

A Lesson in Semantics

I attended government run schools, but I don't remember much of specifics that I learned there. However one particular lesson has stayed with me very vividly since I learned it almost 30 years ago.

We were doing a unit on semantics – the study of meaning in language. The teacher stood in the front of the room with only his middle finger raised. There were a few whispers and maybe even a giggle or two.

He said, “What? I’m just holding up my middle finger.”

We went on to discuss that words and symbols only have the meaning that we give them.

How often do we forget that others may not have the same meaning attached to words that we do? I think this is definitely that case when it comes to words in the realm of voluntarism: anarchy, government, law, public, etc.

We can either complain about the differences in our semantics – or we can try to understand what those words mean to them. If we do this, perhaps we can find common ground to reason together.

Musing Fool