



## The Story behind “Raconteur”

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Drawing lexical information from various dictionaries, Eriyon Tecson narrates her research process to sketch a comprehensive image of the unusual word “raconteur,” as well as its adjacent synonyms and antonyms. This innovative research essay was written for Writing I with Dr. John Bruce.

**W**HEN SEARCHING FOR the word “raconteur” on different dictionaries’ websites, I noticed little differences and similarities. On the *Oxford English Dictionary* website, I received the definition, “The narrator of an anecdote or story, *esp.* a person particularly skilled in this role.” On the *Merriam-Webster* website, the definition was, “a person who excels in telling anecdotes.” Lastly, when I explored the *American Heritage Dictionary* website, I was given the meaning of “One who tells stories and anecdotes with skill and wit.” Each website has a similar definition of the word but in a different language and wording.

When further researching the *American Heritage* and *OED* websites, I noticed how they do not address the definition of being a personal skill until the end of each entry. The *Merriam-Webster* website draws attention to “raconteur” being a skill first through the verb “excel.” I was also able to differentiate which definition was

meant for what level of reader. The origin is the key feature in why they are all diverge from each other. The word is derived from “French, from raconter, to relate, from Old French: re-, re- + ac-onter, to count up, reckon” (“Raconteur,” *Oxford*). I also looked at the *OED* for the origin and etymology of the word, and here is what I found: “Origin: A borrowing from French. Etymon: French *raconteur*. Etymology: < French *raconteur* (1355 in Middle French; compare Old French *racontier* (1st half of 13th cent.), *reconteor* (c1200)) < *raconter* to relate . . . + *-eur -eur suffix*.” I find the word’s French origin fascinating and unique. A word and its place of beginning, I feel, always convey a story to how the word came to be. Learning about where something came from through time can be quite a journey, like going back in the past without actually having a time machine.

While doing deeper and more observant research, I came across three useful examples of the word “raconteur.” There were many examples to choose from that came from different time periods, dating all the way back to the early 1800s. Although there were many to choose from, I chose three examples from a time period closer to mine. I based this choice on a desire to better understand the examples that was given. I found one from Lawrence George Durrell’s 1958 *Mountolive: A Novel*: “. . . the inevitable anecdote of a famous raconteur to round off the letter” (qtd. in “Raconteur,” *Oxford*). I already like how this one uses a synonym of the word “raconteur” in the example. My second example is from 1972 John Mosedale’s 1972 book *Football*: “Jimmy Conzelman functioned as quarterback, coach, raconteur, songwriter and promoter” (qtd. in “Raconteur,” *Oxford*). My last example was from the year 2001. It is by J. Hamilton-Paterson’s *Loving Monsters*: “Surely all these would constitute a raconteur’s dream of endless episodes and reminiscence?” (qtd. in “Raconteur,” *Oxford*). By doing so much research on the word “raconteur,” I was able to understand each example clearly.

When researching synonyms, I found the words “storyteller” and “narrator” as ones closely related to “raconteur’s” meaning. I

did some digging around the first synonym I found, which was “storyteller.” When discovering more about this word, I realized there was a lot more information on the matter than the original word “raconteur.” This synonym is a very common word that is used for younger audiences to understand meaning. This word also has multiple meanings, like a liar or someone who literally tells stories like legends or myths. While researching the word on different dictionary sites, I noticed they all came with more than three definitional meanings. The *Merriam-Webster* website was the only one that did not provide a definition that meant “liar” or “fibber.” I did question why that may be, then came to the conclusion that the website might just be for a quick word lookup. I did like how the *OED* gave at least five definitions of the word and had a variety of ways they patterned the meaning. Some seemed easier to understand and others appeared as college-level definitions. Another synonym I chose that is similar to the word raconteur is “narrator.” When I was doing background research on this synonym for “raconteur,” I got different results from the first synonym. When skimming the dictionary sites, I found only three definitions or less each of the word “narrator.” Despite the sites not offering more meanings for the word, they did, however, all connect in defining someone speaking a plot to a story. All the definitions of this word connect to some type of literature where the narration is happening. They use example synonyms for the word such as “commentary,” “record,” and “report” to help one understand what a narrator is. While a raconteur is someone who tells stories in a skilled way, a narrator can be anyone depending on the story and who one wants to deliver the message to.

My search for antonyms on the word “Raconteur” was a lot more difficult than I expected. No antonyms occurred when researching the dictionary websites, so I had to use my head and come up with antonyms that would match. I came up with only two good ones, but I believe both antonyms convey enough information to get the point across. My first antonym was “fibber,” which I got from *Merriam-Webster* and derives from “fib,” or “a trivial or childish lie.” When I

checked the *OED*, the definition was, “One who fibs or tells fibs; a petty liar.” Lastly, in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, its meaning reads, “An insignificant or childish lie.” The other antonym chosen was “deceitful.” On the *American Heritage Dictionary* website, the meanings listed were “Given to cheating or deceiving” and “Deliberately misleading; deceptive.” The word “deceitful” on the *OED* website had a meaning of being “Full of deceit; given to deceiving or cheating; misleading, false, fallacious.” Lastly, *Merriam-Webster*, which had a somewhat different wording compared to the other two definitions, reads, “having a tendency or disposition to deceive or give false impressions.”

The inference to be drawn from this is that these words all correlate to one another. One can make the conclusion that the word “raconteur” has developed over time into the other synonyms to best fit our language today. The word “raconteur” is not used as commonly as a “storyteller” or “narrator.” Considering each dimension of the word also showcases different levels of sophistication in the definitions as well. Some meanings evoke scholarly interpretations of what the word has meant, and others are easier for a kid to understand. They all share similar synonyms and antonyms. One can make out that these do in fact come from the same family of words. ►►

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