

The Master of Manuscripts

Learning objective: To develop retrieval, inference, and evaluative skills while exploring the importance of etymology and accurate spelling in the English language.

Read the passage carefully. Use your knowledge of spelling rules and word origins to answer the questions below. Ensure your answers are written in full sentences.

Pip the bookworm caterpillar spends his days in the Great Library, navigating vast shelves of ancient scrolls. To Pip, every word is a treasure chest waiting to be opened. He knows that English spelling can be a labyrinth, often reflecting the history of the languages that shaped it. For instance, the silent 'k' in 'knight' or the 'ph' sound in 'alphabet' are echoes of Old English and Greek ancestors. Pip believes that spelling is not just about memorising letters; it is about understanding the DNA of a word. By mastering root words, prefixes, and suffixes, one can unlock the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. Pip keeps a tidy ledger where he records tricky spellings, often creating quirky mnemonics to remember the order of vowels. He notices that when he writes with precision, his stories flow more gracefully. For Pip, a well-spelled page is like a perfectly mapped path through the woods—it guides the reader's eye without any distracting bumps or confusing detours. He encourages all young explorers to treat their notebooks as maps and their pens as compasses, guiding them towards linguistic mastery.

Word bank: Etymology · Suffix · Prefix · Root word · Consistent · Mnemonic

1. According to the passage, what two languages does Pip mention as having influenced the spelling of English words? (2 marks)

2. What does Pip keep to help him remember the correct order of vowels in tricky words? (2 marks)

3. Why does the author compare a well-spelled page to a 'perfectly mapped path through the woods'? (3 marks)

4. What can we infer about Pip's attitude towards the English language based on his description of it as a 'labyrinth'? (3 marks)

5. Do you agree with Pip's idea that spelling is like the 'DNA of a word'? Justify your answer with reference to the text. (4 marks)

Draw: Draw Pip the bookworm caterpillar sitting on a large, open book, surrounded by floating letters and symbols that represent different languages.



Extension challenge: Research the etymology of three 'tricky' words. Create your own mnemonic device for each one and explain to a partner why your mnemonic is effective for memory retention. How might the English language change if we simplified all spellings to match their phonetic sounds? Debate the pros and cons of this change.