



RICH TASK ACTIVITY **Pittsburgh: Yinz Play!**

This engaging rich task was developed by the Education Department of the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh. Rich tasks are open-ended classroom investigations designed for students working alone or in a group and may be conducted before or after your visit to the Children's Museum to enhance your experience in the Pittsburgh: Yinz Play! exhibit.

This Rich Task complements the *Pittsburghese Illustrated Word Play* exhibit component of Pittsburgh: Yinz Play!

Say Wah?!

Have you and your friends or family ever created a word or phrase that is special to you?

Suggested Materials

- Paper
- Pencil

Task Tools

- Say Wah?! (see Rich Task Tool Sheet)
- An inquiring mind!

Investigation

- Write about a word or phrase that is special or unique to you.

Teacher Hints

- Sharing a special language such as “Pittsburghese” gives our city and its neighboring communities both a sense of pride and belonging. The local dialect is a culmination of the rich cultural ties to many of the many ethnic groups that make up Pittsburgh and the slang of the working class that once ruled the city’s steely past. Some of the most prominent Pittsburghese words and phrases include: “yinz,” “dahtahn” (downtown), or failing to use the words “to be” when saying that something needs to be done (ex. the car needs washed.) And while the origins of this shared language are deep in our roots and imbedded in our history, the pride in continuing this tradition remains today.
- Try priming the students’ language skills with a game of Mad Gab®. Then discuss the similarities between the game and Pittsburghese.
- Explore the evolution of language by introducing words or phrases that are no longer used, such as: fortnight, groovy, and By George. Then review the ones that have been recently invented to accommodate our growing and changing world, such as: bling, tweeting, gastric bypass, swine flue. For more information, visit <http://blog.oup.com/2009/11/unfriend/> and www.askoxford.com/worldofwords/newwords/?view=uk.
- Introduce students the word *etymology* and its definition, which is “the study of the history of words and how their form and meaning have changed over time.” Then investigate a list of words and their etymology. Here are some examples:
 - The English word circus is derived from the Greek *kirkos*, which means circle or ring.
 - The English word choreography comes from the Greek *khoreia*, which means dance.Brainstorm other words that the students would like to know the origins of, and look them up in a dictionary, or online at www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=a. Write out a dictionary definition and point out the abbreviated language of origin (ex: *Fr.* for French).

Questions to Think About:

- Have you and your friends or family ever created a word or phrase that is special to you?
- How did that word or phrase begin?
- How has it evolved or changed over time?
- Do you think that you will continue to use the word or phrase in years to come?
- Do other people understand what you are saying? Do you want them to?
- Was the word or phrase influenced by your cultural heritage?
- Was the word or phrase influenced by someone's ability to talk, such as a baby or toddler?

Ways to Extend Your Investigation:

- Keep a journal of unique words and phrases that you hear throughout the day and their meanings.
- Present your word or phrase to your classmates.
- Develop your own classroom language.
- Research and explore Pittsburghese and other dialects.
- Lead a debate on how long Pittsburghese and other dialects will last by dividing the class into opposing teams. Those who believe it will last forever may fight on the grounds of its importance to our hometown pride while those who believe it will become a thing of the past may point out the effects of more people moving around the country and more people pursuing higher levels of education.

Standards

This rich task addresses the following Pennsylvania State Academic Standards:

- 1.5 Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. Quality of Writing
- 1.6 Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. Speaking and Listening
- 1.7 Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. Characteristics and Function of the English Language

With some variation, this rich task can also address the following Pennsylvania State Academic Standards:

- 1.8 Reading, Writing, Speaking, & Listening. Research
- 7.3 Geography. The Human Characteristics of Places and Regions
- 8.2 History. Pennsylvania History
- 9.1 Arts and Humanities. Production, Performance and Exhibition of Dance, Music, Theatre and Visual Arts

Explore More – Other Resources

Websites:

- www.carnegielibrary.org/research/pittsburgh/pittsburghese.html
- www.cit.cmu.edu/current_students/services/pittsburghese.html
- <http://english.cmu.edu/pittsburghspeech/index.html>
- <http://pittsburgh.about.com/library/weekly/aa071200a.htm>
- www.pittsburghese.com
- www.sesraw.com/Birdra/pitt.htm

Books:

- American Voices: How Dialects Differ from Coast to Coast.* Walt Wolfram (2005)
- How We Talk: American Regional English Today.* Allan Metcalf (2000)
- The Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang and Unconventional English.* Tom Dalzell (2008)
- Sam McCool's New Pittsburghese: How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher.* Sam McCool (1982)
- The Tongue-In-Cheek Guide to Pittsburgh - New, Mini-Version.* Ken and Jackie Abel (1997)

Tell us what you think!

Please share your results and feedback with us and other educators by sending to:
education@pittsburghkids.org

