

Inspiration: The Myrroure of the Worlde



Myrroure of the Worlde

In this activity sheet you will learn about the origins of the English language and one of the first books to be printed in English called the *Myrroure of the Worlde*. You'll find activities and fun interactive links to help you learn how this important book shaped the English language we use today.

In the spotlight
Myrroure of the Worlde
William Caxton
1490

Words to know
Cosmography, astronomy, dialects.

Pages to visit

<http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/printed/index.php>

http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/printed/myrroure_of_the_worlde.php

The first English encyclopedia

'Hier begynneth the booke callyd the myrroure of the worlde.'

This sentence is from a book printed in the 15th century. It's a very early printed book. Can you read it? What language do you think it's in?

Does it look familiar? As a matter of fact this is where the title of this website comes from: The Mirror of the World.

The *Myrroure of the Worlde* is an early form of encyclopedia, printed and translated from a 12th century manuscript. It is a document that tells us quite a lot about how medieval people lived: about their daily life, religion, traditions, sciences and knowledge of the world.

In the book there are sections on grammar, geometry, economics, mathematics, geography, **astronomy**, **cosmography**, music and religion. It discusses the place of the earth in the world, its roundness and its relation to other planets. Another section is on world geography, with descriptions of India, Europe and Africa and their animals. Other subjects include the weather, the stars, how day and night happen, the eclipses of the sun and why money was invented.

William Caxton was the first English person to work as a printer and the *Myrroure of the Worlde* was the first illustrated book in English. Caxton is very important for two reasons: he brought the art of printing to England and he also helped develop the English language. There used to be not just one English language,

but many different **dialects**. As you can imagine it would have been very difficult and confusing at that time in England. With this book, and the invention of printing, Caxton helped to transform English into one common language. The Myrroure of the Worlde was so popular that when it first appeared all 1250 copies sold out in a day!

Activity 1- Get interactive!

Visit the Mirror of the World website at:
<http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au>

Read the text and then follow the Zoom & Pan links to look at some of the books.

You can view Caxton's the *Myrroure of the Worlde* on the website by clicking on the interactive link:
http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/printed/myrroure_of_the_worlde.php

Here you will see some of the book's woodblock illustrations; they will give you a very good idea of how people in the Middle Ages saw themselves and the world.

Question time 1

What do you think the people in each of the woodblock illustrations are doing? Write down your ideas for each image and compare your answers with your classmates.

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Activity 2 – Special studies

Astronomy is the study of the stars, moons and planets and cosmography is the study of the universe. Do you know what the following studies are about? If you're not sure, use a dictionary to find what the following studies focus on.

meteorology	
zoology	
geology	
biology	
vulcanology	
etymology	
entomology	

Question time 2

In the *Myrrou of the Worlde*, we are told that there is an island near India that has dragons that live near mountains of gold! We now know of course that this is not true, but in medieval times it was written as a fact.

1. Do you think everything that is in encyclopedias today is reliable and true?

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2. Is information reliable and true on the internet and with online encyclopedias? Wikipedia is an online dictionary/encyclopedia and things that happen last week are already in Wikipedia! Almost anyone can write in it and change the information. Is this a good idea? Why/Why not?

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3. What are some of the positives and negatives of online information?

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4. Have a guess at why you think this book was named the *Myrroure of the Worlde*?

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5. Spelling was very different 500 years ago. Look at some of the text from the *Myrroure of the Worlde* interactive:
<http://mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/printed/caxton/online.php>

Do you think spelling will change again in another 500 years? How?

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6. Do you think that people in the future will be able to understand the English we speak, our books, magazines, advertisements and emails? Why /Why not?

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7. When Caxton was printing there was no English dictionary. What would life have been like before dictionaries?

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8. Why do you think the dictionary is an important invention?

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9. What sort of problems would early English printers, readers and writers have had without a dictionary to refer to?

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Did you know?

An early copy of the *Myrroure of the Worlde* was sold for about A\$1.4 million in 1998!

It's all English to me

Read and consider these two sentences:

Olde and ancient englysshe
&
cr8ing nu txt 4 the futr

If you thought they are both in English, you are right. One belongs to the medieval English of the 15th century and the other to 21st century text messaging.

The English language was changing rapidly in William Caxton's time and the works he was given to print were in many different regional dialects from all over England. Through his printing, Caxton helped to standardise the English language - that is, make one common English from all the different English dialects.

Today we have dictionaries, spell checks on our computers and predictive text on our mobiles to help us spell words correctly. However, the English language is still changing and it will continue to change in the future. Spelling changes in different parts of the world – for example, there are different ways of spelling in England, America and other English speaking countries. And new words are always entering the English language.

Activity 3 – Ye olde English

Have a look at some examples of Old English that was spoken hundreds of years before Caxton's time. Can you recognise any of the words that we still use today?

<http://www8.georgetown.edu/departments/medieval/labyrinth>

Question time 3

Think about some words that have been added to our language in your lifetime. You will notice that they are mainly words from technology. For example: to google, to surf the net, the web, podcast, blog, SMS.

1. Why are so many new words related to computing and technology?

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2. Most of these words would have meant nothing to most people ten years ago! Think about what new words you think we will have in another ten years' time. Write down what you think some might be and why.

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3. Many people spell in a short-hand way when they text on mobiles or write emails:

txt c u l8r c ya coz c u 2nite

How do you write to your friends when you text or send an email?

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4. In William Caxton’s time, English was not one language, but many dialects. Today there are still some regional differences, for example between British and American spelling. For example, the British word ‘colour’ is spelt ‘color’ in America. Can you think of any other examples?

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5. Often when we are typing on a computer, we are given a spelling option – British or American. In Australia, sometimes both are acceptable. Which do you prefer? Why? Discuss with your class.

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Did you know?

The word book comes from ‘Bok’, an Old English word that means ‘beech tree’. Why do you think it was given this name?

Activity 4 – Make your own dictionary/ encyclopedia

There are many different types of dictionaries, and some of them are very different to the ones we use at school. How many of these dictionaries have you seen before?

- Dictionary of Origins of Names
- Dictionary of Baby Names
- Dictionary of Strange words
- Dictionary of Aussie Slang
- Dictionary of Monsters
- Dictionary of Imaginary places
- Dictionary of Cars
- Dictionary of Disgusting Facts

How many more can you think of? Create your own class dictionary or encyclopedia. Use some of the ideas above or create your own.

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Did you know?

Homer Simpson’s “D’oh!” actually appears in the Oxford English Dictionary.

