

## Stump III

Our word *stump*, referring to, for example, a short block of wood or the base of a felled tree comes from a very old Germanic term which meant “the part remaining after the main part has broken off or worn away.” The word *stump* in this sense has been a part of the English language since the 1300s.

But early American English speakers turned the noun into a verb, *to be stumped* is to be puzzled, exasperated. This sense was inspired by the immense labor required for extracting hardwood tree stumps from ground cleared for planting. Farmers were often “stumped” or baffled by this near-impossible task. Publications began printing the verb *stump* in 1807, but it had probably been in verbal circulation for decades prior to that date.

The largest and most obdurate of those hardwood stumps, notable local landmarks, often made impromptu stages for political addresses. As early as 1775, politicians were said to *take the stump* when advocating their party’s causes.

Often called *stump speakers*, local politicians *stumped*, or traveled throughout a district, literally mounting the felled-tree “platforms” to deliver their *stump oratories*.

Today, the word is used metaphorically each election year as presidential hopefuls deliver *stump speeches* and *stump* for votes, though the platforms are now elegant lecterns, and orations are amplified by microphones and speakers.