The ‘worst alphabet book’ becomes a bestseller

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

1 Warmer

Five of these seven words begin with a silent letter. Can you find them?

- knowledge
- science
- wristwatch
- honest
- writer
- psychology
- wheel

2 Key words

Complete the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers will help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pterodactyl</th>
<th>quinoa</th>
<th>hit</th>
<th>aisle</th>
<th>run</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A ______________ is something that is very successful. (para 1)</td>
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<td>2. A ______________ was a flying reptile that lived millions of years ago. (para 1)</td>
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<td>3. An ______________ is a passage between rows of seats, for example in a church, theatre or plane, or between the shelves in a supermarket. (para 1)</td>
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<td>4. A ______________ is the amount of something that a company or factory produces at one time. (para 2)</td>
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<td>5. ______________ is a flowering plant the seeds of which are used as a food. (para 4)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>underestimate</th>
<th>homophone</th>
<th>awesome</th>
<th>tsunami</th>
<th>nerd</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. If something is ______________, it is extremely good. (para 5)</td>
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<td>7. A ______________ is someone who is very interested in a specific subject. (para 6)</td>
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<td>8. A ______________ is a word with the same pronunciation as another word but with a different meaning and spelling. (para 6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. A ______________ is a very large wave or a series of waves caused when something such as an earthquake moves a large quantity of water in the sea. (para 8)</td>
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<td>10. If you ______________ someone, you think that they have less ability than they really have. (para 8)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. How many copies of *P is for Pterodactyl* were printed in the first run?
2. How many copies of the book are in the reprint?
3. When did the author first eat quinoa?
4. Which word is given as an example of a word beginning with a silent G?
5. Which two words are given as examples of words beginning with a silent T?
6. How many words in English start with a silent B?
P is for pterodactyl, T is for tsunami: the ‘worst alphabet book’ becomes a bestseller
Alison Flood
3 December, 2018

1 The authors have described it as the “worst alphabet book ever” but it has become a surprise hit. Hundreds of thousands of parents have rushed to buy *P is for Pterodactyl*, a picture book that explains to children that A is for apple but it’s also for aisle.

2 The idea of rapper Raj Haldar and computer programmer Chris Carpenter, *P is for Pterodactyl* was published in the US in November, 2018. The first print run of 10,000 copies sold out almost immediately and the publisher is now waiting for a reprint of another 210,000 copies. The book is also popular in the UK. Sales representative Rob Richardson said that excitement on social media after a Facebook post caused sales to increase from five to 3,000 orders overnight.

3 “The first day, we sold out of the entire first run. It’s been quite amazing since,” said Haldar, whose book is now No 8 on the *New York Times* bestseller list. “It’s totally unexpected.”

4 He and Carpenter had the idea when they had lunch with a friend. The friend’s child had some alphabet cards with him. “Each card was of a food, so we were looking through them and reading them to our friends’ kid. We got to Q, and Q was for quinoa,” said Haldar. “We were laughing about it because it sounds strange – plus, I didn’t have quinoa until I was 25. We were joking about that and started talking about how it would be even sillier if there was an entire alphabet with silent letters.”

5 For a while, they just added words to a document as they thought them up, but “we started to realize that the words in this document would make an awesome kids’ book – gnomes and knights and tsars”.

6 Illustrator Maria Tina Beddia joined the project and they found a publisher, Sourcebooks. The editorial director called the idea a “completely new approach” to the usual alphabet book. “Word nerds, like me, love to argue about the complexities of the English language. Silent letters and crazy homophones can be incredibly difficult for all of us but especially for kids just learning how to read,” she said.

7 Haldar admitted that he and Carpenter had found it difficult with some letters. “There are plenty of words with a silent first letter, but there are letters where there are very few examples and we had to find creative solutions,” he said. “For example, there is only one word in the English language starting with a silent B. People can get the book to find the answer.”

8 Haldar, whose favourite was “T is for Tsunami”, said he was glad the book had not underestimated children’s interest. “Kids really love big long words – when we point at the cover of the book, even the three- or four-year-old just learning to read will say, ‘Pterodactyl!’,” he said.

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4 Comprehension check

Match the beginnings and endings to make statements about the text.

1. The authors of P is for Pterodactyl …
   a. … would make a fantastic book for children.
2. They got the idea for the book when …
   b. … when they are learning to read.
3. They thought that words like gnome, knight and tsar …
   c. … like long words like pterodactyl.
4. They found it quite difficult …
   d. … didn’t expect the book to be so popular.
5. Children often find silent letters and homophones difficult …
   e. … to find words for some of the letters.
6. But it also seems that children …
   f. … they were looking at some alphabet cards.

5 Prepositions

Complete the sentences or phrases using these prepositions.

1. A is __________ apple.
2. One word starts __________ a silent B.
3. There was a lot of excitement __________ social media.
4. Sales increased from five __________ 3,000.
5. They were joking __________ quinoa.
6. the complexities __________ the English language

6 Two-word expressions

Match the words in the left-hand column with the words in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

1. picture       a. media
2. silent        b. representative
3. sales         c. run
4. surprise      d. letter
5. print         e. book
6. social        f. hit
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7 Word stress
Put these words from the text in two groups according to their word stress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bestseller</th>
<th>alphabet</th>
<th>computer</th>
<th>programmer</th>
<th>document</th>
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<td>publisher</td>
<td>completely</td>
<td>excitement</td>
<td>popular</td>
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A 0 o o
B o 0 o

8 Discussion

• Would you buy this book? Why? Why not?
• Do you find English spelling and pronunciation difficult? Why? Why not?
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KEY

1 Warmer

knowledge
wristwatch
honest
writer
psychology

2 Key words

1. hit
2. pterodactyl
3. aisle
4. run
5. quinoa
6. awesome
7. nerd
8. homophone
9. tsunami
10. underestimate

3 Find the information

1. 10,000
2. 210,000
3. when he was 25
4. gnome
5. tsar and tsunami (Note, though, that many native speakers do pronounce the T in tsunami – /tsuːˈnɑːmi/. Tsar is pronounced /zɑː/.)
6. one

4 Comprehension check

1. d
2. f
3. a
4. e
5. b
6. c

5 Prepositions

1. for
2. with
3. on
4. to
5. about
6. of

6 Two-word expressions

1. e
2. d
3. b
4. f
5. c
6. a

7 Word stress

<table>
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<th>A</th>
<th>0 o o</th>
<th>B</th>
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