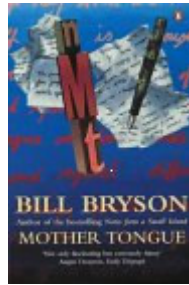


## Topic Option 1: Language and Culture



### Mother Tongue: The History of the English Language

**Directions for Written Assignment:** To help you better understand the Topic Option: Language and Culture, you are required to read Bill Bryson's Mother Tongue. As you read, make connections to what we have read /studied this past year and to your own experiences with language, especially the English language. It would be worthwhile to take notes on all the chapters you read, but you are required to do the following written assignment:

For **Chapters 1, 3, 7, and 13** you are to:

1. **Select at least 2 quotes** which best summarize the chapter. After each quote, you are to comment on why you selected the quote and how it is significant to the chapter. Please go beyond simply repeating what Bryson has already stated in the chapter.
2. Write a **brief but thoughtfully-developed reflection for each chapter**, noting how the chapter relates to your own experience and/or to what we have studied this past year.

Your work must be word processed and clearly labeled as shown on the sample.

***This assignment is due as specified by the teacher and will constitute part of the first grades of the semester.***

(See example on the back.)

## Example of Chapter Labels, Quotes and Comments:

### Chapter 1 “The World’s Language”

1. p. 15 “Even among speakers of the same language, regional and national differences abound.”

I think this underscores the fact that English is not just different among countries such as England, the United States and Australia. Many differences abound within each country and within each region.

2. pp. 13-14 “...English speakers can often draw shades of distinction unavailable to non-English speakers... On the other hand, other languages have facilities we lack.”

I think this is interesting because it shows that there are both strengths and weaknesses in languages. However, Bryson ends up saying that English has the richest vocabulary. It seems a bit arrogant, given the selected quotes above.

## Example of Discussion following each of the 3 Chapters:

### Discussion of Chapter 1

I am always surprised to find fellow Americans using different words to express the same idea: e.g. in the southern state of Kentucky people call a drink such as Coke Cola, “soft drink,” whereas, people from the North, say Michigan, call it “soda.” And, of course, there are the differences between the American and the British English: Americans say, “sidewalk” whereas British say “footpath”

When I left the United States for the first time and found myself in a country that largely did not speak English, Thailand, I was disconcerted by questions about English that I couldn’t answer. e.g. What do you call this, someone would ask, holding up a fruit I’d never seen. I realized that some things had not existed in my previous “English-speaking world” and now I needed words to express those “things.” I also was surprised to find that there were so many varieties of bananas, for example. To me a banana was a banana. There were no distinctions in the English I learned. I realized that somebody had had to figure out what the English equivalent would be so future generations could “translate.” I also was quick to try to find words in English, which had many distinctions of which the Thai language did not have. I found that difficult. I used the idea that “snow” in Alaska had many different shades of distinction (though I didn’t know what they were!). Somehow, I felt embarrassed that English was so “simple.” However, it wasn’t long before I realized just how rich the English language is. Many times I was asked what word in English expressed an equivalent idea in Thai and found myself listing many words rather than just a single word. English, indeed, is full of rich vocabulary.