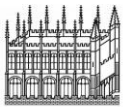




BABEL

Adventures in Translation

Teacher's Guide



Bodleian Libraries
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



THE HELEN HAMLYN TRUST



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

creative
multilingualism

Teacher's guide

This pack offers an overview of the exhibition's structure, summarizing the themes of the ten cases and highlighting a selection of exhibits. There is far more to see in the gallery, with over 100 items on display.

We have also included some ideas for discussion questions or follow-up activities for each case, which might be useful in focusing students on key themes before, during, or after your visit. Some questions may help to make connections between the exhibition and students' experience of translation in the classroom context. The questions have been designed to be generally accessible rather than specific to a particular language, though teachers may wish to add more targeted translation tasks suited to the capabilities and syllabus of the group.

We hope that this information will help teachers and group leaders to plan an enjoyable visit to *Babel – Adventures in Translation*.

Exhibition introduction

Why can't we all speak the same language? Since ancient times, people have imagined a perfect language that is universally understood, or even tried to construct such a language. 'Lingua francas' used alongside local languages – like Latin in medieval times, or 'global English' now – go some way towards achieving that goal.

So why do we also value and retain the diversity? Words we use just with our friends, a regional dialect, a language spoken at home, a national language: they form part of who we are, the group we belong to, our shared heritage and identity.

We therefore need to translate – creating channels between languages, and adapting meanings to other cultural contexts. Translation is everywhere, from the market place and political summit to health information and fairy tales.

Exhibition overview

CASE 1: A Confusion of Tongues

CASE 2: Building Babel

CASE 3: Lost and Found Languages

CASE 4: Beyond Languages

CASE 5: Translating the Divine

CASE 6: Traversing Realms of Fantasy

CASE 7: Negotiating Multilingual Britain

CASE 8: An Epic Journey: Translating
Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*

CASE 9: Tales in Translation

CASE 10: Translating for the Distant Future



Summary of exhibition cases

CASE 1: A CONFUSION OF TONGUES

A large wall case introduces key questions concerning ways in which translation mediates between languages. Dictionaries, different media and evolving technologies all play a part, as do religious agendas, colonial conquest and humour.

CASE 2: BUILDING BABEL

This tower case places the biblical myth of Babel centre stage with an impressive illustration showing the Tower of Babel under construction – a vision of the perfect cooperation facilitated by a universal language.

CASE 3: LOST AND FOUND LANGUAGES

The two objects in this case take the visitor back to the days of the earliest recorded languages. They differ in one crucial respect: the clay tablet, with a script called Linear B, has yielded up its meaning through translation. The Linear A script on the stone bowl still resists decoding.

CASE 4: BEYOND LANGUAGES

This large case invites visitors to explore how people have attempted to create universal means of communication. Maths works with numbers and symbols – but it needed translators to build its foundations. A universal language would be understood by everyone, making translation unnecessary – so why have the exhibited languages designed for that purpose not caught on?

Summary of exhibition cases

CASE 5: TRANSLATING THE DIVINE

This case shows the significance of translation for religions. For example, it has shaped the history of Judaism and Christianity. For Islam, by contrast, the Arabic words of the holy Qur'an are considered sacred – translations can aid understanding, but can't take their place.

CASE 6: TRAVERSING REALMS OF FANTASY

Imagination knows no bounds – but stories need translations if they are to travel. The case celebrates the role of translation in helping Cinderella, Jabberwocky, Asterix and Harry Potter to gain a global following.

CASE 7: NEGOTIATING MULTILINGUAL BRITAIN

Translation is all around us – part of our lives in a UK community built on migration and cultural exchange. The large case in the centre of the room takes the visitor from iconic books exemplifying the rich linguistic heritage of the British Isles to modern objects, leaflets and high-street paraphernalia that mediate between languages.

Summary of exhibition cases

CASE 8: AN EPIC JOURNEY: TRANSLATING HOMER'S *ILIAD* AND *ODYSSEY*

The case exemplifies the long history of translation (over two thousand years) that has enabled Homer to inspire generations of listeners, readers, writers and film-makers beyond those able to appreciate the original Greek. While the *Iliad* showcases a heroic, tragic and futile war, the *Odyssey* focuses on return, survival and revenge – epic stuff.

CASE 9: TALES IN TRANSLATION

Animal tales have been popular since ancient times, usually illustrating a moral. Aesop's ancient Greek fables have lived on in a multitude of translations, new versions and illustrations. The case also uncovers a less well known strand of animal tales: the *Panchatantra*, originally in Sanskrit, one of the world's most translated texts.

CASE 10: TRANSLATING FOR THE DISTANT FUTURE

Nuclear waste will stay radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years. We've seen how Linear A (Case 3) has become a useless communication tool after less than four thousand years. The case offers no answers – just an object, posing the question of how we can convey 'DON'T DIG HERE!' to future generations.

Case 1: A Confusion of Tongues

Translation creates understanding across languages. It has always formed an essential part of trade, diplomacy and control of foreign territories – in times of peace and war, friendly cultural exchange and brutal conquest.



Translate and rule



The Codex Mendoza was created for Spanish authorities around 1541 in Mexico, following their colonial conquest.

The pictures are a Mexica form of writing: they show seven towns that had previously been conquered by the Aztecs, together with the annual tribute they had to pay to the Aztec emperor – including warrior outfits, bins of maize and beans, and a live eagle.

The pictures are labelled in a newly written form of Nahuatl, the Mexica language, and in Spanish. The facing page (not shown here) gives a fuller Spanish explanation.

Bodleian Library, MS. Arch. Selden. A. 1.

Case 1

A Table Alphabeticall

of hard English words.

radicall, pertaining to the roote, naturall:

radiant, shining bright:

§ rallie, gather together men dispersed, and
out of order.

§ rampar, fortification, or trench

rapacitie, } violent, catching, extortion, or

rapine, } pillage, or rauening.

raritie, scarcenes, fewnes

ratifie, establish, or confirme

§ rauish, take away by force,

§ raunged, ordered, or put into order

reachlesse, carelesse, or negligent:

reall, substantiall, or that is indeede substi-

ting:

recantation, an vnswaying of that which was
said before

recapitulation, a brieue rehearsing againe
of any thing

receptacle, a place to receiue things in

reciproock, or } that hath respect back a

reciprocall, } gaine to the same thing.

recite, rehearse, or repeate

reclaime, to gainesay, or call back againe:

§ recognissance, acknowledging, or a signe
of acknowledging, and confessing any

thing.

§ recoile, goe backe.

recon-

recon-

Many people struggled to understand the new 'harde English wordes' which had been borrowed from Latin, Hebrew, Greek, or French.

This was the first English-English dictionary, designed by its Puritan author to help "ladies, gentlewomen, or any other unskilfull persons" to follow sermons in church.

*Robert Cawdrey, A Table Alphabeticall (1604)
Bodleian Library, Arch. A f.141 (2), open at 'Q'-'R'*

Case 1: A Confusion of Tongues

Questions

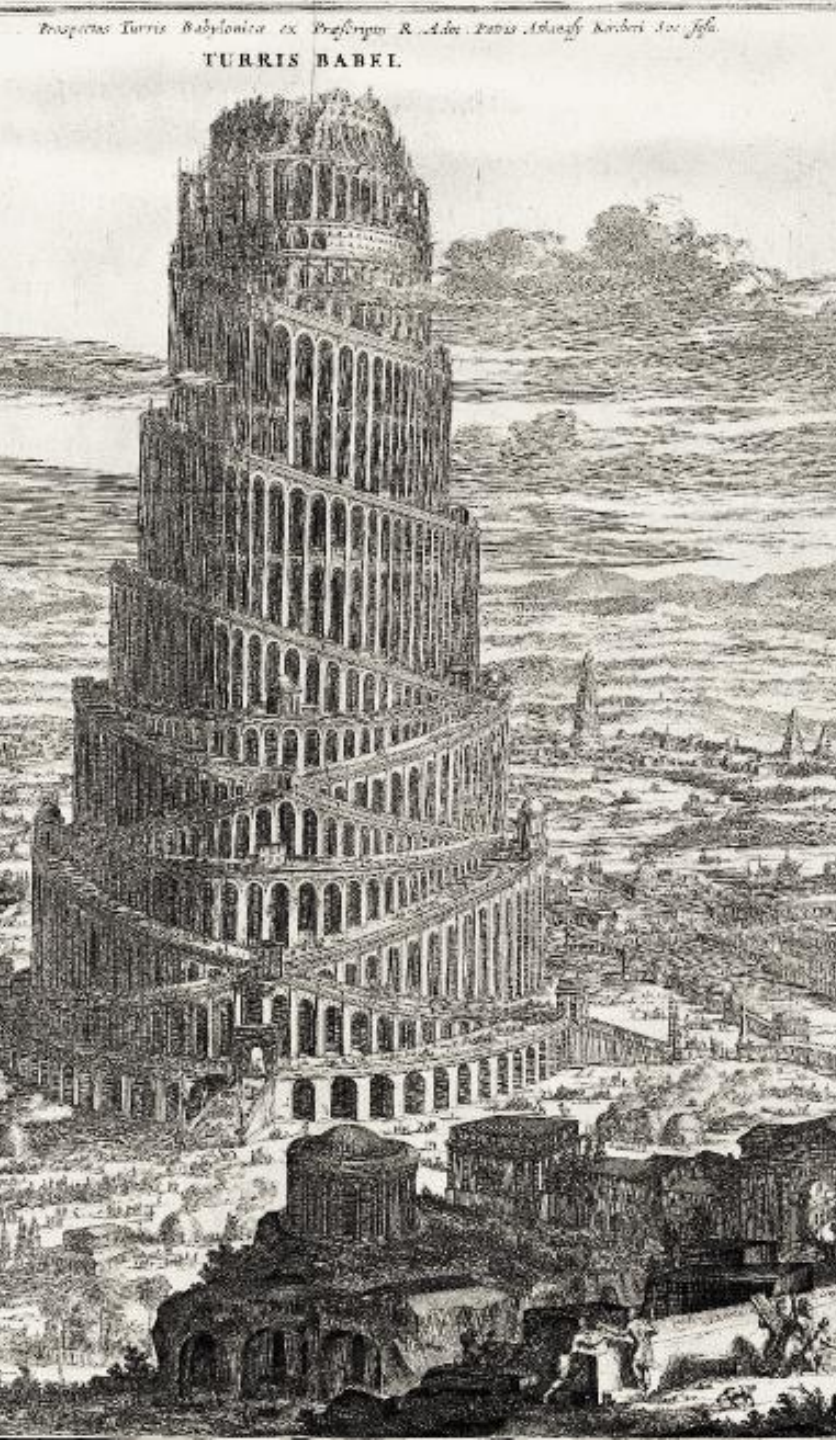
- A. Why do you think the Spanish authorities wanted the trilingual *Codex Mendoza*?
- B. Why do you think a fuller explanation in Spanish was added to the picture language and the labels above the pictures?
- C. In *A Table Alphabeticall*, can you find some words on this page which are now used regularly, and others which never became popular in ordinary spoken English? You may also find it interesting to check out the 'New words list' published online by the OED - Oxford English Dictionary.

Case 2: Building Babel

The ancient biblical myth of Babel – recorded in the Book of Genesis, Chapter 11, in Hebrew – casts the diversity of human languages as a curse.

The myth imagines humanity united by a single language and able to cooperate in building a tower reaching up to heaven. But God punishes this ambition by confusing the language of the workers, and scatters them across the earth.





Turris Babel

In this 17th-century illustration by the German Jesuit and polymath Athanasius Kircher, building the Tower is still busily underway – before catastrophe strikes.

The book is in Latin, then considered a ‘universal’ language rather like ‘global English’ today. In fact, while it was international, it was restricted to learned people and widely used only in the West.

Athanasius Kircher, Turris Babel, sive archontologia (Amsterdam, 1679)

Bodleian Library, Vet. B3 b.33

Case 2: Building Babel

Questions

- A. Is the diversity of languages a curse, a blessing – or neither?
- B. Why do you value your own language, or languages?
- C. Design a form of ‘global English’ suitable for widespread use as an international second language, or lingua franca. How should it differ from English as it is used in the UK?

Case 3: Lost & Found Languages

Deciphering an unknown script is like cracking a code. Linear B, a script from the second millennium BCE, was discovered around 1900 on the island of Crete by the archaeologist Arthur Evans.

It was only deciphered in 1952 by the architect and amateur linguist Michael Ventris, who had become fascinated by the challenge. The breakthrough came with his realisation that some words were place names, denoting known locations. The language turned out to be an early form of Greek.

The earlier Cretan script Linear A remains undeciphered.



Cracked tablet



This clay tablet from the 14th century BCE has an inscription in the script known as Linear B.

The code was cracked by Michael Ventris, a self-taught linguist who became fascinated by the mysteries of Linear B when he was still at school.

His work opened a window onto the lives of people living in Crete three and a half thousand years ago. This tablet records details of bronze and willow chariot wheels.

AN1910.211 Linear B tablet

Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Silent writing



Like the tablet, this stone bowl was excavated at Knossos on the island of Crete.

It is inscribed with letters in the Linear A alphabet, used by the Minoan civilization in the first half of the second millennium BCE.

Although its symbols are similar to Linear B, which was used later, Linear A has never been deciphered.

AN1938.872 Stone vessel with Linear A inscription

Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

Case 3: Lost & Found Languages

Questions

- A. In what ways is language like a code? And how do you think translation differs from cracking a code?
- B. How do you think place names helped Michael Ventris to decipher Linear B?
- C. Find out why the Rosetta Stone was so important for understanding Ancient Egyptian.

Case 4: Beyond Languages

Numbers, pictures, a 'perfect' verbal language understood by all – many people have designed means of communication intended to be universally understood.

But none of them has succeeded in taking the place of 'natural' languages...



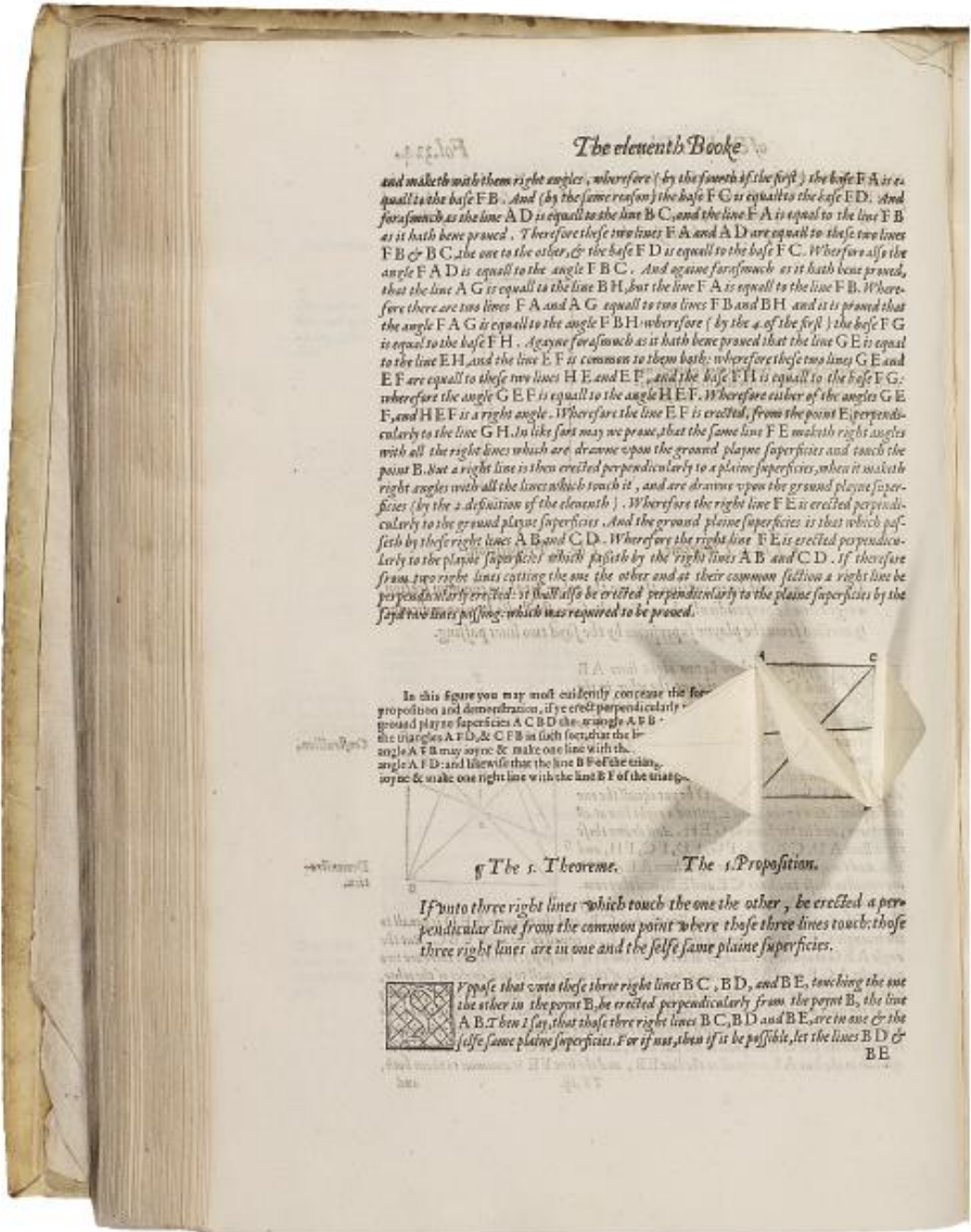
Pop-up Euclid

After the Bible, Euclid's *Elements* is the most translated, published and studied of all Western books.

From the 3rd century BCE, it was the main geometrical textbook – but it would have been lost if it hadn't been for translations from the original Greek into Arabic, then Latin, and eventually a wealth of other languages.

This first English translation additionally 'translates' the diagrams into 3D.

Euclid, The elements of geometrie (London, 1570)
Bodleian Library, Savile W 5



The British Esperantist



Esperanto, invented in the 1880s, is the most successful 'constructed' language designed to be used as a universal second language.

Esperantists have produced newspapers, tourist guides, and translations of the world's classics.

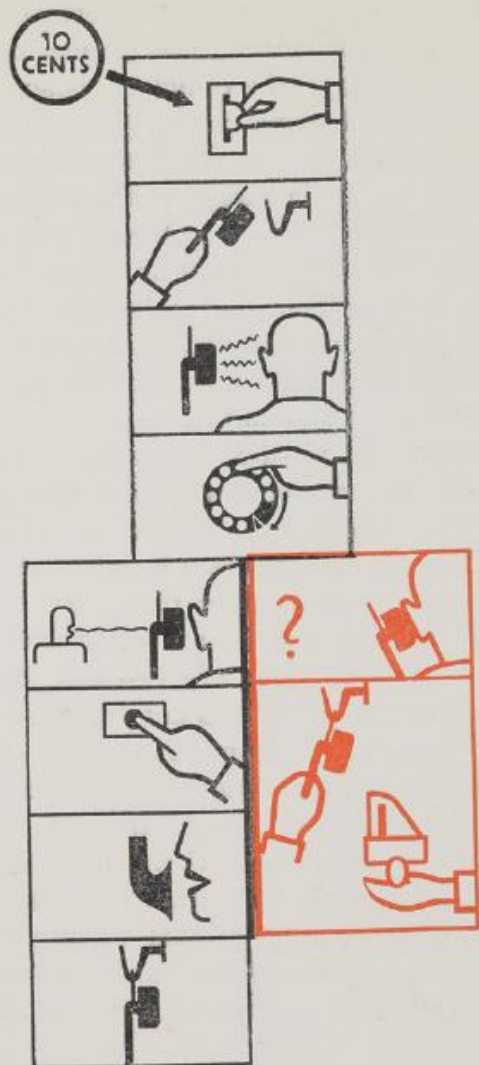
It's estimated that millions of people use it today – but not enough to make it universal!

Bodleian Library, John Johnson Collection, Esperanto Box 1

Case 4

Speaking in pictures

How to make use of the telephone



PICTURE 2

19

How much can we say using pictures instead of words?

In the 1930s, Otto Neurath developed his International Picture Language, mainly for signage and instructions. He appreciated that not everything could be expressed easily in his images.

His language is a forerunner of the pictograms used widely today in public places.

Otto Neurath, International Picture Language (London, 1936)

Bodleian Library, 26231 f.16

Case 4

Case 4: Beyond Languages

Questions

- A. How universal is the symbolic language of maths – and what are its limitations?
- B. How does the purpose of the constructed language Dothraki differ from the purpose of the international lingua franca Esperanto? You can use Duolingo to have a go at learning Esperanto – or Klingon!
- C. Write simple instructions for a) making tea, b) riding a bicycle, or c) buying fish and chips. Translate these first into a language of your choice, and then into universally comprehensible pictograms.

Case 5: Translating the Divine

Religions are about spirituality, but means of communication play an important part. How does the divine communicate with human believers? And in what language and form do the believers conduct their religious practices, and spread the word?

For most religions that spread beyond a linguistically united community, translation takes on a vital role – as does the need to control how faithful that translation is to its original.



The inimitable Qur'an

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic, and it is said to be 'inimitable'. Recitation of the Qur'an is a special art, and use of its written form is governed by rules.

Muslims may use translation as a help towards understanding the Qur'an; but a translation cannot become the sacred text.

This intricate illustration contains the verse which explains how the Qur'an cannot be translated: a dazzling image of the untranslatable divine.

Bodleian Library, MS. Bodl. Or. 793



Collaborative translation

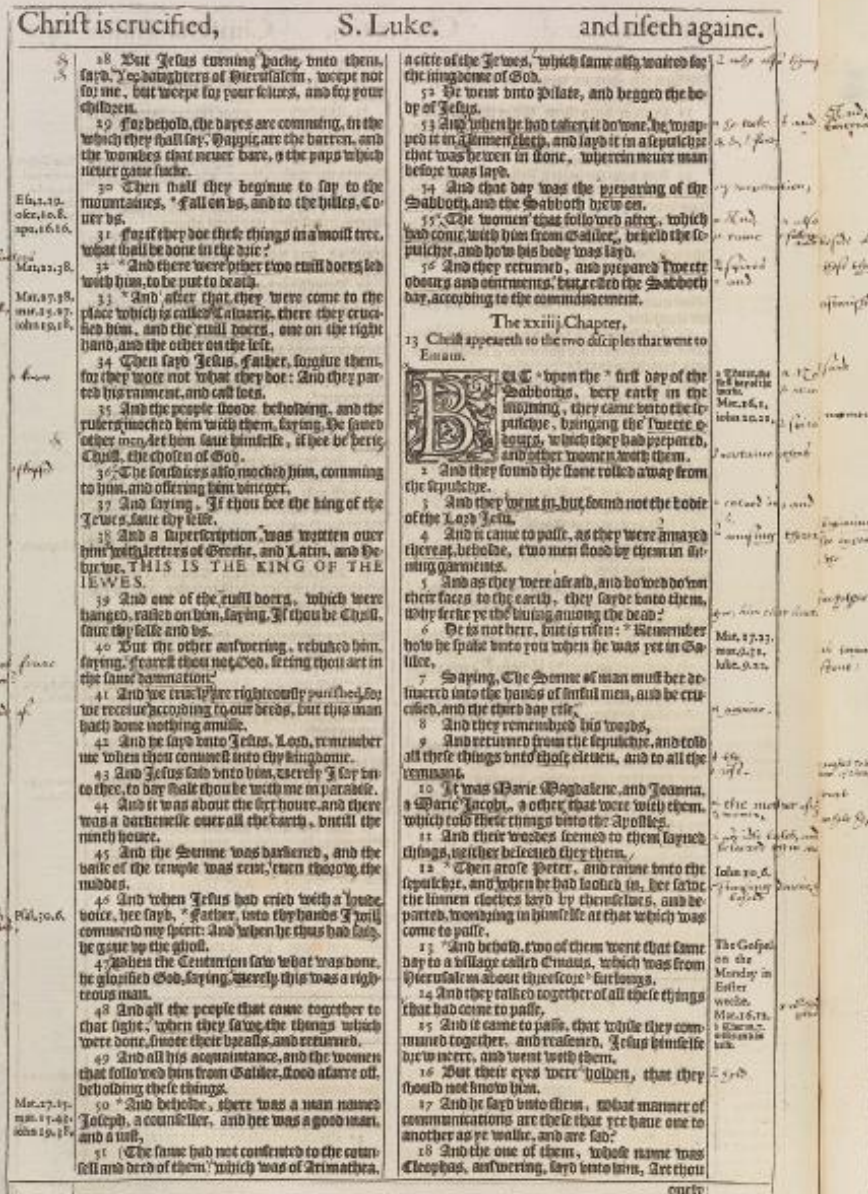
In the Christian tradition, translation of the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek biblical texts has always played a legitimate part in spreading the word.

47 translators worked together to produce the 1611 'Authorized' or 'King James' version of the Bible. They drew on previous translations into English rather than starting from scratch. The marginal notes in this copy of an earlier Bible were made by one of the translators during the translation process.

The Holy Bible (London, 1602)

Bodleian Library, Bib. Eng. 1602 b.1, fol. 429v

Case 5



Case 5: Translating the Divine Questions

- A. Find out about the art of reciting the Qur'an and listen to a recitation by an imam. What are the benefits of encouraging all believers to learn the original language of a religion's holy book?
- B. Why do you think it was decided to use a large team of translators for the King James Bible? Will this have had disadvantages as well as advantages?
- C. Select a religious text that was originally written in a language other than English, and compare two English versions. What type of differences can you find?

Case 6: Traversing Realms of Fantasy

Fantasy allows us to travel without restriction to new places, and inhabit or invent new scenarios. Fairy tales, magical plots and even insignificant items such as a slipper can prompt inventive retellings and manifold adaptations.

It's not surprising therefore that fantasy and magic are uniquely well suited to being passed on from one cultural group to another. Translators play a vital role in that process – and it's often futile to distinguish rigidly between translation, retelling and creation.



Once upon a time...

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CENDRILLON,
OU LA PETITE
PANTOUFLE DE VERRE
C O N T E.

L étoit une fois
un Gentil-homme
qui épousa en se-
condes nopces u-
ne femme, la plus hautaine
Sc

The tale of Cinderella has become an all-time favourite – abused by her stepmother and stepsisters, Cinders escapes from drudgery when she loses a slipper and is found by a prince.

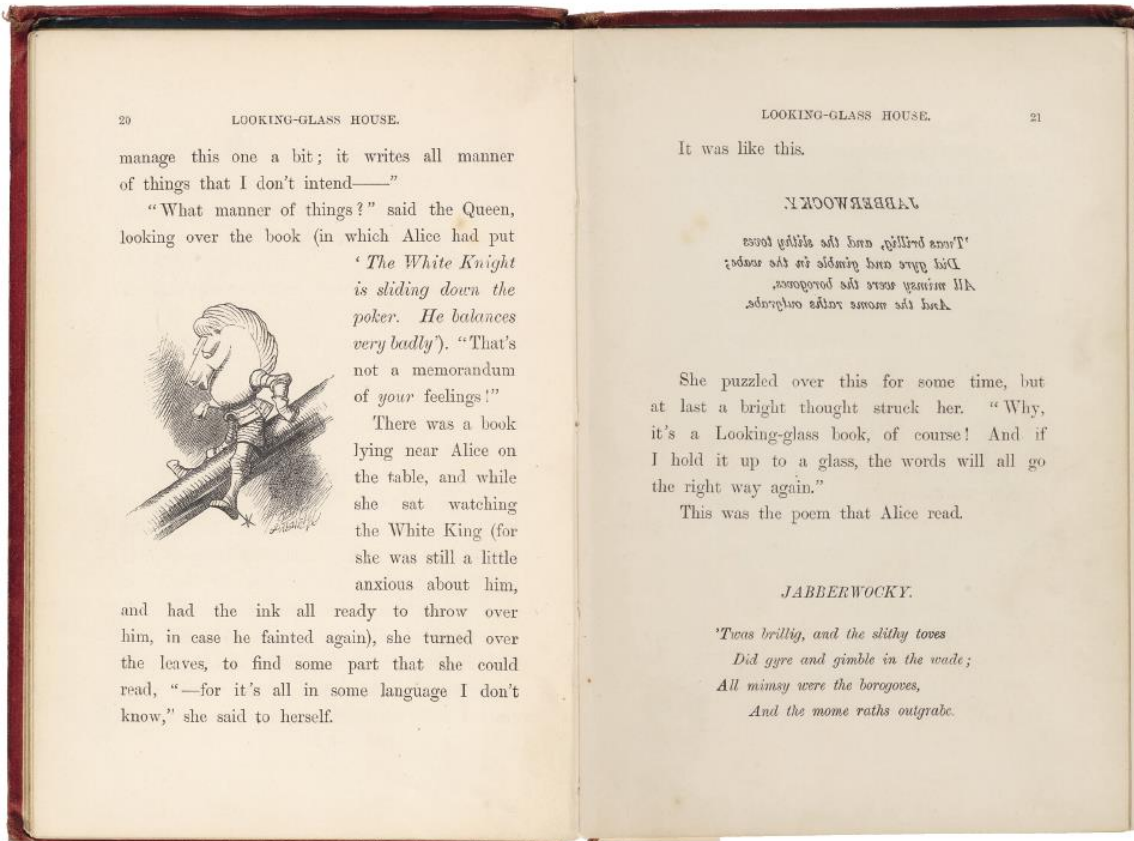
Early traces appear in Asia and across Europe. In 1697 the French courtier Charles Perrault created the version that was translated into English and went on to shape pantomime, musical and film versions.

*Charles Perrault, Histoires ou Contes du temps passé
(Amsterdam, 1708)*

Bodleian Library, Douce P 646, p.91

Case 6

“Somebody killed something: that’s clear, at any rate——”



Alice’s encounter with the Jabberwock in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872) happens in a soundscape of words that aren’t found in English dictionaries, such as ‘brillig’, ‘frumious’, ‘vorpal’ and ‘manxome’.

Does this make the poem incomprehensible and untranslatable?

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* (London, 1872)

Bodleian Library, Opie AA 885

Case 6

Case 6: Traversing Realms of Fantasy

Questions

- A. Write a modern version of *Cinderella* in a language of your choice.
- B. Would you say ‘Jabberwocky’ is in English? Identify features of English, and features that seem foreign. Then recreate the poem in standard English.
- C. The Harry Potter books have been translated into over 80 languages. Would you translate the English names of people and places for readers in other countries, or leave them in English?



Case 7: Negotiating Multilingual Britain

The British Isles have been multilingual as far back as records extend. Migration and cultural exchange have shaped the language landscape and created a highly diverse people.

Regional varieties, different dialects, Celtic, Germanic and Romance languages have played changing roles across the British Isles, and standard English has at no point eliminated people's desire to express their diverse identities in distinctive speech and literature.

Today, many UK schools and work places are multilingual communities. And for many people, translation and interpreting form part of daily life at home.

Traffig gwyriad
Diverted traffic



It's official

Road signs are a daily reminder that Wales has two official languages with equal status in law. Translating between them is a routine activity.

Welsh was losing ground in the course of the 20th century until schools were established where Welsh is taught as the first language.

The Welsh Language Act 1993 then made Welsh an official language alongside English.



Oolala!

Health and safety information needs to reflect that not everyone understands English – even in Anglophone countries.

But the translated warnings on this coffee-cup sleeve seem rather too mashed up to be fit for serious purpose...

Which languages feature - and which words diverge from standard vocabulary and usage?

Case 7: Negotiating Multilingual Britain

Questions

- A. Find out which languages are spoken in your school. Use Google Translate to create a sign in 3 or more of them, saying 'Kill your speed not a child.' Check with speakers of each language whether that would make an equally effective safety sign in their language.
- B. Research on the internet how the NHS caters for UK citizens who don't speak English as their first language.
- C. Create a small exhibition in your class or school with items that include one or more words in a language other than English.



Case 8: An Epic Journey: Translating Homer's *Iliad* & *Odyssey*

Homer's great epics are among the all-time favourites of world literature. The *Iliad* tells the story of the Greek war against Troy while the *Odyssey* focuses on the adventures of Odysseus during his long journey home and his arrival in Ithaca.

Many great translators and authors have been inspired to meet the challenge of recreating Homer's epics in other languages and forms. The film *Troy* released in 2004 reinterpreted the epic for the screen.

Homer into the grave

These fragments from Book 2 of Homer's *Iliad* are written on an ancient Greek papyrus roll produced in the 2nd century BCE.

The papyrus was preserved by desert conditions in the grave of a young woman.

Over 1500 papyrus fragments of the *Iliad* survived in the Egyptian sands.

Bodleian Library, MS. Gr. class. a. 1 (P), plate 9r

Case 8



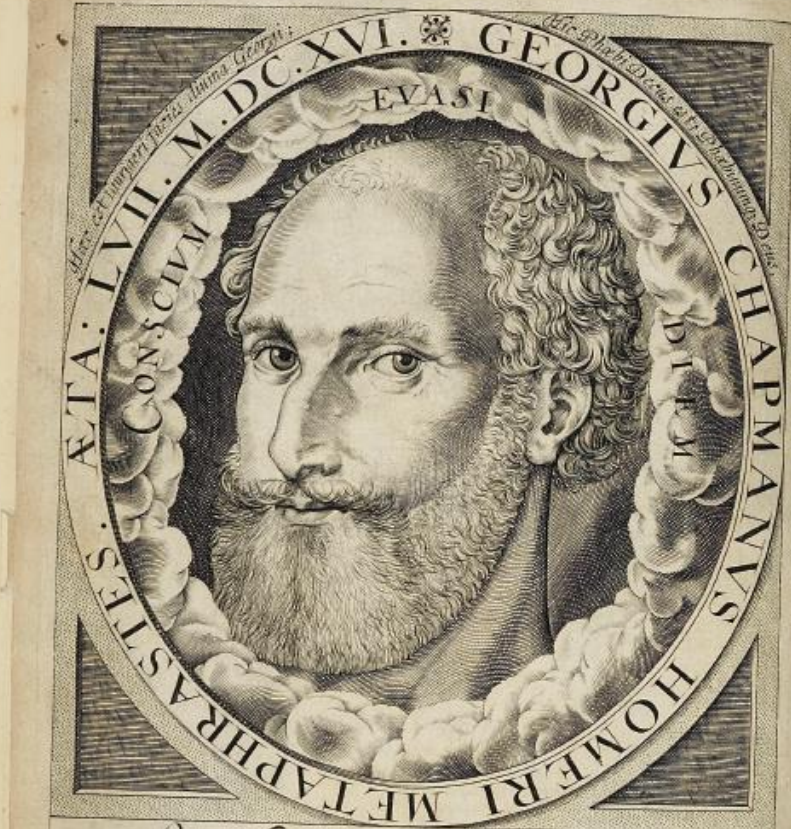
Inspirational translation

Shakespeare's contemporary George Chapman produced the first complete English translation of Homer, opening up the world of Greek antiquity for people who knew no Greek.

One of these readers was John Keats, two hundred years later. He marks the inspirational moment in his sonnet 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'.

George Chapman, *The Whole Works of Homer*
(London, 1616)

Bodleian Library, Mal. 9, frontispiece



Case 8: An Epic Journey Questions

- A. Why do you think the epics attributed to Homer have gained such lasting importance?
- B. How does translating a great epic differ from translating a history book about the same events?
- C. Alice Oswald's poetic version of the *Iliad* entitled *Memorial* (2011) focuses on the deaths of the foot soldiers. By contrast, Wolfgang Petersen's film *Troy* (2004) celebrates the heroes. Write a review of the film, including discussion of whether it glamorises violence.



Case 9: Tales in Translation

We can't imagine English children's literature without stories about talking animals. Yet these have evolved from tales written primarily for adults, both for entertainment and as vehicles of moral improvement.

Two very different strands of the tradition came together in the 17th-century French collection of *Fables* by Jean de la Fontaine. His popular works responded both to the ancient Greek tales of Aesop (6th century BCE) and the widely translated Sanskrit collection *Panchatantra* (4th century BCE).

The vividness of the animal encounters has fostered a rich tradition of illustrations.

Greek Aesop in English, via French

William Caxton produced his English Aesop in the first decade of printing in England, translating from an already popular French version rather than the Greek original.

The woodcut depicts the fable of 'The Fox and the Raven' (often translated as 'The Fox and the Crow'), in which the cunning fox plays on the foolish bird's vanity and tricks it into dropping its cheese.

The book of the subtil historyes and fables of Esope (*Westminster, 1484*)

Bodleian Library, Arch. G d.13, p. 256

Case 9



Into limericks, for babies

Beautifully illustrated editions of Aesop's *Fables* translated familiar tales into images.

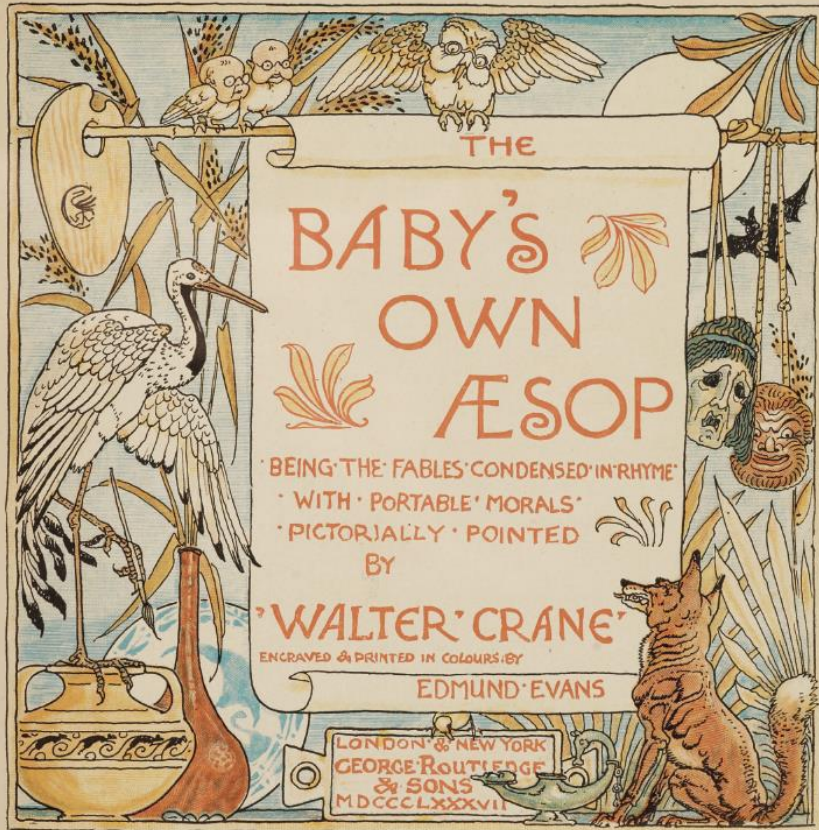
This children's version uses new colour printing techniques and condenses each story into a limerick, with a short moral:

How the cunning old Crow got his drink
When 'twas low in the pitcher, just think!
Don't say that he spilled it!
With pebbles he filled it,
Till the water rose up to the brink.
- *Use your wits.*

Walter Crane, *The baby's own Aesop* (London, 1907)

Bodleian Library, Dunstan D85

Case 9



Case 9: Tales in Translation

Questions

- A. What do you think has made animal tales so popular and transferable across languages, cultures and periods?
- B. Aesop's fable 'The City Mouse and the Country Mouse' inspired Beatrix Potter to write the children's book *The Tale of Johnny Town Mouse*. She was also a distinguished naturalist. Write a brief article for *New Scientist* comparing how rodents respond to rural and urban habitats.
- C. Research Aesop's fables and rewrite one as a limerick.



Case 10: Translating for the Distant Future

Nuclear waste is buried deep underground, but hundreds of thousands of years from now it will still be highly radioactive.

How should we write ‘DON’T DIG HERE!’ for people a hundred millennia from now?

Suggestions have included translating the message into architecture, such as a ‘Landscape of Thorns’ to signify menace. Or perhaps into folklore about a ‘cursed place’. Or a symbol. But how can we make sure it will be understood?



Radioactive warning signal

How can we warn future generations to keep away from deadly radioactive waste?

Messages in languages like Linear A have survived thousands of years, but we have lost the ability to read them.

The radioactive warning symbol was designed in 1946 at the University of California Radiation Laboratory at Berkeley. It represents activity radiating from an atom. But its meaning must be learned and remembered.

Some theorists have argued that we should create myths about these dangerous sites, hoping that superstition will communicate more lastingly than science.

Case 10: Translating for the Distant Future

Questions

- A. Design a symbol that will clearly communicate the danger of radioactive waste dumps without the need for words.
- B. What criteria would a story need to fulfil to be maximally transferable and universally understood? Write one that conveys the danger associated with uncovering the nuclear waste.
- C. In a language of your choice, debate – orally or in writing – the advantages of conveying an effective warning, versus the hazard of thereby inadvertently encouraging evildoers to ‘DIG HERE!’.

Useful information for teachers

Entry to the 'Babel: adventures in translation' exhibition is free, but we ask schools to book in advance. The exhibition will run from 15 February to 2 June 2019.

The maximum group size in the gallery is 35, including accompanying adults. Depending on your group, we recommend planning to spend between 30 and 60 minutes in the exhibition.

The Bodleian Education Office may be able to offer taught sessions alongside an exhibition visit; please enquire. For further information about the exhibition or to book your visit, please contact education@bodleian.ox.ac.uk

This Teacher's Guide was created by the Bodleian Education Department and Creative Multilingualism. Further resources for exploring languages are available at www.creativeml.ox.ac.uk/resources

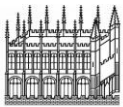
BABEL

Adventures in Translation

The Weston Library is part of the Bodleian Libraries and houses special collections. The address is Weston Library, Broad Street, Oxford, OX1 3BG.

Further details and online teaching resources are available at:

www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/whatson/learn/school-visits



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