



American Expression E2779 Riddle me

IOTS Publishing Team
International Online Teachers Society
Since 2011

“Riddle me” is an English expression most commonly heard in the phrase “riddle me this,” which means “answer this question” or “solve this puzzle for me.” A riddle is a question, statement, or puzzle designed to make someone think carefully before discovering the answer. When a person says, “Riddle me this,” the speaker is usually introducing a difficult, clever, humorous, or mysterious question. The expression can sound playful or dramatic and is more colorful than simply saying, “Answer this question for me, please.”

The word “riddle” has a long history in English. As a noun, it refers to a puzzling question whose answer must be discovered through reasoning or imagination. As a verb, “to riddle” can mean to present someone with a riddle or puzzle. Therefore, in “riddle me this,” the word functions as a verb. The structure is somewhat old-fashioned, similar to expressions such as “tell me this.” In modern conversation, people rarely say “riddle me” alone; they usually complete the expression by saying “riddle me this.”

For example, someone might say, “Riddle me this: Why do we park on driveways and drive on parkways?” This question is not necessarily a traditional riddle with one correct answer. Instead, the expression introduces an amusing observation or contradiction. Another person might say, “Riddle me this: If the restaurant is always crowded, why do people say nobody goes there anymore?” In such cases, “riddle me this” invites the listener to think about something confusing, ironic, contradictory, or difficult to explain.

The expression became especially recognizable in popular culture through the Riddler, a famous villain from Batman stories. The Riddler enjoys challenging Batman with riddles, puzzles, clues, and intellectual games. Versions of the character have frequently used language associated with riddles, helping make “riddle me this” sound theatrical and mysterious. Because of this association, someone using the expression today may intentionally imitate the dramatic style of a puzzle master. It can add humor, suspense, or playful challenge to an otherwise ordinary question in conversation.

“Riddle me this” can also be used when questioning someone’s logic or pointing out an apparent inconsistency. Imagine that a manager says the company must reduce expenses but then purchases extremely expensive office furniture. An employee might jokingly ask, “Riddle me this: If we need to save money, why did we buy those expensive chairs?” Here, the speaker is not really requesting a puzzle solution. Instead, the phrase emphasizes that the situation seems contradictory and deserves an explanation. Tone is therefore important for understanding its meaning.

English learners should distinguish “riddle me this” from several related expressions. “Solve this riddle” usually refers to an actual puzzle with an intended answer. “Figure this out” asks someone to understand or solve a problem. “Explain this to me” directly requests an explanation. “Riddle me this,” however, has a more playful, dramatic, or challenging quality. It can introduce a genuine riddle, a difficult question, an amusing contradiction, or a sarcastic observation. Because of its distinctive tone, it is more common in informal speech than formal writing.

In conclusion, “riddle me” is best understood through the complete expression “riddle me this,” meaning “answer or explain this puzzling question.” It comes from the idea of presenting someone with a riddle and challenging that person to discover an answer. Although it can introduce a traditional puzzle, modern speakers often use it humorously or dramatically when discussing confusing situations or contradictions. Its connection with the Riddler has strengthened its playful image in popular culture. Learning the expression gives English learners another lively way to ask thought-provoking questions and challenge others in conversation.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does the expression “riddle me this” mean, and when would you use it?
2. Why do people usually say “riddle me this” instead of simply saying “riddle me”?
3. How can “riddle me this” be used to point out a contradiction or confusing situation?
4. How did the Riddler from Batman help make the expression “riddle me this” more recognizable?
5. Can you create your own question beginning with “Riddle me this”?