DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 548 CS 209 690

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TITLE Answering Students' Questions about Words.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, Urbana, Ill.; National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, Ill.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 86
CONTRACT 400-83-0025
NOTE 86p.; TRIP: Theory & Research into Practice.
AVAILABLE FROM National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, IL 61801 (Stock No. 01879, $5.00 member, $6.50 nonmember).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; *Diachronic Linguistics; Elementary Education; *English; *Etymology; Language Patterns; Linguistic Borrowing; Linguistics; Orthographic Symbols; Teaching Methods; Theory Practice Relationship

ABSTRACT

Acknowledging that to study the development of a language is to study the history and culture of people and that English has been influenced by many geographic, political, economic, social, and linguistic forces, this booklet provides a ready reference for elementary and middle school/junior high school teachers confronted with students' questions about the characteristics of the language they speak and are learning to read and write. Since most questions are directed toward words and their spellings, the first section of the booklet emphasizes selected historical aspects of vocabulary growth and orthographic change. The second section of the booklet presents exercises designed around actual student questions, providing not only initial suggestions for vocabulary study activities, but also a rationale for the incongruities of English with an eye toward putting modern usage into a historical perspective. (HTH)

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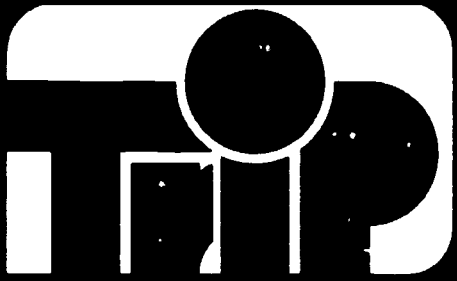

THEORY & RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

Answering Students' Questions about Words

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Published 1986 by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills and the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. 400-83-0025. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Prior to publication, the manuscript was submitted to the National Council of Teachers of English for critical review and determination of professional competence. This publication has met such standards. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view or opinions of either the National Council of Teachers of English or the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Contents

Foreword

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system developed by the U.S. Office of Education and now sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). ERIC provides ready access to descriptions of exemplary programs, research and development reports, and related information useful in developing effective educational programs.

Through its network of specialized centers or clearinghouses, each of which is responsible for a particular educational area, ERIC acquires, evaluates, abstracts, and indexes current information and lists that information in its reference publications.

The ERIC system has already made available—through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service—a considerable body of data, including all federally funded research reports since 1956. However, if the findings of educational research are to be used by teachers, much of the data must be translated into an essentially different context. Rather than resting at the point of making research reports easily accessible, OERI has directed the ERIC clearinghouses to commission authorities in various fields to write information analysis papers.

As with all federal educational information efforts, ERIC has as a primary goal bridging the gap between educational theory and classroom practice. One method of achieving that goal is the development by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (ERIC/RCS) of a series of booklets designed to meet concrete educational needs. Each booklet provides teachers with a review of the best educational theory and research on a limited topic, followed by descriptions of classroom activities that will assist teachers in putting that theory into practice.

The idea is not unique. Several educational journals and many commercial textbooks offer similar aids. The ERIC/RCS booklets are, however, noteworthy in their sharp focus on educational needs and their pairing of sound academic theory with tested classroom practice. And they have been developed in response to the increasing number of requests from teachers to provide this kind of service.

Topics for these booklets are recommended by the ERIC/RCS National Advisory Board. Suggestions for topics are welcomed by the Board and should be directed to the Clearinghouse.

Charles Suhor
Director, ERIC/RCS

1 Theory and Research

Students are curious about their language, and they ask all sorts of questions:

> Why do we have two words—like *street* and *road*—when they mean the same thing?
>
> How come words like *island* have silent letters?
>
> Why don't we say "childs" and "mans" and "mouses"?
>
> How come you can't say "eated"?
>
> Why do we say *eleven* and *twelve* instead of "one-teen" and "two-teen"?
>
> How are you really supposed to spell *theater: theater* or *theatre*?

We are writing this booklet because we have been stymied by questions such as these. Our purpose is to provide information, gleaned from the history of the English language, to help elementary and middle school/junior high school teachers answer their students' questions about language. Most of the questions that students ask focus on the seeming lack of consistency in English: irregular plural and past tense forms, silent letters, British and American English spelling contrasts, synonyms, and homonyms. Events in the history and development of English often account for these inconsistencies. It is crucial that teachers have information to present to students to help them understand and appreciate our language. We fear that teachers' often noncommittal answers suggest to students that English is difficult to understand, or, worse yet, capricious.

To study the course of development of a language is to study the history and culture of a people, for language is a reflection of the people who speak it. The development of our language has been influenced by many geographic, political, economic, social, and linguistic forces. It will not be possible nor appropriate, however, within the scope of this booklet to mention all or to attempt to explain in detail the complex relationships between these linguistic and extra-linguistic forces. These forces have melded together in a subtle, ever-shifting ebb and flow of English language growth and change. For the

interested reader, more technical discussions of these phenomena are referred to throughout the text and are listed in the references.

Nevertheless, it is important to underscore—particularly in the case of English, which has many foreign elements—that all language systems, regardless of external influences, evidence a general "drift" away from any fixed form. As Edward Sapir, one of the most eminent linguists of this century, has said, "Language moves down time in a current of its own making" (Sapir 1921, 150). In other words, even without contact from another language group, any particular language will of its own accord, as a function of the largely unconscious language habits and idiosyncrasies of its speakers, evidence gradual changes in its sound, grammatical, and meaning systems.

For English, this means that the changes in its sound system and grammar, some of which will be touched upon shortly, began long before the Norman invasion. It is far less the case than is often thought that contact with the Norman-French intrusively altered the course of English language development; the French elements, although powerful, merely flowed into the current and direction of the ongoing English language change begun centuries earlier. In fact, the inviolability of English's own structure and movement through time is noted by Sapir, who has written, "The wonder, then, is not that it [English] took on a number of external morphological features, . . . but that, exposed as it was to remolding influences, it remained so true to its own type and historic drift" (1921, 203). We may be sure that despite the changes that English has undergone during its history, it has remained unalterably "English" throughout (Baugh and Cable 1978; Pyles and Algeo 1982).

This booklet is intended to provide a ready reference to which elementary and middle school/junior high school teachers may turn when confronted with the questions students ask about the characteristics of the language which they speak and which they are learning to read and write. Since a majority of the questions we have collected are directed toward words and their spellings, the first section emphasizes selected historical aspects of vocabulary growth and orthographic change.

The exercises in the second section have been designed around actual questions that students in grades one through eight have asked while attempting to grapple with our written language system. The exercises provide not only initial suggestions for vocabulary study activities, but, more importantly, they begin with a rationale for the apparent incongruities of English with an eye toward putting modern usage into a historical perspective.

Our intent throughout is to create an impression that our language is anything but haphazardly thrown together. Rather, English is the rich and dynamic composite of many centuries of varying cultural and linguistic inputs to which we ourselves are contributing today. It is our hope that the results of this effort will provide teachers with reasonable answers to their students' questions and will encourage both teachers and students alike to probe ever deeper into the intricacies of their language and, thus, into themselves as well.

History of the English Language

The family of languages to which English belongs is known as Indo-European (IE). Members of this family extend from northern India (Sanskrit) across Europe. These Indo-European languages had a common origin, but the parent language is not known. Linguists can only hypothesize about the grammar and spelling because the language existed more than five thousand years ago, before writing was invented. However, the common origin is demonstrated by the similarities among common words in various Indo-European languages. For example, the English word *mother* is remarkably similar to these other words for *mother:*

Bulgarian: maika
Celtic: mathair
Czech: matko
Danish: mor
Dutch: moeder
French: mère
German: Mutter
Greek: meter
Icelandic: módir
Italian: madre
Latin: mater
Lithuanian: moter
Portuguese: mãe
Romanian: mama
Russian: mat'
Sanskrit: mātr
Spanish: madre
Swedish: moder

The original Indo-European speakers probably lived in northern Europe, rather than in the Middle East as was hypothesized earlier. Linguists have reached this conclusion after analyzing some of the common words in many Indo-European languages. They found words relating to the north, such as *snow, beech tree, turtle, wolf,* and *bee,* but not words relating to a milder climate, such as *palm, olive, monkey, tiger,* or *elephant.* From this beginning, people migrated across Europe and developed separate languages. Nine groups of languages have survived; English belongs to the Germanic branch, which also includes the Scandinavian languages (Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and Icelandic, [illegible]ot Finnish), German, and Dutch.

For convenience, our discussion of English language development will be segmented into three periods: Old English (450–1100), Middle English (1100–1500), and Modern English (1500–present).

Old English (450–1100)

The recorded history of the English language begins in 449 when Germanic tribes including the Angles and Saxons invaded Britain. These invaders pushed the original inhabitants, the Celts, to the northern and western corners of the island. This annexation is romanticized in the King Arthur legends; Arthur is believed to have been a Celtic military leader who fought bravely against the Germanic invaders.

The English language began as an intermingling of the dialects spoken by the Angles, Saxons, and other Germanic tribes in Britain. While at least four major dialects existed, what evidence we have of vernacular writers suggests that they always referred to themselves as speaking "Englisc" (Baugh and Cable 1978). Although 85 percent of the Old English words are no longer used, the words that have remained in our language include such common, everyday words as *child, cow, death, foot, hand, house, little, man, mother, old,* and *sun.* In contrast to Modern English, Old English had few loan words (words borrowed from other languages and incorporated into English) and was highly "synthetic," having a highly developed inflectional system for indicating number, case, gender, verb tense, person, mood, and adjective comparison. The Anglo-Saxons added affixes to existing words, including *be-, for-, -lice (-ly), -dom,* and *-hād (-hood).* They also invented vividly descriptive compound words. For example, the Old English word for *music* was "earsport," *world* was "age of man," and *folly* was "wanwit." The elaborate metaphors, kennings, and poetic use of words is evidenced in the folk epic *Beowulf,* the great literary work of the period. Here, the sea is described as a "whale-path" and a "swan's road" (Alexander 1962).

Through contact, sometimes hostile as well as friendly, with other cultures, foreign words began to make their way into the predominantly Germanic word stock during the Old English period. Those words that were borrowed came from three sources: the Celts, the Romans, and the Vikings. The native Celts had a very limited influence on English, contributing only a handful of words (e.g., *babe, Britain, cradle, London*).

A far greater number of words were borrowed from Latin and incorporated into English. First, during the Roman occupation of Britain (43–410), a few words (e.g., *camp, port*) were borrowed by the Celts and later assimilated into English. Next, contact between the Roman soldiers and traders and the Germanic tribes on the continent

before they invaded England contributed some words, including *cheese, church, copper, dish, mile, street,* and *wine*. The missionaries who reintroduced Christianity to Britain in 597 also introduced a number of religious words (e.g., *angel, candle, disciple, hymn, priest*).

In 787, the Vikings from Denmark and other areas of Scandinavia began a series of raids against English villages, and for the next three centuries, they attacked, conquered, and occupied much of England. Their influence was so great that Canute and other Danish kings ruled England during the first part of the eleventh century. The Vikings' contribution to the English language was significant. They provided the pronouns *they, their, them;* introduced the /g/ and /k/ sounds (e.g., *dike, kid, get, egg*); contributed most of our *sc-* and *sk-* words (e.g., *scrape, scrub, skin, skirt, sky, whisk*); and enriched our vocabulary with more than five hundred everyday words, including *awkward, bull, fellow, husband, ill, low, take, ugly,* and *window.*

In Old English, some consonant combinations not heard today were pronounced, including the /k/ in words like *cneo* (knee). The letter *f* represented both dental fricatives /f/ and /v/, resulting in the Modern English spelling pattern *wolf* and *wolves*. The pronunciation of the vowel sounds was very different, too. For example, OE *stān* (ā = a in father) has become our word *stone*.

The structure, spelling, and pronunciation of Old English were significantly different from Modern English, so much so that we would not be able to read an Old English text or understand someone speaking Old English. It was a highly inflected language with many different word endings, and the arrangement of words in sentences was different, too, with verbs often placed at the end of sentences. In many ways, Old English was more like Modern German than Modern English.

Middle English (1100–1500)

An event occurred in 1066 that changed the course of the English language and ushered in the Middle English (ME) period: the Norman Conquest. In that year, William the Conqueror crossed the English Channel from the French province of Normandy and defeated the English king, Harold, at the Battle of Hastings. William claimed the English throne and established a French court in London. This event had far-reaching consequences: for nearly three hundred years, Norman-French was the official language in England. Although it was spoken by the nobility and upper classes, the lower classes continued to speak English.

By 1300, the use of Norman-French had declined, and before the end of the fourteenth century, English was restored as the official

language of England. The *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, written in the late 1300s, provides evidence that English was also replacing French (and Latin) as the preferred written language. Political, social, and economic changes contributed to this reversal. The Norman kings lost their holdings in France, the Hundred Years' War increased hostilities with France, and the middle-class artisans and merchants who spoke English gained prestige.

The Middle English period was one of tremendous change. Some of the changes were the result of the Norman Conquest, while others were a continuation of the trends toward simplification begun in the Old English period. These changes were reflected in vocabulary, syntax, and spelling.

The most striking change in Middle English was the vocabulary. A large portion of the Old English vocabulary was lost as ten thousand new Norman-French loan words were added to the language (Baugh and Cable 1978). These loan words reflected the impact of the Normans on English life and society, which was conspicuous in comparison to the influence of English on the French language (Sapir 1921). The loan words included military words *(army, navy, peace, siege, soldier, victory)*; political words *(government, princess, sovereign)*; medical words *(physician, stomach, surgeon)*; and words related to the arts *(comedy, literature, music, poet, sculpture)*. It is interesting to note that the Old English names for farm animals (e.g., *steer, sheep, calf, deer, pig*) have survived, but the names for the meat of these animals (e.g., *beef, mutton, veal, venison, pork*) were borrowed from the French. There is a simple explanation for this phenomenon: the English peasants who tended the animals used the English words, and the Normans who ate the meats used the Norman-French words.

Many of the new Norman-French loan words duplicated Old English words. Typically, one word was eventually lost; if both words remained in the language, they developed slightly different meanings. Often it was the Old English word that disappeared; for example, the Old English word *ēam* was replaced with the Norman word *uncle*. The words *hardy* (OE) and *cordial* (F) were originally synonyms, both meaning "from the heart." In time they differentiated and now express different meanings.

Most of the Norman-French loan words were derived from Latin. In addition, a few Latin words passed directly into English during this period (e.g., *individual, necessary, polite*). In contrast to the French loan words, these Latin borrowings were more sophisticated words and were used more often in writing than in speech. Also, several words (e.g.,

dock, freight) were borrowed from the Dutch during the Middle English period as a result of trade with the Low Countries.

During this period, there was a significant reduction in the use of inflections or word endings. Many strong verbs were lost, and others became weak or developed regular past and past participle forms (e.g., *climb, talk*). Modern English still retains some strong verbs (e.g., *sing, fly*), contributing to our usage problems. By 1200, *-s* had become the accepted plural marker, although the Old English plural form *-en* was used in some words. Today, this artifact is still found in a few plurals, such as *children* and *oxen.*

Modern English (1500 to the Present)

The Modern English (Mod E) period is not characterized by invasions or other significant political events, but rather by the development of the printing press and the tremendous upswing in exploration, colonization, and trade with countries around the world.

The introduction of the printing press in England by William Caxton in 1476 marks the dividing point between the Middle and Modern English periods. The printing press was a powerful force in standardizing English spelling as well as a practical means for providing increasing numbers of people with books. Until the invention of the printing press, English spelling kept pace with pronunciation (Alexander 1962). However, the printing press served to standardize and fix spelling, and the lag between pronunciation and spelling began to widen.

The tremendous increase in exploration, colonization, and trade with many different parts of the world resulted in a wide borrowing of words from more than fifty languages. These borrowings included *alcohol* (Arabic), *chocolate* (French), *cookie* (Dutch), *czar* (Russian), *hallelujah* (Hebrew), *hurricane* (Spanish), *kindergarten* (German), *smorgasbord* (Swedish), *tycoon* (Chinese), and *violin* (Italian).

Many Latin and Greek words were added to English during the Renaissance to increase the prestige of English. For example, *congratulate, democracy, education, janitor,* and *splendid* came from Latin, and *anonymous, atmosphere, catastrophe, encyclopedia, enthusiasm,* and *thermometer* came from Greek. Many modern Greek and Latin borrowings are scientific words (e.g., *aspirin, bronchitis, metabolism, vaccinate*), and some of the very recently borrowed words (e.g., *criterion, focus*) have retained their native plural forms, adding confusion about how to spell their plural forms in English. Also, some recent loan words from the French have retained their native spelling and pronunciation, such as in *à la carte, fiancé,* and *hors d'oeuvre.*

During this century, many new words have been added as science and technology advanced. For example, words such as *astronaut, launch pad, orbiter,* and *splashdown* were introduced through the space program during the past two decades, and even more recently, computer terms such as *baud, floppy disk,* and *modem* have been added.

While the vocabulary expansion has been great during the Modern English period, there have also been extensive sound changes. Although the short vowels have remained relatively stable, there was a striking change in how long vowels were pronounced. Henry Alexander (1962, 114) characterizes this change, known as the "Great Vowel Shift," as "the most revolutionary and far-reaching sound change during the history of the language." The change was gradual, occurring during the first century of this period. Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable (1978, 238) describe the change this way: "All the long vowels gradually came to be pronounced with a greater elevation of the tongue and closing of the mouth." Because spelling had become fixed before the shift, the vowel letter symbols no longer corresponded to the sounds. To illustrate the change, the word *name* rhymed with *comma* during the Middle English period, but through the Great Vowel Shift, the Modern English pronunciation of *name* shifted to rhyme with *game* (Hook 1975).

Three other vowel changes should also be mentioned. First, the final vowels in unstressed syllables, especially the final *e*, became silent. The unaccented vowels in the middle of words did not disappear, but they developed the schwa sound (e.g., *among*). Also, vowels followed by *d, f,* or *th* were shortened, explaining why the vowels in *bread, deaf,* and *breath* have short sounds today. Finally, the *er, ir,* and *ur* diphthongs originated during this period.

There was a continued simplification of consonants in Modern English. The guttural sound represented by the letters *gh* in *night* (cf. Scottish *loch*) was lost even though the digraph remained and represented the /f/ sound in words like *enough* and *laugh*. Later in the eighteenth century, the initial consonant sounds in *kn-, gn-,* and *wr-* words disappeared. Also, the final /b/ in *-mb* words such as *lamb* and *comb* was lost, although this combination appears in the medial position in words such as *bombard*, where the symbol represents a division across a morpheme boundary (Venezky 1970).

The Modern English period brought changes in syntax, particularly the disappearance of double negatives and double comparatives and superlatives. These eliminations were slow in coming; for instance, Shakespeare still wrote, "the most unkindest cut of all." Also, the practice of using *-er* or *-est* to form comparatives and superlatives in

shorter words and *more* or *most* with longer words was not standardized until after Shakespeare's time.

Borrowing and Other Sources of New Words

The most common way our vocabulary is expanded is through borrowing words from foreign languages. This practice dates back to Old English times when words were borrowed from the Romans and the Vikings, and it continues to the present day. While the nature of borrowing is complex, a few general observations have been made. First of all, when two languages come into contact, the influence is likely to be predominantly one-way and not reciprocal. For example, just as English shows the larger influence of French, languages like Japanese and Korean evidence the primary influence that Chinese has had, but they have not in turn influenced the Chinese language (Sapir 1921). The reasons for this one-way flow of words may be several. In many cases, the language of a "conquered" culture becomes less desirable to learn. This situation was certainly true in England as Norman-French became the language of the governing class for at least several hundred years. This same situation existed earlier between the Germanic tribes and the native Celtic population which they displaced. Hence, the Celtic influence upon English was very slight.

Some languages gain significance for being what Sapir (1921) has called the "carriers of culture." He lists classical Chinese, Sanskrit, Arabic, Greek, and Latin as being most typical of these carriers. Particularly during the late Middle English and early Modern English periods, many words of Latin and Greek origin were introduced into English in order to "refine" and "enrich" the language, although opposition to these "inkhorn" terms was not infrequent (Baugh and Cable 1978).

Words are also borrowed through cultural contact stimulated by trade, exploration and missionary endeavors. For instance, as a result of contact with Roman missionaries, the Anglo-Saxons adopted many Latin religious terms, such as *chalice, cleric, litany, hymnal, synod,* and *relic* (Baugh and Cable 1978). Even earlier, Roman merchants followed the Roman armies into northern Europe, and they facilitated the inclusion of many words expressing aspects of Roman military and economic activities into the languages of the Germanic peoples who would later invade and settle in Britain.

However, the mere contact between language groups and cultures is not in itself sufficient to assure the borrowing of words from one

language to another. The life of new words is often tenuous and short-lived. As some scholars have pointed out, the gradual acceptance of one word and the dropping of another, when both have existed in the language side by side for a time, seems often to be more the result of chance than any calculated purpose by succeeding generations of speakers. However, Sapir has offered the intriguing hypothesis that it may be the unconscious "psychological attitude" of the borrowing language that determines to a large degree which words adhere in the language and which words do not. English, he has suggested, "has long been striving for the completely unified, unanalyzed word, regardless of whether it is monosyllabic or polysyllabic" (1921, 195). In other words, according to this view, as long as the whole word in English denotes a "well-nuanced" idea or concept, its survival is more assured, even though other synonyms may coexist with it. Thus, the tremendous influx of foreign words, particularly French words, during the Middle English period and the more recent borrowings of foreign words are more than likely aided by the characteristics of English itself.

Finally, borrowed words can be generally categorized into two main groups: "popular loans" and "learned loans," each reflecting, more or less, the channels through which such words initially entered the language. With popular loans, a native speaker or several speakers independently introduce and subsequently reproduce a foreign word of a neighboring culture. Through a process known as "cultural diffusion" (Bloomfield 1933), the new term finds life in ever-widening language communities, being transformed phonetically and grammatically in many cases, and may become a permanent addition to the native stock. Both before and after the Norman invasion, many words of Scandinavian and French origin entered the language this way as a result of the intermingling of the Anglo-Saxon peoples with their Viking, and later Norman-French, overlords.

Learned borrowings, on the other hand, which may eventually enter the mainstream of the spoken language, are usually introduced by clerics and scholars through written materials. For instance, Sir Thomas More, one of the great intellectuals of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, is credited with introducing such words as *absurdity*, *combustible*, and *frivolous* as well as the more esoteric words *adumbrate*, *beneficence*, and *inimitable* (Baugh and Cable 1978). Interestingly, the word *education* was first introduced in a book on the same subject by Sir Thomas Elyot, a contemporary of More.

While it has been estimated that approximately 75 to 80 percent of our word stock is derived from foreign words, other forces are also at work. Other ways that words enter English include (1) compounding,

(2) adding affixes, (3) coining, (4) clipping, (5) deriving words from names, and (6) imitation.

Compounding, or combining two existing words to create a new word, is a process that has gone on continuously through the history of our language. *Friendship* and *childhood* are two examples of Old English compound words that continue to be used today. Examples of more recently developed compound words include *body language*, *jet lag*, and *software*. These compound words are labeled "self-explaining" because the meaning can be interpreted from the words themselves. Interestingly, some compound words are written as two words (e.g., *ice cream*), some are hyphenated (e.g., *baby-sit*), and others are written as one word (e.g., *splashdown*). A second type of compound word uses Greek and Latin elements. Many scientific terms, such as *stethoscope*, *fluorine*, and *television*, were developed this way.

Vocabulary is also enlarged by adding prefixes and suffixes to existing words. For example, *pre-*, a Latin prefix meaning "before or in front of," was used in creating these words: *precaution*, *precinct*, *prehistoric*, *premonition*, *prenatal*, *preschool*, and *preview*. The Old English suffix *-less*, meaning "without," is found in such words as *careless*, *friendless*, *hopeless*, *powerless*, *ruthless*, and *timeless*. Prefixes and suffixes used in English words come from three sources: Old English, Latin, and Greek.

Coining is the deliberate invention of new words. One example is the word *pandemonium*, which John Milton created in *Paradise Lost*. Two other types of coined words are trademarks and acronyms. Examples of well-known trademarks include *Kodak*, *Kleenex*, *Coca-Cola*, *nylon*, and *zipper*. Acronyms, words formed by combining the initial letters of several words, include *radar*, *OPEC*, and *scuba*. Blending, the process of collapsing two words into one, creates another kind of coined word. Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, is probably the most famous creator of blended words, which he called *portmanteau* words, borrowing from the British word for a suitcase that opens into two halves. His best-known example, *chortle*, a blend of *snort* and *chuckle*, is found in the poem "Jabberwocky." Other examples of blended words include *brunch*, *electrocute*, *guesstimate*, and *smog*.

Clipping is a process of shortening existing words. For instance, *mob* is the shortened form of *mobile vulgus*, *pants* comes from *pantaloons*, and *zoo* is the shortened version of *zoological garden*.

Words come from names as well. The word *eponym* originally denoted the person for whom something is or is believed to be named; now the term is more often applied to the word that is derived from the name of a person, real or imaginary. Words such as *maverick*, *lynch*, and *boycott* come from the names of actual people. Other words, including *janitor*,

Thursday, and *volcano*, can be traced back to the names of Norse, Greek, and Roman gods and goddesses. Still other words enter our language from the names of places. The word *cantaloupe* comes from the Italian villa where it was first grown, the "explosive" *bikini* takes its name from the Pacific island of Bikini where the first atomic bomb tests took place, *china* is the name of porcelain first manufactured in China, and *tangerine* is derived from Tangiers, Morocco.

One last source of words is imitation. People in all cultures and in all generations have created sound words, called *echoic* words because they echo sounds. Familiar examples include *splash*, *meow*, and *choo-choo*. It is interesting to compare echoic words in different languages and cultures. While dogs around the world presumably make the same sound, it is recorded in different ways in different languages: *bow-wow* in English, *gnaf-gnaf* in French, *wang-wang* in Japanese, and *gav-gav* in Russian.

The meanings of words are also subject to gradual change, as words rise and fall in prestige, and widen and narrow in focus. For example, *nice*, which once meant "foolish or ignorant," has risen in meaning, and *knave*, which originally meant "boy," has fallen in meaning. The word *politician* is another word which has lost prestige in American English. While *politician* still denotes a person skilled in politics or engaged in the business of running a government, the word more often connotes a person involved in or interested in political office for his or her own personal advantage. Examples of words which have widened in meaning include *mill*, which originally denoted a place for grinding meal, and *barn*, which used to refer to a place for storing barley. In contrast, *meat* originally indicated food in general, *deer* could signify any animal, and *starve* could denote death by any means. All three of these words have narrowed in meaning.

English Orthography

We have assumed that alphabets should be phonetic, that there should be a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds. Although Old English had no "silent" letters as we think of them today, some sounds had always been represented by variant symbols, and shortenings and lengthenings of vowel and consonant sounds had been indicated by doubling consonant symbols (Pyles and Algeo 1982; Scragg 1974). In this respect, however, English is no different than any other language. The noted historian of the development of writing, Ignace Gelb (1980), has observed that it is inevitable, particularly with alpha-

betic writing systems, that "language drift" causes the written language to be less faithful in representing its spoken counterpart in one-to-one correspondence as time passes. Thus, it is a convenient but unfounded myth often espoused by spelling reformers that any written language has ever been able to—or ever will be able to, for that matter—accurately and consistently represent oral language without observable irregularities.

English was first written using Roman alphabet symbols, which were introduced to the Anglo-Saxons by predominantly Irish missionaries sometime during the fifth century. While these Germanic tribes had an alphabet whose letters were known as *runes*, it has been suggested that runic letters were "ill adapted to any sustained composition" and were used primarily as inscriptions associated wtih pagan celebrations (Pyles and Algeo 1982, 50). While there are no extant original documents recorded in the vernacular of this early period, later twelfth-century copies of the *dooms*, or law codes of the early English kings, show that legal writing was well underway by the turn of the seventh century.

The alphabet used during the Old English period did not differ significantly from the one we use today, with the symbols and sound values of the consonants being particularly similar. Yet, there were differences. The Old English alphabet did not make use of the letters *j*, *k*, *v*, or *w*, and the letters *q* and *z* were used only sparingly. In addition, there were five other symbols: a vowel ligature called *ash*, æ (pronounced as *a* in *cat*); *eth*, ð, representing either voiced or voiceless dental fricatives, as the *th* in *thing* and *this;* a letter form similar to our cursive *z* called *yogh*, ȝ, which typically represented the sound of /g/; and two runic symbols, *thorn*, þ, also representing the dental fricatives, and *wynn*, ƿ, pronounced like our /w/.

There were several spelling differences as well. The /sh/ sound was spelled *sc* (e.g., *scip* for *ship*), and both /k/ and /ch/ were spelled with a *c* (e.g., *folc* for *folk* and *cild* for *child*). By the end of the Old English period, the vowel sounds represented by the letters *i* and *y* had "fallen together" so closely that scribes seemed to use the symbols indiscriminately for this one sound, the remnants of which are seen in such variant spellings as *gipsy–gypsy* and *pigmy–pygmy* (Scragg 1974; Venezky 1976).

As mentioned earlier, from its outset as a way of transcribing the oral language, written English employed more than one symbol to represent the same sound. The most salient example is the use of both þ (thorn) and ð (eth) interchangeably to designate the two sounds associated with the Modern English grapheme *th*. Although the two

sounds were not so contrastive that the pronunciation of the pair *thigh–thy* would be distinguishable, no definite preference for either symbol has been documented (Pyles and Algeo 1982). In fact, the failure of the English scribes to use the two symbols to distinguish between the two sounds may be the reason why the sounds are represented by a single digraph today (Scragg 1974).

A stable system of representing spoken English by widely accepted spelling conventions seems to have been firmly in place before William the Conqueror invaded England. However, with the displacement of English as the national language as well as with the changeover in monasteries from the Anglo-Saxon monks to the Norman-French, the alphabet underwent its most drastic changes. David G. Scragg (1974) surmises that while Anglo-Saxon monks wrote in Latin as well as English, they tended to keep the two languages separate and were not inclined to be influenced by Latin spellings when writing in their native tongue. In contrast, French-speaking scribes, trained in the classics, did not maintain this distinction.

For instance, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the French form *qu*, used to designate the sound /kw/, replaced the OE spelling *cw* (e.g., OE *cwen*, ME *queen;* OE *cwic*, ME *quick*). In addition, French scribes influenced by the Latin practice of replacing the letter *u* with *o* did so in native English words, particularly those in which the original *u* was contiguous with a similarly shaped letter such as *m*, *n*, or *u*. Thus, OE *cuman* became *come*, OE *wundor* became *wonder*, and OE *luue* became *love*.

The scribes also substituted the French spelling *ou* for the Old English *u*, changing the Old English word *hus* (house) to *hous*. Despite the change in spelling, the pronunciation remained the same. The sound represented by *ou* in ME *hous* has since changed, but the Middle English value of *ou* is retained in two Modern English words, *group* and *through*.

The letter *h* stood for two sounds (German *ach* and *ich*) in Old English that were lost and replaced in Middle English with a similar guttural sound which was then represented by the digraph *gh*. To illustrate, our word *night* was spelled *niht* in Old English and *nyght* in Middle English but with the guttural associated with both *h* and later *gh*. The Middle English /gh/ guttural sound was later dropped, but we have retained the *gh* spelling in Modern English. Alexander (1962, 86) warns that the spelling changes in Middle English were sometimes very misleading: "spelling sometimes conceals changes in sounds and sometimes, on the other hand, suggests changes that have not actually taken place."

It is interesting that even though the letter *v* was introduced in the Middle English period through French loan words such as *vertu* (virtue), both *u* and *v* were used to represent the same sound, sometimes a consonant and sometimes a vowel. Examples of this practice can be found in Shakespeare's writing. He used *neuer* (never) and *haue* (have) but also *vniuersall* (universal). Not until late in the eighteenth century was *v* finally established as the consonant and *u* as the vowel (Vallins 1965).

Other spelling conventions introduced by French scribes included the replacement of the yogh, ȝ, with the French letter *g*; the reversal of the Old English sequence *hw* to *wh* (OE *hweol*, ME *wheel*); the use of the letter *v* to indicate the medial sound that Old English scribes represented with the letter *f* (OE *drifen*, ME *driven*); and the addition of the letters *k* and *ch* to represent more accurately two of the sounds spelled with a *c* in Old English (OE *cyning*, ME *king;* OE *cirice*, ME *church*).

In summary, Middle English spelling lacked the widespread uniformity that existed in manuscripts prior to 1066. There was consistency, but it was localized within individual monasteries rather than existing among them.

The final changes in the orthography took place during the early part of the Modern English period. In addition to the many Greek and Latin words that found their way into the language at this time, many original Anglo-Saxon words fell victim to a false etymologizing. For instance, the words *debt* and *doubt* were originally spelled *det* and *dout* in Middle English, reflecting their French origin. However, they were supposed to have been derived from the Latin forms *debitum* and *dubitare*, and therefore the letter *b* was inserted. Other examples are the words *scissors* and *scythe*. They were wrongly assumed to be derived from the Latin words *sciendere* (to cut), and hence the inclusion of the *c* during this period. A final example is the word *island:* the *s* was inserted to reflect the supposed origin from the Old French and Middle French word *isle* (spelled *île* in Modern French).

In addition to the changes caused by the etymologizing done by writers during this period, many Middle English words were altered by analogy. An *h* was added to *anchor* (ME *anker*) through analogy to another Greek loan word, *echo*. In the modal verbs *should*, *would*, and *could*, the *l* (which lost its pronunciation in the sixteenth century) is only etymological in the first two words. The Old English forms were *sceolde*, *wolde*, and *coude* without an *l*. Another example involving the appearance of an *l* comes in the word *fault*, which was spelled *faute* in Middle English. However, since the English scribes compared *fault* with

false from the Latin word *falsus*, they changed the spelling of *faute* to *fault* by analogy. In the same way, a *d* was added after the initial *a* to the Middle English words *avaucen* and *avauntage*, eventually yielding *advance* and *advantage*, on the assumption that they reflected the Latin prefix *ad-* as did the words *adventure* and *advice*, which were changed from their Middle English forms, *aventure* and *avice*. However, Scragg (1974) points out that the former pair originally had the prefix *ab-* instead. Interestingly, whereas in some etymologized words, like *doubt*, a truly unnecessary letter has been added, in others, like *advantage*, the same process has produced a truly unnecessary pronunciation.

By approximately 1650, our modern spelling was well established. But it is important to reiterate that the need for a strict one-to-one letter and sound adherence has never been a dominating criterion in English word building. Factors such as etymologizing (false or not), conforming to analogous forms, and marking pronunciation by unpronounced letters (such as the Old English practice of doubling final consonants to indicate a preceding short vowel in such words as *all*, *will*, and *off*) have influenced those responsible for writing English through the ages.

Mario Pei (1952, 310) concluded that "English spelling is the world's most awesome mess." However, the development of written English has been anything but haphazard or capricious. Scragg (1974) argued that a stable system of spelling existed as early as the tenth century. And despite the fact that between the time of the Norman invasion in 1066 and the setting up of Caxton's printing press in 1476 our language experienced an influx of new vocabulary and underwent some symbol changes, the same general principles which created stability four hundred years earlier can be seen operating shortly after the invention of the printing press.

Stabilizing Influences

While a segment of the original Celtic population remained Christian even after the final Roman legions withdrew from the island in 410, it was not until the widespread conversion of the Anglo-Saxon population to Christianity during the seventh century that the output of English writing by scribes both in the monasteries and in the chancery (the king's writing house) began to have an effect on setting a standard for spelling. The event which served as an impetus to the conversion of the English people to Christianity was the arrival of Augustine, an emissary of Pope Gregory, in 597. In addition, Augustine, who later became the first Archbishop of Canterbury, established a monastery

which served as a model for other monasteries in the centuries to come. It was almost solely through these monasteries that English writing, both for the instruction of native missionaries and for translations of some of the Latin classics, was sustained until the Norman invasion.

The output of the scribes was aided greatly in the century preceding the Norman conquest by the political unity established by the kings of Wessex in southwestern England. The spelling conventions and writing style of these West Saxon scribes became the standard throughout England and provided a norm which is evident in documents of that period. Thus, the freedom from invasion, at least temporarily, coupled with a demand both in England and in Europe for books written in English, provided further impetus for the establishment and subsequent dissemination of a scribal tradition of spelling.

The Norman invasion of 1066 can be seen as the beginning of the deterioration of the spelling standard which existed in the tenth century. First of all, with the displacement of English by Norman-French as the official language, the production of English books, particularly those produced by the government and clerics, was interrupted. Second, the monasteries were gradually turned over from English-speaking scribes to French-speaking ones. Also, as has been mentioned, the French scribes were much more inclined to be influenced by their training in the classics, and as English scribes died or were replaced by French ones, knowledge of the conventions of written English gradually lessened. During the early part of the Middle English period, English was used primarily as a spoken language, and French and Latin replaced English as the preferred languages for writing.

While English manuscripts were still being produced and copied in the monasteries, the scribes' former adherence to the West Saxon standard diminished and regional orthographies became the norm. Also, individual scribes seemed "lax" in following any one style consistently. Not until the sixteenth century, when reformers such as Sir Thomas Smith, John Hart, and Richard Mulcaster began to impugn variant spellings as indicative of "ill breeding," were different spellings for the same word looked upon as anything unusual.

With the decline of the French influence in England, perhaps beginning with King John's loss of Normandy in 1204 and culminating in the Hundred Years' War, which ended in the mid-1400s, the production and spread of religious manuscripts once again began to reestablish a certain written dialect as the universal standard. Toward the end of the fourteenth century, the writings and Bible translations of John Wycliffe and his followers served as a model for other writers as well. That his translations and subsequent copies of them must have

been ubiquitous is attested to by the fact that over 170 manuscripts of gospel translations survive from this period.

Just as the chancery produced official documents which helped promulgate the West Saxon standard in the Old English period, the government once again, five centuries later, began to distribute official documents in English with a similar effect (Venezky 1976). However, with the rise of the merchant class in England and the need for accurate record keeping, the secular trade of scrivener arose. The training of these secular scribes was seldom as rigorous as monastic tradition; therefore, a number of variant "house styles" arose, each with its own style of spelling. For example, variant spellings of the word *where* from this period include *wher, whear, wheare, were*, and *whair* (Baugh and Cable 1978). Finally, through the widespread dissemination of materials made possible by the printing press, a general convention began to be established in the printed literary and government texts.

William Caxton established the first printing press in England at the sign of the "Red Pale" in Westminster in 1476. During the fifteen years after establishing his press, Caxton printed nearly a hundred books. The increasingly widespread distribution of books provided an excellent opportunity to stabilize or even reform English orthography; however, Scragg (1974) reports that Caxton and the other early printers were more of a hindrance because their books lacked consistent spelling. Several reasons exist for the spelling irregularities. First, the early printers were primarily businessmen and typically were not as well trained in English orthography as the scribes had been. Also, the typesetters often used variant spellings in order to justify the right margins, and the early printers often employed foreign typesetters who did not speak English. In fact, the Dutch typesetters brought to England to work for English printers are said to have been responsible for adding the unnecessary letter *h* to the word *ghost* (ME *gost*).

Through the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, several forces were operating simultaneously to bring about a uniform convention in English spelling. First, the professional scriveners' trade merged with the printing establishment. Therefore, the printing houses gradually became not only book producers, but also representative of the best scribal traditions, whereas earlier the printers and their typesetters had little professional training in orthographic traditions. Second, the growing uniformity of spelling conventions in published material provided teachers with a stable norm to follow in teaching spelling, which led to an improvement in the quality of private writings. Also influential in the early Modern English period were the outcries

of spelling reformers such as Sir Thomas Smith, John Hart, and Richard Mulcaster, who brought public attention to the existence of diverse spelling practices. This increased social consciousness, in turn, exerted pressure on the printers to follow more closely the "accepted" ways of spelling. Finally, the publishing of spelling books and dictionaries in the latter half of the sixteenth century provided additional information on the "accepted" ways of spelling many words.

The final crystallization of British English spelling came with the publication of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755. Johnson's work, more complete than any other dictionary, contained forty thousand entries and thousands of quotations to illustrate word usages. However, Johnson's spelling reflected the common usage of the time and was not innovative. Also, Baugh and Cable (1978) call many of his etymologies "ludicrous." While Johnson enjoyed the distinction of being the authority in literary matters during his lifetime, he actually effected far fewer changes in orthography than did his counterpart in the United States, Noah Webster.

Noah Webster and American English

In the era of strong patriotism following the Revolutionary War, Noah Webster and others advocated developing a uniquely American language as well as reforming English spelling. Webster's most persuasive argument for an American language was a patriotic one:

> . . . a national language is a band of national union. Every engine should be employed to render the people of this country national; to call their attachments home to their own country; and to inspire them with the pride of national character (quoted in Mencken 1936, 382).

While Webster's dream of a uniquely American language never materialized, he was responsible for far-reaching reforms to simplify and standardize our spelling, and through these changes he did create a distinctly American form of English spelling.

Webster published his first book, *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*, in 1783, and it was later reissued as the *American Spelling Book* (and more commonly known as the "blue-backed speller"). Webster's book was the first spelling textbook published in America and was used for generations in American public schools, providing a strong standardizing influence on both spelling and pronunciation. It became the most widely used spelling textbook of all time with more than seventy million copies sold.

Webster is best known for his dictionary. His most definitive work, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, was published in 1828, and a revised edition appeared in 1841. His dictionary of seventy thousand entries was larger and more wide ranging than any of its predecessors. In comparing Webster's dictionary to the earlier dictionaries written by Johnson and others, J. N. Hook (1975) notes that Webster attempted to reform spelling, advocated American pronunciations, corrected many false etymologies (while introducing others), and added new scientific and industrial words.

Webster set out to simplify our spelling, and he directly effected most of the changes that distinguish American English spelling from British English (BE). His reforms included dropping the *u* in *-our* words, such as *color, favor,* and *honor* (BE *colour, favour, honour*); reversing the British ending *-re* to *-er,* as in *center* and *theater;* using *-se* instead of *-ce* in words such as *defense* and *offense* (BE *defence, offence*); and preferring *ct* over *x*, through analogy with *affection,* in words like *connection* and *deflection* (BE *connexion, deflexion*). Webster initiated the change from *-ise* to *-ize* in words such as *recognize* and *dramatize,* and hastened the dropping of the *-k* in such words as *almanac, music,* and *public.* He was also responsible for shortening British English words such as *axe, catalogue, cheque,* and *programme* to *ax, catalog, check,* and *program.*

Other reforms, however, did not take hold. For instance, Webster urged that the words *built, laugh, machine,* and *phantom* be spelled *bilt, laf, masheen,* and *fantom.* He recommended omitting superfluous or silent letters, thus changing *bread* to *bred, give* to *giv, medicine* to *medicin,* and *woe* to *wo.* Also, Webster advocated using spellings that reflected American pronunciations, such as *wimmen* for *women* and *zeber* for *zebra.* Sensible as the changes might have been, the older spellings remained. But despite these "failures," Webster succeeded in simplifying and standardizing American spelling.

Summary

The English language has been influenced by the historical and cultural events affecting the people who speak and write it. Through nearly fifteen hundred years, the language has been shaped by a continuing trend toward simplification, by the addition of thousands of loan words from nearly every language in the world, and by the skills and idiosyncrasies of a long line of scribes and printers, each acting within the limits of individual ability and according to the customs of the day. And, our language is ever changing. Signs and logos such as "Drive-u" and "Kwik Stop" remind us that the process of "tinkering" with

language is ongoing, something that we are all involved in today, whether by writing such things or by reading and comprehending them.

Students in the elementary and middle school/junior high grades, grappling with written language as they learn to read and write English, are often puzzled by aspects of it. For example, "Why does that sign say *thru*, but I have to spell it *t-h-r-o-u-g-h* on my papers?" and "How come I can't spell it the easy way?" Students have many questions about words and spelling, but they rarely learn the answers. We believe that understanding how English words and spellings developed is an essential component of language awareness. Margaret Gentile McKeown (1979, 175–76) described language awareness as "the ability to stand back from one's role as language user and view language as a phenomenon, thereby grasping its nature as a dynamic, arbitrary symbol system of human invention." Our purpose, then, is to provide teachers with the needed information to help students become more aware of the reasons for the complexity of English and to help students develop an appreciation for the richness and diversity of our language.

2 Practice

This section is organized around the questions that elementary and middle school/junior high school students typically ask about English words and their spellings. To answer these questions, we provide background information for teachers and suggest student activities. We call these activities *extensions* because they grow out of students' curiosity and questions. The extension activities are designed to challenge students to explore and integrate their knowledge about history, geography, economics, literature, and other areas of the curriculum in order to develop an understanding and appreciation of our language.

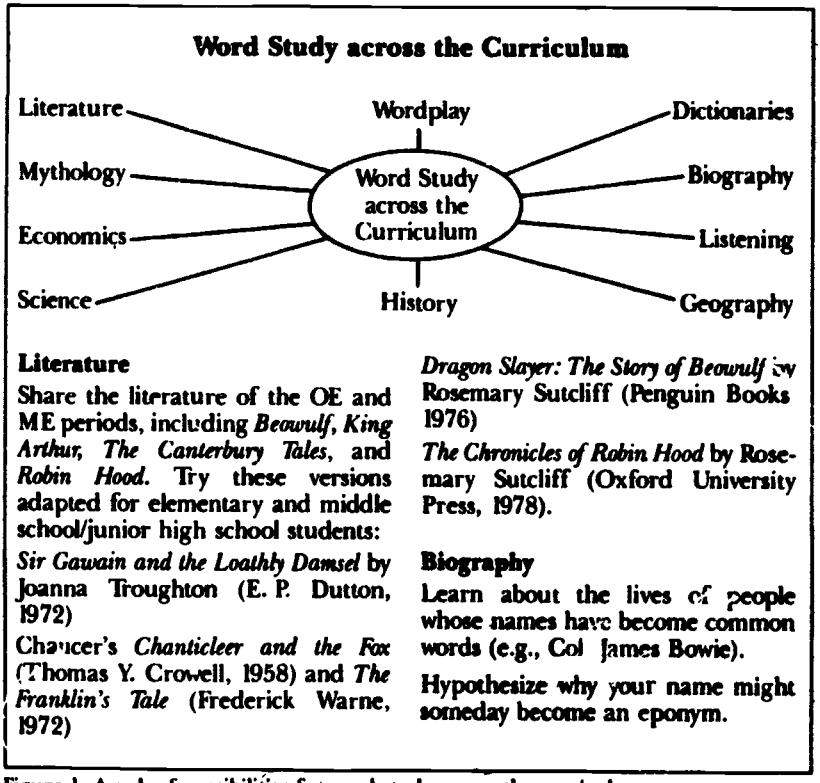
Lists of words—loan words from various languages, synonyms, root words, brand names, and so on—are included with many of the extension activities. These lists are intended to be resources for teachers rather than the raw material for student worksheets and dittos. Instead of getting out copies of the dictionary, passing out lists of words, and saying, "look it up," the teacher can adapt these activities in response to students' "I wonder why" questions, according to the level of the class. Once students indicate an interest in a particular question, the teacher can provide some information and a few examples. In our experience, this introduction serves to pique students' curiosity, and they are eager to locate more examples, to read, to write, and to learn.

The teacher has several responsibilities. The first is to have available for student use resources ranging from an unabridged dictionary, thesaurus, other dictionaries, word-history books, and information books to maps and other materials suggested in the extensions. Next, the teacher needs to provide direction for students' investigations, using the information and lists provided in this booklet. For example, when students learn that *maverick* is an eponym (a word derived from a person's name), they will ask about other eponyms. Rather than assigning each student a list of eponyms to investigate, the class might brainstorm a list on the board. Then pairs or small groups of students might each investigate a word that interests them.

Another of the teacher's roles is to ask and answer questions. Students often need answers to some basic questions in order to sustain their interest, and just as often they need to be asked a question to probe,

direct, or integrate their thinking. For example, after charting on a map the areas of the United States explored and colonized by different countries, students might be asked to speculate why there are Dutch place-names in New York, English place-names in the East, French place-names in Louisiana and along the Mississippi River valley, and Spanish place-names in Florida and the Southwest.

The extensions that follow illustrate ways to extend language study and to integrate it with language arts, literature, and content areas. Learning about eponyms, for instance, involves reading biographies, taking notes, and writing reports. Investigating U.S. place-names involves both map-reading skills and applying historical knowledge. The extension activities described in this section that invite and/or incorporate across-the-curriculum activities are marked with an asterisk. Some general topics for word study across the curriculum are diagramed in a "web of possibilities" (Huck 1976), which is presented in Figure 1. A detailed listing of activities follows the diagram.



Literature

Share the literature of the OE and ME periods, including *Beowulf*, *King Arthur*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and *Robin Hood*. Try these versions adapted for elementary and middle school/junior high school students:

Sir Gawain and the Loathly Damsel by Joanna Troughton (E. P. Dutton, 1972)

Chaucer's *Chanticleer and the Fox* (Thomas Y. Crowell, 1958) and *The Franklin's Tale* (Frederick Warne, 1972)

Dragon Slayer: The Story of Beowulf by Rosemary Sutcliff (Penguin Books 1976)

The Chronicles of Robin Hood by Rosemary Sutcliff (Oxford University Press, 1978).

Biography

Learn about the lives of people whose names have become common words (e.g., Col James Bowie).

Hypothesize why your name might someday become an eponym.

Figure 1. A web of possibilities for word study across the curriculum.

Wordplay

Examine the creative use of OE in *Storm and Other Old English Riddles*, ed. and trans. by Kevin Crossley-Holland (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970).

Investigate American folk words using Alvin Schwartz's *Chin Music: Tall Talk and Other Talk* (J. P. Lippincott, 1979).

Read Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" and locate his portmanteau words. Next, try creating some new blended words.

Dictionaries

Examine a variety of dictionaries (unabridged, rhyming words, synonyms, eponyms, idioms, acronyms, homonyms, etc.).

Learn more about Noah Webster and his contribution to our language.

Listening

Listen to a recording of OE and ME (*Our Changing Language*, NCTE, 1965).

Geography

Locate on a world map the countries where English is the native or the official/semiofficial language.

Locate the sources of loan words on a world map.

Locate Indian place-names on a state or U.S. map.

History

Investigate what life was like during the Middle Ages. Consult *Castle* by David Macauley (Houghton Mifflin, 1977) and John S. Goodall's *The Story of an English Village* (Atheneum, 1979). Culminate with puppet shows or skits depicting life in the OE or ME periods.

Trace the routes of English and other European explorers as they traveled around the world. Compare their routes with the languages spoken in those areas today. Think of loan words to English that have come from those languages.

Draw parallel time-lines of historical events and the development of the English language.

Science

Check the source of scientific words, names of planets, and units of metric measurement.

Mythology

Read and compare Roman, Greek, and Norse myths. Also, compare these myths to Japanese, Indian, and Egyptian myths.

Compile a list of words derived from the myths and hypothesize why they developed.

Economics

Investigate the stories behind famous brand names.

Figure 1 *(continued)*.

The English Language

"English is the best language, isn't it?"

One language is no better than any other, but English is the dominant language in the world today. For instance, English is the language used

by pilots and air-traffic controllers around the world. More than 300 million people speak English as their first language, and another 400 million speak it as their second language. One in every seven people in the world claims some knowledge of English. English first spread around the world as the British Empire grew. During the post-World War II era, American English has become a world language, although British English remains the favored choice of those learning English as a second language.

Extensions

*1. English is the native language in these twelve countries (McBee et al. 1985, 50):

Australia
Bahamas
Barbados
Canada (except Quebec)
Grenada
Guyana
Ireland
Jamaica
New Zealand
Trinidad and Tobago
United Kingdom
United States

Have students chart these countries on a world map and then speculate why English is the native language in each country. What role, for example, did British colonization play?

*2. English is the official or semiofficial language in thirty-three other countries (McBee et al. 1985, 50):

Bangladesh
Botswana
Burma
Cameroon
Ethiopia
Fiji
Gambia
Ghana
India
Israel
Kenya
Lesotho
Liberia
Malawi
Malaysia
Malta
Mauritius
Namibia
Nigeria
Pakistan
Philippines
Sierra Leone
Singapore
South Africa
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Swaziland
Tanzania
Tonga
Uganda
Western Samoa
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Have students add markers for these countries to the world map used in extension 1 and investigate why English plays such a prominent role in these countries.

Etymologies

The History of Words

"How do you learn stuff about words?"

The best source of information about word histories and spelling changes is the unabridged dictionary. This dictionary provides basic etymological information about words: the language the word was borrowed from, the form of the word in that language or the representation of the word in our alphabet, and the original meaning of the word. Etymologies are enclosed in square brackets and may appear either at the beginning or at the end of an entry. They are written in an abbreviated form to save space, and use such abbreviations for language names as *Ar* for Arabic, *Gk* for Greek, *IE* for Indo-European, *L* for Latin, and *OE* for Old English. There is some variance among dictionaries. Unfamiliar abbreviations may be checked in the list of abbreviations included at the beginning of the dictionary.

The etymologies of five words which were derived from very different sources are presented below. After listing each etymology from *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1973), we translated and elaborated each etymology, a process we call *extrapolation*.

deer [ME *der*, OE *dēor* beast]

Extrapolation. Our word *deer* originated as the Old English word *dēor*, indicating any beast or animal. In the Middle English period, the word was written *der*. Today the word *deer* has become more specialized, referring to a particular kind of animal.

echo [ME *ecco* < L *ēchō* < Gk, akin to *ēché* sound]

Extrapolation. *Echo* is a loan word from Latin and can be traced back to Greek, where it referred to any sound. (The symbol < means "from" and is used to trace the development of a word.) The word now denotes a repeated sound.

igloo [< Eskimo *ig(d)lu* house]

Extrapolation. The word *igloo* is borrowed from the Eskimo language and means "house." We use the word to indicate a particular kind of house associated with Eskimos.

skirt [ME *skirte* < Scand; cf. Icel *skyrta* shirt]

Extrapolation. *Skirt* is a loan word from a Scandinavian language. While the original Scandinavian word is not listed, it is comparable to the Icelandic word *skyrta*. (The abbreviation *cf.* means "compare.") Originally the word denoted a shirt or kirtle, but now it refers to a woman's garment that extends downward from the waist. The English were introduced to the word during the Old English period, probably by the Vikings.

skunk [< Algonquian; cf. Abnaki *segankw, segonkw*]

Extrapolation. Our word *skunk* was borrowed from the Algonquian family of languages; it is comparable to the Abnaki word *segankw* or *segonkw*. The Algonquian Indian tribes originally lived throughout the north central and northeastern part of the United States; the Abnaki tribe lived in Maine, New Brunswick, and Quebec. The word was borrowed by early English explorers and settlers to describe an unfamiliar American animal.

More detailed information about word histories is included in etymological dictionaries, which differ from regular dictionaries in that they supply more detail about the origin and development of words and do not include any information about pronunciations or definitions unless this information is important to the etymology. The most complete etymological dictionary is the twelve-volume *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, which first was published between the years 1884 and 1928, with a supplement appearing in 1933. It provides extensive information about word histories as well as tracing the word's spelling and meaning, using excerpts from written documents and literature that date from the earliest surviving records to the present. There is also an abridged version of the *OED* that should provide most of the information teachers and their students would need. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, first published in 1933 and now in its third edition, and many other etymological dictionaries, such as Eric Partridge's very readable *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (1983), are available in libraries and bookstores.

The historical derivations of some words are fascinating. For example, the word *varnish* has quite a history, but the etymological information does not tell the complete story:

varnish [ME *varnisch* < MF *vernis, verniz* < ML *vernicium* sandarac < MGk *bernikē*, syncopated var. of Gk *Berenikē*, city in Cyrenaica]

Extrapolation. The word *varnish* entered English during the Middle English period and can be traced back to the Middle French form *vernis* or *verniz*, to the Middle Latin form *vernicium*, which meant

"sandarac," a pale yellow resin, and further back to the Middle Greek word *berníkē*, which is said to be derived from *Berenítē*, the Greek name for a city in present-day Libya where varnish was first made. Moreover, the city of *Berenítē* was named for the wife of Pharaoh Ptolemy III, who is said to have sacrificed her beautiful amber hair as a religious offering to bring her husband home safely from a war.

The etymological information in the dictionary does not explain that *Berenítē* was the city where varnish was first made or where the city was located. Nor does the etymology provide any information about the woman for whom the city of *Berenítē* was named. Word-history books can be used to help fill in such missing pieces and can make tracing etymologies more interesting. Suggested word-history books for students and teachers are listed in the references.

Extensions

1. Have students locate the etymologies for these words:

angel	manufacture	quick
biscuit	mercury	robot
caterpillar	mermaid	salary
dinosaur	muscle	sherbet
gossip	music	silly
helicopter	nice	sinister
humor	noon	tennis
husband	nostril	villain
ink	penguin	window
lord	pepper	world
lunatic	poodle	zodiac

   Next, ask students to extrapolate using the information contained in the etymologies. How is salt related to salary? What mistake was made in naming the penguin? How could a muscle look like a little mouse to the Romans? Why was the word *mercury* chosen to name both a planet and an element?

2. Ask students what the words *applaud* and *explode* have in common. They're called "word cousins" because they developed from the same parent word, L *plaudere* (to clap). While the words share the same root, they have developed very different meanings and spellings. Here are other sets of word cousins to be examined:

arch–arc	clock–cloak
ball–ballot–bullet	fancy–fantasy
cage–cave	frail–fragile
cash–case	hotel–hospital
chair–cathedral	infant–infantry

loyal–legal	poodle–puddle
mayor–major	person–parson
muscle–mouse–mussel	rage–rabies
onion–union	road–raid
pansy–pensive	salami–salad–salt

3. The meaning of a word can change in four ways: it can (1) rise, (2) fall, (3) widen, or (4) narrow. For example, *nice* once meant "foolish or ignorant," and long ago the word *meat* was used to refer to food in general. Have students check the etymologies of these words to see how the meanings have changed:

adventure	flesh	nice
angel	fowl	notorious
barbarian	governor	silly
barn	knave	sly
brave	knife	smug
cavalier	marshall	starve
deer	meat	stink
disease	mischief	trivial
fabulous	naughty	villain

4. Collect as many different kinds of dictionaries as possible for students to examine and compare, including dictionaries of antonyms, eponyms, slang, rhyming words, etymologies, foreign languages, and thesauri. According to Rober raske (1975), there are 250 different kinds of dictionaries to c ose from. Discuss with students how these dictionaries are alike and how they are different.

*5. Have the class investigate how dictionaries are made. A good reference for students is Robert Kraske's *The Story of the Dictionary* (1975). Students may also want to learn more about Noah Webster and Samuel Johnson, the two great lexicographers.

Loan Words

"How come we have words like *taco* and *spaghetti*? They're not English!"

Perhaps as many as three-quarters of our words have been borrowed from other languages and incorporated into English. *Taco* and *spaghetti* are two of these loan words. *Taco* comes from Mexican Spanish and *spaghetti* from Italian.

Word borrowing has occurred during every period of language development, beginning when the Angles and Saxons borrowed over four hundred words from the Romans. Next, during the eighth and

ninth centuries, the Vikings contributed approximately nine hundred words, including a number of *sc-* and *sk-* words (Baugh and Cable 1978). The Norman conquerors introduced thousands of French words into English, reflecting every aspect of life: *adventure, captain, ceiling, dance, fork, government, gown, juggler, music, poison, quilt, surgeon, tournament*. Later, during the Renaissance, scholars recognized the limitations of English as they translated Greek and Latin classics into English. They borrowed many words from Latin and Greek to enrich our language—for example, *anonymous, chaos, dexterity, encyclopedia, enthusiasm, pneumonia,* and *skeleton*. More recently, words from more than fifty languages have been added to English through exploration, colonization, and trade. A list of loan words is presented in Figure 2.

Loan Words from around the World

African (many languages): banjo, cola, gumbo, safari, zombie
Arabic: alcohol, apricot, assassin, ghoul, magazine, sultan
Australian/New Zealand (aboriginal): boomerang, kangaroo, kiwi, kookaburra
Celtic: walnut
Chinese: chop suey, kowtow, tea, wok
Czech: pistol, robot
Dutch: caboose, easel, pickle, waffle
Eskimo: igloo, kayak, mukluk, parka
Finnish: sauna
French: à la carte, ballet, beige, chauffeur, crochet, hors d'oeuvres
German: kindergarten, poodle, pretzel, waltz
Greek: atom, cyclone, hydrogen
Hawaiian: aloha, hula, lei, luau
Hebrew: cherub, hallelujah, kosher, rabbi
Hindi: bangle, dungaree, juggernaut, jungle, shampoo
Hungarian: goulash, paprika
Icelandic: geyser
Irish: bog, leprechaun, shamrock, slogan
Italian: broccoli, carnival, fiasco, macaroni, opera, pizza
Japanese: honcho, judo, kimono, origami
Persian: bazaar, divan, khaki, shawl
Polish: mazurka, polka
Portuguese: albino, cobra, coconut, molasses
Russian: czar, sputnik, steppe, troika, vodka
Scandinavian (Swedish, Norwegian, Danish): egg, fiord, husband, ski, sky, slalom
Scottish: clan, golf, slogan
Spanish: alligator, guitar, mosquito, potato
Turkish: caviar, horde, khan, kiosk, yogurt
Yiddish: bagel, chutzpah, klutz, pastrami

Figure 2. Loan words to English from other languages.

Native Americans also contributed a number of words to English. The early American colonists encountered many unfamiliar animals, plants, foods, and aspects of Indian life in America. They borrowed the Native American terms for these objects or events, trying to spell them phonetically. In attempting to spell the Native American form of our word *raccoon*, for instance, colonists experimented with a variety of spellings, including *rahaugcum, raughroughcum, aracoune*, and *rarowcan*. Native American loan words include *chipmunk, hickory, moccasin, moose, muskrat, opossum, papoose, pow-wow, raccoon, skunk, succotash, toboggan, tomahawk*, and *tepee*. In addition, Native American words have been used to name cities, states, and rivers in the United States, such as *Chattanooga, Oklahoma*, and the *Mississippi River*.

Extensions

*1. Have students determine the source of the following words, write the words on small cards, and attach the cards to a world map according to country of origin.

assassin
atom
bagel
balcony
bandanna
banjo
barbecue
bazaar
beige
bungalow
cake
casserole
chic
chocolate
chop suey
chutzpah
cobra
cocoa
coleslaw
coyote
cul-de-sac
curry
czar
epidemic
extravaganza
frolic
get
goulash
gymnast
hallelujah
hammock
hibachi
hula
hydrant
igloo
jaguar
jubilee
kayak
khaki
kimono
kindergarten
kiosk
knife
law
lei
llama
macaroni
mosquito
motto
mukluk
mumbo jumbo
noodle
opossum
orange
outlaw
pajamas
paprika
parka
pastrami
pentagon
piano
piranha
polka
potato
prairie
pretzel
raccoon
ranch
restaurant
rhyme
robot
rug
Santa Claus
scold
shampoo

sherbet	thug	vanilla
sister	tomahawk	violin
skate	tundra	waffle
skin	typhoon	waltz
skoal	ugly	wampum
skunk	ukelele	yacht
solo	umbrella	zenith
tepee	vampire	zero

2. Many animals have unusual or interesting names. For example, when Captain James Cook was exploring Australia in the eighteenth century, he reportedly asked his native guide the name of the large, jumping animal he saw. The guide replied, "Kangaroo," which meant "I don't know" in his language. The name has remained, and the kangaroo is the "I-don't-know animal" (Sarnoff and Ruffins 1981). Have students discover the etymologies of these animal names:

   aardvark: earth–pig (Dutch)

   alligator: lizard (Spanish)

   beetle: biter (English)

   caterpillar: hairy cat (Latin)

   cobra: snake with hood (Portuguese)

   crocodile: worm that crawls in gravel (Greek)

   duck: diver (English)

   elephant: ivory (Greek)

   hippopotamus: river horse (Greek)

   leopard: lion–panther (Latin)

   lobster: spider of the sea (Latin)

   moose: he strips off bark (Native American)

   octopus: eight feet (Greek)

   opossum: white beast (Native American)

   porpoise: pig–fish (Latin)

   rhinoceros: nose horn (Greek)

   spider: spinner (English)

   squirrel: shadow–tail (Greek)

   penguin: white head (Welsh)

   porcupine: spine–porker (French)

   walrus: whale–horse (Danish)

Invite students to construct a matching game or puzzle using these and other animal names and etymologies. A good reference book for students is Gladys R. Saxon's *Secrets in Animal Names* (1964).

*3. These Dutch, French, German, and Spanish words originated in America and were added to the English language:

adobe	delicatessen	pretzel
barbecue	depot	pumpernickel
bonanza	frankfurter	ranch
bronco	gopher	rodeo
bureau	hamburger	stampede
burro	hammock	Santa Claus
cache	hurricane	sauerkraut
canoe	lariat	sierra
canyon	lasso	sleigh
chaparral	levee	spook
chocolate	mustang	tapioca
cockroach	noodle	tobacco
coleslaw	ouch	tomato
cookie	patio	tornado
coyote	poncho	waffle
dachshund	prairie	yankee

Have students trace these words to their origins and determine the answers to the following questions: Which words originated in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam? Which were coined by the French in Louisiana? Which words were contributed by the German settlers? Which were introduced by traders who traveled to the West Indies, Cuba, and other Caribbean islands? Which words originated in Mexico or on the southwestern frontier? For more information about American English, refer to H. L. Mencken's *The American Language*, 4th ed. (1936).

4. Have students work in small groups to compile dictionaries of words that were borrowed from a particular language or that originated in a region of the United States.

*5. Ask students to research the meaning of these commonly used Latin abbreviations:

A.D. (*anno Domini* = in the year of the Lord)

e.g. (*exempli gratia* = for the sake of example)

etc. (*et cetera* = and the rest)

i.e. (*id est* = that is)

Idioms

"How come people say you 'spilled the beans' when they really mean you told a secret you weren't supposed to tell?"

Idioms are groups of words that have a special meaning. They can be confusing because they must be interpreted figuratively rather than literally. The idiom "spilling the beans" is thousands of years old, dating back to ancient Greece. James A. Cox (1980) explains that at that time, many Greek men belonged to secret clubs, and when someone wanted to join the club, the members took a vote to decide whether or not to admit him. They wanted the vote to remain secret so they voted by each placing a white or brown bean in a special jar. A white bean indicated a "yes" vote, and a brown bean was a "no" vote. Then the club leader would count the beans, and if all the beans were white, the person was admitted to the club. The vote was kept secret in order to avoid hurting the person's feelings in case the members voted not to admit him to their club. Sometimes during the voting, one member would accidentally knock the jar over, spilling the beans. Then the vote would no longer be a secret. The Greeks turned this real happening into a saying, and we still use it today. Another idiom with a different history but a similar meaning is "to let the cat out of the bag."

There are hundreds of idioms in English, and we use them every day to create word pictures that make our language more colorful. Some examples are "out in left field," "a skeleton in your closet," "stick your neck out," "a chip off the old block," "open a can of worms," "in one ear and out the other," "cry over spilled milk," and "put your foot in your mouth." Some of these idioms are new, while others are hundreds or thousands of years old; some are American in origin, while others come from other regions of the world.

Extensions

*1. A class project could be to research the meanings and histories of idioms. Dictionaries provide limited information, but a number of other resources supply detailed information. Four excellent books for students are James A. Cox's *Put Your Foot in Your Mouth and Other Silly Sayings* (1980), Ann and Dan Nevin's *From the Horse's Mouth* (1977), Alvin Schwartz's *Chin Music: Tall Talk and Other Talk* (1979), and Marvin Terban's *In a Pickle and Other Funny Idioms* (1983). Charles E. Funk's *A Hog on Ice and Other Curious Expressions* (1948) and *Heavens to Betsy and Other Curious Sayings* (1955) make good reading for teachers.

2. In order to help students understand the figurative meanings of idioms, ask them to act out both the figurative and literal meanings and to compare the two.

-Nyms

Homonyms

"Why did God make homonyms?"

Homonyms are words that sound alike but are spelled differently. J. N. Hook (1975, 88) explains that "most homonyms are the result of chance." In most cases, homonyms have developed from entirely different root words and even from words in two different languages. Consider the homonyms *cell* and *sell: cell* comes from the Latin *cella* (a cave or small room), while *sell* comes from the Old English word *sellan* (to give or deliver). The two words are easily recognizable in their original forms. In contrast, another pair of homonyms, *horse* and *hoarse*, can both be traced back to Old English words. *Horse* came from *hors*, meaning "horse," and *hoarse* came from *has*, meaning "rough." It is interesting to note that these two words were once homographs, words that are spelled alike. The etymological information in the dictionary states that both words were spelled *hors* in Middle English.

A few pairs of homonyms have developed from the same root word. Perhaps the most interesting pair is *muscle* and *mussel*. Both these words come from the Latin word *musculus*, meaning "little mouse." The Romans used metaphor in applying *musculus* to muscles and mussels. To them, the rippling of muscles looked like a little mouse running under the skin. Similarly, they thought that the shellfish we call *mussels* looked mouse-like. Three other pairs of homonyms that are derived from the same root word are *flea–flee*, *flower–flour*, and *stationary–stationery*.

The trio of homonyms *metal–medal–meddle* is unique because two of the words come from the same source while the third one does not. Both *metal* and *medal* are derived from the Latin word *metallum* (metal, mineral, ore). The semantic relationship between the two words is clear: a medal is a special piece of metal, usually resembling a coin which is inscribed and given as a reward. The third homonym, *meddle*, comes from the Latin word *miscere*, meaning "to mix."

Extensions

1. Have students examine the etymologies for these pairs of homonyms that developed from different root words:

ball–bawl	sore–soar
fairy–ferry	steak–stake
merry–marry	steel–steal
night–knight	tail–tale
pair–pare–pear	toe–tow
reign–rain–rein	wait–weight
root–route	wring–ring
sail–sale	write–right

Which pairs of words developed from the same language? Which words date back to the Old English period? Which words did the Normans contribute?

2. Ask students to investigate the etymologies for these three pairs of homonyms that developed from the same sources: *muscle–mussel*, *flea–flee*, and *flour–flower*. In each pair, one or both words developed as metaphors. Have students hunt for additional pairs of homonyms that developed from the same source.

Homographic Homophones

"How can the animal *bat* and the baseball *bat* have the same name?"

Homographic homophones are words that are spelled and pronounced alike. Some are related words while others are linguistic accidents. For example, the different meanings of *toast* come from the same Latin source word, *torrere* (to parch, bake). The derivation of *toast* as heated and browned slices of bread is obvious. However, the relationship between the source word and *toast* as an act of drinking to the honor or to the health of someone is not immediately apparent. The connection is that toasted, spiced bread flavored the drinks used in making toasts. In contrast, *bat* is a linguistic accident. *Bat* as a cudgel comes from the Old English word *batt*. The verb *to bat* is derived from the Old French word *batre*. The nocturnal animal which we call a *bat* derives its name from an unknown Old Norse word and was spelled *bakke* in Middle English. Thus, not only do the three forms have unrelated etymologies, but they originated in three different languages.

Extensions

1. Ask students to check the etymologies of these omographic homophones:

bank	bill	fly
bark	bore	pit
bear	box	rare

ring	row	taps
rock	scale	tattoo

Which words have a common source word and which are linguistic accidents?

2. Have students each choose one homographic homophone and design a chart to illustrate the different etymologies and meanings.

Synonyms and Near Synonyms

"Why do we have two words—like *street* and *road*—when they mean the same thing?"

Street and *road* are similar words, yet there is a shade of difference between them. While both words denote a public way for the travel of persons and vehicles, streets are more commonly found in towns and cities and often have curbs and sidewalks. In contrast, roads are often found in rural areas. Both words have been in our language since the Old English period, but they trace back to very different sources. *Road* is derived from an old Germanic language, suggesting that the Angles and Saxons brought the word with them Britain; *street* is one of the earliest Latin loan words.

We have so many synonyms and near synonyms in English because our language has borrowed so many words from other languages. In fact, S. I. Hayakawa (1968) reports that English has more synonyms than any other language. These borrowed words are useful, however, because they provide so many options, allowing us to express ourselves with more exactness. Think of all the different synonyms and near synonyms we have for the word *cold: cool, chilly, frigid, icy, frosty, freezing.* Each of these words has a different shade of meaning: *cool* means "moderately cold"; *chilly* is "uncomfortably cold"; *frigid* is "intensely cold"; *icy* means "very cold"; *frosty* means "covered with frost"; and *freezing* is "so cold that water changes into ice." Our language would be limited if we could only say that we were cold.

The largest number of synonyms entered English during the Norman occupation of Britain beginning in 1066. Compare these pairs of synonyms: *end–finish, seem–appear, work–labor, clothing–garments, forgive–pardon, buy–purchase, deadly–mortal.* The first word in each pair comes from Old English, and the second word was borrowed from the Normans. The Old English root words (e.g., *end, work, buy*) are often simple, basic words, while the French loan words (e.g., *finish, labor, purchase*) are more sophisticated. Perhaps that is why both words in each pair have survived: they express slightly different meanings.

Other pairs of synonyms come from other languages. For example, *comfortable* is a Latin loan word, while *cozy* is probably of Scandinavian origin, and both *copy* and *imitate* have Latin roots.

Extensions

1. Ask students to research these synonyms and near synonyms for *street* and *road: alley, avenue, boulevard, court, drive, highway, lane, path, route, thoroughfare,* and *way,* checking the etymology for each word and comparing different shades of meaning. The word *boulevard* has a particularly interesting history. Originally it referred to the top surface of a rampart or fortification. When the fortifications were no longer needed for defense, villagers often took walks on them. Now *boulevard* has come to denote a broad street or avenue usually ornamented with trees.
2. Have each student choose a "basic" word such as *child, hard,* or *say* and check the listing of synonyms for the word in a thesaurus. A good thesaurus for students is Harriet Wittels and Joan Greisman's *The Clear and Simple Thesaurus Dictionary* (1971). The next step is to investigate the synonyms. What slight differences of meaning exist among them? What languages can they be traced back to?
3. These pairs of words were originally synonyms, but they now have slightly different meanings: *hearty–cordial, stool–chair, heavenly–celestial, shepherd–pastor.* Have students check the etymologies to learn the original meanings. Which word in each pair is a loan word?
4. Have students use pairs of Old English/loan word synonyms to construct a crossword puzzle, using the Old English words as clues. An example of a crossword puzzle and the pairs of words to use in completing the puzzle are presented in Figure 3.

Root Words

Indo-European Roots

"Why do we say *dentist* instead of 'tooth doctor'?"

The relationship among the words *tooth, dentist,* and *orthodontist* is not apparent at first. The etymologies inform us that *tooth* is a native English word, *dentist* is a French word derived from the Latin word *dent,* and *orthodontist* is a Greek word containing *ortho-,* meaning "to straighten." The connection came earlier. Peter Davies, in his fascinating

A Synonym Crossword Puzzle

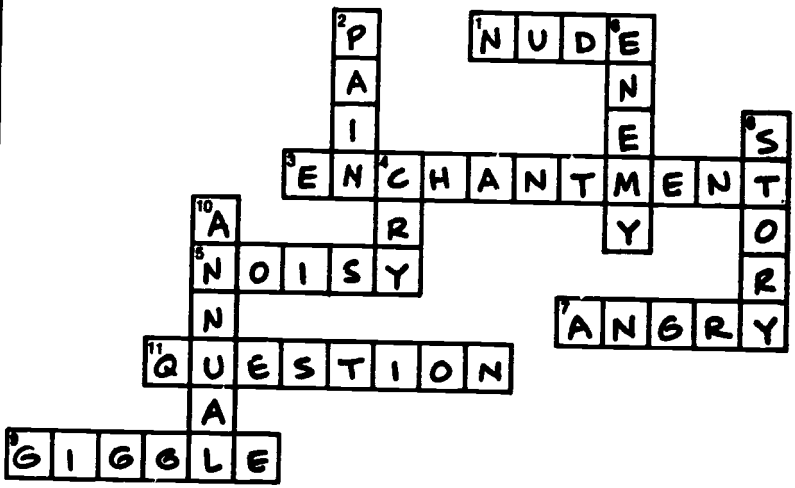
Puzzle Clues

Across

1. naked
3. spell
5. loud
7. mad
9. laugh
11. ask

Down

2. ache
4. weep
6. foe
8. tale
10. yearly



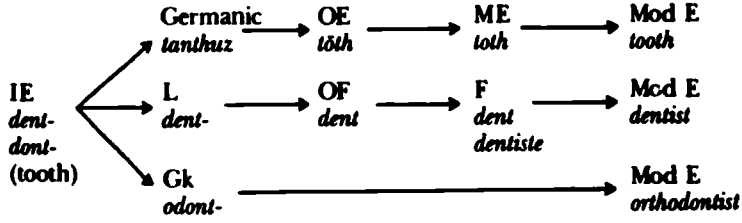
Pairs of Synonyms (Old English Words/Loan Words)

ache/pain	heal/cure	sea/ocean
ask/question	holy/sacred	sick/ill
brotherly/fraternal	laugh/giggle	spell/enchantment
dirty/soiled	lid/cover	tale/story
fatherly/paternal	loud/noisy	teacher/instructor
find/discover	mad/angry	truth/veracity
foe/enemy	motherly/maternal	watery/aquatic
folk/people	naked/nude	weep/cry
goodness/virtue	old/venerable	yearly/annual

Figure 3. A synonym crossword puzzle using Old English words and loan words.

book entitled *Roots: Family Histories of Familiar Words* (1981), traces these three words back to their common parent word, the hypothetical Indo-European word *dent-* or *dont-*, meaning "tooth." The tracing diagram below shows the derivations the original word underwent.

Knowing the probable Indo-European parent word and tracing the three words through their development in different languages clarifies the relationship among them. Even though the three Modern English



words look so different, their meanings are all related to teeth. The "basic" or most common word in the trio is the native English word *tooth;* both *dentist* and *orthodontist* are loan words. Without these borrowings, we probably would call a dentist a "tooth-doctor."

An additional example of a tracing diagram, that for the word *eight*, is presented in Figure 4. For more information on root words, derivations, and word families, refer to Davies (1981), Mario Pei's *The Families of Words* (1962), or *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (1985).

Tracing Diagram: *Eight*

Indo-European Parent Word: *oktō*

Modern English Words and Their Etymologies:

eight [ME *eighte*, OE *eahta*]

October [ME, OE < L: the eighth month of the early Roman year, equiv. to *octō-* and *-ber* adj. suffix]

octave [ME < L *octāva* eighth]

octopus [< L < Gk *oktōpous* eight-footed]

octagon [< L *octagon(os)* eight-cornered < Gk *oktágōnos* octangular]

Tracing:

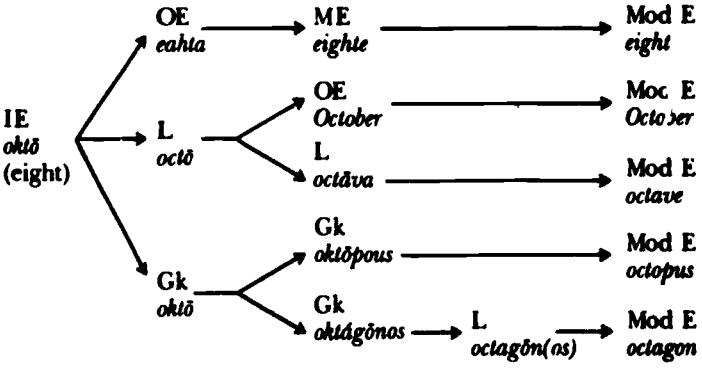


Figure 4. A tracing diagram for *eight*.

Extensions

1. Have students use tracings to diagram the relationships among the sets of words listed below. Using etymological information, students are to fill in the missing pieces between the hypothetical Indo-European parent words and the Modern English words.

IE Parent Words	*Modern English Words*
bhreg- (to break)	break, fracture
dekm (ten)	ten, December, decade
dwo (two)	two, duet, double, dozen
gwei- (to live)	quick, vivid, survive, vital, biology
kerd- (heart)	heart, cordial, courage, cardiac
kmtom (hundred)	hundred, cent, century
kwetwer/kwetr (four)	four, square, quart, quarter
men- (think)	mind, mental
mer- (to die)	murder, mortal, immortal
nas- (nose)	nose, nostril, nasal
newn (nine)	nine, November, noon
nogw- (naked)	naked, nude, gymnast
ped-/pod- (foot)	foot, pedicure, pedal, pedestrian, tripod
ster- (star)	star, constellation, astronaut, astronomy, astrology

Word Families

"How come words are so much alike: *report, important, porter, transportation*? They all have *port* in them."

Many words have developed from a single root word. For example, the Latin word *portare* (to carry) is the source of at least nine Modern English words:

deport	port	report
export	portable	support
import	porter	transport

Some Old English, Latin, and Greek root words and the families of words developed from them are listed in Figure 5. Peggy Dilts's *Words to the Wise* (1972) provides additional examples of word families.

Old English, Latin, and Greek Root Words

Old English Root Words

brecan (to break): break, breach, breakfast, brake
cræft (skill): craft, crafty, craftiness, witchcraft, handicraft, craftsman
faran (to go): farewell, welfare. thoroughfare, ferry, ford, carefree
midd (middle): middle, amid, meddling, midshipman, mid-America
nēah (near): near, neighbor, nigh, next
sār (pain): sore, sorrow, sorry, sorrowful
stigan (to ascend): stair, staircase, stile, stirrup, sty
twā (two): two, twice, between, twilight, twig, twin

Latin Root Words

agere (to drive, do): act, action, active, activity, agent, agility, reaction
magnus (great, large): magnify, magnitude, major, magnificent, majority, maxim
scribere (write): description, inscription, postscript, prescribe, scribble, script, scripture
trahere (to draw, handle, manage): attract, contract, portrait, refract, retreat, trace, tractor, train, trait, treaty
videre (to see): evident, improvise, invisible, revise, supervisor, television, video, vision, visit, vista, visualize
volvere (to roll, turn around): convolutions, evolution, involve, revolution, revolver, volume

Greek Root Words

aero (air): aerial, aerobics, aerosol
auto (self): automatic, automobile, autobiography
cosmos (world, universe): cosmic, cosmopolitan, microcosm
cycle (circle): bicycle, cycle, cyclone
geo (earth): George, geography, geometry
graph (write): biography, epigraph, geography, grammar, graph, graphite, telegraph
logos (speech, word, reason): dialog, ecology, logic, psychology, zoology
metre (measure): barometer, thermometer
onyma (name): anonymous, antonym, homonym, pseudonym, synonym
phōn (sound): phonics, symphony, phonograph
tēle (far): telephone, telegraph
thermos (hot): thermal, thermometer, thermos, thermostat

Figure 5. Old English, Latin, and Greek root words.

Extensions

1. Have pairs of students select one root word; then ask them to locate as many words as possible that have developed from this root word. Students may want to display the word family that they discover by attaching word cards to a tree branch hung from the ceiling or set into a pot.

2. Have students construct a set of cards with word families and root words to use in playing Rummy, Concentration, or other card games.

Affixes

"What good are prefixes and stuff like that?"

Adding prefixes and suffixes to existing words is an important way to create new words. Consider how many new words can be created using the word *like* and one or more affixes:

alike	likeliest	likeness
dislike	likelihood	likewise
likeable	likely	unlike
likelier	liken	unlikely

Some affixes date back to Old English times, and others have been borrowed from Latin and Greek. Examples of all three sources of affixes are presented in Figure 6. Also see Edgar Dale and Joseph O'Rourke's *Techniques of Teaching Vocabulary* (1971) for additional information about prefixes and suffixes.

Old English, Latin, and Greek Affixes

Old English Affixes	Modern English Words
a- (on, to, toward, into, up)	ago, asleep, ashore
be- (all over, thoroughly)	bemoan, bespeak
for- (from)	forget, forlorn
fore- (before, in front of)	forehead
mis- (bad)	mistake, misdeed
off- (from)	offspring
out- (out)	outline, outside, outwit
over- (over)	overboard, overtake
under- (beneath)	undermine, undergraduate
with- (against, from)	withdraw, withstand
-ard (one who)	drunkard, wizard
-dom (dominion, quality, condition)	freedom, kingdom, wisdom
-en (made of, to make)	harden, lengthen, wooden
-er (one who)	hunter
-ful (full, full of)	hopeful

Figure 6. Old English, Latin, and Greek affixes.

-hood (state, quality)	statehood, falsehood
-ish (having the qualities of)	girlish, Turkish
-less (without)	reckless
-ly (like)	godly
-ness (condition of being, place)	wilderness, goodness
-ship (skill, art, condition)	friendship, craftsmanship
-ster (one who)	spinster, gangster, youngster
-ward, -wards (toward)	backward(s)
-y (full of, having)	greedy, windy
Latin Affixes	**Modern English Words**
ab-, abs- (from, away from)	abduct, abstract
ambi- (both)	ambidextrous
ante- (before)	antediluvian, anterior
bi- (two)	bicycle
col-, com-, con- (with, very, together)	collapse, combine, confront
contra-, contro- (against)	contradict, controversial
de- (down, off, away)	decline
di-, dif-, dis- (not apart)	dilute, differ, discontinue
in- (in, into)	incline, insult
inter- (between, among)	international, interchange
mal- (bad)	malnutrition
multi- (many, much)	multicolored, multiple
post- (after)	postpone
pre- (before)	preschool
re- (again)	relax, repeat
semi- (half, twice in a given period)	semifinal, semiannual
sub- (under, secretly, less than)	submarine, subtract
super- (over, above)	superman, superficial
trans- (across)	transcontinental
tri- (three)	triangle
-able, -ible (capacity)	portable, readable, possible
-ation, -ition (act or state of)	education, recognition
-cle, -cule (little)	molecule, muscle
-fy (to make)	beautify, magnify
-ist (one who does)	cartoonist
-ive (having the quality of)	creative
-sion, -tion (act or state of)	action, admission

Figure 6 *(continued)*.

Greek Affixes	Modern English Words
amphi- (both)	amphibian
anti- (against, opposite)	antibiotic
arch (chief)	architect
cata-, *cath-* (down, against)	catastrophe, cathedral
hemi- (half)	hemisphere
mono- (one, alone)	monorail, monopoly
par-, *para-* (by the side of)	parallel
proto- (first)	protozoa
-ic, *-ics* (pertaining to)	artistic, gymnastics
-ize (to make into)	dramatize
-oid (like)	anthropoid

Figure 6 *(continued).*

Extensions

*1. Ask students to hunt for examples of words with particular affixes in the books they are reading. Collect the words on cards and hang them as mobiles.

2. Choose a root word from the list in Figure 5 and have students suggest as many affixes as possible. Explain how the affixes change the meaning of the original word. Chart these words on a web to show the variety of words that can be created from one root word. A sample web developed using the root word *port* (to carry) is presented in Figure 7.

3. Choose a word and have the class add improbable affixes to it to create "unique" words, such as *like* + *-ster* = *likester*, meaning "one who likes." Have students illustrate and define these unique words and compile them into a booklet.

Old English

Old English Words

"Why do we say *eleven* and *twelve* instead of 'one-teen' and 'two-teen'?"

Long ago when people counted, they used their fingers in counting to ten. After reaching ten, they ran out of fingers and would say "one left over" for eleven and "two left over" for twelve. Both eleven and twelve contain the Old English word *lif*, meaning "to leave" (Barnes 1948). These early people picked up the habit of saying "three and ten" or thirteen and "four and ten" or fourteen, and so on for the remaining numbers in the teens.

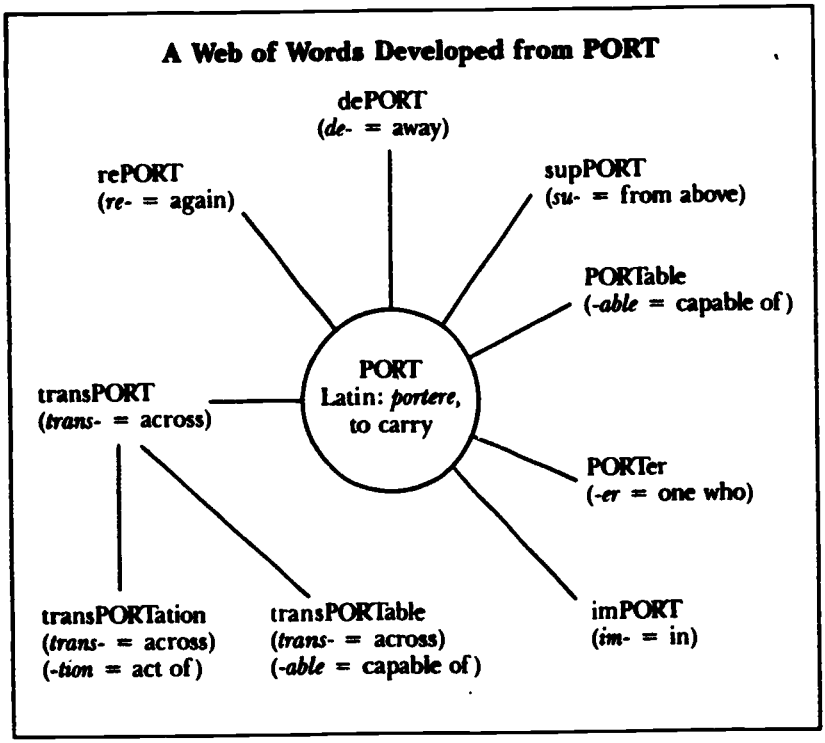


Figure 7. A web of words developed from *port*.

While only approximately 20 to 25 percent of our words date back to the Old English period, these native words account for more than half of our most frequently used words, such as *a, the, in, for, have, you* (Pei 1962). According to Baugh and Cable (1978), the only non-Old English high-frequency word is *very*. Some Old English words are easy to decipher:

bōc (book)
dæg (day)
hrōf (roof)
hwæt (what)
mete (meat)
nēahgebūr (neighbor)
regnboga (rainbow)
spōn (spoon)
upp (up)
wrītan (write)

Extensions

1. Ask students to select a passage from their own writing or from a book they are reading and to compare the number of native words to the number of loan words used in the passage.

2. Assign each student to hunt through a dictionary looking for native words beginning with a particular letter of the alphabet. For example, some recognizable Old English words beginning with *b* are listed below:

batt (bat)	botm (bottom,
bēan (bean)	brēad (bread)
beofor (beaver)	brycg (bridge)
bēo (bee)	brōm (broom)
betst (best)	bisig (busy)
betwēonum (between)	butorflēoge (butterfly)
blæc (black)	bī (by)
blōd (blood)	

After students prepare a list of native words, have them write the Old English word forms on flash cards to use in a game. Next, divide the class into teams and ask questions alternately of each team. A team scores a point if a student can identify the Modern English word developed from the Old English form.

3. Many Old English words such as *beek* and *dringle* have been lost or replaced with loan words. Older students might enjoy developing a list of Old English words that are not found in Modern English. For more information about these lost words, students might check Susan Sperling's *Poplollies and Bellibones: A Celebration of Lost Words* (1979).

*4. While our names for the months of the year are drawn from Latin, the Old English names for the months are interesting, too. The Angles and Saxons were agrarian peoples, and the names they invented reflect their culture:

January	Wulf–mōnath	wolf month
February	Sprote–Kalemōnath	month when cabbages sprout
March	Hlyd–mōnath	boisterous month
April	Ēastre–mōnath	Easter month
May	Thrīmilce–mōnath	month of three milkings
June	Sēre–mōnath	dry month
July	Mæd–mōnath	meadow month
August	Wēod–mōnath	weed month
September	Hærfest–mōnath	harvest month
October	Wīn–mōnath	wine month

November	Blōd–mōnath	sacrifice month
December	Midwintra–mōnath or Hālig–mōnath	midwinter month or holy month

Ask students to speculate on the reasons for the names. For example, March was called the "boisterous month" because it was such a windy time, and November was called the "sacri[illegible]nth" because farmers slaughtered some of their stock before the harsh winter weather arrived. Have students create new names for the months based on their own activities.

5. What did Old English sound like? *Our Changing Language*, a recording by Evelyn Gott Burack and Raven I. McDavid, Jr. (1965) presents short readings in Old English as well as Middle English and Early Modern English. *The Sound of English: A Bibliography of Language Recordings*, compiled by Michael D. Linn and Maarit-Hannele Zuber (1984), lists other available records on the history of English, American English, and Modern English dialects.

Irregular Verb Forms

"How come you can't say 'eated'?"

Most verbs have become weak or regular and use the *ed* past tense form. However, a few verbs reflect the Old English tradition and have strong or irregular past and past participle forms. These irregular verbs include:

begin	fight	ride
blow	find	see
come	fly	shake
drink	freeze	sing
drive	grow	sink
eat	hold	swear
fall	know	take

While these verbs may cause problems for students, they do not have to learn the more complicated system of inflectional endings used in Old English and in many foreign languages.

Extensions

1. Have each student select an irregular verb and construct a verb mobile with cards listing the correct tense forms.

2. Compile a class book of irregular verb forms. Students might follow the format of Marvin Terban's *I Think I Thought and Other Tricky Verbs* (1984).

Irregular Plurals

"Why don't we say 'childs' and 'mans' and 'mouses'?"

While we use *-s* or *-es* to indicate plurals for most words, a few words have irregular plurals which have survived from the Old English plural forms. One Old English plural form, *-en*, is still used in several Modern English words, including *oxen* and *children*. Some other words also derive their irregular plural forms from Old English:

Old English		*Modern English*	
singular	*plural*	*singular*	*plural*
fōt	fēt	foot	feet
tōth	tēth	tooth	teeth
mann	menn	man	men
wīfmann	wīfmenn	woman	women
gōs	gēs	goose	geese
mūs	mȳs	mouse	mice

The Old English tradition is easy to see in the Modern English words, and sharing them with your students will help them better understand what at first appears to be a capricious system of forming plurals in Modern English.

The practice of changing the *f* to *v* in words like *loaf* when forming the plural *(loaves)* also dates back to Old English. At that time, *f* was pronounced /f/ at the beginning and end of words and /v/ in the middle. Later, when *v* was added to the English alphabet, it was used to spell *calves, elves, halves, knives, leaves, lives, thieves,* and *wives.*

Extensions

1. Compile a class booklet of words with irregular plural forms.
2. A few borrowed words have retained their foreign plural forms. Ask students to check the plural forms of the words *alga, alumna/ alumnus, criterion, datum, focus, fungus,* and *index,* and to generalize a rule about forming the plurals of some words borrowed from Greek and Latin.

Spelling

Sound/Symbol Correspondences

"How come you can't just spell words the way they sound?"

When English spelling developed in the 600s, words were spelled the way they were pronounced. There were no "silent" letters in Old English, and even the first letter in words like *knight* and *write* was pronounced. Because there were no dictionaries listing the "correct" way to spell words, scribes felt free to change the way a word was spelled to reflect changes in pronunciation. These changes in spelling came to an end with the standardization of spelling in the 1500s. Even though the way we pronounce a word might change, we continue to spell it the same way, resulting in silent letters and mismatches between letters and sounds.

Also, the addition of thousands of loan words from languages around the world has contributed to our spelling difficulties. Say these words: *chafe, chagrin, chameleon, chasm, chef, chemist, cherub, choir.* The *ch* in these words is pronounced four different ways: /k/, /ch/, /sh/, and /kw/. And consider the word *cello*, a word without an *h* but with a /ch/ initial sound. While the sound/symbol correspondences in English are not always predictable, they provide other information about these loan words. For instance, *ch* is often pronounced /sh/ in French loan words and /k/ in Greek loan words.

Extensions

1. Have students brainstorm a list of all the ways we spell a particular sound. For example, four ways to spell /f/ are *f* as in *fish*, *ff* as in *cuff*, *ph* as in *triumph*, and *gh* as in *enough*. Pei (1952) listed fourteen different spellings for the /sh/ sound: *shoe, sugar, issue, mansion, mission, nation, suspicion, ocean, nauseous, conscious, chaperon, schist, fuchsia, pshaw.* A list of common spelling options for other phonemes is presented in Figure 8. Ask students to locate examples of the spelling options in books they are reading and in their own writing.
2. A followup activity for students is to try spelling words in outlandish ways. For instance, dramatist George Bernard Shaw tried spelling our word *fish* this way: *ghoti.* He used the *gh* in *laugh* for the /f/, the *o* in *women* for the /i/, and the *ti* in *nation* for the /sh/. How do unconventional spelling options mask lexical and etymological information?

Common Spelling Options		
Sound	*Spellings*	*Examples*
ā	a-e	date
	a	angel
	ai	aid
	ay	day
ē	ea	each
	ee	feel
	e	evil
	e-e	these
	ea-e	breathe
ĕ	e	end
	ea	head
ō	o	go
	o-e	note
	ow	own
	oa	load
ô	o	office
	a	all
	au	author
	aw	saw
o͝o	oo	book
	u	put
	ou	could
	o	woman
o͞o	u	cruel
	oo	noon
	u-e	rule
	o-e	lose
	ue	blue
	o	to
	ou	group

Figure 8. Common spelling options for certain phonemes in the English language. Reprinted, with permission, from Horn 1957, 426–28. © 1957 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved.

Common Spelling Options		
Sound	*Spellings*	*Examples*
ŭ	u	ugly
	o	company
	ou	country
stressed syllabic *r*	er	her
	ur	church
	ir	first
	or	world
	ear	heard
	our	courage
unstressed syllabic *r*	er	better
	or	favor
	ure	picture
	ar	dollar
oi	oi	oil
	oy	boy
ou	ou	out
	ow	cow
ū	u	union
	u-e	use
	ue	value
	ew	few
syllabic *l*	le	able
	al	animal
	el	cancel
	il	civil
syllabic *n*	en	written
	on	lesson
	an	important
	in	cousin
	contractions	didn't
	ain	certain

Figure 8 *(continued).*

Common Spelling Options		
Sound	*Spellings*	*Examples*
ch	ch	church
	t(u)	picture
	tch	watch
	ti	question
f	f	feel
	ff	sheriff
	ph	photograph
j	ge	strange
	g	general
	j	job
	dge	bridge
k	c	call
	k	keep
	x	expect, luxury
	ck	black
	qu	quite, bouquet
l	l	last
	ll	allow
	le	automobile
m	m	man
	me	come
	mm	comment
n	n	no
	ne	done
ng	ng	thing
	n	bank, anger

Figure 8 *(continued)*.

Common Spelling Options		
Sound	*Spellings*	*Examples*
s	s	sick
	ce	office
	c	city
	ss	class
	se	else
	x(ks)	box
sh	ti	attention
	sh	she
	ci	ancient
	ssi	admission
t	t	teacher
	te	definite
	ed	furnished
	tt	attend
y	u	union
	u-e	use
	y	yes
	i	onion
	ue	value
	ew	few
z	s	present
	se	applause
	ze	gauze

Figure 8 *(continued)*.

3. Noah Webster simplified the spelling of many words. Ask students to consider which words they would like to simplify and how they would do so. Would their changes affect the clues that the present spelling provides about the meaning and origin of the word? For example, if we changed the word *phone* to *fon*, we would lose the etymological information indicating that *phone* is a Greek loan word and that the *o* has a long sound.

Silent Letters

"How come words like *island* have silent letters?"

During the sixteenth century, scholars believed Latin was a "model" language and English was a limited, unpolished vernacular. To add more prestige to English, these scholars modified the spelling of a few words, including *island*, to reflect Latin and French spellings. Island was spelled *ilond* in Middle English; the *s* was added to imitate the Old French and Middle French word *isle* (spelled *île* in Modern French) and the Latin word *insula*. Even though the spelling does not correspond to the pronunciation, it has remained. The spelling change also sends a false message about the word's etymology. While *island* with an *s* may appear to have developed from a French or Latin source word, it is actually a native English word.

Today other words such as *knight* and *folk* have silent letters because the consonants in six particular consonant clusters ceased to be pronounced during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The *w* in *wr-* words such as *wrist*, the *g* in *gn-* words such as *gnat*, and the *k* in *kn-* words such as *knock* have become silent, as well as the *b* in *-mb* words such as *climb*, the *n* in *-mn* words such as *hymn*, and the *l* in *-lk* words such as *talk*. While these letters are no longer pronounced, they, too, have remained in our spelling. It must be noted, however, that both letters are pronounced when the letters cross morpheme boundaries in words such as bom*b*ard, sig*n*ature, hym*n*al, and crum*b*le.

Originally the silent *e*'s on words such as *time*, *name*, and *come* were pronounced, but by the beginning of the Modern English period, they became silent. The final *e* has remained on most words to indicate that the preceding vowel is long. While spelling reformers have suggested alternate ways of marking long vowels, including doubling the long vowel to indicate length (e.g., *maad* for *made*), the practice of using silent *e*'s has remained.

Extensions

1. Three other words, *receipt*, *debt*, and *doubt*, have silent letters that were added when the words were "Latinized." Have students check the etymologies for each word to learn the source words as well as the Latin words contributing the silent letters.
2. Have the class compile a list of *wr-*, *gn-*, *kn-*, *-mb*, *-mn*, and *-lk* words, and mark the unpronounced letters in each word.
3. Many early printers who came to England from Holland were responsible for adding the silent *h* to words such as *ghost*, *gherkin*,

and *ghastly*. For example, *ghost* was spelled *gost* in Middle English, but the printers in the 1500s, either by accident or because the *gh* pattern was familiar to them, added the unnecessary *h*. However, the *h*'s added to other words such as *ghospel* and *ghossip* have been dropped, and the *h*'s added to *ghess* (guess) and *ghest* (guest) have been replaced with *u*'s. Have students investigate the etymologies of *gh-* words and note in particular the derivations of *ghetto* and *ghoul*. Could the Dutch printers have added the *h*'s to these two words?

Name Words

What do these words have in common?

America	Delaware	saxophone
aspirin	Ferris wheel	siren
atlas	jeans	suede
Band-Aid	leotard	tangerine
boycott	mayonnaise	teddy bear
cereal	sandwich	zipper

All of these words are derived from names: people's names, names of gods and goddesses from Greek and Roman mythology, brand names, and place-names. For example, the *teddy bear* was named to honor Theodore Roosevelt, *sandwich* comes from the Fourth Earl of Sandwich, and *jeans* were named after the city of Genoa, Italy, where they were first manufactured.

Words from Names

"Is *Levi's* a name or a word?"

Many people's names have become common words. In the nineteenth century, Levi Strauss founded Levi Strauss and Company, the world's first and largest manufacturer of denim jeans. Strauss called his jeans *Levi's*, and over the years Levi Strauss's name has become a widely known brand name. Another example is Samuel A. Maverick, an unconventional nineteenth-century Texas cattleman who refused to brand his cattle. His name has become a word that means a person who acts independently or is a nonconformist. People whose names become the source of words, such as Levi Strauss and Samuel A. Maverick, are *eponyms*. The term is now more often applied to the word that is derived from a person's name.

Extensions

*1. Have students determine the words that are derived from the following names:

Michel Bégon
Amelia Jenks Bloomer
E. G. Booze
Col. James Bowie
Charles Cunningham Boycott
Louis Braille
Ambrose Burnside
Julius Caesar
John Duns Scotus
Gabriel Fahrenheit
George W. G. Ferris
Elihu Frisbee
Richard Jordan Gatling
Joseph Ignace Guillotin
Jules Léotard
Charles Lynch
John Montagu (Earl of Sandwich)
Samuel F. B. Morse
Jean Nicot
Louis Pasteur
Joel Robert Poinsett
Theodore Roosevelt
Adolphe Sax
Norman Selby (Kid McCoy)
Étienne de Silhouette
William Archibald Spooner
Levi Strauss
Count Paul Stroganoff
Amerigo Vespucci
Alessandro Volta
James Watt
Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin
J. G. Zinn

While students can guess the words derived from many of these people's names, they may need to research to learn, for example, that the begonia was named in honor of Michel Bégon. Two excellent resource books for students are Vernon Pizer's *Take My Word for It* (1981)and Allan Wolk's *Everyday Words from Names of People and Places* (1980).

Words from Mythology

"Vulcan? Is that where they got the word *volcano*?"

Yes, our word *volcano* comes from *Vulcan*. The connection between the two words is clear. Vulcan was the Roman god of fire, and when molten lava spewed from volcanoes, the ancient Romans believed that Vulcan was working in his underground workshop. The names of numerous gods, goddesses, and other characters from both Roman and Greek mythology are eponyms, contributing such words as *atlas, cereal, echo, janitor, money,* and *siren.*

Extensions

*1. Have students investigate words that developed from the names of the following gods, goddesses, and other characters in Greek and Roman mythology:

Atlas	Jove	Odysseus
Calliope	Juno Moneta	Olympus
Ceres	Luna	Pan
Cupid	Mars	Saturn
Echo	Mercury	Sirens
Furies	Morpheus	Tantalus
Iris	Muses	Titan
Janus	Oceanus	Vulcan

One good resource for students is Isaac Asimov's *Words from Myths* (1961).

*2. Have students research the English names for the months of the year. The names come from Latin, and some months were named to honor Roman gods and goddesses.

*3. The English names for the days of the week are mixed in origin, but some come from Roman and Norse mythology:

Sunday	OE *Sunnandæg*	day of the sun (L *dies solis*)
Monday	OE *Monandæg*	day of the moon (L *lunae dies*)
Tuesday	OF *Tiwesdæg*	day of Tiw or Tyr
Wednesday	OE *Wōdnesdæg*	day of Woden
Thursday	OE *Thūresdæg*	day of Thor
Friday	OE *Frīgedæg*	day of Frigg or Freya
Saturday	OE *Sæternesdæg*	day of Saturn (L *saturni dies*)

Compare the English word *Friday* with the Latin form *dies veneris*, meaning "day of Venus." Frigg or Freya was the Norse goddess comparable to the Roman goddess Venus. The French and Spanish words for Friday, *vendredi* and *viernes*, respectively, reflect their derivation from the Latin word form. While the English word *Friday* differs significantly in appearance from the French and Spanish words, all three honor a goddess of love and beauty. Make similar comparisons between the Norse god Tiw or Tyr and the

Roman god Mars for Tuesday, the Norse god Woden and the Roman god Mercury for Wednesday, and the Norse god Thor and the Roman god Jupiter or Jove for Thursday.

*4. Tie classroom discussions about words derived from mythology to reading the myths. One good source of Norse myths for students is Ingri and Edgar d'Aulaire's *Norse Gods and Giants* (1967). Compare Norse myths to Greek and Roman myths and to Native American, Egyptian, Chinese, and Japanese myths.

Words from Places

"Do you know why my mom calls her good dishes *china* and we call that country *China*?"

Many objects are named for the city or country where they were first grown or manufactured. The word *china* originally referred to porcelain or ceramic ware manufactured in China, but we now use the word to describe any high-quality porcelain. Other words from place-names include *cantaloupe*, named for the Italian villa where it was first grown, and *frankfurter* from Frankfurt, Germany.

Extensions

*1. Have students investigate the place-name origins of these words:

bayonet (Bayonne, France)
bikini (island of Bikini)
brussels sprouts (Brussels, Belgium)
Chihuahua (state in Mexico)
cologne (Cologne, Germany)
damask (Damascus, Syria)
denim (Nimes, France)
dollar (Joachimsthal, Czechoslovakia)
gauze (Gaza)
gypsy (Egypt)
hamburger (Hamburg, Germany)
jalopy (Jalopa, Mexico)
jeans (Genoa, Italy)
mayonnaise (Port Mahon, Spain)
millinery (Milan, Italy)
palace (Palatine Hill in Rome)

Parmesan cheese (Parma, Italy)
peach (Persia)
Pekingese (Peking, China)
polka (Poland)
spinach (Spain)
suede (Sweden)
tangerine (Tangiers, Morocco)
tarantula (Taranto, Italy)
tobacco (Tobago, Antilles)
turkey (Turkey)

Brand Names

"What's a brand name?"

The word *brand* comes from the Old English word *brand*, meaning "a piece of burning wood." As Hook (1975) explains, brands began as a mark burned on cattle and other possessions and later came to mean an identifying sign or trademark. Today a brand name is printed rather than burned onto product labels, but its purpose remains to identify the product. Well-known brand names include *Band-Aid*, *Coca-Cola*, *Crest*, *Frigidaire*, *Levi's*, *Pepsi*, and *Xerox*.

Extensions

*1. Have students research the histories of brand names of products. For example, in searching for a name for their oven-proof glassware, scientists at the Corning Glass Works first chose the name *Pie King*. They decided that they wanted a more elegant name so they changed the word *king* from English to Latin, producing the word *Pyrex*. Some brand names for students to investigate include:

Adidas	Jeep	Polaroid
Amoco	Kleenex	Post
Avon	Kraft	Quaker
Bic	Lego	Revlon
Birds Eye	Maxwell House	Singer
Chevrolet	Mazda	Sony
Coca-Cola	Mobil	Toyota
Colgate	Nabisco	Tupperware
Ford	Nestlé	Volkswagen
Greyhound	Palmolive	Wrigley's
Heinz	Pepsi	Xerox

One good resource for students is Oren Arnold's *What's in a Name: Famous Brand Names* (1979).

2. Many brand names have entered our language and have replaced the generic name for the product. For example, *Kleenex, Scotties,* and *Puffs* are all brand names for facial tissues; *Kleenex* is the best known and most often replaces the generic name. Have students identify the gene ic names for these well-known brand names:

Band-Aid	Levi's	Sanka
Coke	Pyrex	Thermos
Jell-O	Q-Tips	Vaseline

First and Last Names

"Where did our names come from?"

During the Old English period, people had a single name of Germanic origin such as *Edgar, Edmund, Godwin, Ethel,* and *Winifred.* They also used an interesting system for forming new names. According to Eloise Lambert (1955), children's names were often created by combining the first half of one parent's name with the second half of the other parent's name. To illustrate, a daughter born to a father named *Alfred* and a mother named *Edith* might be named *Aldyth.*

After the Norman conquest, French nan es such as *Caroline, Charles, Louis, Margaret,* and *William* came into style. Also, biblical names including *David, Joseph, Mary, Peter,* and *Sarah* became popular, perhaps due to the Crusades.

Some of the first names we use today date back to the Old English period, others are French or biblical, and still others come from languages around the world. The language a name is derived from as well as its original meaning can be traced through etymological information. For example:

Alan (Irish: handsome, cheerful)
Amy (French: beloved)
Barbara (Latin: stranger)
Brian (Celtic: strength, virtue, honor)
Diana (Latin: goddess)
Donna (Italian: lady)
George (Greek: farmer)
Gerald (German: spear-mighty)

Linda (Spanish: pretty one)
Michael (Hebrew: he who is like God)
Phillip (Greek: lover of horses)
Ralph (English: swift wolf)
Robert (English: shining with fame)
Roxanne (Persian: brilliant one)

The use of last names did not develop in England or the rest of Europe until late in the Middle Ages, when it became increasingly difficult to distinguish among people. In a village there might have been four or five boys and men named Thomas. To tell them apart, it became customary to add a nickname: Thomas the short, Thomas the smith, Thomas from near the bridge, Thomas the son of William. Gradually the word *the* was dropped, resulting in Thomas Short, Thomas Smith, Thomas Bridges, Thomas Williamson (or Wilson). Thus, there were at least four sources for our last names: (1) physical appearance, (2) occupation, (3) geographic location, and (4) paternity.

The practice of adding *-son* or another affix to indicate paternity or family relationship is widespread. In addition to the English *Robertson, Thompson,* and *Wilson,* Scandinavians have contributed *Anderson, Erickson, Hansen, Johnson,* and *Olson.* The prefix *Fitz-* also means "son of" and is used by both Irish and English in the names *Fitzgerald* and *Fitzsimmons.* The Scottish and Irish both use the form *Mac/Mc,* as in *McDonald.* The Irish form *O',* as in *O'Brien,* means "grandson of" but is often translated as "descendant of." The suffix *-vich* is used to mean "son of" in the Slavic languages.

Extensions

1. Invite students to research their own first and last names. Small paperback books of names for the baby are often available in displays near supermarket checkout lanes and provide basic information about most first names. Students may obtain additional information about names from Barbara Shook Hazen's *Last, First, Middle and Nick: All about Names* (1979) and from reference books that are available at public libraries.
2. Ask students to create new names for themselves using the Old English custom of combining parts of both parents' names to create the child's name.
3. We often clip first names to make new names. For example, *Beth, Betsy, Betty, Elsie, Lisa,* and *Eliza* are shortened forms of *Elizabeth.*

Have students determine the original names from which these shortened forms were taken:

Bob	Gail	Pat
Chuck	Hank	Peggy
Ellen	Jack	Ted
Frank	Jerry	Vickie

4. Have the class discover the etymologies of the following last names, which originated as physical characteristics:

Boyd	Campbell	Follett
Burnett	Curtis	Hardy
Cameron	Fairfax	Power

5. Ask students to investigate the derivations of these occupation-related surnames:

Bailey	Fletcher	Turner
Baxter	Foster	Tyler
Chandler	Lambert	Wagner
Clark	Marshall	Webb
Collier	Plummer	Webster
Cooper	Smith	Wheeler
Day	Spooner	Wright

6. Have students research the history of the titles *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Miss*, and *Ms.*

Place-Names

"How come some of our states like *New York* and *New Jersey* have the word *new* in their names? Why are they 'new'?"

American place-names—names of cities, states, mountains, and rivers—come from several sources. Because the United States was settled relatively recently, many place-names can be traced. *New York* was named after the English Duke of York and Albany, and *New Jersey* honors the island of Jersey in the English Channel. Nearby, *New Hampshire* pays tribute to the English county of Hampshire. Other American place-names beginning with *new* include *New England, New Mexico,* and *New Orleans.* Also, there are several "new" place-names outside the United States: *Nova Scotia, New Guinea,* and *New Zealand.*

Eloise Lambert and Mario Pei (1959) explain that place-names provide valuable clues in tracing the movement of peoples and the spread of civilization. Many American place-names entered the English language from Indian words, such as *Chesapeake Bay, Appalachian*

Mountains, Wyoming, Mississippi River, and *Milwaukee,* while *Alaska* is an Aleut word meaning mainland.

Other place-names reflect the languages spoken by the early settlers. To generalize, English place-names are found in the eastern part of the United States *(Annapolis, Carolina, Virginia),* French place-names in Louisiana and along the Mississippi River valley *(New Orleans, Prairie du Chien, St. Louis),* and Spanish place-names in Florida and the Southwest *(El Paso, St. Augustine, Santa Cruz).* Other languages are represented, too. A number of Dutch place-names remain in the region of the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam: *Yonkers, Brooklyn, Harlem,* and the *Hudson River,* named for the Dutch explorer Henry Hudson. Settlers from Germany, Scandinavia, and other European countries came to the United States later. Their place-names are fewer and scattered. The names of many cities, states, mountains, and rivers were chosen to honor kings, nobility, presidents, saints, and explorers, as shown in the examples below:

Cincinnati: Cincinnatus, a Roman statesman

Columbus: Christopher Columbus

Delaware: Lord De La Warr, a colonial governor

Georgia: King George II of England

Laramie: Jacques La Ramie, a French fur trapper

Louisiana: King Louis XIV of France

Mount McKinley: President William McKinley

Pennsylvania: William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania

Pike's Peak: Zebulon Pike, an eighteenth-century explorer

Pontiac: Pontiac, an Indian chief

San Francisco: St. Francis of Assisi

Washington, D.C.: George Washington

Place-names come from a wide variety of other sources, too. Sometimes names are chosen because of physical characteristics, such as the *White Mountains, Las Vegas* (the plains), and *Baton Rouge* (red stick). Other place-names come from popular personal names such as *Gene Autry,* Oklahoma, and *Santa Claus,* Indiana. Another source of place-names is religious words such as *Sacramento, San Antonio,* and *Los Angeles* (the angels). One final source of place-names is animal names such as *Beaver Dam, Buffalo, Elkhart,* and *Foxboro.*

Three good references for students to consult about place-names are Vernon Pizer's *Ink, Ark., and All That: How American Places Got Their*

Names (1976), Christine Fletcher's *One Hundred Keys: Names across the Land* (1973) and Eloise Lambert and Mario Pei's *The Book of Place-Names* (1959).

Extensions

*1. Have students research the name of their city and state and try to determine the sources of names given to rivers, lakes, streets, and highways near their homes.

*2. Have students examine a state or U.S. map and discover as many different sources of place-names as they can. Discuss with students how the history and geography of a particular area affect the place-names.

*3. Americans tended to repeat the names of cities as they moved west. How many cities can students locate on state maps with these often-used names?

Albany	Florence	Plymouth
Alexandria	Jefferson	Portland
Columbus	Madison	Springfield

*4. America was named in honor of Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian explorer who was falsely credited with discovering our country. The names of other countries have interesting histories, too, often based on their geography or historical events. Have students trace the history of the names of these and other countries:

Argentina: Silvery Republic

Australia: land of Auster, the south wind

Bolivia: named for Simón Bolívar

China: Middle Kingdom

Ecuador: the equator

France: free men

Mexico: named for the Aztec war-god, Mexitli

Venezuela: Little Venice

Vietnam: land of the south

Forming New Words

English is a living language, growing and changing to reflect the people who speak and write it. New words are added to English in a variety of ways. As previously discussed, many words are borrowed from other

languages and numerous words are developed from names. Four additional ways that new words are formed are (1) compounding, (2) coining, (3) clipping, and (4) imitation (echoic words).

Compounding

"Why do we have to have compound words?"

Joining two words to produce a new word is a common practice dating back to the Old English period. In compounding, two words are combined to express a new idea. Three examples of Old English compounds that have remained in our language are *childhood* (OE *cildhād*), *friendship* (OE *frēondscipe*), and *kingdom* (OE *cyningdōm*). Other Old English compounds have been replaced with Norman French or Latin words. For example, the Old English word *lǣcecrǣft* (leechcraft) has been replaced by *medicine*, *frumweorc* (beginning-work) by *creation*, and *brēostcearu* (breastcare) by *anxiety*. Other compound words have survived in different forms. Our word *lord* is derived from *hlāf-weard* (loaf-warden), and *world* comes from *wer-eld* (man-age). Other compound words such as *telephone*, *stethoscope*, and *automobile* are formed from Greek and Latin words.

Hook (1975) explains that compound words usually progress through three stages. They begin as separate words (open); later they are hyphenated; and finally they become single words. However, there are many exceptions to this rule, such as the compound words *cash register*, *post office*, and *ice cream*, which have remained separate words. An interesting word is *ball-point pen*, a compound word that is both open and hyphenated.

Extensions

1. When the colonists came to America, they found many new animals and plants, and they created new compound words to describe these objects, such as *firefly*, *popcorn*, *sweet potato*, *bullfrog*, and *copperhead*. Have students discuss why these words were chosen and research the histories of these and other uniquely American compound words.
2. Compound words are most often formed from nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. Have students classify the parts of speech of the original components of these and other compound words:

birthday	evergreen	kickback
blueberry	fingerprint	lipstick
downfall	headache	sunshine

3. Ask students to collect examples of compound words and sort them into three classes: open, hyphenated, and single compound words.

Coining

"Is *brunch* a real word, or is it just made up?"

Creative people have always invented or coined new words. Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, is perhaps the best-known inventor of words. He called his new words *portmanteau* words, borrowing from the British word for a suitcase that opens into two halves, because his new words were created by blending or combining two words into one. His best-known word is *chortle*, a blending of *snort* and *chuckle*. The word *brunch* is also a blend, a combination of *breakfast* and *lunch*.

Pure inventions are a second type of coined words. For example, *gas* was coined by J. B. van Helmont in the seventeenth century, and John Milton invented the word *pandemonium* in *Paradise Lost*. More recently, a scoutmaster named R. H. Link coined the word *boondoggle*. Brand names such as *Kodak*, *nylon*, *Pyrex*, and *zipper* are also pure inventions.

Acronyms, words formed by combining the initial letter or letters of several words, are a third type of coined words. *Laser*, for example, is created by combining the initial letters of the words *light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation*. *Radar*, *scuba*, *NOW*, *OPEC*, and *NASA* are examples of other well-known acronyms.

Extensions

1. Ask students to check the etymologies of these portmanteau words to learn the original words that were blended to form the new words:

broasted	dumbfound	smog
brunch	flurry	splatter
cafetorium	hokum	squawk
clash	motel	twirl

2. Have students consult the dictionary to learn the words used in forming these acronyms:

BASIC	HOPE	Nabisco
CARE	jeep	NASA
FIAT	laser	NOW

OK/okay	SALT	UNICEF
OPEC	scuba	VISTA
radar	sonar	ZIP

(In some dictionaries, the acronyms are listed separately in an appendix.)

*3. Read aloud or have students read individually Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" and make a list of the portmanteau words used in the poem. Two captivating, book-length versions of the poem are available—one illustrated by Jane Breskin Zalben (Warne, 1977), the other by Kate Buckley (Albert Whitman, 1985).

4. Ask students to invent "sniglets" or new words that should be in our language but haven't been coined yet. They might pattern their new words after *Sniglets* (Macmillan, 1984) and *More Sniglets* (Macmillan, 1985) by Rich Hall and friends.

Clipping

"Why do some people call a *cab* a 'cab' and others a *taxi* a 'taxi'?"

Cab and *taxi* as well as *taxicab* are shortened forms of the term *taximeter cabriolet*. The process of making a shorter word from a longer one is known as clipping. In this example, three synonymous words were clipped from the same term. Other clipped words include *fan* (from *fanatic*), *goodbye* (from *God be with ye*), *math* (from *mathematics*), and *zoo* (from *zoological garden*). Most of these clipped words are only one syllable long and commonly used in informal conversation.

Extensions

1. Have students research the etymologies of these words to learn the original words from which they were clipped:

ad	flu	phone
bedlam	gym	photo
bike	gypsy	piano
burger	hood (gangster)	plane
bus	lab	razz
cello	lunch	rep
curio	mend	sax
cute	mike	van
dorm	mob	vet
exam	mum (flower)	wig

Echoic Words

"How come we say that dogs say 'bow-wow' when they don't?"

Every language has developed words to represent the sounds made by animals, objects, and people: *beep, chirp, gurgle, moo, plop, sizzle.* These words are known as *echoic* words because they attempt to echo or imitate natural sounds. Often there is very little phonetic correspondence between the sound and the word used to represent that sound. Animal sounds are especially intriguing because the words used to represent the same animal sound vary greatly from one language to another. For example:

What a dog says
English: *bow-wow*
Finnish: *hau-hau*
French: *gnaf-gnaf*
Irish: *amh-amh*
Japanese: *wang-wang*
Russian: *gav-gav*
Spanish: *guau*

What a rooster says
Chinese: *kiau-kiau*
English: *cock-a-doodle-doo*
French: *coquericot*
Italian: *chicchirichi*
Japanese: *kokek-koko*
Spanish: *kiquerique*
Swedish: *ku-kukelik*

Some common words also began as echoic words. The word *zipper,* a brand name, was invented to represent the sound a zipper makes, and etymologists hypothesize that *knock* may have originated as an echoic word.

Extensions

*1. What sound does a hippopotamus make? Or a penguin? Have the class investigate the words we use to represent animal sounds and compile a class booklet of animal sounds. One good resource is Peter Spier's *Gobble, Growl, Grunt* (1971).

*2. Have students explore the words we use to represent the sounds that objects make. For example, how do we write the sound made by the siren of a police car or ambulance, or the sound that popcorn makes as it is popping? Have the class compose sound poems by listing all the sound words associated with particular topics, such as recess or a circus. Recommended books for students include Joan Hanson's *Sound Words* (1973) and *More Sound Words* (1979), Peter Spier's *Crash! Bang! Boom!* (1979), and John Burningham's series of "noisy books"—*Skip Trip, Sniff Shout,* and

Wobble Pop (all 1984), and *Cluck Baa, Jangle Twang,* and *Slam Bang* (all 1985).

*3. The comics are another good source of echoic words. Have students search for words representing action sounds in the comics and add these words to a classroom chart.

British/American Contrasts

"How are you really supposed to spell *theater: theater* or *theatre*?"

Our language was brought to America by English settlers hundreds of years ago. As time passed, the language Americans spoke and wrote became slightly different from the English used in Britain and in other English-speaking countries. Our language is called *American English,* and the English spoken in Britain is called *British English.*

Soon after the United States became a country, Noah Webster, Ben Franklin, John Adams, and others wanted to develop a national, truly American language. Webster, the leader of this movement, initiated changes in order to simplify our spelling. He advocated spelling words as they were pronounced and dropping unnecessary silent letters. For example, in his *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), Webster removed the final *k* in *music, fabric,* and *public,* and the unnecessary *u* in words like *humor* and *color.* He also changed the *-re* ending to *-er* in *theater, center, meter,* and so on. The spelling differences between British English and American English are summarized in Figure 9.

British variant spellings are becoming more common in American English. *Ax* and *axe* are used interchangeably, and stylish new office and shopping complexes often call themselves *centres.* Newer dictionaries do not indicate that *axe, theatre,* and *enquire* are British variants; instead, the words are simply listed as alternative forms for *ax, theater,* and *inquire.*

Extensions

*1. Students can learn more about Noah Webster by reading a biography of his life. Why did he feel so strongly about creating an American language? How successful was he in this endeavor?

*2. Have the class hunt for examples of British variant spellings in British newspapers and magazines.

*3. More British variant spellings are appearing in American communities, such as the words *theatre* and *centre.* Have students look for examples in their local community.

British English and American English Spelling Contrasts

	British English	American English
1. *our* to *ur*	armour	armor
	colour	color
	favour	favor
	honour	honor
	humour	humor
	neighbour	neighbor
2. *ll* to *l*	levelled	leveled
	traveller	traveler
	jewellery	jewelry
	woollen	woolen
3. *re* to *er*	centre	center
	theatre	theater
	metre	meter
	manoeuvre	maneuver
4. *ce* to *se*	defence	defense
	offence	offense
5. *en* to *in*	enclose	inclose
	enquire	inquire
6. other changes	axe	ax
	catalogue	catalog
	cheque	check
	pyjamas	pajamas
	tyre	tire
	connexion	connection
	plough	plow
	grey	gray
	gaol	jail

Figure 9. Spelling contrasts between British English and American English (Alexander 1962; Hook 1975; Mencken 1936).

Questions Not Asked

The students' questions in this booklet have focused on the inconsistent surface features of the English language such as silent letters, homonyms, and British English/American English spelling contrasts. Students did not ask us about slang and language registers, nor did they ask about the vowel alternations in words such as *declare/declaration* or *wide/width*. We can only speculate as to why students focused on surface-level, phonetic features rather than deeper-level, lexical features (Chomsky 1970). Perhaps students recognize slang and other language variations for what they are: alternative ways of communicating the same

message. They may have ignored the vowel alternations in words such as *wide* and *width* because they were attending to the lexical relationship between the words rather than phonetic differences. Or, students' questions may have reflected the content of their reading and language arts curricula. If their teachers were directing their attention to the inconsistent surface features of English, students may truly have had questions about these features or may have thought that we expected such questions.

Even though we did not collect students' questions as part of a systematic study, we feel compelled to mention this observation about the types of language questions students asked. Our attention to the surface-level features in this booklet reflects the language questions that students in the first through eighth grades have asked. Students' questions must, of course, be considered within the school context in which they were collected, and the same restraints apply that affect all types of metalinguistic study. Nonetheless, the results are startling.

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