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## Inspiration: The Myrroure of the Worlde

### In this activity sheet students will:

- see text and images from a very early printed book as well as one of the first books printed in English
- explore medieval world views through text and images
- consider the specific impact of printing on the English language, as well as recent and future trends in English
- critically evaluate the validity of historical and contemporary encyclopedias and online information
- have an opportunity to create their own dictionary/encyclopedia.

### Answers to question time 1

Go to the *Myrroure of the Worlde* webpage:

[http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/printed/myrroure\\_of\\_the\\_worlde.php](http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/printed/myrroure_of_the_worlde.php)

Look at the slideshow of images and conduct a class discussion. Some of the images feature feudal practices such as paying fealty to a lord or monarch, petitioning for a hearing; other images suggest early attempts at geometry, mathematics and cosmology, the study of the heavens and the universe.

### Answers to Activity 2 –Special studies

meteorology – the study of the atmosphere, climate and weather patterns

zoology – the study of animals

geology – the study of the structure of the earth, the soil, rocks and minerals

biology – the study of living things

vulcanology – the study of volcanoes

etymology – the study of the origins of words

entomology – the study of insects

### Answers to question time 2

1. No, the accuracy of encyclopedias changes as more knowledge on a particular subject matter comes to light. Also, not all information is proven or reliable. Another factor to consider is political, social and religious bias that reflects society's thinking at a particular point in history.

Consider the following article in *Nature* about *Wikipedia vs Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

<http://www.nature.com/news/2005/051212/full/438900a.html>

2. & 3. The positives of online information might include:

- accessibility
- broad range of materials
- ability to search increased with advanced search engines.

The negatives might be:

- sites sometimes disappear
- our online information will be lost if the internet one day fails, whereas many other 'physical' documents have survived.
- internet contains an overwhelming amount of information, difficult to determine what is really useful.

4. Student discussion. There is no definitive answer, but, since mirrors reflect reality, so too can books, therefore the *Myrroure of the Worlde* claims to capture the reality and known knowledge of its time.
5. Spelling is not cast in stone and it changes/evolves all the time. Reasons for this include:
  - spelling variations exist between different countries. For example, American and British spelling
  - encyclopedias and dictionaries are regularly revised as more information becomes available
  - new technology needs new words to describe or better reflect its function. For example, text messaging
  - cultural influences such as jargon and colloquialisms
  - specialised areas of expertise requires its own language and spelling.
6. Probably, as increased literacy and the spread of written English on the internet and/or digital form will probably lead to a standardisation of English, meaning a slower rate of change over time.

7. Life before dictionaries would mean that, for the literate, they would have relied on phonetic rather than 'correct' spelling. The illiterate would have to rely on communication by speech, images or universally recognised symbols. It would have been very difficult for early publishers to agree on one 'English'. People learning to read and write in England spoke in different dialects in different regions and each had their own preferences for spelling.
8. It helped to standardise spelling. It also developed a shared understanding of the meaning of words and how they were used in the English language. People were better able to communicate with one another.
9. They would have had different spellings for many words and trouble communicating in writing with each other.

### Question time 3

Class discussion:

1-5. Students to use own initiative.

### Additional activities

The Myrroure of the Worlde: 'One Language?'

Explain to students that some dictionaries not only tell us what words mean, but where words come from and that the study of the origins of words is called etymology. The English we speak today has words from many different language sources and new words are always being added. Some very common English words come from Latin, Arabic, German and Ancient Greek, to name a few!

Give students this link to an online dictionary to explore where some of the following words come from. You will need to provide students with the list of abbreviations. For example, **L.** = Latin and **Ar.** = Arabic.

<http://www.etymonline.com/>

Students may come up with more than one answer, as there are often several sources. The focus of the activity, however, is to understand the multicultural foundations of English and to utilise an online dictionary.

shampoo	pyjamas	cotton	apricot	karate	
coffee	kangaroo	lemon	city	hotel	kindergarten

Another way of introducing this topic might be to ask how many languages students in the class speak. If there are any bilingual students, any words similar in English can be noted. The student can also teach the class a few basic phrases, such as "Hello, how are you?" or the numbers 1-10.

### Sources consulted

The following sources were used in the development of these activity sheets:

Blake, NF, 1969, *Caxton and his World*, Deutsch, London.

Carmody, Shane, *Mirror of a World: William Caxton at the State Library*, The La Trobe Journal No 77, Autumn 2006, reproduced in The State Library of Victoria website.

<http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/about/news/latrobe/mirrorofaworld.html>

*The Mirror of the World*, Exhibition, 2005, University of Glasgow Library Special Collections Department website.

<http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/month/aug2005.html>

*Caxton's England*, British Library website.

<http://www.bl.uk/treasures/caxton/caxtonsengland.html>

