

# Stump I

During an election year, presidential candidates rely on the *stump speech* to connect with voters on a personal level, outlining campaign plans, attacking rivals and weaving promises of a better future for all. Why are these election year orations called *stump speeches*? During the next three Wordsmith editions, we'll look at the term stump, chase down its history and usage, and, finally, examine how it found its way into the name of a presidential hopeful's discourse.

When *stump* began showing up in English documents in the 1300s, it meant "the part remaining of an amputated or severed limb of the body." The term's progenitor is an older German word meaning "blunt or dull."

By the 1400s, stump was extended to mean the "portion of a felled tree that remains fixed in the ground," a tree stump. Soon, the word referred to anything blunted or broken: the remains of a ship's mast, a worn pencil, or an animal's docked tail.

People used to make joking reference to the legs as stumps. To *stir your stumps* was a command to get up and move with purpose. Since the 1600s, the verb *stump* has meant to walk heavily or clumsily, as if with wooden legs, and to *fight to the stumps* meant to battle bravely on regardless of the severity of injury or discomfort. Next time: the stump that perplexes.