

There are approximately 171,146 words in the English language.

Some I like. Nepotism. Millipede. Gargantuan. Velvet is my favorite. It glides smoothly from my lips, complex in a way that I can't quite describe. It reminds me of a cat's tongue, hooked and rough and rasping, but that is not what I mean when I speak it. A gargantuan millipede? Terrifying. Nepotism? I don't have the most positive view of it.

Words are confusing. In this perilous moment, I am perplexed, bewildered, and a multitude of other descriptors. Thesaurus.com would tell you that 43 words and phrases describe how I feel at this time. I don't accept this. I may very well be puzzled, bewildered, and at a loss, thank you, but I also feel as if I am a sailor lost at sea, longing beyond my own knowledge for the wind to carry me to shore. I am a 7th grader wondering why there are letters in math. I am a dog that doesn't know what a car is. There are thousands of patterns and combinations in which to organize fragments of language to describe a feeling as common as confusion.

Words are infinite. Words can be anything. A beautiful word can mean something foul, and the most revolting sounds can describe something exquisite. "Languid" seems as if it could be the name of a high-end wine, and "fudge" feels more along the lines of a new pair of shoes squelching in the mud.

Words can double-speak. He drank whine. She birthed a sun. I gazed upon the see. Words can be like siblings- completely different in every way, but still related, somehow. They can be pretty and pulchritudinous. They can be drivel and poppycock.

Some words sound exactly as you would expect. They fit right into their clothes. Awful words that mean awful things, like leech, gunk, pus, and screech. Ick. Pleasant words that mean pleasant things: ethereal, epiphany, lullaby, serendipity. It can be said that words are like music- but, just like music, a word doesn't have to be complicated to be nice on the ears. Velvet, honey, chocolate. These words are simple, yet lovely.

Artists live in parallel. They share a spark- a way of looking that does not concern the eyes. A painter will work at her easel and see more than paint. She will see the strokes that she has left upon it. She will see its path, its journey to this point, because she knows what lies beyond the surface. An author will peruse the words upon his page, and he won't just see the letters or hear their sounds or know their definitions. He will see them as more than just the sum of their parts.

The artist will see the leech in its fullness. It implies disgust; an uncaring parasite. It is a creature so mindless that it does not know *how* to care. Simply its name infects you with a feeling of revulsion that sticks to your skin and does not come away no matter how hard you scrub. It holds power. It carries a hidden meaning, not written in stone, but widely understood like a secret second language that we are inherently fluent in.

Because a word isn't what it means. A word is not a mark that communicates an idea. A word is the hand that made that mark. A word is what it invokes. A word isn't an empty shell- it's a voice. A word is the journey that it has made to arrive at its current destination- and, for words, that journey never ends.

There's a reason why a kiss is described as fireworks and not explosions, though the two are remarkably similar. A firework is an astounding burst of color that lights up the darkness of night in a gorgeous display. It pirouettes along the invisible lines that turn stars into constellations. Explosions are dangerous. Explosions can hurt. A kiss is sweet. A kiss should hurt no one.

A word can speak of something beyond itself. A word can be so tied up and confused that it may as well be just a sound. A word can be spoken aloud and sound like something different to each and every ear that hears it. A word's meaning can flip in its voyage from speech onto paper. A word can have rules. A word can mean everything- and nothing.

...I must admit, I don't understand words. But until I do, I'll ride upon the back of a gargantuan velvet millipede and feast upon ethereal chocolate lullabies.