

## Velleity and Redatt Assembly

Let us use today's assembly to think about words. We all know that it is Friday today, but where does that word come from?

The words we use for days of the week tell a story. Two come from celestial objects – the Sun and Moon give us Sunday and Monday. One is named for a Roman God – Saturn's day gives us Saturday. The rest are named for Norse Gods. Tuesday is "Tiw's day." Tiw was a one-handed Norse god associated with single combat. Wednesday is Woden's Day. Woden, or Odin, is the head of the Norse Gods. Thursday is Thor's day. Thor was the god of thunder, which connection you can also hear in the German *Donnerstag* ('thunder's day'). Which takes us to Friday, named after the Anglo-Saxon goddess Fríge. We are also in the month of October. From its name, we might expect it to be the eighth month – octo meaning eight – but in fact it is the tenth. That is because two prominent Romans had their names given to months earlier in the year. I'll let you work out who they are for yourself.

Sticking with the theme of words, Stephen Fry is something of a national treasure – he is of course a frequent sight on our televisions, but is also a writer and essayist. In *Paperweight* - one of his lesser known, but still rather marvellous, books – he writes of two words he especially likes, but which are largely unknown. There are many reasons why words fall in or out of favour with the speakers of a language. No-one is able to predict which will survive and which will be left unused.

No-one is in control of the process, but thousands of words are invented each year and thousands creep out, unnoticed and unloved, from daily usage.

The first word I wish to discuss this morning has had a place in our language for hundreds of years, but is now on the verge of extinction. That word is 'velleity'. What does it mean? Well, it is an abstract noun. Therefore, it refers to a feeling or a state of mind. It can best be defined thus: 'a wish or hope, unaccompanied by any effort to achieve it.' So, if you are watching television and you think – I would love to have a cup of tea – but can't be bothered to get up: that's velleity. If you look around your messy bedroom and think – I should tidy this place up – but you can't be bothered to: that's velleity. Anything that you want, but can't rouse yourself to go and get or go and do: that's velleity.

How can such a word, which refers to a feeling that I am sure everyone recognises, be allowed to fall into disuse? I am fascinated by the notion that we can want something but not be motivated to get it. Shouldn't the act of wanting something motivate us to get it? Apparently not. How can you want something and not want it at the same time?

But it isn't just your home life which is affected by velleity. It is just as common in school. Have you ever thought: I need to do my homework now, but found yourself unmotivated to do it? Have you ever thought: I should concentrate in this class

because I find the work hard and I want to do well – but then stared out the window. Cast your mind back to the last set of exams you took. Did you ever think: I should begin my revision now... but end up doing nothing?

Have you? You have experienced velleity. A common feeling, but not a good one to bring to school with you. So the first word of the day is velleity, and I mention it in order to ask you to avoid it. We want no velleity in this school.

My next word is not from this country or even from the English language. It comes from one of the 700+ languages which anthropologists have identified on the island of Papua New Guinea. The word is 'redatt.' What does it mean?

It is an adjective, so it describes someone or something – in this case it describes a person. Quite simply, if one is redatt, one is 'unlikely to take part in after dinner games.'

How extraordinary that a people on the other side of the world have produced so elegant a word to denote what can only be said in our own language in a long-winded fashion. 'Unlikely to take part in after dinner games.'

If you are redatt, you are unlikely to have much joy in life, much involvement, much enthusiasm. And those are the qualities which make life worth living.

So, in addition to having expanded your vocabulary by two words, there is a message for us all in the obsolete word from our own language and the linguistic gift from the headhunters of Papua New Guinea. Let us... none of us... allow ourselves to be the victims of velleity. Let none of your wishes to improve yourselves go unsupported by action.

If you want something but are not motivated enough to go out and seize that something, well, shame on you.

And let us not be redatt. I want each and every one of you to be a full participant in life. Whether it is a club, a school trip, or school team that you play for; whether it's after dinner games or another part of life – get involved and enjoy it. Don't be redatt.