



## WORDS AND THEIR STORIES

# 'Set in Stone'

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

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

Some things in life change easily and often. They are fluid. They change and move as fluids do -- easily. When we are planning events or establishing rules and policies, sometimes it is good to keep things fluid or changeable.

But some things are not easily moved or changed. They are fixed or **inflexible**.

To describe these inflexible things, we can say they are set in stone. Things that are set in stone are very difficult or impossible to change.

We can say that permanent rules, laws, and policies are set in stone. It often takes several difficult actions to change them.

The dates of some events are also set in stone.

For example, **weddings** take a lot of planning. Some people even start planning for their wedding a year or more ahead of time.

You simply cannot tell friends and family that your wedding will happen sometime in June. You must find a space for the ceremony. You need to invite people and find out how many are coming. You need to decide on food, music, and flowers. And you must have money to pay workers to do different things.

So, setting a wedding date in stone is the best way to make sure the wedding happens smoothly. Setting the date in stone means it cannot change. Or at least, changes would cause problems for people and possibly cost you a lot of money.

We also use this expression with two other verbs: **carve** and write. So, you can say something is carved in stone or something is written in stone. The meaning stays the same.

On the other hand, if a rule, date, or event could be changed easily, we can say it is penciled in.

If you pencil something in, you are admitting that it is not set in stone. It may change and may be **erased**. When using this expression, however, you do not need to really use a pencil.

So, when we say something is not carved, set, or written in stone, we mean it can be changed.

For example, many workers were upset by some new office rules. So, the supervisor said, “If they don't work, we can always change them.” In other words, the rules are not carved in stone.

Before we end the program, here is one more example for set in stone. The editor used it when he sent back my edited story. He gave some changes but added, “These are just suggestions. They are not set in stone.”

It's good to have an editor with a **sense of humor**!

And that's the end of this *Words and Their Stories*. Until next time ... I'm Anna Matteo.

*Anna Matteo wrote this lesson for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**inflexible** – *adj.* incapable of change

**wedding** – *n.* a wedding anniversary or its celebration

**carve** – *v.* to cut with care or exactness

**erase** – *v.* to rub or scrape out (something, such as written, painted, or engraved letters) : to remove written or drawn marks from

**sense of humor** – *noun phrase* : a personality that gives someone the ability to say funny things and see the funny side of things

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