



OK

The Improbable Story of America's Greatest Word

By Allan Metcalf

ISBN 978-0-1953-779-34 • 208 pages

£12.99 • 27th January 2011

It all started with a joke...

Pulling together popular culture, history and language, *OK* traces the roots of this most ubiquitous word from its earliest beginnings in 19th century America to its global success as the English word with which all non-Americans are familiar.

In 19th century America there was a fad for abbreviations of words and over 150 years ago in a newspaper article 'ok' first appeared. Had it not been picked up by a presidential campaign it might have died a quick death. But then operators of the telegraph began to use it and over the decades OK established a firm grip in the American lexicon, ultimately embedding itself in popular culture. In the 1970's the best-selling transactional analysis book *I'm Okay, You're OK* brought this handy word to a new audience and it was the first word spoken on the moon. It has been used by authors from Steinbeck to Capote, and from Chandler to Vonnegut. It can describe a state of mind, the American state of Oklahoma or a popular magazine. It can be spelt okey dokey, okay, O.K. or ok, or okie dokie but almost always signifies that things are, well, OK.

Allan Metcalf follows the evolution of this American idiom with brevity and wit, traipsing across American history with colourful portraits of the nooks and crannies in which OK has found itself. In its earliest days, around 1828, it was used as a joke against US Presidential candidate Andrew Jackson's

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supposed inability to spell. Today, OK can be applied as a noun, a verb, an adverb, an adjective, *and* an interjection! This remarkable nugget of a word packs a lot of power, possessing an extraordinary ability to prosper and survive and instil itself into not only the popular culture of America but as a globally recognized word.

OK is a fact-finding, history laden, and grammatical study that will leave anyone interested in the life of words absorbed, intrigued and delighted.

Allan Metcalf is well respected in the lexical community and a popular writer on language. He is president of the American Dialect Society.

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