

# Proposal for Emoji: PLUNGER

**Submitted by:** Christian Krenek of Emojination

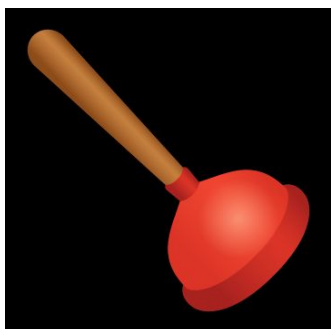
**Date:** March 31, 2019

**Emoji Name:** PLUNGER

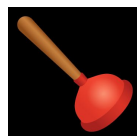
**Sort Order:** In the OBJECT-HOUSEHOLD category, after TOILET

**Reference Emoji:** TOOL-WRENCH

**Keywords:** plunger, plunge, plumber, force cup, plumber's helper



72x72



18x18

Credit: Apee Messer. Free for use in conjunction with this proposal. Black and white images will be forthcoming on request.

## Abstract

This proposal requests the addition of the PLUNGER emoji to the Unicode emoji library. A crucial item closely tied (arguably, a symbiotic evolution) with indoor plumbing, the plunger has become a necessity in contemporary times--a symbol of the phrase "it's a dirty job, but someone

has to do it!” In addition, the simple design of the plunger has expanded its use into the world of music, where brass instruments can be silenced using a plunger cup. The plunger is also one of the items closely tied to a profession not currently listed within the Unicode library--the plumber, that “patron of pipes” who can undo clogs and restore flow. It is, perhaps, a simple item, but a necessary one, and as such, it deserves a unique emoji.

## Introduction

*“Teddy said it was a hat, so I put it on. Now Dad is saying ‘Where the heck’s the toilet plunger gone?’”--“The Hat,” Shel Silverstein<sup>1</sup>*

Riddle! What is it no one wants to use, but no one wants to be without? The answer, of course, is the plunger--that tool used for the dirtiest of jobs, unclogging toilets and keeping the plumbing of a household flowing in order. Despite the apparent simplicity of the tool, the plunger took quite some time to be developed, as its existence is closely tied to the existence and development of the flush toilet. It might be argued that the two, like certain creatures in nature, have “co-evolved” over time, adapting and changing to better suit one another.

Despite the ubiquity of the plunger, its origins are shrouded in relative mystery. The earliest use of a plunger-like object connected to plumbing occurred in 1777, when one Samuel Prosser filed a patent for the *plunger closet*.<sup>2</sup> This model, unlike other water closets, operated by lifting the plunger (kept on top of the outflowing water), which in turn sent waste rushing from the bowl into the soil collection pipe.<sup>3</sup> Joseph Bramah was the next man with a *flush* idea--his water closet used a spring-operated valve at the bottom.<sup>4</sup> The plunger as we know it, however--the wood-handled object with a pliant suction cup fixed on one end--would not arrive until nearly a century later. The exact date is impossible to pinpoint, but New York University researchers suggest that the contemporary plunger was created circa 1850, when S-trap drainage pipe toilets became common and suction cups were invented.<sup>5</sup> Since then, the plunger has remained relatively constant across the decades; some cosmetic changes have occurred, but the plunger itself remains near identical in function.

A plunger’s relatively simple job--being used to cover the hole in a toilet bowl and being pushed until the pipe blockage comes loose--belies the laws of physics that govern its purpose.

Plungers create a seal over the hole; when pressed, the air pressure within the pipes increases, decreasing the volume of the air within that seal, in accordance with Boyle’s Law.<sup>6</sup> With a great enough increase in pressure, the blockage is released, sending it into the pipes. The same

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/195834-teddy-said-it-was-a-hat-so-i-put-it>

<sup>2</sup> <https://thep plumber.com/the-men-that-made-the-water-closet/>

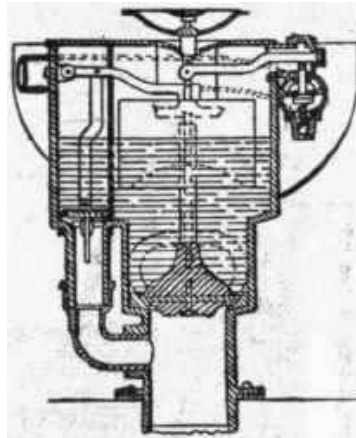
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hunker.com/13409380/the-history-of-the-toilet-plunger>

<sup>4</sup> <https://thep plumber.com/the-men-that-made-the-water-closet/>

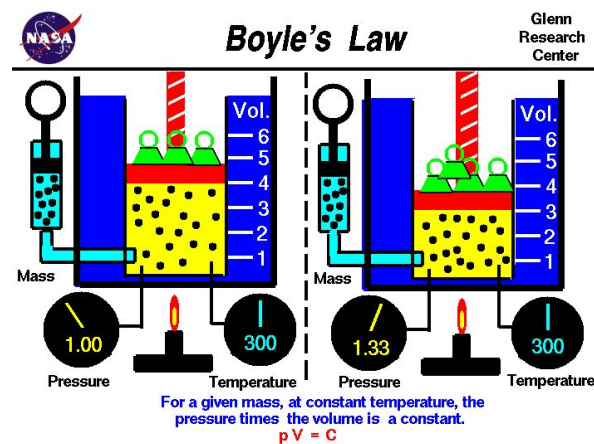
<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hunker.com/13409380/the-history-of-the-toilet-plunger>

<sup>6</sup> <https://physics.stackexchange.com/questions/143622/how-does-a-plunger-toilet-plunger-work>

principle applies to water used with a plunger: pressing down on a filled toilet bowl creates a “piston of fluid” that pushes down against the blockage, eventually forcing it loose.<sup>7</sup> A plunger and its uses, then, provide a beginner’s course in the fields of thermodynamics and gas laws!<sup>8</sup>



A model of a “plunger closet,” the ancestor of the contemporary plunger. Note the similarity of the plunger-shaped object in the middle of the device.<sup>9</sup>



An image demonstrating the principles of Boyle’s Law, the physics equation that allows a plunger to work.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> @MISC {263481,  
 TITLE = {How does a plunger (toilet plunger) work?},  
 AUTHOR = {Mark H (https://physics.stackexchange.com/users/45164/mark-h)},  
 HOWPUBLISHED = {Physics Stack Exchange},  
 NOTE = {URL:https://physics.stackexchange.com/q/263481 (version: 2016-06-19)},  
 EPRINT = {https://physics.stackexchange.com/q/263481},  
 URL = {https://physics.stackexchange.com/q/263481}

}  
<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boyle%27s\\_law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boyle%27s_law)  
<sup>9</sup>

<https://chestofbooks.com/home-improvement/construction/plumbing/Household-Sanitation/Valve-And-Plunger-Closets-Continued.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.grc.nasa.gov/www/k-12/airplane/boyle.html>

While plungers are almost universally connected to toilets and plumbing, there is one surprising field that uses them in another way: jazz music. Plungers are used as a form of *mute*, “a device fitted to a musical instrument to alter the sound produced.”<sup>11</sup> The cups of plungers can be used as mutes, especially in brass instruments; jazz artists, including “Tricky” Sam Nanton of Duke Ellington’s famed orchestra, moved the plunger in and out of their instruments, creating a variety of sounds that could even mimic the human voice.<sup>12</sup> It is said that Nanton’s use of the plunger in his trombone created the famous “wah-wah” sound now commonly associated with trombones.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the seemingly simple plunger has not just unclogged toilets across history—it has also set the music of jazz free and flowing into people’s ears!



*Jazz legend “Tricky” Sam Nanton, pioneer of the plunger-mute in jazz. Note the plunger cup sitting snugly in the mouth of his trombone; Nanton’s ability to move the cup quickly created an entirely new range of sounds.<sup>14</sup>*

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mute\\_\(music\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mute_(music))

<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mute\\_\(music\)#Plunger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mute_(music)#Plunger)

<sup>13</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tricky\\_Sam\\_Nanton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tricky_Sam_Nanton)

<sup>14</sup> <https://jazzlives.wordpress.com/tag/tricky-sam-nanton/>

# Selection Factors – Inclusion

## Compatibility

Not applicable.

## Expected Usage Level

### Frequency

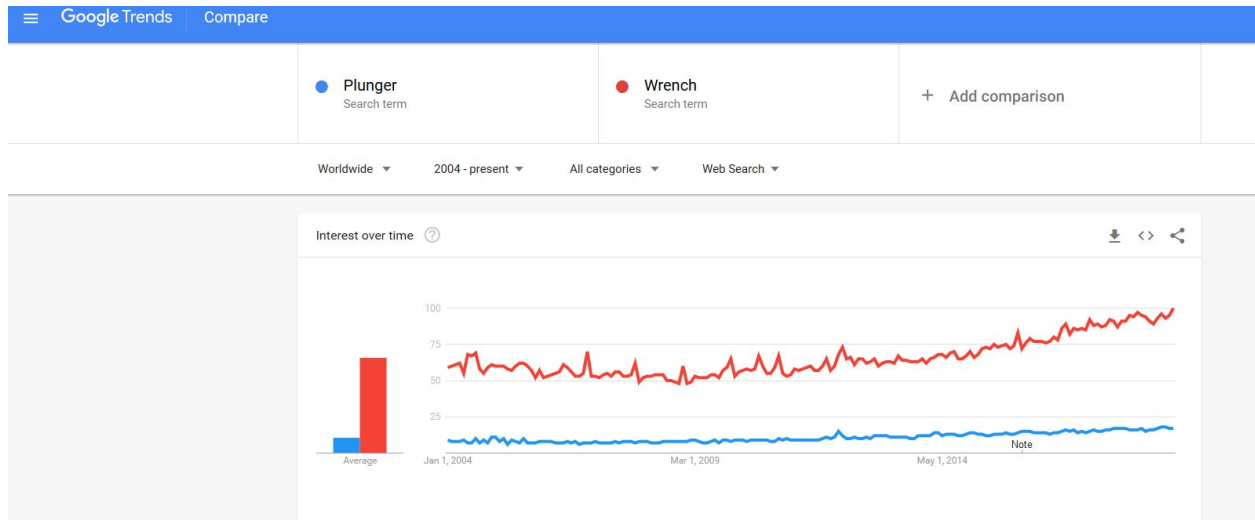
I have selected WRENCH as the **reference emoji** for PLUNGER. Both are tools, although the former is used for repairs and metalwork, while the latter is specifically connected to plumbing and toiletry (in another sense, the WRENCH is used for the exterior of pipes, while the PLUNGER removes clogs from within them). I briefly considered including PLUNGER among the TOOLS list of the Emoji Library, but other authors suggested HOUSEHOLD, which does seem more appropriate, especially since the art provided by Aphree Messer resembles the type of PLUNGER commonly seen in households.

Since the plunger is largely designed for a single purpose--removing clogs from pipes, and especially toilets--any and every community that possesses indoor plumbing and pipes will be able to use it. Similarly, plumbers--individuals who frequently use plungers in their work--are found in societies that contain indoor plumbing. The PLUNGER, then, can be used by both anyone who uses a toilet in their living space, and those who professionally repair those toilets.

### Google Trends: Web Search

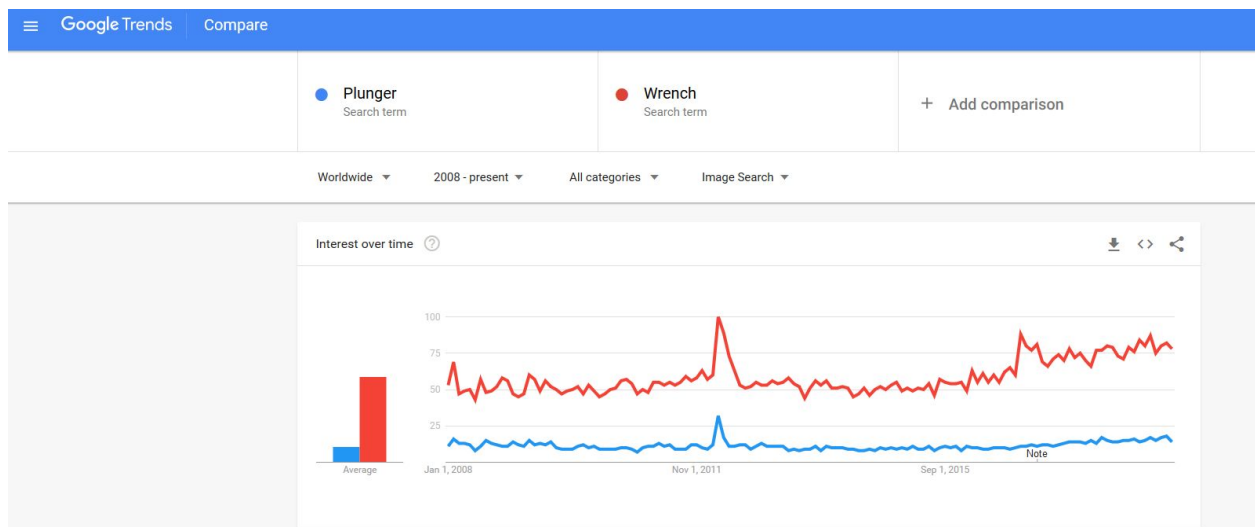
WRENCH has been searched more frequently than PLUNGER; I attribute this marked split between the singular purpose of the plunger (used to unclog plumbing) to the more varied uses of the wrench; similarly, wrenches come in various types, while plungers

have a largely uniform shape for their uniform function.



### Google Trends: Image Search

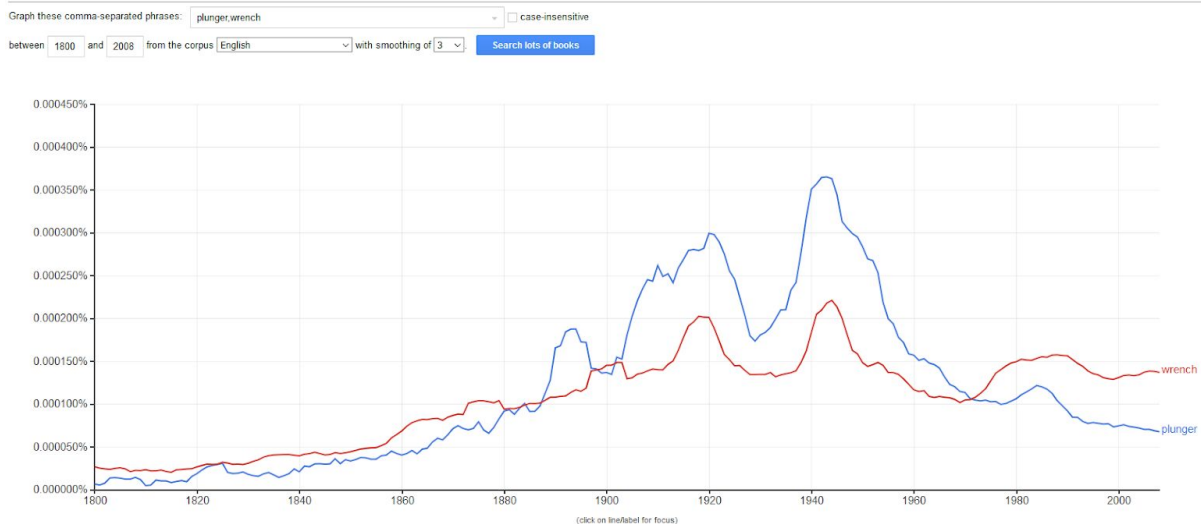
The Image Trends search largely follows the same patterns of the overall Google Trends. There is an interesting parallel between the two in the first half of the chart (right down to a similar spike around the 2011 mark); however, after this, the search for WRENCH gradually increases over time, while PLUNGER remains flatter.



## NGram Viewer

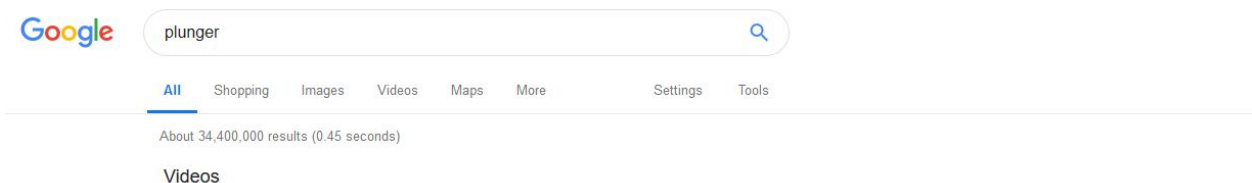
This particular trend reverses the pattern seen in the others--while PLUNGER (in blue) and WRENCH (in red) largely run together throughout the early nineteenth century, the former overtakes the latter in the late 1800s and largely remains above it across the twentieth century, only falling off in the new millennium. There may be a link between the spread of indoor plumbing in the latter portion of the nineteenth century and the presence of PLUNGER in texts.

## Google Books Ngram Viewer



## Google Search

The common trend continues, with WRENCH appearing over two hundred million more times than PLUNGER. As with the first comparison on this list, it is likely that WRENCH requires more specific searching, and thus more hits are available.



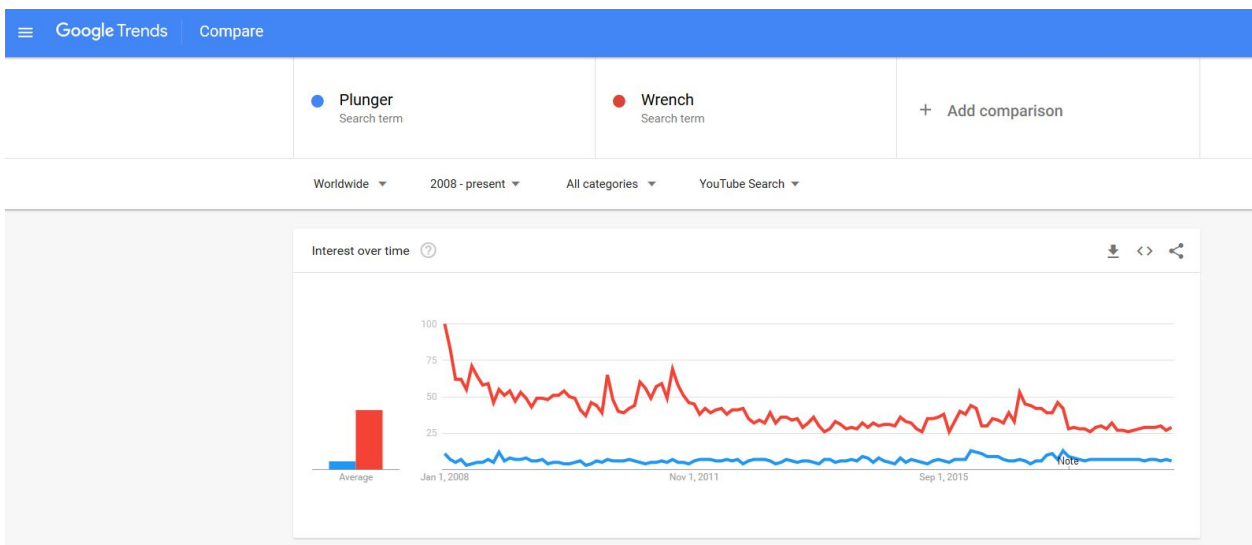


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About 251,000,000 results (0.59 seconds)

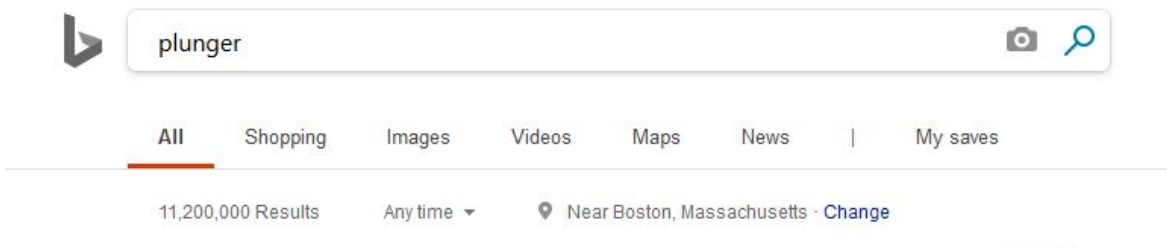
## YouTube Search

This pattern speaks to the overall usefulness of the PLUNGER--while the WRENCH is searched more frequently over time, it gradually drops across the years, while PLUNGER remains steady. I theorize that this is because people largely look up PLUNGER on YouTube for the same purpose--unclogging their toilets.

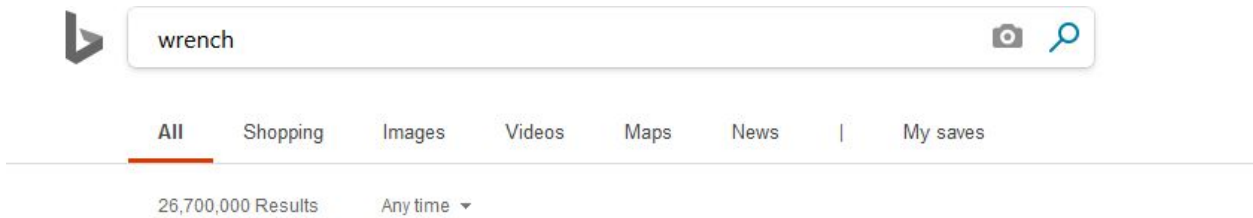


## Bing Search

WRENCH has over twice as many hits as PLUNGER in this search engine. The overall trend continues.

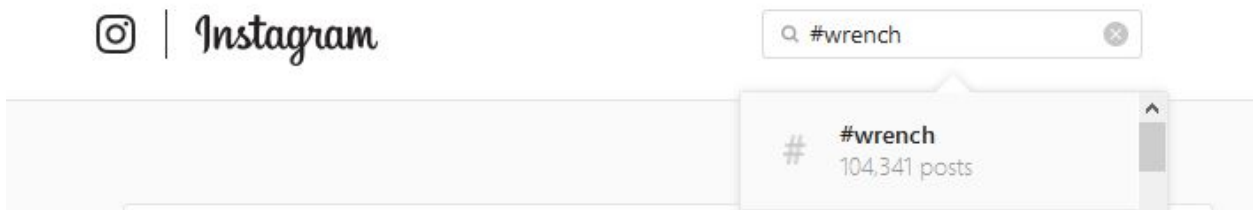






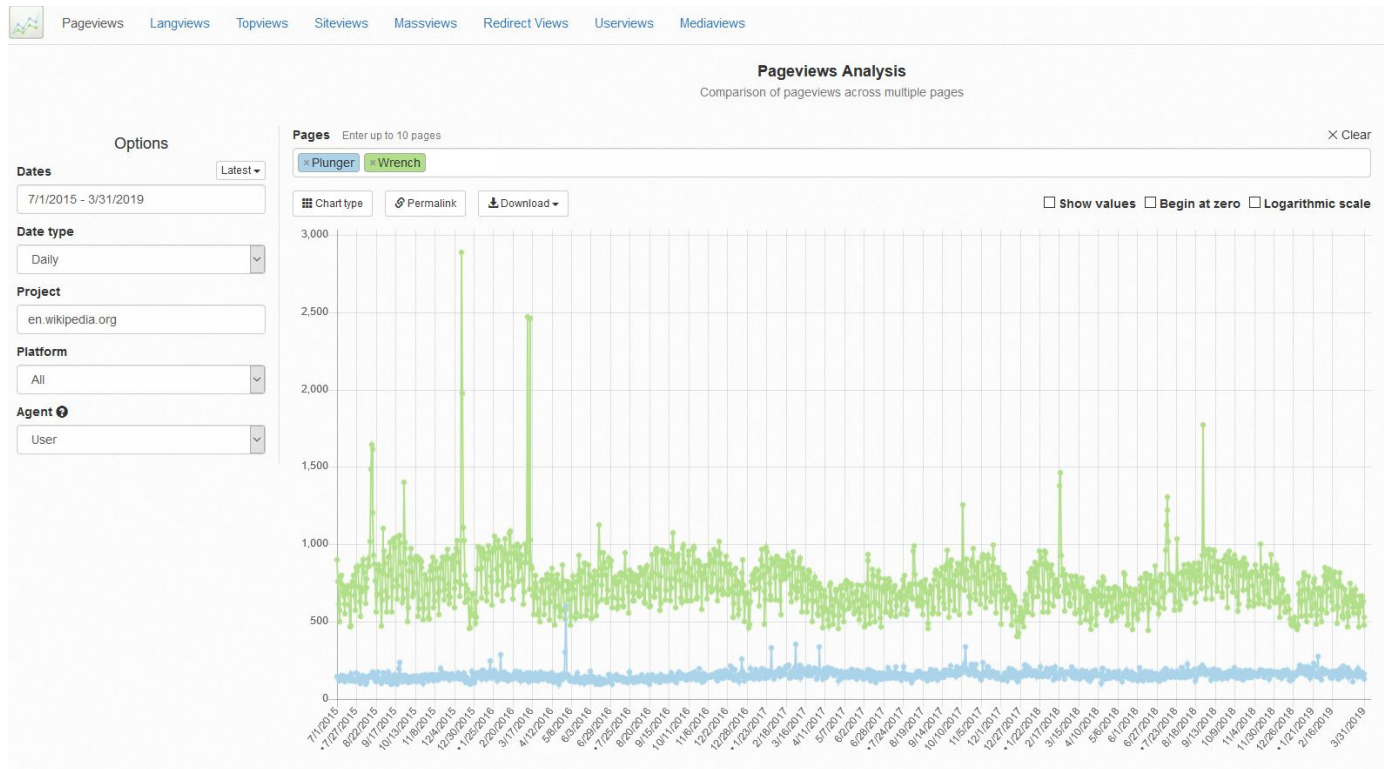
### Instagram Search

In a continuation of WRENCH's wreaking havoc, it contains over four times as many tags on Instagram than PLUNGER.



### Wikipedia Search

PLUNGER has far fewer page views than WRENCH. At its peak, PLUNGER is searched 601 times; meanwhile, on its highest day, WRENCH appears over 1,000 times. Given how much shorter PLUNGER's page is when compared to WRENCH, this data is unsurprising.



## Multiple Usages

The PLUNGER is used (whether owners like it or not!) in every household and structure that has centralized plumbing; at some point, clogs are going to happen, and when they do, a plunger is the fastest and simplest way to set them free. It will also be possible to tie the plunger together with the WORKER emoji to signify the plumber, an important occupation that currently lacks representation. Finally, more creative users might be able to combine PLUNGER with the more metaphorical “plunge,” a phrase used to signify a big decision or change.

## Use in sequences

The PLUNGER’s uses will largely be connected to plumbing, although it may be possible to try some other ideas.

PLUNGER + TOILET + PILE OF POO (possibly + GRIMACING FACE or POUTING FACE)= CLOGGED TOILET (the angry faces would signify the unpleasant nature of the job!)

PLUNGER + TOILET + GRINNING FACE (possibly + DROPLETS)= UNCLOGGED TOILET (a much happier scenario!)

PLUNGER + MECHANIC/CONSTRUCTION WORKER= PLUMBER (one who unclogs toilets and fixes clogs for a living)

PLUNGER + SNAKE (possibly + TOILET)= PLUMBER'S SNAKE (a long, flexible tool used to directly enter pipes)

PLUNGER + SAXOPHONE = PLUNGE MUTE (a tool that, as described above, jazz musicians manipulate to change the timbre and volume of their brass instruments)

PLUNGER + MAN IN TUXEDO (or 2, for same-sex couples) + BRIDE WITH VEIL (or 2, for same-sex couples): "TAKING THE PLUNGE" (a term used to refer to marriage!)

## Breaking new ground.

Despite the plunger's use across societies with indoor plumbing--and the ubiquitousness of what it is commonly used for, ha ha--there is still not a PLUNGER emoji. The use of PLUNGER may also lead to the creation of new occupations, including MAINTENANCE WORKER, PLUMBER, and CARPENTER (all individuals required to keep the physical structure of a house well-kept).

## Image Distinctiveness

PLUNGERS are brilliant in their simplicity--a simple brown stick with a red suction cup attached to one end are the universal symbol for the tool. The bright red color of the cup in Aphree Messer's art, and its proximity to the TOILET emoji, will keep users from confusing it with the BROOM.

## Completeness

The current set of HOUSEHOLD emoji contains various things relating to common chores, including the BROOM, the SPONGE, and even the FIRE EXTINGUISHER. And yet one of the most common "emergencies" of all--the clogged toilet--does not have any kind of representation. Similarly, items commonly found in a bathroom with indoor plumbing--including the SHOWER, the BATHTUB, LOTION, and SOAP--are found inside the list, but no bathroom is truly complete without a plunger.

## Frequently Requested

In a humorous twist, the "Squatty Potty Emoji Poo Plunger" has been created to clear clogs from toilets around the world. Surely a *real* plunger would be better than seeing the PILE OF POO be used to represent toilet clogs!



plunger emoji



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About 647,000 results (0.47 seconds)

### Images for plunger emoji



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## Selection Factors – Exclusion

### Overly Specific

Any household that contains indoor plumbing will, at some point, need a PLUNGER. The universal use of the object, and its relative simplicity of design, prevents it from being confused with other TOOLS and HOUSEHOLD items. Similarly, any MECHANIC + PLUNGER will be easily understood as PLUMBER--there are few other occupations that require the regular use of that toilet tool.

### Open Ended

There are few other uses of the word PLUNGER in the English language. One, described above, is the “mute plunger”--a tool used in jazz music to create alternate sounds for brass instruments. The only other possible use is a detonation

*plunger*--typically a small box with a push-down handle used to trigger explosions--but as demolitions are far less common than plumbing clogs, it seems unlikely that the two will be confused.

## Already Representable

Many instances of plumbing are already represented in the Emoji Library--TOILET, SHOWER, and BATHTUB come to mind--but none of the objects require to *maintain* these objects, including a plumber's snake, liquid drain cleaner, or the PLUNGER, are present in the emoji library. Maintenance is crucial to the upkeep of household pieces!

## Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, deities

The PLUNGER is such a universally-used tool that it is impossible to trademark; while individual plumbing companies might use a plunger as their logo (again speaking to the almost intrinsic connection between the profession and the object), or others might advertise on signs, it is impossible for any one company to be uniquely associated with it. The fact that plungers came into existence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries excludes the possibility of deities, and there are few famous individuals (or indeed, any individuals at all!) named "Plunger."

## Transient

As described above, plungers have existed for over two hundred and fifty years in some way, shape, or form, and the earliest toilets date back to antiquity. So long as humans need to remove their waste, they will need pipes--and as long as there are metallic pipes, they will be clogged. There may come a time when human waste is immediately vaporized or transmuted into another, more useful form of matter--but until that day comes, we will need plumbing to take waste away, and plungers to undo the clogs created by it.

## Faulty Comparison

As no other tool--both represented in the current Emoji library and in the non-digital world--has the same function as a PLUNGER, it is impossible to compare it to any other object. As mentioned above, it is close, at least in shape, to the BROOM, but the two do entirely separate things and are even used in different rooms in the household.

## Exact Images

While the iconic “brown stick/red cup” PLUNGER is the most commonly reproduced, it is possible to see other combinations (yellow stick/black cup is frequently present on the “industrial,” or company, level). As long as the shape of the suction cup is present, and there is a strong contrast between the color of the stick and the cup, it will be easy to identify the PLUNGER, especially if it is next to TOILET in the HOUSEHOLD list.

## Other Character Properties

The other character properties are suggested to be defined as follows.

General Category: So

Canonical Combining Class: 0

Bidirectional Class: ON

Decomposition Type:

Decomposition Mapping:

Numeric Type:

Numeric Value:

Bidirectional Mirrored:

N Unicode 1 Name:

ISO Comment:

Simple Uppercase Mapping:

Simple Lowercase Mapping:

Simple Titlecase Mapping:

## Author Biographies

**Christian Krenek** ([Christian.Krenek@gmail.com](mailto:Christian.Krenek@gmail.com)) realized that he’d finally become an adult the day he realized that it was time to purchase a plunger for his apartment. He lives in Medford, Massachusetts, and has spent his time doing odd jobs in everything from professional theatre companies to escape rooms. He likes to consider his views on the plunger similar to his views on life: “Sometimes you have to do unpleasant things to get things moving smoothly again.” He thanks you for unclogging your schedule to read this proposal!