: could one thing have so many names? The answer is yes—if you know about the history of these foods.

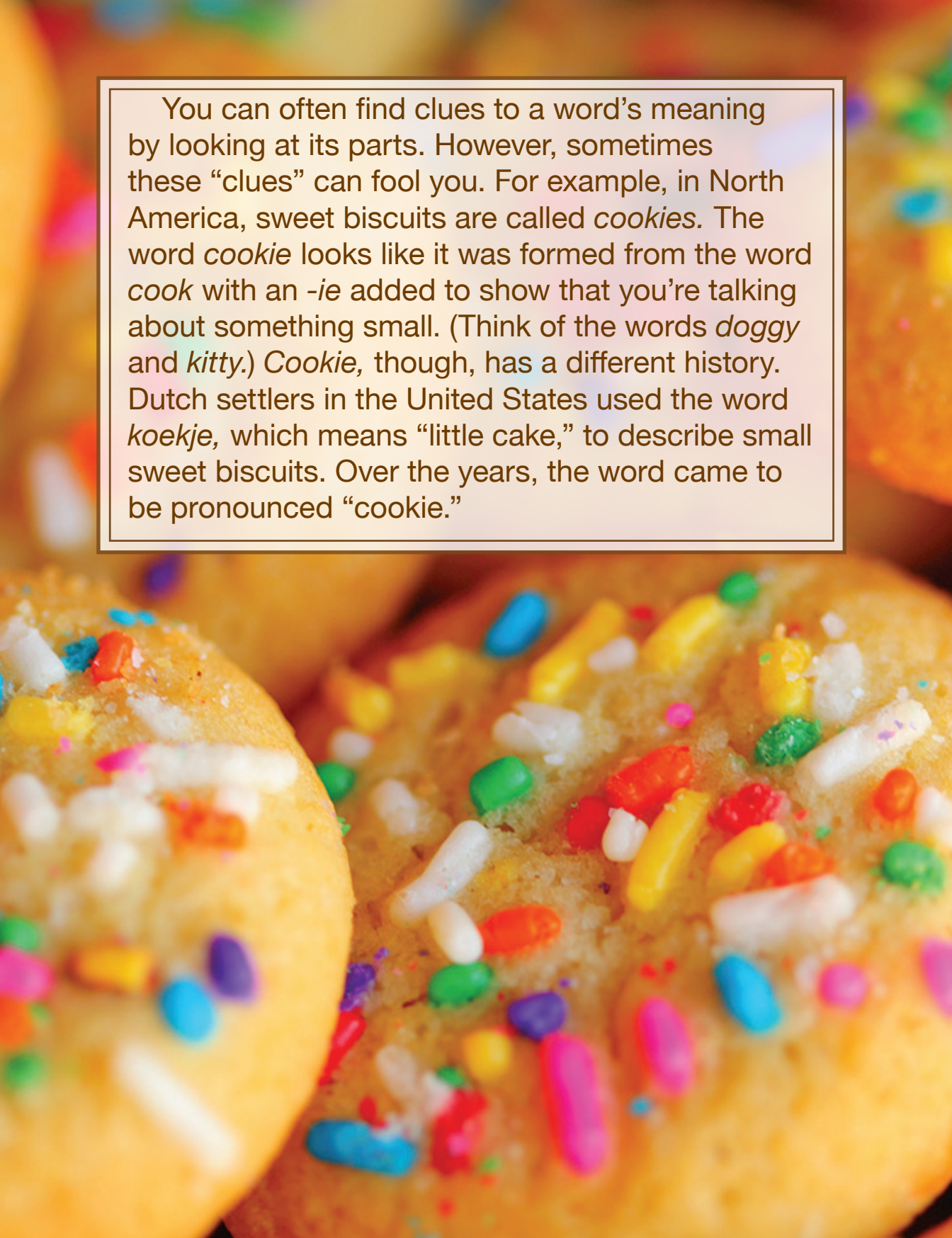




In English-speaking countries outside North America, cookies are called “biscuits.” *Biscuit* is an old word that comes from the Latin words “bis,” meaning “twice,” and “coctus,” meaning “baked.” Before ovens with thermometers were invented, cooks baked a small part of batter to see if the oven was hot enough. These bits of batter became known as “biscuits.” At that time, the name *biscuit* was given to all small pieces of baked dough, whether they were like bread or like cake.

About 250 years ago, bread-like biscuits began to be called *crackers* in the United States. This word came from *crack*, which means “to make a sharp noise,” in this case. Think of the sound crackers make when you break them.



A close-up photograph of several round, golden-brown cookies. The cookies are heavily decorated with a variety of colorful sprinkles, including red, yellow, green, blue, pink, and white. The background is softly blurred, showing more cookies and sprinkles, creating a warm and appetizing atmosphere.

You can often find clues to a word’s meaning by looking at its parts. However, sometimes these “clues” can fool you. For example, in North America, sweet biscuits are called *cookies*. The word *cookie* looks like it was formed from the word *cook* with an *-ie* added to show that you’re talking about something small. (Think of the words *doggy* and *kitty*.) *Cookie*, though, has a different history. Dutch settlers in the United States used the word *koekje*, which means “little cake,” to describe small sweet biscuits. Over the years, the word came to be pronounced “cookie.”





Small bits of baked dough have a very long history. Biscuits or crackers were made more than 10,000 years ago! At that time, early people baked a mixture of grain and water on hot stones.

Today, even though crackers and cookies are both made with grain, they are different from one another. Crackers are similar to bread, while cookies are similar to cake. Sometimes, though, the names seem mixed up. Two kinds of crackers taste like cookies but have the word *cracker* in their names: animal crackers and graham crackers. When you eat an animal cracker or a graham cracker, you're really eating a cookie, biscuit, cake, and cracker—all at the same time.



Usually, a cookie's name tells you something about what's inside, such as chocolate chip, peanut butter, or oatmeal raisin. Other cookies are named for their color, such as brownies. But there are a few cookies with names that don't tell anything about what's inside them or what they look like. Here are stories about three of them.



## Other Kinds of Cookies

**Shortbread:** You may not think of a sweet treat when you hear the word *shortbread*, but that is what it is. Cooks say a cookie has a *short* dough when it has a lot of butter, which is also called *shortening*. The word *shortening* means “making something crumbly.” Shortbread is a kind of thick, crumbly cookie.



**S'mores:** This is a strange name for a roasted marshmallow and a piece of chocolate sandwiched between two graham crackers. However, “I want some more, please” is hard to say with a hot marshmallow in your mouth. You can probably say “s'more,” though. Some similar sandwich cookies also have strange names, such as moon pies.



**Snickerdoodles:** No one knows how a sugar cookie rolled in cinnamon and sugar got the name *snickerdoodles*. It's probably a nonsense word, but old cookbooks have lots of strange names for cookies, including *jumbles* and *cry babies*. These cookies aren't popular today, but snickerdoodles are.



# Our Changing Language

Many words have changed over the years. Some changed when they moved from one language into another. Some changed even in their first language as people said them differently or gave them different meanings. Knowing a word's history can help you understand and remember it. It's also fun to follow clues to find a word's secret history!





# Glossary

**biscuit:** a small piece of bread made with baking powder or soda; a thin, crisp cracker; a cookie

**breakfast:** the first meal of the day, usually eaten in the morning

**dachshund:** a small dog developed in Germany for hunting badgers. Dachshunds have long bodies, short brown or black fur, long ears, and very short legs.

**dinner:** the main meal of the day, eaten either in the evening or in the early afternoon

**lunch:** a meal eaten in the early afternoon

**sausage:** chopped and seasoned meat, especially pork, that is usually stuffed into a casing, and then cooked or cured

**shortbread:** a cookie made of flour, sugar, and butter or other shortening

**s'mores:** a treat popular in the United States and Canada, that has a roasted marshmallow and a piece of chocolate sandwiched between two graham crackers

**snickerdoodles:** a type of sugar cookie that is coated with cinnamon sugar

**unleavened:** made without yeast or anything else that causes batter or dough to rise



# Think About It

- Sometimes families call a food by a name that is different from the names others use. Does your family have any foods like that? If yes, find out where that name came from and what it means.
- People have invented strange combinations of food, such as French fries with spicy chili sauce. What strange combination of foods do you enjoy? What is something that sounds strange but you think might taste good?
- Think of a new name for food you already know. In two or three sentences, explain why you chose that name.





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