

Legend and Symbol An Etymology Lesson

by Rose Williams

(N.B. Italicized words are English words of Latin or Greek origin being targeted in these lessons. In subsequent lessons, words which have been targeted are underlined.

Underlined words are English words of Latin origin not targeted in these lessons. They are defined at the end of Legend and Symbol.)

Lesson I

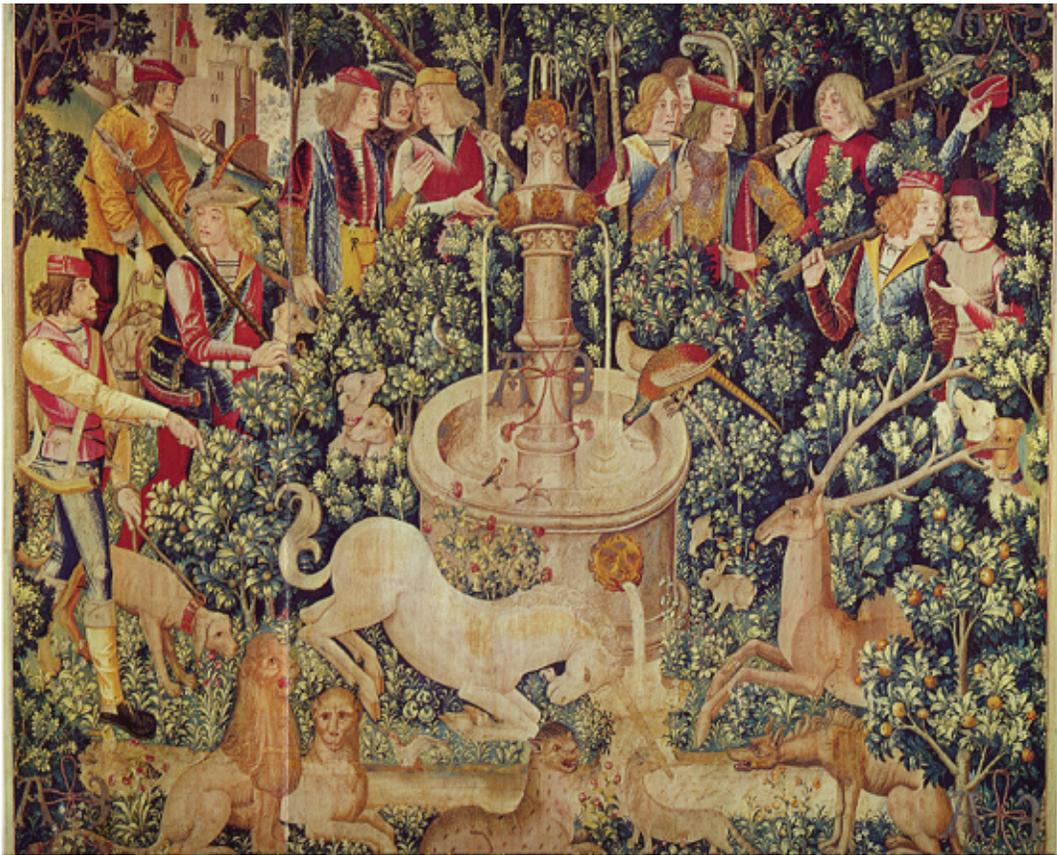
Should you ask me, whence these stories?

Whence these *legends* and *traditions*?

Hiawatha, Introduction, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1807-1882

(In this lesson you will learn words relating to stories *created* long ago which have remained popular in many nations for many centuries. Such stories become *traditional symbols* which have meaning for people, but the meaning may not be the same in all centuries and in all lands. The huge woven picture below contains all the *symbolic* animals and plants discussed the next three lessons).

The earliest known description of a unicorn was written about two thousand five hundred years ago. The unicorn is always a beautiful animal, usually white, which may resemble a horse or a goat. Always, however, it has a single horn in the middle of its forehead. According to ancient *legends* it would dip its horn in bad water to *purify* it so that people and animals could drink from it. It was very swift and strong; it could only be conquered if it submitted voluntarily to being led by a maiden.



In the unicorn tapestry above, which was made in the sixteenth century, the men and their hounds in the top of the picture are waiting to hunt and kill the unicorn after it has used its *legendary purity* to make the water safe. The animals at the bottom of the picture are waiting to drink after the water is *pure*. People at the time of the tapestry hunted and killed most wild *creatures*, but it seems *traitorous* to kill the unicorn after it has helped men and animals. After its death it came back to life, but it no longer ran wild and free. By the time of the tapestry the unicorn had become a *symbol* of two types: it represented Christ to the Christian world and to poets it represented a lover who adores a maiden from afar. Its death and return *symbolized* the Christian God, and its submission to a maiden *symbolized* the lover in poetry and song.

KEY WORDS

create
creature
legend

legendary
purify
purity

symbol
symbolict
symbolize

tradition
raditional
traitorous

KEY SUFFIXES

-ary: L. -arius pertaining to, belonging to
-al: L. -alis pertaining to, belonging to
-fy: L. facio to make
-ic: L. pertaining to, belonging to
-ize: G. -izein to act (as)
-ty: L. -tas state of being

SOURCES AND DEFINITIONS OF KEY WORDS

CREARE, CREATUS < L. to produce

create: to make or form; to cause to exist. The weavers **created** a wonderful tapestry.

creature: a created form or being which owes its existence to someone or something.

The **creatures** of the forest are varied and beautiful.

LEGO, LECTUS < L. to read

legend: a story handed down from long ago which can be read or told.

The **legends** of miraculous animals were repeated century after century.

legendary: pertaining to, or having the qualities of, a legend. The **legendary** powers of the unicorn depended on his purity.

PURUS, PURA, PURUM < L. clean, unpolluted

purify: to cleanse, to make clean. The chemical solution **purified** the water.

purity: the state of being clean. The **purity** of our lake was unpolluted.

SYMBOLON < G. an object animate or inanimate which calls forth an idea

symbol: an object which stands for an idea. The flag of the United States of America is a **symbol** for the country.

symbolic: pertaining to a symbol; representative. The branch of an olive tree is **symbolic** of peace.

symbolize: to represent or stand for an idea. The eagle **symbolizes** national strength.

TRADO, TRADITUS < L. to hand over, hand down; to betray

tradition: Something which is handed down from one group or generation to another. A family Thanksgiving dinner is an American **tradition**.

traditional: Handed down; received from earlier people. Pumpkin pie is a **traditional** Thanksgiving dessert.

traitorous: Acting as a traitor; betraying those who trust one. Putting friends in danger for personal gain is a **traitorous** act.

Word Story: The words "tradition" and "traitor" may seem unrelated, but they come from the same ancient Latin word "**trado**", "to hand over." Traditions are handed over or down to other persons or groups, usually younger. A traitor hands individuals or groups that trust him over to their enemies or to evil treatment.

Exercise 1. Synonyms

Circle the synonym (the word or phrase most nearly the same as the word in bold-faced type).

1. a **traitorous** person: a. advisor b. false friend c. joker d. good actor
2. to **symbolize**: a. to admire b. to endanger c. to make stronger d. to stand for
3. the suffix **-ty** a. relating to being b. condition of being c. one who is d. part of
4. **traditional** a. handed-down b. holy c. narrow d. wide-spread
5. **purify** a. to adopt b. to cleanse c. to enlarge d. to ignore
6. **create** a. to desire b. to enjoy c. to make d. to renew
7. the suffix **-ize** a. to love b. to replace c. to revise d. to act as
8. **legendary** a. contrary b. factual c. false d. found in stories

Exercise 2. Fill-ins



Using words from the word bank, fill in the blanks to complete the description of the picture:

creature
legends

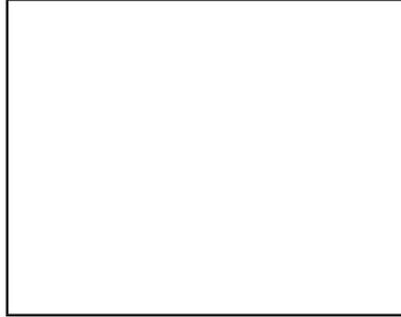
purity
symbols

traditional
traitorous

Many animals are used in _____ as _____ of human qualities. The lion is one _____ which people have always admired, and it has become a _____ symbol of bravery and strength. Although lions are strong, they are usually not considered _____; they are praised for their love of their offspring and the _____ of their loyalty to their families.

Exercise 5. Claiming the vocabulary for yourself.

1. Draw a simple **symbol** in this box.



2. What **traditional** holiday is your favorite? Why?

"My favorite holiday is _____ because _____
_____."

3. Describe a **creature** you admire.

Legend and Symbol **Lesson II**

Though scorned for your plain color, you were not scorned for your singing;
A wide song poured fourth from that narrow throat.
The Lost Nightingale, Alcuin of York, 732 – 804

(In this lesson you will learn words associated with the animals shown in the unicorn tapestry and what they symbolize.)

Beasts and birds have long been used as symbols to show and *explain qualities* that people have. Some *beastly qualities* were considered evil; some were considered good. Two animals who *qualified for special* human admiration in the Medieval and Renaissance periods were the stag and the weasel.



People believed that the stag, or male deer, could kill poisonous snakes, and could protect his young and help mankind by doing so. The female deer was devoted to her fawns and hid them with *tender* care in forests or grassy *plains*.

According to the legends the weasel killed not only ordinary snakes but also the fabled basilisk, a monster which would kill most animals. He was a small *beast*, but he was very brave; therefore he was a symbol of courage. One *species* of weasel, the ermine, turns white in winter. Because of his color the ermine became a symbol of purity.



The small brown bird at the top of this picture is the nightingale. Poets said that she was small and *plain*, but that her song was heavenly music, and her *devotion* to her young was great. She was the symbol of springtime and the flowering earth. On the fountain sits a parent goldfinch watching *tenderly* over a young one. The goldfinch was a good and hardworking parent which could find its food in thorny bushes and yet was able to sing among the thorns. Perhaps because it ate in such difficult places, its care for its young *extended* even into their maturity.

KEY WORDS

beast	explain	plain (adj.)	qualify	special	tender
beastly	extend	plain (noun)	quality	species	tenderly

KEY SUFFIXES

ex-: L. "out, thoroughly"
-fy: L. facio "to make"
-ty: L. -tas "state of," "condition of"

SOURCES AND DEFINITIONS OF KEY WORDS:

BESTIA: <L. "a four-footed animal"

beast: a four-footed creature; an irrational animal as opposed to man

The **beasts** of the forest show more kindness than some people.

beastly: pertaining to a four-footed animal.

The pet monkey's **beastly** habits were not suitable to society.

PLANO, PLANUM: <L. "to level out, make even"

explain: to make something understandable.

He **explained** the math problem to me very clearly.

plain: an area without high or low places; dry land which has no hills.

The large **plain** was covered with tall grass.

plain: smooth, simple, without special beauty or decoration.

The food was **plain** but good.

QUALIS: <L. "what kind of, such"

qualify: to become fit for a position

The hardworking boy **qualified** for the Honor Roll.

quality: a trait or characteristic which helps define something or someone.

His outstanding **quality** was honesty.

SPECIO, SPECTUM: <L. "to look at"

special: having a trait different from others.

He had a **special** ability to imitate the sounds of birds.

species: a group of animals or plants that resemble each other and have similar offspring.

This **species** of flowering plants does not grow very large.

TENDO, TENTUM: <L. "to stretch out, to be inclined toward"

extend: to continue or prolong.

He **extended** his care for his employees even after they had retired.

tender: sensitive; extending understanding or care to another.

The mother's voice was **tender** and comforting.

tenderly: in a gentle and caring manner.

She handled the wounded bird very **tenderly**.

Word Story:

1. An ancient Latin root meaning “to beat down, or make smooth” gave the Romans the words **plangere** – “to beat”; **plano** – “to level or flatten”; and **planus** – “flat, unadorned, simple.” Many English words come from these.

2. The word “**special**” comes from the Latin word meaning “to look at,” because looking at things was the way people first began to notice differences and to group similar things. The Latin word **species**, which means “appearance,” came into English as a scientific word of classification.

3. The Latin words **tenere** -- “to hold”; **tener** -- “delicate”; **tenuis** – “thin”; and **tendere** – “to stretch out, or to move toward” all come from a common root. Their meanings have all contributed to the very rich and meaningful English word “tender.”

Exercise 1:

Fill in the blanks using a synonym from the list of Key Words.

1. to hold out toward someone or something _____
2. a four-footed creature _____
3. a flat or level area _____
4. a trait that defines something or someone _____
5. carefully and lovingly _____

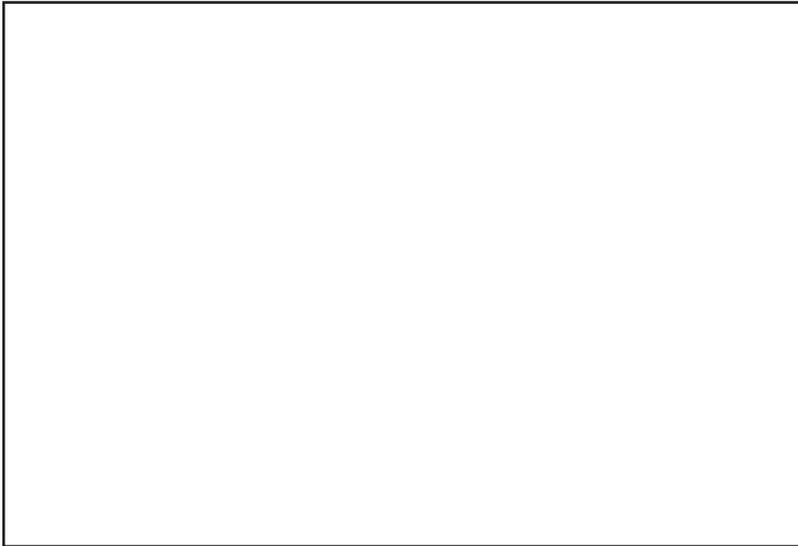
Exercise 2:

Fill in the blanks using key words and prefixes.

1. When people long ago saw a bird which was _____ in appearance but which had a beautiful song, they took it as evidence that human looks could also conceal hidden worth.
2. People long ago often admired a _____ such as a lion or a unicorn for a _____ such as strength or courage; then they made stories about the animal.
3. Many animals are devoted mothers who care for their young _____.
4. When people first began to classify animals, they grouped them according to how they looked; therefore the groups were called _____.

Exercise 3: Claiming the vocabulary for yourself.

1. In the box, draw a simple picture of your favorite **beast**.



2. How can you **qualify** as a child devoted to your parents?

3. Name one person, place or thing which is **plain** in looks but dear to you.

Exercise 4: Crossword

Complete the crossword puzzle and learn the name of the country where the tapestry we are studying was made, _ _ _ _ _.

1						=		
2						=		
			3			=		
	4					=		
		5				=		
		6				=		

1. To become fit or suitable
2. In a gentle and loving manner
3. A four-footed creature
4. A level or flat area
5. Having a trait different from others
6. to continue or prolong

Lesson III

Legend and Symbol

To see the world in a grain of sand,
And Heaven in a wild flower.

Auguries of Innocence, William Blake 1757-1827

(In this lesson you will learn words connected with the *plants* shown in the unicorn tapestry and their use as *images*.)



People long ago saw special lessons in *plants* as well as in animals. *Plants* served as symbolic images because of their real or *imaginary qualities*, and they also gave food and sometimes shelter and medicine to men. They had strength and beauty, and the woody ones, shrubs and trees, could lose their leaves and then come back to life. The orange tree, pictured here, was *planted* in gardens for its beauty as well as for its fruit. It was the favorite *floral* decoration for weddings because it has *flowers* and fruit at the same time, and therefore was a symbol of the new wife.



Flowers are very beautiful and they *flourish* for only a short time, so they were also useful symbolic images. Among the most popular of these was the rose, which was often *transplanted* carefully and with great difficulty. It was larger and brighter in color than most *flowers* in early times and it had a sweet smell. In the *imagery* of poetry and song it symbolized love and *fidelity*.



The *pansy*, also called hearts-ease, differs from its relative the violet by having petals of three colors, purple, yellow and white. Its name relates to the *pensive* person thinking of someone loved who is far away. Lovers were said to *confide* in it as in the daisy. Its juice sprinkled on the eyes of a sleeper was supposed to relieve loneliness, and also to cause the person to fall in love with the first person seen on waking.

KEY WORDS

confide
fidelity

floral
flourish
flower

image
imagery
imaginary

pansy
pensive

plant
transplant

Source and Definition of Key Words:

FIDES: <L., "faith, trust"

confide: to trust fully; to trust with secrets.
The children **confided** in their mother.

fidelity: <L., "loyalty, truthfulness"

His **fidelity** to his family was complete.

FLOS, FLORIS: <L., "a flower"

floral: pertaining to or composed of flowers.

The **floral** displays at Christmas were beautiful.

flourish: to grow luxuriously.

My roses **flourished** even in our dry climate.

flower: on a plant, a circle or group of leaves or petals of some color other than green; a bloom or blossom.

The **flowers** of many plants are small and pale.

IMAGO: <L., "likeness, picture"

image: a representation or likeness of a person or thing; a visible symbol of an idea.

The **image** helped me realize what a cobra looks like.

imagery: the use of images to represent mental vision.

His **imagery** made the difficult ideas more understandable.

imaginary: pertaining to something seen in the mind which we do not have before us;
pertaining to the creation of new objects in the mind we have not seen.

He wrote wonderful stories about **imaginary** beasts and birds.

PENDO, PENSUS: <L., "to weigh, consider; to think seriously about"

pansy: a small flower of the violet family having petals of purple, yellow, and white; it has long been associated with thinking of someone dear.

Her thoughtful husband sent her an arrangement of **pansies** when he was away.

pensive: thoughtful in a sad way.

Remembering friends who have moved away makes me a little **pensive**.

PLANTA: <L., “one of the organisms which form the vegetable kingdom”

plant: a living organism which clings to and draws food from another body, generally the earth.

Many beautiful **plants** grow in the harsh desert.

transplant: to remove a plant or object from one place and establish it in another.

It is best to **transplant** bushes in wet weather.

Word Story: The ancient Romans made an image, usually in wax, of the face of a major government official when he died. This **imago** was displayed in the main room of his family home. Therefore the word **image** came to mean an artistic representation of an absent person or object or an abstract idea.

Exercise 1. Synonyms

Circle the synonym

1. to **flourish:** a. to die b. to grow quickly c. to grow poorly d. to shrink
2. a **plant:** a. a bush b. a house c. a painting d. a snake
3. **fidelity:** a. beauty b. disgrace c. faithfulness d. sorrow
4. **imaginary:** a. angry b. invented c. stupid d. tolerant
5. **pensive:** a. confused b. happy c. kind d. thoughtful
6. to **transplant** a. to copy b. to destroy c. to move something d. to read aloud

Exercise 2. Fill-ins

Fill in the blanks using key words:

In the days when few people could read or write, _____s were very important in self-expression. People created a language of _____ for blooming _____s and sent them to others. A gift of a _____ meant “I’m thinking of you.” Roses represented _____ and love. This flower language _____ed even after most people could read and write.

Exercise 3. Claiming the vocabulary for yourself.

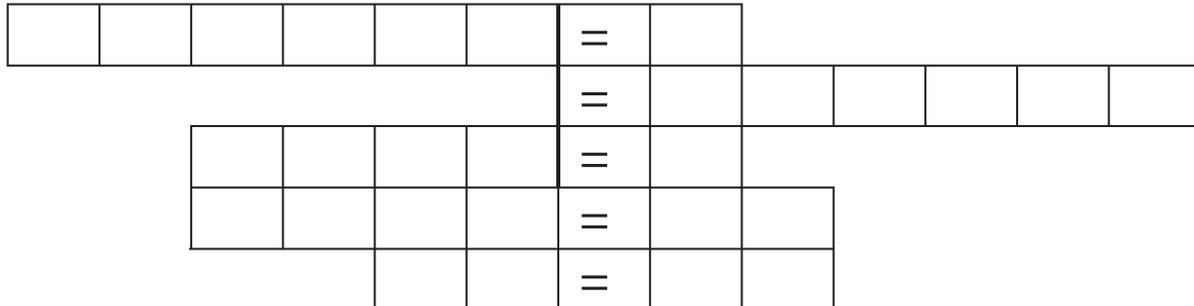
1. In the box below, draw an **imaginary** plant, either like one you have seen or totally different from the plants you know.



2. What is your favorite **flower**? If you were making a language of flowers, what would this one say?

3. When people are **pensive**, they are usually remembering someone or something that they value that is not with them at the moment. Write a sentence about something which might make you **pensive**.

Exercise 4. Crossword



Complete the crossword and learn the name of a European country, _____, which is especially famous for its oranges.

Clues

1. to grow abundantly
2. thoughtful
3. pertaining to flowers
4. to trust someone with your thoughts
5. a small tri-colored flower

Supplementary words

animals living creatures; from Latin **ANIMA** - life or soul

centuries hundred year periods; from Latin **CENTUM** - a hundred

conquer to overcome; from Latin **CONQUIRO** - to procure

courage bravery; from Latin **COR** - the heart

description an account of something; from Latin **DESCRIBO** - to write about

medieval pertaining to the time between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance; from Latin **MEDIUS** and **AEVUM** - the middle age

monster from Latin **MONSTRUM** - a wonder or a warning

ordinary from Latin **ORDO** - established pattern

pictured from Latin **PICTUM** - painted

poisonous from Latin **POTIO** - a drink

submission from Latin **SUBMITTO** - to yield

unicorn from Latin **UNUS** and **CORNU** - one horn

voluntarily from Latin **VOLUNTAS** - will or choice

Legend and Symbol TM

Section I

Exercise 1. Synonyms

Circle the synonym (the word or phrase most nearly the same as the word in bold-faced type).

1. a **traitorous** person: a. advisor b. false friend c. joker d. good actor
2. to **symbolize**: a. to admire b. to endanger c. to make stronger d. to stand for
3. the suffix, **ty** a. relating to being b. condition of being c. one who is d. part of
4. **traditional** a. handed-down b. holy c. narrow d. wide-spread
5. **purify** a. to adopt b. to cleanse c. to enlarge d. to ignore
6. **create** a. to desire b. to enjoy c. to make d. to renew
7. the suffix, **ize** a. to love b. to replace c. to revise d. to act as
8. **legendary** a. contrary b. factual c. false d. found in stories

Exercise 2. Fill-ins

Many animals are used in _____ (legends) as _____ (symbols) of human qualities. The lion is one _____ (creature) which people have always admired, and it has become a _____ (traditional) symbol of bravery and strength. Although lions are strong, they are usually not considered _____ (traitorous); they are praised for their love of their offspring and the _____ (purity) of their loyalty to their families.

Exercise 3. Analogies

Circle the letter of the best analogy:

1. purity : pure ::
 - a. library : book
 - b. work : hard
 - c. clarity : clear
 - d. charity : give
2. creature : create ::
 - a. foot : measure
 - b. cake : sugar
 - c. shoe : polish
 - d. statue : sculptor

Exercise 4 Crossword

1	C	R	E	A	T	U	R	E											
		2	T	R	A	D	I	T	I	O	N								
				3	P	U	R	I	F	Y									
	4	L	E	G	E	N	D												
				5	S	Y	M	B	O	L	I	Z	E						
6	P	U	R	I	T	Y													
			7	C	R	E	A	T	E										
			8	S	Y	M	B	O	L										

Legend and Symbol II

Exercise 1:

Fill in the blanks using a synonym from the list of Key Words.

1. to hold out toward someone or something _____ extend
2. a four-footed creature _____ beast
3. a flat or level area _____ plain
4. a trait that defines something or someone _____ quality
5. carefully and lovingly _____ tenderly

Exercise 2:

Fill in the blanks using key words and prefixes.

1. When people long ago saw a bird which was _____ (plain) in appearance but which had a beautiful song, they took it as evidence that human looks could also conceal hidden worth.
2. People long ago often admired a _____ (beast) such as a lion or a unicorn for a _____ (quality) such as strength or courage; then they made stories about the animal.
3. Many animals are devoted mothers who care for their young _____ (tenderly).
4. When people first began to classify animals, they grouped them according to how they looked; therefore the groups were called _____. (species)

Exercise 4: Crossword

Complete the crossword puzzle and learn the name of the country where the tapestry we are studying was made, _____.

F	L	O	U	R	I	S	H													
						P	E	N	S	I	V	E								
	F	L	O	R	A	L														
	C	O	N	F	I	D	E													
			P	A	N	S	Y													

1. To become fit or suitable
2. In a gentle and loving manner
3. A four-footed creature
4. A level or flat area
5. Having a trait different from others
6. to continue or prolong

Legend and Symbol III

Exercise 1. Synonyms

Circle the synonym

1. to **flourish**: a. to die b. to grow quickly c. to grow poorly d. to shrink
2. a **plant**: a. a bush b. a house c. a painting d. a snake
3. **fidelity**: a. beauty b. disgrace c. faithfulness d. sorrow
4. **imaginary**: a. angry b. invented c. stupid d. tolerant
5. **pensive**: a. confused b. happy c. kind d. thoughtful
6. to **transplant** a. to copy b. to destroy c. to move something d. to read aloud

