

The DICTIONARY of LOST WORDS

BOOK INTRODUCTION & READING JOURNAL

The Dictionary of Lost Words by Pip Williams is a historical fiction novel inspired by the true story of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

It follows Esme Nicoll, a girl growing up in the late 1800s who becomes fascinated by the words people use every day—and determined to save the ones others forget.



BEFORE YOU READ

What do you already know about the *Oxford English Dictionary*?

What are you most curious about or hoping to learn from this book?

Look at the cover of the book. What do you think the story might be about? What clues can you see?

ABOUT THE BOOK

Title:

Author:

Genre:

Time Period:

Place:

A word is never just a word.

*It is a small story
waiting to be told.*

AS YOU READ

Use this space to record your thoughts, favourite quotes, new words, or anything that surprises, moves or makes you think.

CHAPTER CHECK-IN

After each chapter (or section), write a few words or sentences about what you have read.

What happened?

What did you learn?

What do you wonder or want to know more about?

The Dictionary of Lost Words

by Pip Williams:

A Story About the Words History Forgot

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS



REFLECT

- ❖ What does the title, *The Dictionary of Lost Words*, make you think about? Which “lost words” in the story affected you the most, and why?
- ❖ How does Esme’s understanding of words and their power change throughout the story?
- ❖ What does the novel suggest about whose voices are heard – and whose are forgotten – in history?
- ❖ How are language, identity and power connected in the book?
- ❖ Which characters’ stories were most meaningful to you, and what did they teach you?
- ❖ How does the novel make you think differently about history and the way it is recorded?

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RESEARCH

- ❖ What was the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and why was it such a huge project? Investigate how it was created and how long it took to complete.
- ❖ Who was Dr James Murray? What role did he play in the dictionary project?
- ❖ Look into the real history of the word “bondmaid.” Why do you think it might have been left out of the dictionary?
- ❖ What words or phrases from your own family’s history might be considered “lost words” in the future? Record and research their origins and meanings.
- ❖ Find out about the people who contributed quotations to the OED. Who were they? How were their words used?



DIG DEEPER

- ❖ Research the women’s suffrage movement in Britain. What were the main groups? What strategies did they use? What changed as a result of their efforts?
- ❖ How did the First World War affect people on the home front, especially women? Look at changes in work, roles and opportunities.
- ❖ Explore the daily life of women in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. What were their choices and challenges?
- ❖ Find primary sources from the time – letters, diaries, newspaper articles or photographs. What do they reveal about people’s lives and the language they used?
- ❖ Choose a word from the book and trace its history. How has its meaning or usage changed over time?
- ❖ Create your own “Dictionary of Lost Words.” Gather words, sayings or expressions that you think deserve to be remembered and write their stories.

*Every word
carries a life.
Let them*