

AHA!

A Brief History

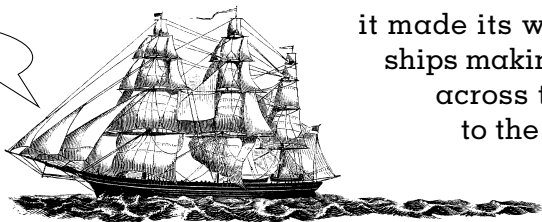
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Most people assume that the word “aha” has existed for as long as there’s been a need to use it. In actuality, the word is a scant century and a half old.

Before its advent, “eureka” was all success-utterers had available to them. Archimedes, inventor of the catapult and grappling hook, among other useful items, is credited with its creation. His new word spread quickly across Europe, thanks in large part to an invading Roman army who visited his Greek colony in Sicily back in 212 BC. Archimedes didn’t fare so well, but

his word did. Centuries later, it made its way onto the ships making their way across the Atlantic to the New World.

EUREKA!



Early Americans made good use of it. Gold miners blurted it out at the drop of a hat: “Eureka! I’ve dropped my hat!” Inventors likewise embraced it: “Eureka! I’ve invented the bandwagon!” Soon, ordinary folk were jumping on the bandwagon: “Eureka! What a view!”

Perhaps the apex of “eureka’s” popularity was reached when the word became a grade school punch line that, ironically, answered the question: “What did Archimedes say to the Roman in the smelly toga?”

Unfortunately, “eureka’s” days were numbered. In 1850, California decided upon “Eureka” as its state motto, which would have been well and fine had it not been for an overzealous official who decided to register it with the copyright office—and then started charging royalties for its use!

Eureka-shouting gold miners could afford it for awhile, but when the gold strikes stopped coming, so too did their payments. As for the rest of the country, it soon became apparent few people were willing to pay a fee on those rare occasions when they actually succeeded at something.

A new word was needed.

In March of 1851, a hastily-assembled who's who of American lexicographers met in Enid, Oklahoma, and by week's end, a new era of triumphant blurting was born—"aha" had been invented. Short, sweet and palindromic to boot.

Within a fortnight, "aha" was ringing out from sea to shining sea. Case-cracking detectives couldn't get enough of it. Cross-examining litigators peppered their orations with it. Parents nearly wore it out on their curfew-breaking teenagers (teenagers weren't any different in the 19th century!).

But, popular as it was, it wasn't until 1913 that "aha" found the use for which it seemed destined—the crossword puzzle. As the crossword craze took hold of America, so too did the two-syllable response to its most clever clues ... **AHA!**
An irreversible bond had been formed.

Clue: "Where men are often taken" Answer: CHESS MATCH **AHA!**

Clue: "End of a sentence" Answer: PAROLE **AHA!**

Clue: "Word from the lab" Answer: **AHA!**

And so it's been for over ninety years.

And so it will be very, very soon ...

... when you turn the page
and begin saying ... **AHA!**

