



Unit 2 Lesson 5

Old English to Modern English Worksheet

Towards the end of Middle English, a sudden and distinct change in pronunciation (the Great Vowel Shift) started, with vowels being pronounced shorter and shorter.

From the 16th century the British had contact with many peoples from around the world. This, and the Renaissance of Classical learning, meant that many new words and phrases entered the language.

The invention of printing also meant that there was now a common language in print. Books became cheaper and more people learned to read.

Printing also brought standardization to English. Spelling and grammar became fixed, and the dialect of London, where most publishing houses were, became the standard. In 1604 the first English dictionary was published.

Late Modern English (1800-Present)

The main difference between Early Modern English and Late Modern English is vocabulary. Late Modern English has many more words, arising from two principal factors: firstly, the Industrial Revolution and technology created a need for new words; secondly, the British Empire at its height covered one quarter of the earth's surface, and the English language adopted foreign words from many countries.

- A. List three important things that happened in the 1500s to change the English language:
- B. Before this, was there one 'correct' way to spell words? _____
- C. When was the first dictionary published? _____
- D. What is the difference between Early Modern and Late Modern English? _____
- E. What two influences were important in creating new vocabulary for Late Modern English?



- F) Have a look at the timeline. Circle or underline a **key event** for each section (Speak Celtic, Old English, Middle English, etc.)

A brief chronology of English		
BC 55	Roman invasion of Britain by Julius Caesar.	Local inhabitants speak Celtic
BC 43	Roman invasion and occupation. Beginning of Roman rule of Britain.	
436	Roman withdrawal from Britain complete.	
449	Settlement of Britain by Germanic invaders begins	
450-480	Earliest known Old English inscriptions (<i>Beowulf</i>).	Old English
1066	William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy, invades and conquers England.	
c1150	Earliest surviving manuscripts in Middle English	Middle English
1348	English replaces Latin as the language of instruction in most schools.	
1362	English replaces French as the language of law. English is used in Parliament for the first time.	
c1388	Chaucer starts writing <i>The Canterbury Tales</i> .	
c1400	The Great Vowel Shift begins.	
1476	William Caxton establishes the first English printing press.	Early Modern English
1564	Shakespeare is born.	
1604	<i>Table Alphabeticall</i> , the first English dictionary, is published.	
1607	The first permanent English settlement in the New World (Jamestown in America) is established.	
1616	Shakespeare dies.	
1623	Shakespeare's First Folio is published	
1702	The first daily English-language newspaper, <i>The Daily Courant</i> , is published in London.	
1755	Samuel Johnson publishes his English dictionary.	
1776	Thomas Jefferson writes the American Declaration of Independence.	
1782	Britain <u>abandons</u> its American colonies.	Late Modern English
1828	Webster publishes his American English dictionary.	
1922	The British Broadcasting Corporation is founded.	
1928	The <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , which explains the etymology of English words, is published. It is 20 volumes, and 21,730 pages long!	

- G) What's Next? Make a prediction about how you think English will evolve in the future:



Ecclesiastes and Orwell

Each word is followed by the date, according to the OED, on which it was first used.

OE = Old English

"I returned [1325], and saw [1300] under the sun [OE], that the race [1330] is not to the swift [888], not the battle [1297] to the strong [OE], neither yet bread [OE] to the wise [897], nor yet riches [OE] to men [OE] of understanding [888], nor yet favour [1300] to men of skill [1175]; but time [OE] and chance [1297] happeneth [1385] to them all [OE]."

Ecclesiastes 9:11, King James Version

"Objective [1838] consideration [1386] of contemporary [1614] phenomena [1583] compels [1380] the conclusion [1382] that success [1537] or failure [1643] in competitive [1829] activities [1425] exhibits [1490] no tendency [1628] to be commensurate [1641] with innate [1420] capacity [1481], but that a considerable [1631] element [1600] of the unpredictable [1840] must [OE] invariably [1646] be taken into account [1660]"

George Orwell: Politics and the English Language (1946)

H. Try dating Hamlet's words to Horatio.

"If thou did'st ever hold me in thy heart,

Absent thee from felicity awhile

And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain

To tell my story."

Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Norse, Norman, Middle English, Modern English