



# Virginia 4-H MAKING the Future

\*18 U.S.C. 707

## The History of Writing

### The History Behind it . . .

#### **When was writing invented?**

A letter is a written message from one person or business to another person or business. Early writing consisted of drawings or symbols to convey a message. **Cuneiform**, developed about 9,000 years ago, is considered by most to be our first written language. **Hieroglyphics**, developed around 3,000 BC, and is considered to be our first recorded alphabet.

The modern English alphabet evolved over several centuries, becoming broadly used in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century when Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press. The first English dictionary was published by Robert Cawdrey in 1604, listing approximately 3,000 words, further solidifying the alphabet as we know it today.

**Cuneiform:** *From the Latin word cuneus, or 'wedge', it is a writing system that uses a series of wedge-shaped strokes that are pressed into clay tablets.*

**Hieroglyphics:** *From the Greek words hieros and glyphe, or 'holy carvings', it is a writing system that uses symbols to represent letters, a combination of letters, or an object.*

#### **World War I**

When the U.S. entered the war the use of electricity for technology was relatively new and there were few modes of communication available. During World War I the only way for soldiers to communicate with their loved ones was through written letters or postcards. Newspapers were widely used and while they provided general news, they did not relay individual messages. Telegrams were used as a more immediate form of communication, utilized by the military to notify families if their soldier was killed or captured, followed by a letter.

During the war, letters were a critical component of support to both the soldiers and their families. Soldiers anxiously awaited letters to read news from their home, providing a connection to their former life. Families were also eager for letters and postcards to reassure them that that the soldier they loved was unharmed.

#### **Did you know?**

Did you know that World War I was the beginning of broad censoring of letters? Letters sent from overseas were read by an officer in the soldier's unit and were either stamped as approved, confiscated, or sent back to the author. The censors were looking for information that may either be helpful to the enemy or disturbing to the families at home like poor morale, the unit's location, or the strength of the unit.

#### **Sources**

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- ⇒ PBS: [www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/the-written-word/](http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/the-written-word/)
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