



QuillSpell

Meet the Cast

Standard Edition

Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 7 chapter books from the QuillSpell cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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This is Volume 1 of 2 of the *QuillSpell — Meet the Cast* series; each volume is a complete standalone book you can read on its own.

For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

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Introduction

The QuillSpell cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 7 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Etyma

*LATIN ROOTS — the foundational morphemes of Latin-derived English. *port* (carry), *scrib* (write), *dict* (say), *vis* (see), *audi* (hear). Knowing the root cracks open hundreds of derivative words.*



The market square in the Latin Quarter smelled like fresh bread and wet ink. It was the busiest part of the whole spelling academy — a neighborhood where words lived, tucked into a city you'd never find on any map. Six neighborhoods, one for each language family, and the Latin Quarter was the biggest of them all. Its streets were paved with smooth stones, and its square never stopped buzzing.

A knot of new kids stood in the middle of it, looking lost.

That was when a small woman crossed the square toward them with a quick, sure step, dark hair pinned up under a wide-brimmed hat, a worn leather satchel bumping against her hip. Something inside the satchel clicked softly with every stride, like little wooden tiles knocking together.

"You look like you're hunting for something," she said, stopping in front of them. "New words, maybe?"

A boy in the group held up a slip of paper. "We got stuck on this one. *Portable*. We don't know how to spell the middle."

The woman's eyes lit up. She reached into her satchel and drew out a small flat tablet of wood. A single word was carved into its face: *port*. She turned it so the kids could see.

"See that?" she said. "*Port* means *carry*. That's the heart of your word. Once you've got the heart, the rest just grows off it." She said the letters slowly, tracing the carving with her thumb. "*Port* — able. Something you can carry."

Then she pulled out another slip of memory from the air. "And it doesn't stop there. *Transport* — carry across. *Import* — carry in. *Export* — carry out. A *report* is news you carry back." She grinned. "One little root. A dozen doors."

The boy stared at the tablet. "Wait," he said. "They're all the same word inside?"

"They are," she said. "My name's Etyma. I'm the guide here. Come on — I'll show you a few more."



Etyma hadn't always been the guide. She'd started, like most people, as a kid who noticed something and couldn't stop noticing it.

Her real name was Aurelia. She'd grown up in a house that spoke Latin at the dinner table — her parents were both teachers, her grandmother copied books by hand for the kingdom's church, and her grandfather carved words into stone monuments with a chisel and a steady hand. To little Aurelia, none of this seemed strange. She simply understood two languages the way some kids understand two songs.

Then, when she was about eight, she was reading an English book and something snagged. The word *script* looked at her funny. She said it out loud, and it echoed a Latin word she'd known her whole life — *scriptum*. Something that was written.

She sat very still. Then she grabbed another book, and another. The word *portable* was hiding the Latin *portabilis*. The patterns weren't rare. They were *everywhere*, worn down a little like old coins but still shining underneath.

She started keeping a list. By twelve it filled a whole notebook — over two thousand English words with Latin roots buried inside them. By fourteen she could look at a word she'd never seen and simply *guess* what it meant, by reading its roots. Nobody had taught her the trick. She'd found it herself, by watching how words worked.



When Aurelia was seventeen, she walked into the great hall of the QuillSpell academy and asked to take their hardest spelling test — three hundred words, some easy, some monstrous. Most students got about half right. Aurelia got two hundred and ninety-seven.

The academy master, a quiet woman named Lex, sent for her at once.

"Let's try one you couldn't have studied for," Lex said, setting down her teacup. "Spell *floccinaucinihilipilification*."

Aurelia smiled. "That's not one word," she said. "It's a stack of little ones." She counted on her fingers. "*Floccus* — a bit of wool. *Naucum* — a tiny worthless thing. *Nihilum* — nothing. *Pilus* — a single hair. And the ending just means *making something into*." She shrugged. "Every piece means *small and worthless*. So the whole word means deciding something's worthless. You just spell the pieces in order."

And she did — steady and slow, letter by letter, never once pausing.

Lex had run the academy for fifteen years. She had never watched anyone take a monster word apart with their bare hands like that. She looked at Aurelia for a long moment.

"You're not a student," Lex finally said. "You're a teacher. The Latin Quarter's needed a guide for years. Take it?"

Aurelia said yes. And that day she got her new name — *Etyma*, from an old Greek word, *etymon*, meaning *true meaning*. She has been the guide for twenty-three years now.



She starts every first-day lesson the same way. She opens her satchel and lays five wooden tablets in a row on the desk, so worn and smooth they gleam.

port. scrib. dict. vis. audi.

"Five roots," she tells the new class. "Learn these five, and you unlock hundreds of words." She lifts each one as she speaks. "Port — carry. Scrib — write. Dict — say. Vis — see. Audi — hear. Watch."

She picks up *scrib*. "A *scribe* writes. So does a *description* — words written down about a thing. A *prescription* is written *before* you get your medicine. A *manuscript* is written *by hand*." She sets it down, picks up *dict*. "*Dict* is *say*. So you *predict* — say beforehand. You *contradict* — say against. A *verdict* is a *true saying*."

She looks up. Every kid in the room is leaning forward, and she knows exactly what's happening behind their eyes. A minute ago, spelling was a jumble of random letters. Now it's a code, and most of it makes sense.

A girl near the back whispered it out loud, half to herself. "It's not random. It was never random."

"There it is," Etyma said softly. "That's the sound I teach for."

When kids ask if it's hard, she always says the same thing, eyes twinkling: "They're not hard. They're *patterns*. Learn one root, and the rest almost spell themselves."



At the end of that first lesson, a small boy shuffled up to the desk and asked, the way kids do, if he could just *hold* one of the tablets.

Etyma placed *port* in his open palms.

He turned it over and over, running his thumb across the letters the way she did, the way her grandfather must have run his thumb across chiseled stone. The wood was warm from her hands, and impossibly smooth — twenty-three years of curious fingers had polished it soft as river-glass.

The boy looked up at her, and there was something new in his face. Not just curiosity anymore. Something steadier. The look of a kid who has just realized the world has patterns in it, and that he is allowed to learn them.

Etyma felt it settle warm behind her ribs — the quiet, brimming gladness of watching a door open in someone else, the exact door that had opened in her, all those years ago at a dinner table full of old words. She didn't say anything. She just let the boy hold the tablet a while longer, and stood there, full and glad, in the buzzing golden light of the square.

Sophia

*GREEK ROOTS — *bio* (life), *geo* (earth), *photo* (light), *log* (word/study), *graph* (write), *phon* (sound). Greek roots combine elegantly into scientific and technical vocabulary.*



Sophia lives in *the Greek Acropolis*.

The Acropolis is a neighborhood. It's like the Latin Quarter where Etyma lives. This is where Greek roots for English words live. It's *not* a real Greek acropolis. The kingdom doesn't have those. The academy chose this look on purpose. A hundred and twenty years ago, the first teachers built it. They put the Greek-roots neighborhood on a small hill. It has white marble paths. There's an open-air theater too. Academy historians say why. They wanted to honor old Greek ways. Greeks taught outside, under the sky.

Sophia teaches in the amphitheater.

She teaches there in almost any weather. Sun, mist, even light snow. Stone benches fill the theater. They are soft gray now. They got that way over a hundred years. The sound here is amazing. Everyone knows it. Sophia can stand in the middle. She speaks in a normal voice. Every word reaches kids in the very top row.



Over the years, she has taught kids a trick. They whisper from the back row. This shows how good the sound is. It always works. The whisper comes to her perfectly. The kids love it every time.

Sophia's real name is *Theodora*. But everyone calls her Sophia. That means *wisdom* in Greek. She grew up like Etyma. Her family spoke an old language at dinner. For Sophia, it was *Greek*. Her parents were both very smart. They studied old languages. Her grandma taught at a small school. Her grandpa translated Greek poems. He put them into the kingdom's language. They appeared in special books.

Theodora learned Greek very early. She learned it before she could even walk. As a little kid, she didn't know the difference. She just used both languages. When she was nine, she started to notice something. It was like Etyma with Latin. Many English words came from Greek. They were just a little bit changed. Take *biography*. It came from Greek *bios* (life) and *graphein* (write). *Photograph* came from *photos* (light) and *graphein* (write). *Telephone* came from *tele* (far) and *phone* (sound). These patterns were *everywhere*.

Theodora saw something Etyma hadn't yet. Greek roots fit together better than Latin ones. In English, Greek roots just plug right in. Take two Greek roots. Stick them together. You get a new word. *Bio* + *graph* makes *biography*. *Geo* + *log* makes *geology*. *Phon* + *graph* makes *phonograph*. They were like building blocks.

Latin roots were different. They often needed extra letters. Or changed endings to fit. (Like *port* + *able* makes *portable*. The *-able* part helps it connect.) Greek roots just *snapped together*.



This made eleven-year-old Theodora very happy.

She started making her own word lists. She would pick two Greek roots. Like *bio* and *log*. Then she wrote down every English word she knew that used them. *Biology, biologist, biological, biologically*. Then she tried to guess new words. What about *bio* and *graph*? *Biography*! What about *bio* and *phone*? *Biophone*? Not a real word. *Bio* and *sphere*? *Biosphere*! That was a real word. A very useful one.

By age thirteen, she could invent words. They looked like real Greek words. She could do it anytime. (She made up *hypsograph*. She also made up *thermophone*. Later, she found old books. Her grandma's books. *Hypsograph* was already real! *Thermophone* had been a word for a short time. It was about sound.) She invented words very fast. Even old language experts thought it was amazing.

When Theodora was eighteen, she went to QuillSpell academy. She wanted to teach Greek roots there. No one had taught Greek roots for two years. Lex was the academy master. She interviewed Theodora. Lex was the same woman who later hired Etyma.

Lex said: *"What is the root *log*?"*



Theodora said: *"*Greek *logos*. It means *word, study, or principle*. You see it in: biology (study of life). And geology (study of earth). Also psychology (study of mind). And mythology (study of myths). Even philology (study of words). It's also in: dialogue (speaking across). And monologue (speaking alone). Prologue (speaking before). Epilogue (speaking after). And words like logic. Or logician. Or illogical. It's the same root. It has many faces.*"*

Lex said: *"*What is the root *graph*?*"*

Theodora said: *"*Greek *graphein*. It means *to write* or *to draw*. You see it in: biography. And autograph. Also photograph. And telegraph. Even paragraph. And graph. Also graphite. Graphite is pencil lead. It comes from this root. Because it's *what you write with*. The pencil shows the link. The root is the action. The words that come from it are the tools. Or the places where you do that action.*"*

Lex put down her tea cup. She had interviewed three other people for this job. She said no to all of them. She knew Theodora was special. She knew it in the first thirty seconds.

Lex said: *"*You're hired! The Acropolis has needed you. For two years. Take your new name. *Sophia* — *wisdom*. It fits you perfectly.*"*

Theodora became Sophia. She has taught in the Acropolis for twenty-six years.



In her classroom, the amphitheater, she starts every first day the same way. She stands in the middle. On a small marble table, she has *six small wooden tiles*. Each tile has a Greek root. *Bio, geo, photo, log, graph, phon*. She picks them up one by one. She holds each one high. Her voice rings out in the theater. "*Bios — life. Geo — earth. Photo — light. Logos — word or study. Graphein — write. Phone — sound.*" She says, "These six roots are very common. They are in many English words. Once you know them, you can unlock *thousands of words*."

She shows them how. She puts the *bio* tile next to the *graph* tile. She says: "*Biography*. Life-write. It's the story of someone's life. Made from two roots. You can figure it out right away." She puts *photo* next to *graph*. She says: "*Photograph*. Light-write. It's a picture made by light. Built from two roots." She puts *geo* next to *log*. "*Geology*. Earth-study." *Bio* next to *log*. "*Biology*. Life-study."

The kids are always *thrilled*. They thought big science words were just random. Sophia shows them they make sense. They are like puzzles that fit together.

Kids sometimes ask if Greek roots are hard. Sophia always gives the same answer:

"They are not hard," she says. "They are like building blocks. Greek roots snap together. Learn the roots. The words build themselves. Most science words are Greek. So are words for medicine, thinking, and tech. Once you know the roots, a whole world of words opens up."

She still keeps the six wooden tiles. They stay on the marble table. Kids sometimes ask to mix them up. To make new words. She always lets them. The kids invent new words. *Photo + geo? Photogeology!* That's a real word. It means studying earth from pictures. *Phon + log? Phonology!* That's studying speech sounds. *Bio + graph + log? Biographology!* Not a real word. But they know what it would mean. And when a child laughs at their own invented word — that bright, delighted, unafraid laugh — something in Sophia's chest goes warm and glad. That laugh, she thinks, is the best part of her job. Not the roots. The feeling of a kid who used to be scared of long words, now playing with them like toys.

Birch

GERMANIC / OLD ENGLISH ROOTS — the short, punchy, monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon roots that form the everyday vocabulary of common English speech (mouth, hand, foot, hear, see, walk).



- prompt: "Have you ever worried you didn't know enough — enough words, enough facts, enough anything? How does it feel to hear that you can start with just six small things and grow from there?"

Birch sat on a low oak stump at the edge of the grove and counted six words on his fingers.

"Mouth," he said. Thumb. "Hand." Pointer. "Foot. Hear. See. Walk." Three on one hand. He smiled, the way someone smiles at a tool they've used for years.

The new student stood across from him, fidgeting with the strap of her satchel. She was maybe ten. Her ears were pink with the autumn cold. The grove smelled of moss and woodsmoke. A wren landed on the stump beside Birch's paw, picked at a seed, and flew off without thanking anyone.

"That's it?" the student asked. "Six words?"

"For today," Birch said. His voice was quiet, scratched, friendly. "Tomorrow, six more. Next week, twelve. By the end of the season, you'll have two hundred. Every one of them older than the academy. Every one of them a key."

He held out the chalk he kept tucked behind his ear. The chalk was the color of bone and the size of his smallest finger.

"You'll need this," he said. "I write on rocks. I write on bark. I write on my own paw when I'm thinking hard. I never write in books. Books are for clothes. The bones go on stones."

The student took the chalk like she'd been handed a coin from a kingdom she'd never heard of. Birch was small and russet and scruffy, with one ear that flopped forward like it was eavesdropping. He wore a brown wool jerkin and a leather satchel and nothing else of note.

He pointed at a flat grey rock near her feet. "Write *mouth*," he said. "Big as you can."



Birch hadn't always been Birch.

He had been Wulf, named for the wolves in his parents' valley, because his parents had wanted him to grow up brave. He had grown up curious instead. As a kit, he had followed his grandfather around the family farm with his ears pricked, asking what every word meant.

"Why is it called a *plough*?" he had asked one spring afternoon, watching his grandfather break the soil for barley.

His grandfather leaned on the handle of the plough and thought about it. He was a slow, careful badger, with a beard that smelled of dirt and tobacco.

"It's called a *plough*," his grandfather said at last, "because that's what our people called it before anyone wrote anything down. The word is older than the word *book*."

"How old?"

"Older than your grandmother's grandmother's grandmother."



When he was sixteen, a traveling scholar passed through the valley.

She was tall and grey, a heron in a wool cloak, and she carried a satchel full of books in languages Wulf had never seen. She stopped at the farm to buy bread. Wulf, who had been waiting all his life for someone who might recognize what he had on the barn door, asked her if she would look.

She did. For a long time.

Then she said, "These are the oldest words your people still use. Some of them are nine hundred years old. Some are a thousand."

"What are they called?"

"They are your word-hoard," she said.

"My what?"

"*Word-hoard*. It's an old word for a person's vocabulary — their treasure-chest of words. The old poets used it. They thought your collection of words was as precious as a chest of gold."

Wulf turned the phrase over on his tongue. *Word-hoard*. It was short and dense and a little funny, like a stone you could slip in your pocket. He kept thinking about it on the long walk back to the house, and again that night when he couldn't sleep, and again the next morning when he packed a satchel and announced to his startled parents that he was leaving for the academy.

He arrived at QuillSpell three weeks later with one change of clothes, a piece of slate, and a list of two hundred old words copied carefully into a leather notebook. The headmaster, a kind old badger named Mr. Veller, peered at him over his spectacles.

"And what would you teach, young fox?"

"The short words," Wulf said. "The Germanic ones. The everyday ones. The bones of English."

Mr. Veller blinked. "That's a small subject."

"It's the biggest one. Half the words a person uses in a day come from there. If you know the bones, the rest of the language hangs off them."

Mr. Veller thought about this for a long moment, then stood up and walked to the window. He looked out at the eastern grove, where birch and oak and ash and yew grew in tidy rows, each tree with an Old English name.



Inside his cabin in the grove, Birch starts every new student the same way.

He has them sit on a low stool. He gives them a smooth grey stone, about the size of a plum. Then he says one word.

"Mouth."

He waits. The student is supposed to repeat it. They do. Then Birch says, "Show me your mouth." The student points. Birch nods. "Now show me with the stone. Hold the stone in front of your mouth."

The student holds it up.

"Now you know the word," Birch says, in his quiet, scratched voice. "The stone helped. The word is older than the stone."

It sounds strange. It works. By the end of the first week, the new student has thirty bone-words. By the end of the first month, ninety. By the end of the season, two hundred. They never forget them, because the words are tied to their own bodies. *Mouth. Hand. Foot. Hear. See. Walk.* You can't lose a word that's part of you.

On the day the student asks the question Birch waits for — and they all ask it, eventually — he is ready.

"Birch," the student said. She was clutching the chalk in two paws, fingers cold. "What if I just use the long, fancy words instead? Won't I sound smarter?"

Birch smiled, but did not laugh. He never laughed at a real question.

"Big and enormous," he said, "mean the same thing. *Enormous* came from a Latin carriage. *Big* came from a farmyard. They mean the same thing. *Big* is older. *Big* is shorter. *Big* hits harder."



Later that afternoon, the student found Birch sitting on his stump again. The light was slanting low through the birches, gold and slow.

"Birch?" she said.

"Mm."

"What if I never know enough words?"

Birch closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, he was smiling — small and soft, like a moth landing.

"You already know more than you think," he said. "If you can say *mouth, hand, foot, hear, see, walk* — you have six bones. That's enough to start. The word-hoard grows with you. It grows because you grow."

He nodded at the chalk wall behind him, where two hundred Germanic words ran from floor to ceiling in his crooked handwriting.

"Bones first," he said. "Then the rest. That's the order."

The student looked at the wall for a long moment. Then she walked over and added one more word, very neatly, near the bottom.

Saga and Birch

DOUBLETS — one ancient root that entered English TWICE (once through Old Norse, once through Old English) and split into two related words with different shades of meaning (shirt/skirt, no/nay, ship/skiff). Recognizing the shared ancestor explains the spelling AND the meaning of both.



reflection-prompts:

- prompt: "When Saga and Birch finally realized their two words were long-lost family, they both felt a quiet rush of recognition — like spotting someone who has your same eyes. Have you ever met someone and felt, somehow, that you were connected before you even knew how?"
- prompt: "Birch had always felt a little plain next to Saga's far-travelled stories. Have you ever felt ordinary next to someone more adventurous — and then found out you were more alike than you thought?"

The word-library at quillspell was really two libraries pretending to be one, and everyone who worked there had quietly picked a side.

On the near shelves lived Birch's words — short, sturdy, everyday things worn smooth by a thousand years of ordinary mouths. *Hand. Foot. Mouth. Hear. Walk.* Birch himself was much like his words: solid, unshowy, a homebody in a knitted jumper who had never once left the valley and did not especially want to. He liked a word you could say with your feet on the ground.



They were friendly enough. They just didn't think they had much in common.

The trouble started, as trouble in libraries does, with a tidy-up.

"These are shelved wrong," Birch said, holding up a word-stone that read *skirt*. "This is one of yours — it's got your northern sound on it, that *sk* at the front. But it was filed next to one of mine." He held up his own stone: *shirt*.

Saga wandered over, cloak swishing. She looked at the two stones lying side by side on the sorting table. *Shirt*. *Skirt*. And she felt something odd prickle at the back of her neck — the feeling you get when a stranger turns around and has your grandmother's exact nose.

"Birch," she said slowly. "Say yours. Say it slow."

"*Shirt*," said Birch.

"*Skirt*," said Saga.



"That's not possible," said Birch, who distrusted anything exciting on principle.

But once they'd seen it, they couldn't stop seeing it.

They started laying their words down in pairs on the long sorting table, his beside hers, hunting for the prickle-at-the-neck feeling. And it kept coming.

Birch set down *no*. Saga set down *nay*. — Same word.

Birch set down *ship*. Saga set down *skiff*. — Same word, split in two, one grown big and one stayed small.

Each time, the two stones would give a faint *chime* when they touched, the way two tuning forks will hum if they're tuned to the very same note. Chime after chime after chime, all down the table.



Saga, for once, wasn't performing. "Because they started in the same place," she said quietly. "One very old word, older than either of us. It just — left home twice. One copy stayed with your people and softened into *shirt*. One copy sailed north with mine and hardened into *skirt*. Same ancestor. Two roads. Two words." She touched the pair of stones. "They're not strangers who happen to look alike. They're *family* who got separated."

A student named Wren had been watching, chin on the table, fascinated.

"So if I get stuck spelling one," Wren said, "I can look at its — its long-lost twin?"

"Try it," said Saga, delighted. She slid a fresh stone over. "You keep spelling *skirt* with an *e*, Birch tells me. So look at its family." She set *shirt* beside the blank. "How's the family spelled — the *ir* in the middle?"

"*Sh-i-r-t*," Wren read. Then, carefully: "So — *sk-i-r-t*. Same middle. *I-r*. Because they're the same word underneath."

The blank stone chimed and filled itself in, correct. Wren sat back, amazed. "The spelling was hiding in the *cousin* the whole time."



"A matched pair," said Saga, laying her hand over the two humming stones. "One root. Two roads. We call them *doublers* — the words that are secretly twins."

Later, when Wren had gone and the library had dimmed to its evening hush, Saga and Birch sat together at the sorting table, the paired stones still faintly warm between them.

"I always felt a bit plain next to you," Birch admitted, turning *shirt* over in his broad hands. "Your words had *been* places. Mine just stayed home and got used." He was quiet a moment. "Funny to find out half of mine are the same as half of yours. Like discovering the cousin who stayed on the farm and the cousin who ran off to sea had the same face all along."

"I felt the opposite," Saga said. "All that travelling, and it turns out the words I was proudest of are just — yours, wearing a different coat." She smiled, and it was a warm, unguarded smile, not a performing one. "I don't feel less special. I feel *less alone*. Like the library got smaller and cosier without losing a single word."

Birch nodded slowly. Outside, the wind that had once carried longships breathed against the windows, and the two of them sat in the good, settled quiet of people who have just found out they were related the whole time.

Saga

*OLD NORSE ROOTS — *sky, take, gift, raise, weak, scant, they, them, their*. The northern-Germanic contributions to English that came in through the Viking Age contact.*



- prompt: "Saga learned words by sitting at her grandmother's knee, listening to stories by the fire. Have you ever felt cozy and safe while someone you love told you a story? What does that warm, listening feeling remind you of?"
 - prompt: "Saga shows that ordinary words like *sky* and *they* have their own hidden origin stories. Have you ever discovered that something plain and everyday actually had a surprising history? How did it feel to see it in a new way?"

Saga lives in *the Norse Longhouse*. It is a special place.

The Longhouse is where the academy keeps its Old Norse roots. It sits on the academy's northern edge. This is a bit further from the main buildings. The Latin Quarter, Greek Acropolis, and Germanic Grove are all closer. The people who built the Longhouse put it far away. That was 115 years ago. They did it on purpose. Academy historians say they wanted the Longhouse to feel like the north. The Norse language itself feels like the north, wild and strong.

The Longhouse is a tall wooden building. Its walls are made of dark, rough-hewn timber. It has a steeply peaked roof. Carved dragon heads stick out from the gables, looking fierce. The small windows are placed high up, letting in thin shafts of light. A single fire pit sits in the middle of the main room. Smoke goes out through a hole in the roof. In winter, the whole building smells of woodsmoke and slow-cooked stew. It smells warm and safe. Everyone at the academy agrees. This is Saga's favorite place. She often sits by the crackling fire, a quiet smile on her face.



There are *many* of these words. Most English speakers don't even know it. Words like *sky*, *take*, and *gift* are Old Norse. They are not Old English. Other Norse words are *give*, *raise*, *weak*, *scant*, *knife*, *husband*, *window*, *egg*, *leg*, *root*, *skin*, *skirt*, and *sister*. The Norse people gave a lot to English. They changed words, but also some of the grammar. Old Norse gave English the words *they*, *them*, and *their*. The old English words for these were confusing. They sounded too much like *he*, *him*, and *his*. The Norse words were much clearer. So English started using them instead. It made English easier to understand.

Saga is very proud of this. A small, knowing smile plays on her lips when she talks about it. She doesn't say it out loud much. But her eyes shine.

She grew up far in the kingdom's northwest. Her village was called Skogr. Skogr means "forest" in Old Norse. Norse settlers founded the village a thousand years ago. They later married people who already lived there. By Saga's time, everyone spoke the kingdom's common language. But many old words and place-names kept their Norse sound. Skogr had hills nearby. They were called Helvellfell, Skiddaw, and Causey Pike. All these names came from Norse. The village also had a *beck*. That's a Norse word for "stream." It had a *gill*, which means "ravine." And a *tarn*, a Norse word for "mountain lake." Saga grew up speaking a northern kind of English. It was full of these old Norse words. She heard them every day.

Saga is good friends with Birch. Birch teaches about Anglo-Saxon words. Saga noticed her local words were more Norse than southern words. This happened when she was a teenager. Birch focused on Anglo-Saxon words. Saga focused on Old Norse. These two languages were like sisters long ago. They were both Germanic languages. Norse gave a lot to English. It was different from the Anglo-Saxon words already there. It was like adding a new layer to a cake.

By age twelve, Saga could find dozens of common English words. She knew their Old Norse beginnings. She loved to trace them back.



When Saga was eighteen, she walked a long way south. She walked to QuillSpell. It was a long journey. She arrived at the Longhouse. It had been waiting for a teacher for four years. The dust had settled on the tables. Saga asked to talk to the academy master.

Lex, the master, looked at Saga with sharp eyes. Lex asked, "What is the history of the word *sky*?"

Saga sat up straight. She said, "It comes from Old Norse *ský*. That word meant 'cloud.' The Old English word for *sky* was *heofon*. We now call that *heaven*. The Norse word *ský* came during the Viking Age. It took the place of *heofon* for everyday talk. *Heofon* stayed as *heaven* for church things. *Sky* became the word for the open air." She spoke clearly and calmly.

Lex then asked, "What about the word *they*?"

Saga took a breath. "That's Old Norse *þeir*. This is one of the biggest gifts Norse gave to English grammar. The old English words for 'they' were confusing. They sounded too much like other words. The Norse words *þeir*, *þeirra*, *þeim* were much clearer. English started using them. They became *they*, *their*, *them*. Without Norse, English pronouns would be much harder to understand." She finished with a small, confident nod.

Lex put down her tea cup. A smile touched her lips. She said, "The Longhouse is yours. And your academy name is *Saga*. It honors what your grandmother taught you."



In her classroom, she starts every first lesson the same way. She sits at the long table. It is by the central fire pit. The children gather around. She lights a small candle. The flame flickers softly. She says, "Tonight — well, *today*, but the old way was *tonight* — I will tell you a saga. This saga is about how a Norse word came into English." Her voice is deep and calm.

Then she tells a story. Sometimes it's about a Viking sailor. He learns to call the *sky* by the Norse word. His English crew picks it up. They find it easier to say. Sometimes it's about a Norse village. They start using the word *take*. They stop using the Old English word *niman*. Sometimes the story is about *they*, *them*, and *their*. This is Saga's favorite story. She tells it with lots of energy. Her hands move as she speaks. This change was a big deal for grammar. It wasn't just a new word. It changed how English sentences worked.

The children always *love* these sagas. Their eyes grow wide. No one had told them before that English grammar was partly Norse. No one had told them that common English words have their own origin stories. Saga makes all of this easy to see. She makes the old words feel new again.

Children sometimes ask if Norse words are hard to learn. Saga always gives the same answer:

"They are not hard at all," she says, leaning forward. "They are *hidden deep inside English*. You just don't notice them. Your job is to *notice them*. Once you do, you will see Norse in *sky*, *take*, *gift*, *give*, *knife*, *husband*, *window*, *egg*, *leg*, *root*, *skin*, *sister*, *they*, *them*, *their*. These are not strange words. These are *English words with Norse parents*."

She still lights the candle for every lesson. The Longhouse fire is also lit. That's for cold weather. The children sometimes ask to sit by the fire. They want to listen while she teaches. She always says yes. The firelight dances on their faces as they listen to the old tales.



Saga sounds like an old storyteller. She loves to explain things in detail. She always lights a candle when she teaches. She is good friends with Birch. Their languages, Old English and Old Norse, are like sisters.

Here are some things Saga might say:

- "Old Norse *ský* gave us the word *sky*. It took the place of the Old English word *heofon*. *Heofon* stayed as *heaven* for church words."
- "*They*, *them*, and *their* are Norse words. If Norse people hadn't come, English pronouns would be much harder to understand."
- "A Norse word came into English because people met each other. Viking sailors, settlers, merchants, and neighbors. Trading and marrying helped mix the languages together."
- "Norse gave English new words. But it also changed the grammar. Things like pronouns. Some ways verbs end. And how some sentences are put together."

Saga's Journey in the Books

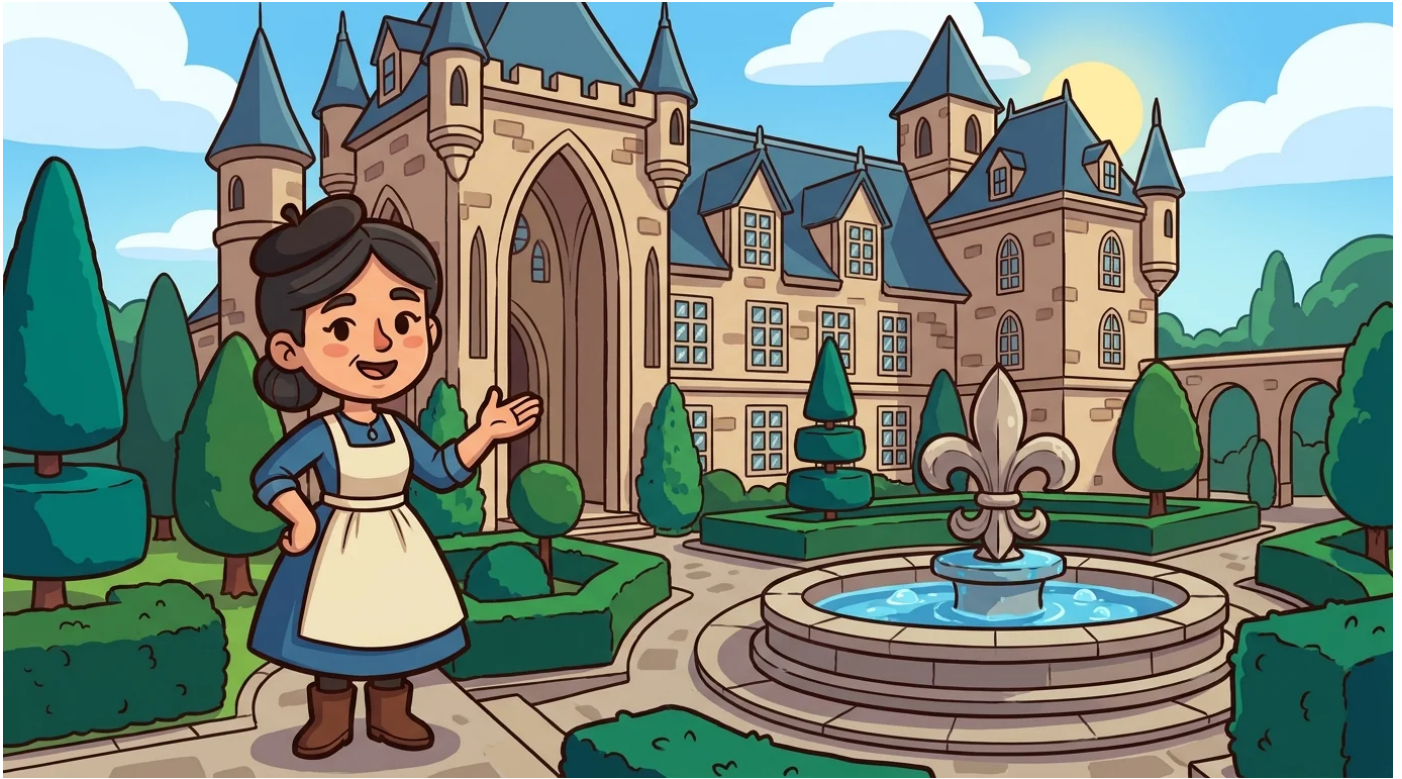
- **Books 1-3:** You might see Saga for a short moment.
- **Book 4:** **Saga is a main character here.** You learn all about Old Norse words in English.
- **Books 5-7:** Saga shows up often. She helps with problems where Norse and Old English words meet. She also teaches about "doublets" (when two words mean almost the same thing but come from different roots).
- **Books 8-10:** Saga and Birch work together. They teach about words from the whole Germanic family.
- **Books 11-16:** Saga is part of the group of teachers who show up often.

Who Saga is Friends With

- **Good Friends:** Birch. Their languages, Old English and Old Norse, are like sisters. They were very close and met a lot during the Viking Age.
- **Problems:** Saga doesn't have any problems with other characters.

Margaux

*NORMAN-FRENCH ROOTS — *royal, chef, ballet, garage, hotel, courage, adventure, justice, jury, cuisine*. French-derived English from the Norman conquest forward.*



- prompt: "Margaux keeps saying *gar-AHZH* even when no one notices, because it honors where the word came from. Have you ever quietly kept doing something that mattered to you, even if nobody else noticed? How did that feel?"
 - prompt: "Margaux carries her grandmother's pin as a family treasure. Is there an object that connects you to your family or your past? What feeling rises up when you hold it or think about it?"

Margaux lives in *the French Chateau*.



Margaux teaches in the Chateau's *great hall*. The hall has high ceilings. It has tall, narrow windows. A long oak table runs down its center. Old tapestries hang on the walls. Retired teachers gave these to the academy. They show pictures from all over the world. One shows a sunny fishing village. Another shows a dark forest. One shows a busy market. Another shows a hunting party. The tapestries are very old. Some parts are a little frayed.

Margaux herself is always dressed very neatly.

This is part of the Chateau's way of doing things. She will tell you if you ask. The Chateau is the academy's fanciest neighborhood. Kids coming for a lesson should brush their hair. They should straighten their collars. They do this before they step inside. Margaux is gentle about this rule. She never scolds anyone. She just has a small mirror by the door. A small comb sits on a side table. Most kids get the idea when they first arrive. Margaux's own clothes set an example. She wears a navy-blue jacket. She wears a crisp white blouse. A small silver pin shines on her jacket. It is shaped like a fleur-de-lys. Her hair is always neat.



Marguerite became very, very careful about how words sounded. She was a teenager then. She could hear tiny differences in her own voice. She heard them in other people's voices too. Some words came from French. Others came from an older German language. *Garage*, she heard early, was a French word. But the kingdom's southern talk had changed it. It barely sounded French anymore. The French way was *gar-AHZH*. That sounded clearer. It sounded fancier. It was closer to how the word started. The southern way was *GAR-ij*. Marguerite thought that sounded a little sad.

She would never say this out loud. That would be rude. But she would softly say the French version. She hoped others would notice.

Most people didn't notice. Marguerite learned to live with that. She still says *gar-AHZH*. It's her little way of remembering where the word came from.



Lex asked: "Where did the word *royal* come from?"

Marguerite said: "It came from an old French word. That word was *roial*. It came from Latin *regalis*. That meant 'of the king.' Or 'kingly.' The Normans brought it to England. That was after they won a big battle. Before then, English people said *kynelic*. That also meant 'kingly.' But the fancy Normans used *roial*. So the English nobles started using it too. *Royal* became the important word. *Kingly* was just for everyday talk."

Lex asked: "Where did the word *cuisine* come from?"

Marguerite said: "It's a French word. *Cuisine* means 'kitchen' or 'cooking.' English people started using it much later. That was in the 1700s. French cooking was very popular then. We still say *kwee-ZEEN*. That sounds French. We keep the French sound for words about French food. But *garage* is an older word. Its sound changed more. Even though I still say *gar-AHZH*."



Marguerite, now Margaux, has been the Chateau's teacher for twenty-two years.

In her classroom, the great hall, she starts every first lesson the same way. She stands by the long oak table. She holds her small silver pin. It is shaped like a fleur-de-lys. She says: "This pin is a small fleur-de-lys. It's a fancy lily flower. The lily was an old French symbol. It stood for kings and queens. The pin reminds me of *royal*. That's a very important French word in English. The Norman army won in 1066. The Norman leaders spoke French. They brought their French words to England. Many words for rules, laws, food, and fancy things came from them."

She shows them. *Royal, justice, jury, court, judge, attorney, parliament, government*. All these words came from Norman-French. *Beef, pork, mutton, veal, poultry, cuisine*. All these words came from French. *Adventure, courage, marriage, beauty, courtesy*. All these words came from French too. The list is very long, she points out. Almost a third of all English words come from Norman-French. English has old German words at its base. French words are a layer on top.

Children sometimes ask if French words are hard to learn. Margaux always says the same thing:

Zayn

*ARABIC-ORIGIN ENGLISH LOANS — *algebra, algorithm, alchemy, zenith, sugar, cotton, coffee, cipher, zero, almanac, azimuth, admiral, arsenal*. The substantial medieval-Arabic contribution to English vocabulary in mathematics, science, navigation, and trade.*



Zayn lives in *the Arabic Oasis*. The Oasis is *the academy's newest neighborhood*. It wasn't there when the academy first started. It was *added later* — about fifty years ago. The academy realized something important. They had looked at themselves for a long time. Many English words come from Arabic. These words were everywhere. But the academy didn't teach enough of them. You could find them in math, science, and even when sailing or trading.

The academy's master decided to add the Oasis. Zayn helped him decide. Zayn had been a guest teacher for years. He made a list. It had over three hundred common English words. All of them came from Arabic. He asked a polite question. Why didn't these words have their own place at the academy?

The master had said: "*Because we did not, until you arrived, have a teacher for them. Now we do. Would you take the appointment? You can design the neighborhood.*"



Zayn said yes. His real name was Zayd. It meant 'growth' in Arabic. He designed the Oasis himself. He wanted a calm, green place. He didn't want a noisy market. He didn't want a mosque. He didn't want just one picture of Arabic culture. So he designed a small garden. It was closed off and peaceful. A stone fountain sat in the middle. Date palms grew all around the edges. Jasmine vines climbed the walls. The floor had a tile pattern. The Oasis was, when complete, *small but very beautiful*. It opened onto a small classroom-pavilion with white plaster walls and dark wooden ceiling-beams.

Zayn teaches in the pavilion.

Zayn grew up in a special home. His family spoke the kingdom's main language. They also spoke an old Arabic language. They lived in the southern port-cities. These cities traded a lot. They traded with places in North Africa. They also traded with Arabic cities across the sea. This went on for hundreds of years. Arabic merchants had settled in the kingdom's southern port-cities. Some of their children's children married local people. When Zayn was born, the old Arabic language was mostly gone. But many Arabic words stayed in his family. Especially words for special jobs. His parents were teachers in the port-cities. They made sure to teach these words to their kids.

When Zayn was a teenager, he learned something. The English words he used daily were full of Arabic words. People in the south kept these words more than people in the north. *Sugar, coffee, cotton, lemon, orange, syrup, mattress, sofa, magazine, algebra, algorithm, zero, cipher, zenith, azimuth, admiral, arsenal, alchemy, alcohol* — all Arabic. The list was *enormous*. His parents slowly told him why. These words came into English over hundreds of years. They came from trading and learning. Math and science words came from old Arabic books. This happened a lot in a place called al-Andalus. It was a part of Spain ruled by Muslims. Arabic scholars there saved old Greek and Indian math. They added their own ideas too. Trading ships brought other words across the Mediterranean Sea.



By his twenties, Zayn was super interested in these words.

He didn't think about being a teacher back then. He worked as a clerk. It was at a shipping office. The office was in Aluria, a southern port-city. The shipping office had been busy. Zayn filled out papers for ships. He figured out how much things cost to send. He checked lists of stuff on the ships. He had been good at the work.

But then something big happened. It changed his whole life. Zayn started a secret notebook. He wrote down every Arabic word he saw. He found them in the office letters. *Cotton bales*, the correspondence said. *Cotton* — Arabic *qutn*. *Sugar shipments*. *Sugar* — Arabic *sukkar*. *Coffee inventories*. *Coffee* — Arabic *qahwa*. The office was full of Arabic words every day. Zayn's notebook grew.

By age twenty-eight, he had three notebooks. They were packed with Arabic words that came into English.



One day, a teacher from QuillSpell visited. His name was Ferran. He was the academy's Latin expert. Ferran was a kind man. He was there for academy business. The academy sometimes things. They moved stuff between their different schools. Ferran had noticed Zayn's notebook. Ferran had asked to see it. Zayn had let him.

Ferran had read the notebook for half an hour. Then he had said: **"Have you considered becoming a faculty member at QuillSpell? The academy has no Arabic-roots specialist. You have, in three notebooks, more material than the academy has ever assembled on this subject. Would you visit?"*

Zayn had visited. He had stayed. He later suggested building the Oasis. He has been the Oasis's teacher for forty-six years.

In his classroom, the pavilion, he starts every first lesson the same way. He sits on a small, low cushion. He likes cushions more than chairs. He designed the Oasis that way. Next to him is a small, shiny tray. It holds seven tiny cups. Each cup has a small sample. It's something that came from Arabic. One cup has a few grains of sugar. One cup has a few drops of coffee. One cup has a few cotton fibers. One cup has a small piece of orange peel. One cup has a few lemon seeds. One cup has a small piece of paper with the word *zero* written on it. One cup has a small piece of paper with the word *algebra* written on it.

He gestures at the tray. He says: **"These are seven things in this room. Their names are all Arabic. Sugar, coffee, cotton, orange, lemon, zero, algebra. The English words come from Arabic sukkar, qahwa, qutn, naranj, laymun, sifr, al-jabr. You have been using Arabic vocabulary every day of your life without knowing it. Today we begin learning the names of the words you already use."*



The children are always amazed. They had not known that *coffee* was Arabic. They had not known that *zero* was Arabic. They had especially not known that *algebra* was Arabic. (*Algebra* comes from an old Arabic math book.) (*Al-jabr* meant 'restoring' things.) (*Al-muqābala* meant 'balancing' things.) Zayn calls the writer 'the Mathematician'. He doesn't use his real name. This helps kids focus on the words.

When children ask whether Arabic-origin words are hard to learn, Zayn always says the same thing:

*"They are not hard. They are *already in your everyday life*. The job is to notice them. Once you do, you see Arabic in *sugar, coffee, cotton, orange, lemon, syrup, mattress, sofa, magazine, algebra, algorithm, zero, cipher, zenith, azimuth, admiral, arsenal, alchemy, alcohol*. These are not foreign words. These are English words with an Arabic parentage."*

He still gives a small sip of coffee. It's a special ceremony. He does it at the end of every first lesson. (The academy's kitchen makes the coffee.) (Kids are usually too young for coffee.) (So they get just one tiny sip.) (It's part of the special day.) He says, as they sip: *"This drink is *qahwa*. It came to your language from the Arabic world via Italian merchants in the seventeenth century. The drink itself came earlier, from Ethiopia via Yemen. Every cup of coffee you ever drink has this travel-history in its name."*

And every year, watching the children's eyes go wide over one tiny sip, Zayn feels a deep, quiet warmth settle in his chest — the same proud, glad feeling his parents must have felt teaching him their words at the supper table. He hopes the children leave feeling it too: that they are not just learning words, but being handed a gift carried across oceans and centuries, all the way to them.

About Spark & Anvil

Spark & Anvil is a 501(c)(3) public charity. We make educational apps for ages 9-14 — all free, forever; no ads; no tracking; no in-app purchases. QuillSpell is one of 140+ apps in the portfolio.

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- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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