

# The Magic Of Words

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**NPR:**

The philosopher George Berkeley famously argued (contra John Locke) that we can never have truly abstract ideas — ideas stripped of all particulars and details. When I think of a triangle, I imagine a *particular* triangle, not some abstract idea of “triangle.” When I think of a dog, I imagine a golden retriever or a Yorkie or a mutt — not a “general” dog that embodies only the essence of “dogness,” devoid of all nonessential features.

Yet, somehow or other, we manage to communicate about *triangles* (and not just about particular triangles) when we say that “triangles have three sides,” and I can tell you something meaningful about the type of animal I just heard outside (“a dog!”) even though you know nothing of its particulars.

Read the whole story: [NPR](#)