Your English Toolbox

VOCABULARY · EPISODE 250

Why Do Onions Make Us Cry? | Curious English

English learning resource · EN

Key words & expressions · English

8 learning entries

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

1

chop

DEF

to cut food into small pieces with a knife

to cut something, such as wood, with quick, heavy strokes

Chop is rougher and less exact than slice. We chop onions, garlic, herbs, nuts and wood. 'Chop up' stresses that the pieces are small.

Could you chop the garlic while I heat the oil?

He chopped the old branch into small pieces for the fire.

2

irritate

DEF

to make a part of the body sore, red or uncomfortable

to make someone a little angry or impatient

For eyes and skin the meaning is physical. For people it is milder than 'enrage'. Related words: irritated (how you feel), irritating (what causes it), irritation (the noun).

Strong perfume can irritate your nose and throat.

It irritates me when people talk during a film.

3

watery eyes

DEF

Eyes that contain or produce a noticeable amount of tears, often because of irritation.

Watery eyes often describes a physical reaction to wind, smoke or an allergy; it does not by itself tell you how someone feels.

The cold wind gave me watery eyes on the way to work.

The smoke from the barbecue gave everyone watery eyes.

4

tear

DEF

(noun, sounds like 'ear') a drop of liquid that comes from the eye

(verb, sounds like 'bear') to pull something apart into pieces; irregular: tear, tore, torn

Same spelling, two pronunciations and two meanings. The eye-drop tear rhymes with 'ear'; the verb tear rhymes with 'bear'. The sentence tells you which one it is.

A single tear ran down her cheek.

Be careful not to tear your sleeve on that nail.

5

chain of reactions

DEF

a series of events or chemical changes in which each one causes the next

Common in science, but also in everyday talk ('a chain of events'). A chain reaction is a close phrase for a process that keeps causing more of itself.

The first mistake started a chain of reactions that delayed the whole project.

In the cell, one signal can set off a chain of reactions.

6

enzyme

DEF

a protein made by living things that helps a chemical reaction happen

Pronounced EN-zyme. Each enzyme usually works on one kind of substance. You meet the word in talk about digestion, cooking and cleaning products.

Enzymes in your saliva start to break down food in your mouth.

Washing powders with enzymes can remove food stains.

7

prediction

DEF

a statement about what you think will happen in the future

We make, give or check a prediction. Unlike a fact, it can be wrong; a prediction based on evidence is stronger than a simple guess.

My prediction is that the train will be late again.

The weather prediction said rain, but it was sunny.

8

damage

DEF

(verb) to harm something so that it is less good, useful or healthy

(noun) harm caused to something

As a verb it takes an object ('damage the cells'). As a noun it is uncountable: 'a lot of damage', not 'damages'. 'Damages' is a legal word for money paid as compensation.

The storm damaged several roofs in the village.

Too much sun can damage your skin.