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Introduction

The English language is used by more than 450 million people and in almost every part of the world. Unfortunately, the study of the history of this language has been ignored in many classrooms. The activities in *Digging into Language* have been designed to introduce students in years 5–8 to the history and richness of our language. Each page allows students to discover and explore the historical origins, or etymologies, of commonly used words.

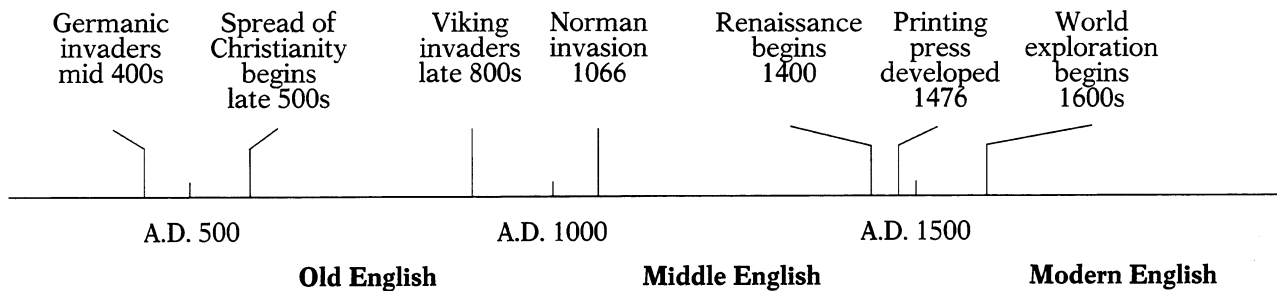
How to Use This Book

Since most classroom dictionaries do not include etymologies, a reproducible *Lexicon* has been provided on pages 48–59. The lexicon is in alphabetical order and contains both the present definitions and the historical origins of words used in the activities. Words whose etymologies and definitions are given as part of the exercise are not included in the lexicon. The lexicon should be duplicated and handed out before you give your students the activity pages.

The *Digging into Language* activities have been divided into five sections: Words from Around the World; Words from Latin and Greek; Words from Proper Nouns; Words with Changed Meaning or Form; and Words in Special Categories. Each section is independent of the others and contains its own Section Review. There are also two Final Reviews that include material from all the activity pages in the book.

Each page is complete with instructions to the students. However, it is recommended that you introduce each section using the background information provided on pages 2–3. This information will help your students understand why and how our language changes. It will also give you additional information about certain worksheets. Following the background information is an Answer Key. This includes answers for all the activity pages and reviews.

Background Information



Part I: Words from Around the World

The history of the English language can be divided into three main periods—Old English, Middle English, and Modern English. The above time line shows the divisions and important events of the periods.

The language that we know as Old English began around A.D. 500 when three Germanic tribes—the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes—invaded Britain. The vocabulary of Old English was chiefly Germanic. When Christianity spread in England during the 500s and 600s, some Latin words were added to the language. Then, during the late 800s, Viking invaders settled in parts of England. As a result, many Scandinavian words were also added to the growing language.

In 1066, England was conquered by the Normans—people from the area in France that is now called Normandy. The Normans took over the rule of England, and their leader became the king of England. Old English was no longer considered the official language of the government and the upper classes. Instead, Norman French became the prestige language for the next 200 years. Most of the English people continued to speak English, however, but they borrowed thousands of French words

and incorporated them into the language. This French-influenced English is now called Middle English. It was spoken between roughly 1200 and 1500.

By the end of the fifteenth century, English had lost most of its Old English inflections, and its pronunciation and word order closely resembled those of today. During the Renaissance period of the 1500s, there was a revival of interest in classical study. Many Latin and Greek words were taken from the classics and added to the English language. Travel and trade brought still more words from foreign lands, and gave Modern English a rich and varied vocabulary. Even today we are still adding new words to our language.

Part II: Words from Latin and Greek

Many Latin and Greek words entered our language between 1440 and 1600. This period was called the Renaissance. The development of the printing press was largely responsible for this influx of words. Latin classics, which were previously known only to religious scholars, became available to secular students. Many Latin words, and Greek words in their Latin form, were taken from these classics and added to the English language.

Some of the Latin words we adopted became the basis of not just one word, but a whole family of words. For example, the word *manus*, which means hand in Latin, became the root for many words including manipulate, manuscript, and manacle. The *Latin Family Trees* and the *More Latin Families* activity pages explore this type of word.

The *Greek Building Blocks* pages introduce some English words that were created by putting together different elements that derive from Greek. An example of this is the word *monologue*, which means a speech by one person. This word is a combination of the Greek elements *mono* (one or single) and *logos* (speech).

Part III: Words from Proper Nouns

Many English words derived from names of people, names of groups of people, names of mythological characters, and names of places. This usually occurred when a name became so associated with something that it was widely recognised by the name. Some fairly obvious examples are *braille*, which was invented by Louis Braille; *panic*, which originally was the fear spread by the god Pan; and *china*, which at one point came only from China.

Part IV: Words with Changed Meaning or Form

Considering that the English language has been in existence for almost 1500 years, it is not surprising that some words have changed meaning or form. Sometimes a word's meaning changes as its connotation changes. These words are said to undergo either *pejoration* (where a word with a neutral or positive connotation slowly takes on a negative connotation) or *melioration* (where a word with a negative connotation becomes more positive). An example of the former occurs in the word *silly*. In Anglo-Saxon times a silly person was one who was "blessed or innocent." Then it came to mean "happy and unworldly."

Gradually the meaning "unworldly" dominated, and the present meaning of "foolish and absurd" developed.

Melioration occurred in the word *lady*, which is used today to mean a refined well-bred woman. Originally the word meant bread-kneader and came from an Old English word that meant loaf. People of wealth fed many people who worked for them and lived on their land. The word *lady*, which originally related just to the person who provided the food, became associated with people of wealth and refinement. Now the original meaning has completely disappeared, leaving only the later connotation. The first two worksheets in this section cover these types of changes.

The second two worksheets cover the continual shortening of words in our language. Since people change language to suit their needs, words that were long and awkward to say were shortened. Some words are simply shortened forms of longer words, such as *story*, which is a shortened form of *history*. Others are contractions or blends of words and phrases. An example of this would be the word *motel*, which is a combination of the words *motor* and *hotel*. Still others, called acronyms, are formed from the first letter or letters of a series of words. One famous acronym is NASA, which stands for National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Part V: Words in Special Categories

This group of exercises is made up of thematic units in which words that are related by subject are examined together. While many words are related by subject, the origins of the words may be different. Because of this, we have many words that basically mean the same thing, but come from different backgrounds. For instance, the words *attic*, *garret*, and *loft* are all used to describe the same room. However, *attic* once meant something related to Athens, *garret* once meant watchtower, and *loft* once meant air.

From Merry Old England

Some of the words we use today came from a language called Old English. This was the language spoken in England between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1100. The meanings and spellings of these words have changed over time. Use your Lexicon to look up the modern words on the left. Match each word with its original Old English meaning. Write the letter of the original meaning on the blank next to the modern word.



- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1. thrill _____ | a. creep |
| 2. silly _____ | b. grass |
| 3. graze _____ | c. pierce |
| 4. cripple _____ | d. blessed or innocent |
| 5. wrestle _____ | e. spin |
| 6. spider _____ | f. twist violently |
| 7. wither _____ | g. not known |
| 8. swap _____ | h. dry up by exposure to air or weather |
| 9. weird _____ | i. strike or hit |
| 10. uncouth _____ | j. fate |
11. Some of the matches probably aren't what you expected. Which original meaning and modern word match is most interesting to you? Write the word and tell why you find it interesting.

12. Which modern word seems most like its original meaning? Write both the word and its meaning in the blank.

13. Which modern word seems least like its original meaning? Write both the word and its meaning in the blank.
