

# Merriam-Webster chooses vaccine as the 2021 word of the year

NEW YORK, Nov 29, (AP) — With an expanded definition to reflect the times, Merriam-Webster has declared an omnipresent truth as its 2021 word of the year: vaccine.

"This was a word that was extremely high in our data every single day in 2021," Peter Sokolowski, Merriam-Webster's editor-at-large, told The Associated Press ahead of Monday's announcement.

"It really represents two different stories. One is the science story, which is this remarkable speed with which the vaccines were developed. But there's also the debates regarding policy, politics and political affiliation. It's one word that carries these two huge stories," he said.

The selection follows "vax" as word of the year from the folks who publish the Oxford English Dictionary. And it comes after Merriam-Webster chose "pandemic" as tops in lookups last year on its online site.

"The pandemic was the gun going off and now we have the aftereffects," Sokolowski said.

At Merriam-Webster, lookups for "vaccine" increased 601% over 2020, when the first US shot was administered in New York in December after quick development, and months of speculation and discussion over efficacy. The world's first jab occurred earlier that month in the UK.

Compared to 2019, when there was little urgency or chatter about vaccines, Merriam-Webster logged an increase of 1,048% in lookups this year. Debates over inequitable distribution, vaccine mandates and boosters kept interest high, Sokolowski said. So did vaccine hesitancy and friction over vaccine passports.

The word "vaccine" wasn't birthed in a day, or due to a single pandemic. The first known use stretches back to 1882 but references pop up earlier related to fluid from cowpox pustules used in inoculations, Sokolowski said. It was borrowed from the New Latin "vaccina,"

which goes back to Latin's feminine "vaccinus," meaning "of or from a cow." The Latin for cow is "vacca," a word that might be akin to the Sanskrit "vasa," according to Merriam-Webster.

Inoculation, on the other hand, dates to 1714, in one sense referring to the act of injecting an "inoculum."

Earlier this year, Merriam-Webster added to its online entry for "vaccine" to cover all the talk of mRNA vaccines, or messenger vaccines such as those for COVID-19 developed by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna.

## Attention

While other dictionary companies choose words of the year by committee, Merriam-Webster bases its selection on lookup data, paying close attention to spikes and, more recently, year-over-year increases in searches after weeding out evergreens. The company has been declaring a word of the year since 2008. Among its runners-up in the word biography of 2021:

**INSURRECTION:** Interest was driven by the deadly Jan. 6 siege on the U.S. Capitol. Arrests continue, as do congressional hearings over the attack by supporters of President Donald Trump. Some of Trump's allies have resisted subpoenas, including Steve Bannon.

Searches for the word increased by 61,000% over 2020, Sokolowski said.

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** President Joe Biden was able to deliver what Trump often spoke of but never achieved: A bipartisan infrastructure bill signed into law. When Biden proposed help with broadband access, eldercare and preschool, conversation changed from not only roads and bridges but "figurative infrastructure," Sokolowski said.

"Many people asked, what is infrastructure if it's not made out of steel or concrete? Infrastructure, in Latin, means underneath the structure," he said.

**PERSEVERANCE:** It's the name of NASA's latest Mars rover. It landed Feb. 18, 2021. "Perseverance is the most sophisticated rover NASA has ever sent to the Red Planet, with a name that embodies NASA's passion, and our nation's capability, to take on and overcome challenges," the space agency said.

The name was thought up by Alexander Mather, a 14-year-old seventh-grader at Lake Braddock Secondary School in Burke, Virginia. He participated in an essay contest organized by NASA. He was one of 28,000 K-12 students to submit entries.

**NOMAD:** The word had its moment with the 2020 release of the film "Nomadland." It went on to win three Oscars in April 2021, including best picture, director (Chloé Zhao) and actress (Frances McDormand). Zhao became the first woman of color to win best director.

The AP's film writer Jake Coyle called the indie success "a plain-spoken meditation on solitude, grief and grit. He wrote that it "struck a chord in a pandemic-ravaged year. It made for an unlikely Oscar champ: A film about people who gravitate to the margins took center stage."

Other words in Merriam-Webster's Top 10: Cicada (we had an invasion), guardian (the Cleveland Indians became the Cleveland Guardians), meta (the lofty new name of Facebook's parent company), cisgender (a gender identity that corresponds to one's sex assigned at birth), woke (charged with politics and political correctness) and murray (a tropical tree and the word that won the 2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee for 14-year-old Zaila Avant-garde).

Dictionary

## Variety



This image released by MGM shows Lady Gaga as Patrizia Reggiani in 'House of Gucci.' 'Encanto,' 'House of Gucci' fuelled Thanksgiving box office. (AP)

## Film

Film triumphs in every category: art, songs and heart

# Disney's 'Encanto' effortlessly enchants

By Mark Kennedy

Mirabel is extraordinary, in that when it comes to her family, she is totally normal. That's the set-up for Disney's absolutely charming new animated musical "Encanto," which flips the typical children's movie script. Instead of few magical people amid a sea of ordinary, here the ordinary is, well, weird.

"I will stand on the side/When you shine," Mirabel sings to her special brothers and sisters, though she confesses, "I'm not fine."

It's only appropriate that "Encanto" — fueled by eight original songs by "Hamilton" creator Lin-Manuel Miranda — turns into that most special thing of all: A triumph in every category: art, songs and heart.

It starts with Mirabel Madrigal, a saucer-eyed, sweet hearted youngster filleom a magical family in Colombia, where their vibrant house holds many generations. Every Madrigal at the age of 5 reveals an inner magic, say, shapeshifting, talking to animals, super strength or powerful hearing. They, in turn, help the surrounding community.

But magic has somehow skipped over Mirabel (voiced by Stephanie Beatriz), who as she grows into a young girl still tries to be useful among a household of Avenger-like siblings. "Gift or no gift, I am just as special as the rest of my family," she says.

But soon not all is well for this family whose magic was built on tragedy. Cracks — literal — appear in their home's foundations and their stern matriarch, Abuela Alma, worries quietly that their magic may be failing. It's up to Mirabel to investigate what's going on and save the family.

Directors Byron Howard, Jared Bush and Charise Castro Smith fill this tale with their own

magic — expressive faces, acres of brilliant flowers, dancing rats, funny donkeys and a house that becomes a character itself, complete with wagging shutters for waves and tiles that move excitedly.

The voice cast includes John Leguizamo, Wilmer Valderrama, Maluma, Adassa, María Cecilia Botero, Angie Cepeda, Diane Guerrero and Jessica Darrow.

Miranda takes a page from musical theater in his first song, "The Family Madrigal," which sets the table by introducing the extended clan, and creates "Waiting on a Miracle" for Mirabel, our spunky, glasses-wearing heroine, who stops time to sing her plaintive tune.

He gives the rocking "What Else Can I Do?" to a beautiful sister who makes flowers bloom but is secretly restless, and he gifts the super-strong sister the song "Surface/Pressure," which reveals the secret stresses she feels. And there's the terrific, fun group tune "We Don't Talk About Bruno," about a family outcast. (Also listen to a little fun Miranda has with another Disney hit, "Let It Go").

## Visuals

The action, technically, mostly takes place in the rambling house, though there are magical parts of it that defy physics. There is no traditional villain, either, just an unease as the magic fades.

As always in a Disney animated movie, the visuals are a delight. Look at how a motif of butterflies is subtly represented in the pattern on Mirabel's dress. There is also a panning shot of the Colombian community at dusk with its lights and candles blazing that is warm and welcoming.

"Encanto" is a film about the pressure of living up to high expectations and the fear of revealing imperfections. It's about outcasts and misfits

in plain sight. "Sometime family weirdos get a bad rap," is one line. "You're more than just your gift," is another message. Behind all that is also a cheer for immigration and how we need to lend our gifts to the community. It is the Thanksgiving movie we need in 2021.

"Encanto," a Walt Disney Studio release, is rated PG-13 for "some thematic elements and mild peril." Running time: 99 minutes. Four stars out of four.

## Also:

**NEW YORK:** An emerging young filmmaker is also very much in demand in the book world. Nick Brooks has reached a seven-figure deal for his young adult thriller "Promise Boys," in which three boys at a Washington, D.C., charter school investigate the murder of their principal, and learn hard truths about their education and community.

According to Henry Holt Books for Young Readers, which announced the deal Wednesday, "Promise Boys" draws in part on Brooks' experiences as a teacher with at-risk kids. Henry Holt expects to release the book early in 2023.

"It's a social thriller, told through the perspective of Black and Brown boys, that highlights the inequity in our education system," Brooks said in a statement. "This is a story that needs to be told, to speak for our kids who far too often are unable to advocate for themselves and to inspire them to tell their own story."

Brooks, 32, graduated last year from the University of Southern California's TV and Film Production program, from which he received a scholarship after making the short film "Hoop Dreamin.'" He developed this book with Cake Creative, a content generator which will partner with Holt on the publication of "Promise Boys." (AP)

**NEW YORK:** Thanksgiving weekend moviegoing was still far from the feast it normally is, but Disney's "Encanto" and the Lady Gaga-led "House of Gucci" both gave a lift to two genres that have been particularly battered by the pandemic: family movies and adult dramas.

"Encanto" led the box office with \$27 million over the weekend and \$40.3 million across the five-day holiday frame, according to studio estimates Sunday. While well off the pace of past Disney animated movies released over Thanksgiving — "Coco" launched at the same time of year with \$72 million and "Ralph Breaks the Internet" did as well with \$84 million — the result was the best opening for an animated movie during the pandemic.

Family films have been especially slow to bounce back, though with kids increasingly getting vaccinated, hopes have been rising that releases such as "Encanto" can lead a rebound. Disney earlier this year released films like Pixar's "Luca" straight to Disney+, but put out "Encanto," reportedly made for \$120 million, exclusively in theaters. The film, about a magical Colombia family and featuring original songs from Lin-Manuel Miranda, took in \$70 million globally.

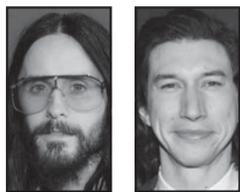
MGM's "House of Gucci," from director Ridley Scott, debuted with \$14.2 million over the three-day weekend and \$21.8 million across five days. That, too, was among the best performances for an adult drama. Scott's own "The Last Duel," for Disney's 20th Century Studios, launched with a paltry \$4.8 million in October.

The \$75 million-budgeted "House of Gucci," about the family behind the Italian fashion brand, features a large cast including Adam Driver, Jared Leto and Al Pacino. But its star, Lady Gaga, who plays Patrizia Reggiani, especially drove the turnout. According to MGM, 59% of the audience was female and 45% were between the ages of 18-35. About 34% were 45 years and older — a higher turnout among older moviegoers than most releases have seen.

"Originality still counts in the public's mind," said Erik Loomis, distribution chief for MGM.

"We were really pleased with the results. If you asked me going into the weekend, I was praying that the predictions were right because you just don't know today. You just don't know how the market's going to react."

Thanksgiving weekend often accounts for around \$250 million in ticket sales domestically. Over-



Leto

Driver

all business this weekend came in at about \$142 million, according to data firm Comscore — a bit more than half of typical business but also almost seven times better than Thanksgiving 2020, when many theaters were still shuttered.

MGM has bet bigger on the theatrical recovery than most studios; its James Bond film "No Time to

Die," with \$755 million globally, will rank as the No. 1 film of the year. Over the weekend, MGM also released Paul Thomas Anderson's "Licorice Pizza," a coming-of-age romance starring Alana Haim and Cooper Hoffman, on four screens in 70mm for a per-screen average of \$83,852 — easily the best of the pandemic.

"Licorice Pizza" expands wider in the coming weeks.

"After all the talk of the reticence of certain demographics to go to the movie theater — more mature audiences and family audiences — both came out this weekend," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore. (AP)