

Archaic Diction

An archaism, also called archaic diction, is a word or expression that is no longer regularly used, or which is only used in specific fields or studies. The word comes from the Greek word *archaikós*, which means “ancient.” Archaisms exist because language is always evolving. Thus, the language that we find in older literary works, such as those from the medieval, Victorian, and Edwardian ages, and even the 19th and 20th centuries, differs in some ways from the language that we speak today. Although archaisms aren’t often used anymore, they are still used. Words that are no longer ever used at all are referred to as being obsolete.

DIRECTIONS: Read the lines from “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Underline the archaisms.

“It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
‘By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp’st thou me?”

He holds him with his skinny hand,
‘There was a ship,’ quoth he.
‘Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!’
Eftsoons his hand dropt he
‘I fear thy skinny hand! ...

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
And thy skinny hand, so brown.’—
Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!
This body dropt not down ...”

