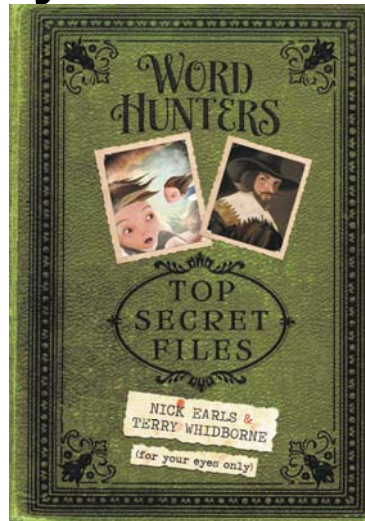


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WORD HUNTERS: TOP SECRET FILES

Nick Earls and
Terry Whidborne



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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SYNOPSIS

Word Hunters: Top Secret Files is a compendium of quirky clues, histories and correspondence shared between Mursili, Caractacus and the other word hunters as they embark on their quest to uncover the origins of words and safeguard their existence into the future. A companion to the Word Hunters trilogy, it sees Mursili and Caractacus once more enlisting the help of twins Al and Lexi, as well as Grandad Al and other word hunters, as they track the roots of words such as 'busk', 'feisty' and 'guy'. They also discover the history of the Latin alphabet and sport-specific vocabulary associated with tennis and cricket.

Word Hunters: Top Secret Files invites readers to actively inquire into the etymology of words and engage in the narrative writing process.

THEMES

Etymology/Origin of Words:

- The origins of words cross many boundaries, borrowing from different languages and influenced by various historical contexts

Adventure:

- Readers are invited to continue the adventure as they decode the clues and events surrounding various words and alphabets
- Readers are also encouraged to complete writing the adventurous tales of Al and Lexi

WRITING STYLE

Word Hunters: Top Secret Files is a collection of letters, notes, artefacts and images designed to actively engage the audience in the adventure of word hunting. It would appeal to younger readers aged 9+ years, particularly those who enjoy decoding and problem-solving. It successfully combines historical evidence with a fast-paced, adventurous style. It also connects readers to online resources, including the Layar app.

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STUDY NOTES

- Before reading *Word Hunters: Top Secret Files*, revisit the original trilogy, either by reading a few of the early word quests or visiting the Word Hunters website <http://wordhunters.com.au/>. For students who may be new to the Word Hunters series, watch the following YouTube clip as a starting point: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGJuC1GhgCA>.
- Take time to familiarise yourself with the main characters in *Word Hunters: Top Secret Files* such as Mursili, Caractacus, Lexi, Al and Grandad Al. Keep a graphic organiser to track their characteristics and qualities. Which character is your favourite? Why?
- Tennis and Cricket
 - As you read the pages about tennis and cricket, take notes outlining the facts you learn.
 - Do some more research of your own, adding to your notes. Include further research about the King Henrys and their love for tennis or the role that shepherds played in the emergence of cricket.
 - Write your own 'word quest' narrative in the style of Lexi's and Al's other word quests to reflect the clues given in the Tennis or Cricket sections.
- In small groups, choose a different sport on which to conduct your own etymological inquiry. Create a page of clues following the layout in *Word Hunters: Top Secret Files* as a style guide. Some suggestions include Australian Rules Football, Rugby League, Rugby Union, basketball and volleyball.
- In what ways did the clothing of the nineteenth century restrict or force changes to sports? Investigate the origins of netball, for example, which started as women's basketball.
- How did inventions such as the lawn mower contribute to the evolution of modern sports?
- After surveying the clues in the 'busk' quest, complete the narrative using the notes given by Nick Earls.
- Use an app such as 'Explain Everything' to explain the origins of the letters J, U and W in the Latin alphabet.
- In pairs, decode the Phoenician, Greek and Latin alphabets to determine which colour route the ship's captain took as the Phoenicians expanded their territory.
- With adult assistance, make the Hittite Bread following the recipe and instructions on p. xxiv/xxv.
- How did the word 'feisty' come into existence? Complete the 'feisty' narrative that has been started for you on p. xxx.
- Make your own cardboard armour using the instructions given.

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- Using the 'Chronicle of the Hunters' table, choose a hunter on whom to base an inquiry. Which words did they hunt? Locate as much information about those words as you can. Create your own files on these words based on the information you find.
- Why is it a problem if words become lost from the dictionary?
- In a paragraph, explain how ketchup came to be.
- The word 'guy' has evolved to have quite a different meaning to its origins. Discuss how history can have this effect on words. Are there other words that this has happened to over time?
- Examine the words that couldn't be saved. Try to match the words with their definitions. Give reasons for your choices.
- Brainstorm a list of new words that have only come into existence in the last 10 or 15 years. In small groups, write clues, notes, letters and a narrative to help explain the origins of these new words. Include appropriate historical references, including the clothing and technology of the times in which these words developed.
- As a class, create your own 'Compendium of Devices and Methods' as a time capsule for future generations.
- The word hunters need to problem solve and seek ways in which to overcome obstacles, such as dealing with nausea on their quest when travelling to the Dark Ages. Discuss the admirable qualities that the word hunters possess.
- Design your own golden peg: <http://wordhunters.com.au/freebies/design-your-own-peg.pdf>
- Participate in some fun dictionary activities of your own using ideas from the following website: <http://minds-in-bloom.com/8-fun-dictionary-activities/>

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

While we were still working on the first three Word Hunters books, we each had things that caught our attention and that we really wanted to do more with, but that didn't fit that format. It was Terry who first suggested we explore them in a different book. He wanted to look into some of the gadgets word hunters use, and wanted to develop some of those ideas, and he knew that some of the most awesome word facts I'd found weren't going to fit with the structure of those first three books and that I wanted to do something with them too. So he suggested a kind of manual kept by Caractacus that had all this stuff in it – projects he was developing, info brought back to him by future word hunters, etc. Then we realised it could be a different way into the series – a way in for kids who mightn't be such a natural fit with a big text-based story.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Earls is the author of more than twenty books, including five for children and five novels with teenage central characters. *48 Shades of Brown* was a CBCA Book of the Year, and his other four young adult novels were Notable Books. *After January* was also shortlisted for the National Children's Literature Award, won a 3M Talking Book of the Year Award and was shortlisted in the Fairlight Talking Book Awards. The International Youth Library, Munich, included it in its White Ravens selection of international notable new books. It was the first of five of Nick Earls's novels to become plays. Two have also been adapted into feature films. nickearls.wordpress.com

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Terry Whidborne is an award-winning advertising art director, who now focuses his time on illustration, animation and stories. He kickstarted his book illustrations with the Word Hunter series, authored by Nick Earls. Terry now has a novella, children's television series and film in the works. He is also behind a global multi-platform writing project, backed by Screen Australia and the Canadian Media Fund, which will be released late 2016. www.the7thworld.com