

Hold Up or Held Up?

Few words can “hold a candle” to “hold” as expressions take on new meanings using the word. “Hold on,” and we will tell you all about it | Words and Their Stories

Now, Words and Their Stories, a VOA Special English program about American expressions.

I’m Rich Kleinfeldt with expressions made using the word “hold.”

“Can’t hold a candle to” is a popular expression. It is from the time before electricity, when people used candles for light. Someone who lived in a big house would have a servant light his way by holding a candle. The expression meant that the person who cannot hold a candle to you is not fit even to be your servant. Now, it means such a person cannot compare or compete. In the following song, singer Dolly Parton tells her new love that her old flames, her old lovers, cannot compare with him...

Another expression is “hold your tongue.” It means to be still and not talk. “Hold your tongue” is not something you would tell a

friend. But a parent or teacher might use the expression to quiet a noisy child.

“Hold out” is an expression one hears often in sports reports and labor news. It means to refuse to play or work. Professional football and baseball players “hold out” if their team refuses to pay them what they think they are worth. Members of labor unions “hold out” and refuse to work until they get the work agreement they want.

The expression “hold up” has several different meanings. One is a robbery. A man with a gun may say, “This is a hold up. Give me your money.” Another meaning is to delay. A driver late for work may tell his boss, “I was held up by heavy traffic.” Someone who was robbed on the way to work might say, “Sorry, boss, I was held up by a hold up.”

Still another meaning of the expression is for a story to be considered true after an investigation. The same driver late for work could say, “My boss did not believe a hold up held me up. But the police confirmed what I said, so my story held up.”

“Hold on” is another expression. Often it means wait or stop. As you leave for school, your brother may say, “Hold on, you forgot your book.”

“Hold on” is used to ask a telephone caller to wait and not hang up his telephone. If you call a library to ask for a book, the librarian might say, “Hold on while I look for it.”

Our final expression is “hold the line.” That means to keep a problem or situation from getting worse -- to hold steady. For example, the president may say he will “hold the line on taxes.” He means there will be no increase in taxes.

Now, I must “hold the line” on this program. I have no more time left today.

This VOA Special English program Words and Their Stories was written by Frank Beardsley.

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