

The Good Words Podcast episode transcript: QUOTIDIAN

Lily: Knock-knock.

Grace: Who's there?

Lily: Isabelle.

Grace: Isabelle who?

Lily: Isabelle broken? I had to knock!

Lynn: The unabridged Oxford English Dictionary contains over [extreme echo effect] two hundred thousand words! These words express the breadth and depth of human experience, from the ordinary to the spectacular. Yet the average American adult only knows about one-tenth of this total number of words, and regularly uses only about half of those. This podcast is dedicated to the pursuit of using words better, and using better words. This is the Good Words Podcast.

Robot voice: Good Words Podcast.

[*music*: "Good Words" by Miss Lynn]

Lynn: Salutations, Logophiles! This is Lynn Hickernell, and I am delighted that you have joined me for this, the first episode of the second series of the Good Words Podcast. This brand-new series is going to feature some brand new segments, in addition to established recurring segments like "Do Over," "It Came from the Internet," and of course, "GET IT?!?" I also have news of a brand-new affiliation to share with you: "The Good Words Podcast" is now part of Kids Listen, which is a grassroots organization of advocates for high-quality audio content for children and families. I am excited to tell you more about them and some of the really excellent podcasts made by other Kids Listen members in future episodes, but in the meantime I encourage you to check them out yourself by visiting KidsListen.org. And it almost goes without saying that this brand-new series is going to feature a batch of brand-new theme words. Here's the first one:

Grace: Quotidian.

Sarah: Quotidian.

Logan: Quotidian.

Millie: Quotidian.

Lily: Quotidian.

Anna: Quotidian means, "happening daily . . ."

Millie: Happening daily . . .

Grace: Happening daily . . .

Logan: Daily . . .

Lily: Daily, or ordinary . . .

Millie: . . . or ordinary . . .

Grace: . . . ordinary . . .

Anna: . . . ordinary . . .

Logan: . . . ordinary, and commonplace.

Millie: . . . commonplace.

Grace: . . . commonplace.

Anna: . . . and commonplace.

Sarah: . . . or ordinary, and commonplace.

Lily: . . . commonplace.

Lynn: Like a lot of words, "quotidian" has two closely-related meanings. The first is something that happens every day. What do you do every day? Here's what some of my friends said when I put that question to them:

Anna: Something that occurs every day is the sunrise, or the sunset.

Millie: Every morning you wake up, and you get ready . . .

Sarah: Well, the first thing I do after I wake up is put in my eye drops, because my eye doctor told me to.

Logan: I wake up in the morning, I eat every day, brush my teeth every day, I put on clothes every day, hopefully . . .

Sarah: But the first thing I do that I want to do, is make a cup of tea. That is absolutely the first thing that needs to be done every day, and I do like to do it the same every day.

Robot voice: Quotidian.

Lynn: The closest synonym for "quotidian" is probably "every day," because that expression also encapsulates the word's dual meanings. Used as two words, "every day" means just what my friends were talking about, "daily." But combined into one word, "everyday" communicates the second meaning of "quotidian," which is to say, "ordinary," or "not unusual."

Now that we're in the second series of The Good Words Podcast, it's about time I mentioned Dr. Samuel Johnson, one of the most prominent English writers of the 18th Century, and to our purposes, one of the most important lexicographers of all time. Lexicography is the study and practice of compiling dictionaries, and Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1755, was a momentous achievement in the scholarship of English.

James Boswell was a friend of Dr. Johnson, and is best remembered today for having written an extensive biography of him. In this journal entry, Mr. Boswell recounts his introduction to the word, "quotidian," which at first he thinks is a word Dr. Johnson has invented himself, but then Boswell cites instances where he has encountered the word elsewhere, including Johnson's own dictionary.

Anthony Ogus: "He maintained that Archibald, Duke of Argyle, was a narrow man. I wondered at this; and observed, that his building so great a house at Inveraray was not like a narrow man. 'Sir,' said he, 'when a narrow man has resolved to build a house, he builds it like another man. But Archibald, Duke of Argyle, was narrow in his ordinary expences, in his quotidian expences.'

"The distinction is very just. It is in the ordinary expences of life that a man's liberality or narrowness is to be discovered. I never heard the word quotidian in this sense, and I imagined it to be a word of Dr Johnson's own fabrication; but I have since found it in Young's Night Thoughts (Night fifth):

"Death's a destroyer of quotidian prey.

"and in my friend's Dictionary, supported by the authorities of Charles I and Dr Donne."

Lynn: In this context, Dr. Johnson and Mr. Boswell use the word "narrow" to mean "thrifty," or "frugal." What Dr. Johnson is noting about the Duke of Argyle is that while he may spend a lot of money on one-time expenses, such as the building of a home, he keeps much tighter purse strings when it comes to the money

spent on everyday expenses, such as food, candles, and other things necessary to run an 18th century household on a daily basis.

Monster voice: Quotidian.

Grace: I like to do different things every day. Sometimes, I do do the same, but I'd rather do, like, different things.

Lily: For the most part, I like to stick to a schedule, but I like different activities every day. But I like playing with, like, the same friends.

Anna: I like to do different things every day, because if I do the same thing every day, I get bored.

Millie: I don't have to, like, do something every day, like . . . or maybe, the thing that I go and do every day is different.

Lynn: Do you like to do the same things every day, or different? Do you think it's boring always to have to do the same things? If you do, part of the reason may lie in the distant past. Our prehistoric ancestors always had to be alert for danger, such as predators, and as a result, human brains developed to pay particular attention when presented with something new, but remain more passive with the quotidian. This makes sense. Imagine how excited you would feel if someone surprised you with a gift you really wanted. Now imagine that you felt that excited every time you did something ordinary, like eat breakfast, put on your socks, or brush your teeth! Being that excited all day, every day, would be absolutely exhausting!

Unfortunately, cognitive development of the human brain is not the only reason why we often feel bored with things that seem quotidian. In the twenty-first century, most of us are surrounded by a lot of advertising. Advertising companies discovered long ago that our brains are wired to pay attention to things that are new and unusual, and as a result, this is a frequent strategy employed to get people to notice ads and products.

I talked in the "echelon" episode of this podcast about advertisers putting their products, and people who use their products, on a higher level, while belittling other products and people. A lot of advertising communicates that new, innovative things, and the people who buy those things, are superior to quotidian things and people.

But in the other direction from advertising professionals, some people who have made a regular practice of celebrating the quotidian are poets. Although poetry can take an infinite number of forms and subjects, poets very often choose to focus their attention on examining the everyday things that most people don't notice.

I chose two poems to share with you illustrating this idea. Emily Dickinson and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow were both American poets who lived in New England in the 19th century. Both of these poems are on the same, very quotidian topic, rain in the summertime. Here is what Miss Dickinson wrote about it:

Judy Roth:

Summer Shower

A drop fell on the apple tree,
Another on the roof;
A half a dozen kissed the eaves,
And made the gables laugh.

A few went out to help the brook,

That went to help the sea.
Myself conjectured, Were they pearls,
What necklaces could be!

The dust replaced in hoisted roads,
The birds jocosely sung;
The sunshine threw his hat away,
The orchards spangles hung.

The breezes brought dejected lutes,
And bathed them in the glee;
The East put out a single flag,
And signed the fete away.

Lynn: Mr. Longfellow focused on what the rain meant to people in different occupations. Here are a few stanzas from his "Rain in Summer":

Levi Weaver:

Near at hand,
From under the sheltering trees,
The farmer sees
His pastures, and his fields of grain,
As they bend their tops
To the numberless beating drops
Of the incessant rain.
He counts it as no sin
That he sees therein
Only his own thrift and gain.
These, and far more than these,
The Poet sees!
He can behold
Aquarius old
Walking the fenceless fields of air;
And from each ample fold
Of the clouds about him rolled
Scattering everywhere
The showery rain,
As the farmer scatters his grain.
He can behold
Things manifold
That have not yet been wholly told,--
Have not been wholly sung nor said.
For his thought, that never stops,
Follows the water-drops

Down to the graves of the dead,
Down through chasms and gulfs profound,
To the dreary fountain-head
Of lakes and rivers under ground;
And sees them, when the rain is done,
On the bridge of colors seven
Climbing up once more to heaven,
Opposite the setting sun.
Thus the Seer,
With vision clear,
Sees forms appear and disappear,
In the perpetual round of strange,
Mysterious change
From birth to death, from death to birth,
From earth to heaven, from heaven to earth;
Till glimpses more sublime
Of things, unseen before,
Unto his wondering eyes reveal
The Universe, as an immeasurable wheel
Turning forevermore
In the rapid and rushing river of Time.

Chipmunk voice: Quotidian.

Lynn: Whether you find them exciting or not, there are a lot of things that are important to do every day in order to have good health, like eating, sleeping, and brushing your teeth. And did you know that it's also important to laugh regularly? It's true! Laughing relieves stress and has been scientifically shown to aid in recovery from illness. So, with that in mind, here's your daily dose of . . .

Many voices: GET IT?!?!?

Charlie: What has hands, but can't clap?

Grace: A clock.

[Cuckoo clock sound effect]

Marty: What kind of bug lives inside a clock?

Lily: A tick.

Logan: Why did the frog eat the firefly?

Fred: It wanted a light snack. But . . . fireflies are actually poisonous. So, the frog probably died after it ate the firefly. Poor frog.

Lily: What's the best thing to put in chocolate cake?

Logan: Your teeth.

Grace: Where does a detective sleep?

Fred: Under cover. Get it?

[snoring sound effect]

Grace: The Good Words Podcast.

Lynn: Dentists suggest that you should brush your teeth every day for two minutes, which can seem like a very long time! I wrote a song called, "Toothbrush Dance" in the hopes of making this quotidian task go by a little quicker. It finishes off this episode of the Good Words Podcast. You can find links to the song on CD Baby and iTunes in the show notes for this episode at GoodWordsPodcast.com, as well as the texts of the poems and passages. James Boswell's journal was read by Anthony Ogus, "Summer Shower" was read by Judy Roth, both for Librivox.org. Longfellow's "Rain in Summer" was read especially for us by Levi Weaver, and you can listen to him read the entire poem, as well as find out more about Levi, in the show notes. Thank you, Levi, and Anna, Charlie, Fred, Grace, Lily, Logan, Marty, Ruby, Sarah, the GWP Partners who support this podcast on Patreon, and thank you for being a part of it by listening! The Good Words Podcast is a proud member of KidsListen, and you can find more excellent podcasts at KidsListen.org, or the Kids Listen mobile app! Another brand-new episode is coming in two weeks, so until then, keep listening and talking about what astonishes you, amuses you, infuriates you and frightens you. And as long as you tell the truth with kindness, the things you say will be good words. Bye for now!

[*music*: "Good Words" by Miss Lynn]

[*music*: "Toothbrush Dance" by Miss Lynn]