

Grand

Our modern English adjective *grand* comes from the Latin *grandis*, a word with a multiplicity of connotations.

Both the Latin *grandis* and its English offspring *grand* can mean ‘great, abundant, full powerful, imposing.’ We see the words’ utility in such formulas as grand jury, grand piano, and grand slam. Somehow the moniker “Big Canyon” seems inadequate for the labyrinth of gorges on the Colorado River. But “Big Canyon” was its nickname before scientific adventurer John Wesley Powell popularized the name *Grand Canyon* in the 1870s.

We see the adjective branded on such eco- and artifacts as Grand Tetons, Grand Forks, Grand Old Flag, grandstand, grand finale, and Rio Grande.

An attitude of respect is etymologically folded into the family titles *grandfather* and *grandmother*, where the *grand* implies ‘grown-up, dignified, stately,’ and possibly even ‘strict and severe.’

But the adjective became a slangy, rather undignified noun in the America of the early 20th century, when a thousand dollars was a ‘grand’ sum of money. The noun *grand* appeared in this context, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, in 1915 in the *Boston Daily Globe*, which explained that a ‘nickel note’ was five dollars, a ‘dime note’ was ten, and a ‘grand’ was a thousand dollars.