

**Recommended Reading:
*A Little Book of Language***

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Founding Partners, Readsters

A Little Book of Language

By David Crystal

Yale University Press: 2010

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\$13.75 on Amazon.com; \$25.00 list price

David Crystal is a noted British linguist and one of our favorite scholars of language. We use his reference books *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* and *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* to answer esoteric questions. We also enjoy other stories, histories, and commentaries by Crystal such as *The Stories of English* and *The Fight for English: How Language Pundits Ate, Shot, and Left*.

His newest book, *A Little Book of Language*, is a quick, entertaining read. This book is written for young adolescents and it provides basic information about linguistics for anyone with little or no linguistics background. *A Little Book of Language* is a broad overview of the development of language, both oral and written. Readers will learn about a variety of topics, such as the origins of speech and writing, the miracle of baby talk, wordplay as the basis of slang, and the constant change of language.

Crystal's description of language production is refreshingly lucid. Have you noticed how we all can almost always recognize someone as a man, woman, or child just by hearing a voice? In Crystal's book you'll learn how the vibrations of the vocal cords create different pitches in men, women, and children. Included in his discussion of the development of speech is an explanation of voiced and voiceless sounds easily understood by students.

Teachers will appreciate Crystal's elucidation of the importance of understanding the standard spelling system. One point he makes is that in order to play effectively with spelling, as is so often the case in text messages, the writer first needs to be competent with standard spelling. Teachers will also enjoy Crystal's discussion of the impact technological communication such as texting, email, and the internet have on our ever-changing language.

Several websites have audio interviews with David Crystal about his new book. While there are similarities among the interviews, each includes additional interesting information. We enjoy noting the evidence of Crystal's British heritage in his dialect, word choices, and spellings. Three interviews we enjoyed are:

1. Talk of the Nation, National Public Radio – audio – 30 minutes
<http://erb.kindomnow.org/multimedia-tuesday-npr-interview-with-david-crystal-author-of-a-little-book-of-language/>
2. Podularity, a website connecting authors and readers – audio – 20 minutes
<http://podularity.com/david-crystal-a-little-book-of-language/>
3. BlackwellOnline – 2 part audio interview – 15 minutes
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDdkM2ubNYI>(Part 1)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDWHXNm2Wbo&feature=related>(Part 2)

For those who would like more depth on the concepts introduced in *A Little Book of Language*, we recommend Crystal's *How Language Works*.