

Dirt.

As I look at the calendar, I realise that I have about five weeks left, five weeks before the snow 'flies'. There are lots of things to do before the beautiful, white blanket of snow covers our town. I'm a gardener, a self-proclaimed addict. But that's not a bad thing. As I sit here typing, looking out at the back garden, or 'yard' as they say here, I see a transformation slowly evolving. There is a long, raised bed of soil, two trees, and one, two, three bushes. Soon, I hope, that amount will be multiplied by four. So what is my goal? It's a mini-forest, that will have a seating area in the middle, accessed only by two windy paths. It will also hide the neighbor's ugly white barn that looks over my garden. To take on a project like this, you have to have a vision. And my vision has helped me to continue working hard. When the soil or 'dirt' was delivered, I thought, "Gosh, that's a lot of soil. Will I really be able to transport all of it from the front garden to the back garden?" The thought was intimidating. My children helped me a little bit, but I think they did that just to keep me happy. They had their own agenda. They took possession of this mountain of soft soil, like it was powdered gold. Before I knew it, they were digging tunnels, building rooves, and having battles right in the 'dirt pile'. In fact, my son Cass, who had just celebrated his birthday, suggested that next year I buy him his own dirt pile for a birthday present. My! How life has changed. When I was young, I played in dirt all the time, and drove my mother crazy. Now, in our ultra-clean, ultra-scheduled society, children are requesting dirt piles as presents. They are abandoning their computers and iPads, and waiting for Santa to pour three cubic feet of soil down the chimney. I applaud their connection with the soil. It's magnificent stuff, the foundation of nature's architecture.

1. 'Before the snow flies' is a phrase used here in the U.S which really means 'when the snow comes'.
 - a. I must get the bulbs planted before the snow flies.
 - b. After the snow flies we will build a snowman.
2. 'Self-proclaimed' is when a person calls himself or herself something.
 - a. Michael Jackson was the self-proclaimed 'Kind of Pop'.
 - b. She is a self-proclaimed authority on fashion.
3. 'A raised bed' is an area of soil that has been built up. It can be used for flowers, vegetables, or trees. However, planting beds do not have to be raised.
 - a. The raised bed will help to hide the neighbor's barn.
 - b. There is a bed of roses around the corner.
4. 'Windy' note the spelling. With a sharp 'i', as in 'ink', it describes weather that has a lot of wind. With a longer, softer 'i', as in 'hi', it describes a curvy line or path.
 - a. Hold on to your hats! It's a windy day today.
 - b. To get to the abandoned house, you must follow a windy path that goes through the forest.
5. 'To keep someone happy' means to appease them, usually for a purpose.
 - a. Walk your dog and feed him everyday. That will keep him happy, and stop him from misbehaving.
 - b. Big speeches with lots of promises often keep the voters happy.
6. 'Before I knew it' is a great phrase that communicates something quickly happening, taking you by surprise.
 - a. The carpet cleaner arrived while I was cooking, and, before I knew it, he had finished the carpet and left.

b. Dark clouds gathered while we walked, and before we knew it, we were in the middle of a storm.

I'd love to hear from you. Email me at acupofenglish@hotmail.com.