

# Word of the Day

June 6 – June 12

**Highlighted word:** New word. Unsure about its meaning or pronunciation.

## capricious

adjective | kə-ˈpri-shəs | kuh-PRISH-us | June 6, 2020

### Definition

: governed or characterized by [caprice](#) : [impulsive](#), [unpredictable](#)

### Did You Know?

The noun [caprice](#), which first appeared in English in the mid-17th century, is a synonym of [whim](#). Evidence shows that the adjective *capricious* debuted before *caprice*; both words are believed to derive, via French, from Italian *capriccio*, which originally referred not to a sudden desire but to a sudden [shudder](#) of fear. The origin of *capriccio* is uncertain, but the going theory has a certain charm. *Capriccio* is thought to perhaps be a compounding of Italian *capo*, meaning "head," and *riccio*, meaning "[hedgehog](#)," The image evoked in this "hedgehog head" mashup is of someone shuddering in fear to such a degree that their hair stands on end, like the [spines](#) of a hedgehog.

[caprice \(n.\): a sudden, impulsive, and seemingly unmotivated notion or action.](#)

[whim \(n.\): a capricious or eccentric and often sudden idea or turn of the mind: FANCY](#)

[shudder \(n.\): the act of shuddering.](#)

[shudder \(v.\): to tremble convulsively: SHIVER, QUIVER](#)

[hedgehog \(n.\): any of a subfamily \(Erinaceinae\) of Eurasian and African nocturnal insectivores that have both hair and spines which they present outwardly by rolling themselves up when threatened](#)

[spine \(n.\): a sharp, pointed part on an animal or plant](#)

### Examples

"Like all great children's writers, [Jacqueline] Wilson and [E.] Nesbit understood how strange and *capricious* children could be...." — [Guy Lodge, Variety, 4 Apr. 2020](#)

"[The television show] *Succession* doesn't just get the details right; mirroring the *capricious* world of media and its greedy [overlords](#), it also makes sweeping plot turns that build to [climaxes](#) as bloody as *Macbeth*." — [Laura Adamczyk, The A.V. Club, 11 Nov. 2019](#)

[overlord \(n.\): An absolute or supreme ruler. One having great power or authority.](#)

[Climax \(n.\): The point of highest dramatic tension or a major turning point in the action \(as of a play\).](#)

# advocate

verb | 'ad-və-, kāt | AD-vuh-kayt | June 7, 2020

## Definition

: to support or argue for (a cause, policy, etc.) : to [plead](#) in favor of

## Did You Know?

Benjamin Franklin may have been a great innovator in science and politics, but on the subject of *advocate*, he was against change. In 1789, he wrote a letter to his compatriot Noah Webster complaining about a "new word": the verb *advocate*. Like others of his day, Franklin knew *advocate* primarily as a [noun](#) meaning "one who pleads the cause of another," and he urged Webster to condemn the verb's use. In truth, the verb wasn't as new as Franklin assumed (etymologists have traced it back as far as 1599), though it was apparently surging in popularity in his day. Webster evidently did not heed Franklin's plea. His famous 1828 dictionary, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, entered both the noun and the verb senses of *advocate*.

## Examples

"During quarantine, teachers are broadcasting lessons from their own homes and figuring out new remote-learning technology and platforms on the fly, all while continuing to educate and connect with our kids. *Advocating* for the children of the world is no easy task, so I wanted to show teachers a little extra love right now." — [Reese Witherspoon, quoted in \*The Hollywood Reporter\*, 2 Apr. 2020](#)

"As a journalist, [Zimbabwean Zororo] Makamba often used his platform to *advocate* for reform and transparency. In his online talk show, 'State of the Nation,' as well as appearances on other current affairs programs, Makamba argued for renewable energy, school reform, anti-corruption measures and youth empowerment." — [Andrew R. Chow, \*Time\*, 3 Apr. 2020](#)

# gest

noun | 'jest | JEST | June 8, 2020

## Definition

1 : a tale of adventures; *especially* : a [romance](#) in verse

2 : [adventure](#), [exploit](#)

## Did You Know?

"Let the Queen know of our gests," Antony instructs his men after a hard-won victory on the battlefield in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Great deeds and heroic acts have been the stuff of gests since medieval days; in fact, the word is more often associated with knights and heroes of old

than with modern adventurers. We may not be hearing about many 21st century *gests*, but we do frequently encounter other relatives of the word. *Gest* traces to Latin *gestus*, the past participle of the verb *gerere*, which means "to wage," "to bear," or "to carry," among other things. That Latin verb gave us **stoutly** enduring words like *gesture*, *ingest*, *jest*, *register*, and *suggest*.

**stout** (adj.): strong of character: such as a: BRAVE, BOLD. b: FIRM, DETERMINED.

## Examples

"The best authentic source of Robin Hood stories is the late medieval poem *A Gest of Robyn Hode...*, a compilation of traditional **ballads** and stories." — Guy McDonald, *England*, 2003

**ballad** (n.): a narrative composition in rhythmic verse suitable for singing.

"I was looking forward to this film [*Onward*] for the last month. My mom follows 'new' movie trailers and called me as soon as she saw this one. The *gest* was essentially an adventure about two brothers." — [Andrew McManus, \*The Portsmouth \(Ohio\) Daily Times\*, 11 Mar. 2020](#)

## lissome

adjective | 'li-səm | LISS-um | June 9, 2020

### Definition

**1 a** : easily flexed

**b** : characterized by easy flexibility and grace : **lithe**

**2** : **nimble**

**lithe** (adj.): easy bent or flexed

**nimble** (adj.): quick and light in motion: AGILE

### Did You Know?

*Lissome* (sometimes spelled *lissom*) is a gently altered form of its synonym, *lithesome*. While *lissome* tends to be the more popular choice these days, the two words have similar pasts. They both appeared in the 18th century, and they both trace back to the much older *lithe*, which first appeared in English during the 14th century and comes from an Old English word meaning "gentle." *Lissome* can also be an adverb meaning "in a **supple** or nimble manner," but this use is rare.

**supple** (adj.): compliant often to the point of obsequiousness.

## Examples

"A couple of images haunt me from this 'West Side Story,' and both do come from video. One is of an anonymous, *lissome* figure, barely detectable as he or she dances at the end of a long, dark street. The

other is of a television playing while Maria and Anita are arguing about a recent gang slaying." — [Ben Brantley, \*The New York Times\*, 20 Feb. 2020](#)

"The visiting Americans ... look **dazed**, like astronauts observing *lissome* green Martian women in a '50s sci-fi **cheapie**." — [David Edelstein, \*Vulture\*, 23 Aug. 2019](#)

**dazed** (adj.): unable to think clearly or act normally due to injury, shock, bewilderment, fatigue, etc.

**cheapie** (n.): one that is cheap. *especially*: an inexpensively produced motion picture.

## troubadour

Noun | 'trü-bə-, dör | TROO-buh-dor | June 10, 2020

### Definition

**1** : one of a class of [lyric](#) poets and poet-musicians often of knightly rank who flourished from the 11th to the end of the 13th century chiefly in the south of France and the north of Italy and whose major theme was **courtly love**

**courtly love** (n.): a late medieval conventionalized code prescribing conduct and emotions of ladies and their lovers.

**2** : a singer especially of **folk** songs

**folk music** (n.): the traditional music of the people in a country or region. *also*: a type of popular music that is based on traditional music and that does not use electric instruments.

### Did You Know?

In the Middle Ages, troubadours were the shining knights of poetry (in fact, some were ranked as high as knights in the feudal class structure). Troubadours made [chivalry](#) a high art, writing poems and singing about chivalrous love, creating the **mystique** of refined **damsels**, and glorifying the gallant knight on his **charger**. *Troubadour* was a fitting name for such creative artists: it derives from an [Old Occitan](#) word meaning "to compose." In modern contexts, *troubadour* still refers to the song-**meisters** of the Middle Ages, but it has been extended to cover contemporary poet-musicians as well.

**mystique** (n.): an air or attitude of mystery and reverence developing around something or someone.

**damsel** (n.): a young woman

**charger** (n.): a horse for battle or parade

**meister** (n.): one who is knowledgeable about something specified —often used in combination.

### Examples

"John Prine was a **raspy**-voiced **heartland** *troubadour* who wrote and performed songs about faded hopes, failing marriages, flies in the kitchen and the desperation of people just getting by. He was, as one of his songs put it, the **bard** of 'broken hearts and dirty windows.'" — [Matt Schudel, \*The Independent\* \(UK\), 19 Apr. 2020](#)

**raspy** (adj.): harsh, grating, irritable.

Heartland (n.): a central area

bard (n.): poet

"With strict [social distancing](#) and isolation directives in place at care centers and assisted living facilities, Bressan has adopted the role of a wandering *troubadour*, offering songs both sacred and secular from outside the windows of patients like Sherry." — [Jon Pompia, \*The Pueblo \(Colorado\) Chieftain\*, 8 Apr. 2020](#)

## vilipend

Verb | 'vi-lə-,pend | VIL-uh-pend | June 11, 2020

### Definition

1 : to hold or treat as of little worth or account : [contemn](#)

2 : to express a low opinion of : [disparage](#)

[contemn \(v.\): to view or treat with contempt: SCORN](#)

### Did You Know?

*Vilipend* first appeared in English in the 15th century and had its heyday during the 19th century—being found in the works of such well-known authors as Sir Walter Scott, William Makepeace Thackeray, and George Meredith—but it fell into relative obscurity by the 20th century. The word comes to us through French from the Latin roots *vilis*, meaning "cheap" or "vile," and *pendere*, meaning "to weigh" or "to estimate." These roots work in tandem to form a meaning of "to deem to be of little worth." Each has contributed separately to some other common English words. Other *vilis* offspring include [vile](#) and [vilify](#), while *pendere* has spawned such terms as [append](#), [expend](#), and [dispense](#).

### Examples

As a women's rights movement pioneer, [Susan B. Anthony](#) fought against the [dicta](#) of those who would *vilipend* women by treating them as second-class citizens.

[dictum \(n.\): a noteworthy statement such as a formal pronouncement of a principle, preposition, or opinion](#)

"Most people who retire do so after having invested multiple years in employment.... Most are on fixed incomes with tight budgets, hoping for good health and years of stress-free happiness. To *vilipend* them about their choice of not working, even if they are healthy enough, is just not fair." — John F. Sauer, letter in *The Rochester (New York) Democrat and Chronicle*, 26 June 2005

# fictitious

Adjective | fik-'ti-shəs | fik-TISH-us | June 12, 2020

## Definition

**1** : of, relating to, or characteristic of [fiction](#) : [imaginary](#)

**2 a** : conventionally or hypothetically assumed or accepted

**b of a name** : [false](#), [assumed](#)

**3** : not genuinely felt

## Did You Know?

*Fictitious* is related to the Medieval Latin word *ficticius*, meaning "artificial," "imaginary," "feigned," or "fraudulent." It was first used in English as an antonym for [natural](#). For instance, a fake diamond would be referred to as a fictitious one. This use indicates the word's deeper Latin roots: *ficticius* is from the Latin verb *ingere*, meaning "to mold, fashion, make a likeness of; pretend to be." Nowadays, *fictitious* is no longer used for physical things shaped by the human hand. Rather, it is typically used for imaginative creations or for feigned emotions.

feigned (adj.): not genuine or real

## Examples

"'Outbreak' follows a team of U.S. Army medical researchers as they struggle to contain a *fictitious* disease, dubbed the Motaba virus, that's quickly spreading in a California town. In the film, they're successful in halting it in its [tracks](#)." — [Brent Lang, Variety, 15 Apr. 2020](#)

in one's tracks: where one stands or is at the moment: on the spot

"Forensic auditors released details of their findings at the last regular [trustee](#) meeting, noting that more than \$14 million was mismanaged.... About \$600,000 was spent on lavish travel by former administrators and on payments to what appears to be a *fictitious* vendor." — [Eva-Marie Ayala, The Dallas Morning News, 1 May 2020](#)

trustee (n.): a natural or legal person to whom property is legally committed to be administered for the benefit of a beneficiary (such as a person or a charitable organization).