



WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

This Is 'The Best Thing Since Sliced Bread'!

September 17, 2022

And now, *Words and Their Stories*, from VOA Learning English.

On this program we explore words and expressions in the English language. We give definitions, notes on usage, and examples.

Today we talk about **innovation**. Innovation is an improved way of doing something. Innovation can lead to change that makes for a better product or idea. Sometimes innovation involves a new, physical invention.

Some innovations are revolutionary.

Innovation brings us to the world of bread and today's expression: “the best thing since **sliced** bread.”

“The best thing since sliced bread” describes a new, excellent thing that makes a great improvement to something. For example, the new map and direction app on my smartphone is the best thing since sliced bread! Now, when driving I find my **destinations** easily and only get lost when my phone dies.

But where does this expression come from?

Well, for many years, bread has been a main part of meals for many people around the world. Most bread comes in a long form, called a **loaf**. A bread loaf travels well. You can buy a loaf of bread, stick in your bag, and make it home without the bread getting damaged. And on the way, you can break off a piece of bread for a little **snack**.

But when making a sandwich, you need two slices of bread of the same thickness. If you had to cut them yourself, that may not happen. One may be thicker than the other -- one of life's little **annoyances**.

Well, that changed in the late 1920s. An inventor in the United States brought an innovation to the world of bread. Otto Frederick Rohwedder invented the bread slicer. The machine cut the bread into individual slices of the same size.

Soon after, he invented a machine that sliced the bread and then **packaged** it. Later, a small machine to **toast** the bread was invented. The slices fit neatly into the toaster. Toasters can be found in homes across the U.S. and other countries.

Sliced bread became even more popular. People love bread and Rohwedder's creation revolutionized the bread industry.

So, being described as the "best thing since sliced bread" is high praise, indeed.

Here is another example.

A: So, what do you think of the chief's new policy on paid leave?

B: It's the best thing since sliced bread! I'm going to use the extra vacation time to visit friends in Paris.

Please note: People also use the expression as an insult.

Let's say you know someone who thinks very highly of herself. she thinks she can do no wrong. You don't agree. You could say, "She thinks she's the best thing since sliced bread."

And that's the end of this *Words and Their Stories*.

Until next time, I'm Anna Matteo.

Anna Matteo wrote this story for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

innovation *-n.* a new idea, method, or device

slice *-n.* a thin flat piece cut from something: a slice of bread, a slice of cake *-v.* to cut with or as if with a knife

destination *-n.* a place to which a person is going or something is sent

loaf *-n.* a shaped or molded mass of bread

snack *-n.* a light meal : food eaten between regular meals

annoyance *-n.* a source of vexation or irritation

toast *-n.* sliced bread browned on both sides by heat : *-v.* to make (food, such as bread) crisp, hot, and brown by heat

packaged *-adj.* a covering wrapper or container

We want to hear from you. Do you have a similar expressions in your language? In the Comments section, you can also practice using any of the expressions from the story.

We have a new comment system. Here is how it works:

Write your comment in the box.

Under the box, you can see four images for social media accounts. They are for Disqus, Facebook, Twitter and Google.

Click on one image and a box appears. Enter the login for your social media account. Or you may create one on the Disqus system. It is the blue circle with "D" on it. It is free.

Each time you return to comment on the Learning English site, you can use your account and see your comments and replies to them. Our comment policy is here.

