The Stories Behind Our Words

Etymology · Answer Key · 18 Questions

1. Which language is the primary source for the word 'kindergarten', meaning 'children's garden'?

A) French
B) German
C) Latin
D) Dutch

2. The word 'robot' was first introduced in a 1920 play by Karel Capek and comes from a Slavic word meaning what?

A) Mechanical servant
B) Forced labour
C) Automatic machine
D) Metal worker

3. The word 'alphabet' is derived from the first two letters of which ancient script?

A) Greek
B) Phoenician
C) Etruscan
D) Hebrew

4. The word 'assassin' is historically linked to a group of people from which historical region?

A) Persia
B) Egypt
C) Greece
D) Mongolia

5. Which English word, meaning a 'disaster', literally translates from Latin as 'ill-starred' or 'against the stars'?

A) Catastrophe
B) Calamity
C) Cataclysm
D) Disaster

6. The word 'quarantine' originates from the Italian word 'quaranta', which refers to the number:

A) 10
B) 20
C) 30
D) 40

7. From which language did the English word 'shampoo' originate, specifically meaning 'to press' or 'to massage'?

A) Hindi
B) Arabic
C) Turkish
D) Mandarin

8. The word 'curfew' historically comes from the Old French phrase 'couvre-feu', which translates to:

A) Close the gate
B) Cover the fire
C) Quiet night
D) Dark hour

9. Which of these words is an 'eponym', meaning it is derived from the name of a person?

A) Boycott
B) Camera
C) Gladiator
D) Trophy

10. The word 'salary' comes from the Latin word 'salarium', which was an allowance given to Roman soldiers to buy:

A) Weapons
B) Grain
C) Salt
D) Clothing

11. The term 'sarcasm' finds its linguistic roots in the Greek word 'sarkazein', which literally means:

A) To bite the tongue
B) To tear flesh
C) To speak in riddles
D) To mock silently

12. The word 'candidate' comes from the Latin 'candidatus', referring to the white robes worn by those seeking office to symbolise:

A) Wealth
B) Purity
C) Power
D) Intelligence

13. 'Trivia' comes from the Latin 'trivium', referring to the place where three roads meet, implying information that is:

A) Secret
B) Commonplace
C) Scientific
D) Religious

14. Which English word for a 'large number' comes from the Greek word 'myrias', meaning ten thousand?

A) Million
B) Myriad
C) Magnitude
D) Multitude

15. The word 'gymnasium' comes from the Greek 'gymnazein', which specifically means to exercise:

A) In the water
B) With weights
C) Naked
D) In the morning

16. 'Algorithm' is a word derived from the name of the 9th-century Persian mathematician:

A) Al-Khwarizmi
B) Al-Farabi
C) Ibn Sina
D) Omar Khayyam

17. The word 'vanilla' is derived from the Spanish word 'vainilla', which means:

A) Small pod
B) Sweet bean
C) Black seed
D) Fragrant flower

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18. The word 'clue' originally referred to a 'clew', which was a term for:

A) A written note

B) A ball of thread

C) A hidden path

D) A secret code