

2.6 GERMANISMS-GERMAN WORDS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

? FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- What is cultural diffusion?
- How is it reflected in language?

STANDARD #1 CULTURE.

LESSON OVERVIEW:

In order to understand the concept of cultural diffusion, students will study words in the English language which derive from German *loanwords* or eponyms. They will have the opportunity to create stories and other activities to illustrate their understanding of these words.

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Language, like many aspects of culture, is not static; it does not consist of a finite collection of words. In fact, new words and expressions continuously come into use as a result of the interaction of peoples. In the eighteenth century, the German

poet Goethe said, “He who doesn’t know foreign languages, doesn’t know his own.” (*Wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiß auch nichts von seiner eigenen*). If one studies the etymology of the English language (the origin and history of words), one may discover that there are many English words which are *loanwords*, that is, words that are borrowed from other languages, including German. These words have become a natural part of everyday English vocabulary. Words that are German in origin may be regarded as “Germanisms”, and words that are based on the names of German people or places are called German eponyms.



Here are a few examples of loanwords and eponyms derived from German: Young children attend a *Kindergarten* (children’s garden). When a person sneezes and you say, *Gesundheit* you are wishing that person (good) “health.” When something is broken, it’s *kaputt* (kaput). Psychologists speak of *Angst* (fear or anxiety) and *Gestalt* (form) psychology. Musical works can have a *Leitmotiv*. *Zeitgeist* refers to the “spirit of the times.” Something that appeals to popular or lowbrow taste and may be of poor quality is referred to as *kitsch*. The addition of the German prefix *über* (meaning over, above, or beyond) with English words, such as *ubercool* or *ubercharming*, often denotes a tone of sarcasm. Sometimes words such as *schadenfreude* are used in English, because there are no real English equivalents – these words are idiomatic.

🕒 TIME:

(1) 45 minute class period

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:

- German *Loanwords* (**Handout 2.6.1 on Instructional Resource Disc**)

PROCEDURE:

ANTICIPATORY SET: The teacher should introduce the concept of cultural diffusion as a component of the geographic theme of “movement” and ask the students to generate a “word wall” of examples of cultural diffusion in our society. (Examples may include food such as tacos or spaghetti, or sports such as karate or judo).

- Next, the teacher should introduce the concept of cultural diffusion as it relates to the etymology of English words. The teacher should define *loanword* and eponym.
- The teacher should distribute the list of aforementioned “Germanisms” in English and ask the students to review the words and identify how many they already know. Are there any categories that these words fall into?
- As a class exercise, the teacher should distribute the *Loanwords Worksheet (Handout 1.6.1 on Instructional Resource Disc)* that defines some “Germanisms”.
- For homework, the teacher should assign the writing of a story using as many “Germanisms” as possible.

WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:

- The teacher should facilitate a discussion on how the study of German *loanwords* illustrates the concept of cultural diffusion.

MODIFICATION:

- Rather than assign the writing of a short story, the teacher might expand the assignment by allowing the students the option of other written expression: letter, postcard, bumper stickers, tourism advertisement, etc. Or, the teacher may allow other forms of expression (graphic/visual, musical, kinesthetic, artistic, etc.). Example: the students might compose and perform a rap song based on the list of words.

EXTENSIONS:

- The teacher may assign the students to write skits that include “Germanisms” or create and film their own videoed programs.
- As a language extension, the students may research the Top 10 German phrases they would need to learn, practice, and use when traveling in Germany.