



# Dictionary Days

By Ilan Stavans

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**The whole of *The Catcher in the Rye* is in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, waiting to be unscrambled, and so are all the novels of our past, present, and immediate future**

### en·thu·si·ast

Function: noun

: a person filled with enthusiasm : as a: one who is ardently attached to a cause, object, or pursuit b: one who tends to become ardently absorbed in an interest

A dictionary, despite its heroic effort to pin down language, is destined for failure the moment a single word is printed; language, with its eternal mutations, is forever uncontainable. In *Dictionary Days*, award-winning essayist Ilan Stavans explores our very human need to "seize upon the meaning of a word." Owner of hundreds of dictionaries, he follows a fascinating, zigzagging history of lexicography across many languages, including English, French, Spanish, German, Arabic, Hebrew, Latin, and Cyrillic. Throughout his journey, Stavans spots strange meaning inconsistencies, uncovers unusual origins, and shares extraordinary and often hilarious anecdotes.

With a dazzling knowledge of dictionaries through the ages, matched by a lively wit, Stavans reaches far beyond the margin of the page and pays a worthy tribute to a discipline that is at once inspiring and maddening. "For dictionaries are oracles: nothing is outside them?except the impossible."

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## Dictionary Days By Ilan Stavans Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Springing from his free-form talk at a *Michigan Quarterly Review* panel discussion, this discursive and charming collection of personal essays by prolific Amherst professor Stavans (*Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language*) explores his lifelong obsession with dictionaries, concordances and lexicons. Just a few examples from his bulging reference shelves include Dr. Johnson's seminal dictionary, the Byzantine *Lexeis*, the medieval *Kitab al-'Ain* and Flaubert's *Dictionary of Received Ideas*. Stavans's ideal of the dictionary represents not only "raw material" for polyglot scholars like himself. It's also "the code to forthcoming masterpieces" such as *Don Quixote*, *Moby-Dick* and all of Shakespeare. Stavans cites these and more with offhand erudition. Drawing on his Mexican-American and Jewish backgrounds, he shares his experiences with English, Spanish and Yiddish and ventures into encounters with Arabic, Chinese and Sumerian. He muses on the meanings of particular words (like "love" and "death") in many languages and on the ambiguous status of colloquial speech, such as Spanglish and four-letter words. At his most playful, Stavans reveals his instructional debt to Fictionary, his deep enjoyment of "cheesy" Mexican musicals and his dreams of fantastical blank books that contain only transporting aromas. Unlike most dictionaries, Stavans's eclectic volume feels too brief, but it shares their enlightening and browsable qualities for anyone who loves the serendipities of language. (Apr.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Authoritative and open, precise and wild, linguist Stavans shares his obsessive love for dictionaries and shows how the words we use define our history and who we are. Even with the heavy entomological stuff--and there is lots of that--he is chatty and playful, with great quotes from Twain, Singer, Neruda, and more. Best of all is the personal commentary throughout, whether Stavans is reflecting on his Mexican Jewish roots, his weary experience of the meaning of *kitsch* and *blah*, or purists' criticism of his own dictionary of Spanglish. When will his beloved American lexicons include Latino words, Stavans wonders. Across all borders, he chooses his topics with eclectic abandon, discussing not only love and honor but also curses (Why did it take so long for dictionaries to include the *f*-word, one of the most used words in the English language?). Lexicographers will relish this mix of memoir and language analysis, and so will anyone who knows that words have attitude. *Hazel Rochman*

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Review

"A brave feat...Stavans takes [us] to another level by reading dictionaries as if they were blogs." -- ***The Village Voice***

"Delicious little essays of powerful intellectual curiosity." -- ***Kirkus Reviews***

"Devoted word lovers will warm to the company of a kindred spirit." -- ***San Diego Union Tribune***

"Displays the charming verbal eccentricities of a man who has been adopted by a language rather than born into it." -- ***The Boston Globe***

"Stavans is uniquely qualified to ponder the meaning of words and the many-splendored pleasures to be found...Fascinating." -- ***The Los Angeles Times***

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Johanna Garrett:**

Book is to be different for every grade. Book for children until eventually adult are different content. As you may know that book is very important usually. The book Dictionary Days ended up being making you to know about other expertise and of course you can take more information. It is very advantages for you. The book Dictionary Days is not only giving you far more new information but also to be your friend when you really feel bored. You can spend your spend time to read your guide. Try to make relationship while using book Dictionary Days. You never feel lose out for everything in case you read some books.

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#### **Ernest Tate:**

In this period globalization it is important to someone to find information. The information will make professionals understand the condition of the world. The health of the world makes the information easier to share. You can find a lot of sources to get information example: internet, newspapers, book, and soon. You can view that now, a lot of publisher in which print many kinds of book. Often the book that recommended to your account is Dictionary Days this guide consist a lot of the information with the condition of this world now. This kind of book was represented how does the world has grown up. The words styles that writer use to explain it is easy to understand. Typically the writer made some exploration when he makes this book. That's why this book appropriate all of you.

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