

digitus

[DI gi toos] finger, toe, inch

digit - finger, numerals from 0 to 9, unit of measure the width of a finger (3/4 of an inch)

digital computer - a computer which uses numerals to mean whole numbers and decimal fractions

digitalis - the "foxglove" plant from which heart medicine is made

prestidigitation - (praesto - at hand, prompt) - a fast-fingered or sleight-of-hand performance of magic or of card tricks

Teaching Notes:

Digit - Since fingers were used for counting, it's no surprise that the Arabic numerals came to be called "digits". (See Appendix I: Roman Numerals.)
Digital computer - Digital computers use numerals to mean whole numbers and decimal fractions, as opposed to analog computers which use numerals to mean units of measurement (like voltage, resistance, or rotations - things which engineers work with).
Digitalis - The leaves of the foxglove are dried and used as part of a medicine for heart ailments. In 1542, a man named Fuchs gave the plant its Latin botanical name, digitalis, because he thought it a good translation of the German name "fingerhut", which means finger hat or thimble. The purple flowers are little bell- or thimble-shaped finger-size cylinders.

Extra Words:

Prestidigitator - A trickster who knows "the hand is quicker than the eye." A prestidigital person is "light fingered" and may be an artist of "legerdemain" (French for "light of hand"); but may be a pickpocket or a petty thief!

caput
capitis

[KAH poot, KAH pi tis] head

capút - "off with his head"

capital - top of a column; head, chief or foundation money

capitalism - system where the "head money" makes money

captain - head of a group of soldiers

capitulate - put headings on chapters or divisions in a piece of writing

recapitulate - (re - again) - to list again the "headings" in a piece of writing

cabbage - vegetable "head"

Teaching Notes:

Now that the words for numbers have been introduced, we will turn to a set of human body words for two reasons. 1) The meaning of the root word is clear and accessible to children no matter how young. 2) Words for one's head, hands, feet, etc., must have been the sources for earliest metaphors. One uses metaphors to express one's understanding of something new or unfamiliar in terms of something well known and close Cabbage is a good case in point. Cabbages growing look like heads. As the head governs what the body does, so does a captain govern or direct what his soldiers do; and the capital or "head money" sets a business or enterprise going and producing goods that people need and want. In various times in history when "beheading" was the execution of choice, poor Marie Antoinette and Anne Boleyn were "capút". In a less grisly vein, when we do something foolish, we speak of "losing our heads" but we are hardly "capút".

Extra Words:

Capitol - From the Roman Capitoline Hill where the Emperors and government were located. Literally, it means a citadel or fortress on the head or top of a hill. Our state and national government legislative buildings are called capitols.

manus

[MAH noos] hand

manufacture - (facio, factum - making) - make by hand

manifest - (festus - hit) - to hit by hand; easily perceived

manicotti - (manica - sleeve) - sleeve-like pasta

manuscript - (scribo, scriptum - write) - writing, written
by hand

manumit - (mitto, missum - send) - to send forth or release
from one's hand (grasp)

Teaching Notes:

The Latin word for “hand” in English derivatives seems to be used more often literally than metaphorically. Metaphor itself is from the Greek words meta - over, beyond, and pherein - to carry, and refers to the use of a simple word or concrete term which is used to describe something else less familiar or more abstract in such a way that the latter is better understood by analogy to the simpler. For example, manifest is used to mean evident or clearly seen, but literally means it hits you like a hand. Picture someone who slaps his forehead as he says “Oh! I see! I get it!” Maybe someone could bring some manicotti to class so everyone could see how much like little sleeves they are (picture the tiny hands that could go through them!)

Extra Words:

Manual refers to using one's hand to do something - to operate manual controls on a machine rather than using automatic ones. It also means a “handbook” of instructions for doing something.

pes
pedis

[PĀS, PEH dis] foot

pedestal - foot of a column

pedestrian - walker - on foot

pedal - foot lever

peddle, peddler - house-to-house salesman

pedicab - bicycle taxi

pedicure - (curo, curatum - care) - care for the feet

pedigree - ("ped de grue" - crane's foot) - genealogy charts

pedometer - measures distance walked

pawn - (in chess) - the foot soldiers

Teaching Notes:

More metaphors! Pedestal, being that part of a column (the architectural support for the roof of a temple or house) which is like "my feet". Pedestrian, pedal, peddle, pedicab, pedicure, pedometer, and pawn all use "foot" literally. Pedigree is something else! It is an Anglicized pronunciation of the French words "ped de grue" which means foot of the crane (grus being Latin for "crane"). Ancestral charts - which give branching lines for listing one's parents and their parents, etc. looked like a crane's foot to some Frenchman. His whimsical description of a family chart was first used in English in 1410, according to our friends who wrote the OED (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

Extra Words:

A word about words like pediatrician which do not come from pes, pedis but rather from the Greek paidos - child + iatros - physician. These two roots are easy to confuse in English derivatives unless this is pointed out. Since iatros - physician is Greek, the Greek word podos - foot is used in the derivative podiatrist - a foot doctor. No need to confuse these when you know the difference!

bracchium

[BRAH key oom] arm

brace - two of a kind - (one for each arm?)

embrace - (em - in, into) - to take into one's arms

bracelet - ornament for the arm or wrist

brachiate - to swing by the arms on bars or tree branches

brachiopod - (podos [Gr.] - foot) - two-shelled creature
with two "arms" inside with which to bring in food

bracero - Spanish word for day laborer (with two strong
arms!)

Teaching Notes:

Brachiopod is actually a Greek derivative. The Romans borrowed the Greek word brachion, arm, and for peculiar reasons of their own, added an extra "c" to the spelling. You will find bracchium in Latin dictionaries, but our English derivatives have all dropped the extra "c" so there is no reason to bring the children into this ancient argument. To make this word clear, someone had better look up brachiopod in the encyclopedia and draw a picture of one on the board! We seldom hear people speaking of a "brace", meaning a set of two, any more. We tend to say "a pair" instead. But 100 years ago, you might hear, "Father brought home a brace of pheasants for dinner." Embrace illustrates how flexible some Latin prefixes are. Em - is an alternate spelling of en - which means "in, into". Which one is used depends on the letter which comes next. Em is easier to say before "b" in brace.

Extra Words:

There are several other kinds of braces to discuss: a set of suspenders for trousers; a support for a wall or anything that needs to be held up; a two-arm handle for rotating a drill bit; a drawing up of one's muscles, nerves, and courage against an attack, "Brace yourself!"