

The Voynich Manuscript

Why Can't Anyone Read This Mysterious Book?

Imagine finding a book filled with strange drawings and flowing handwriting, but no one can understand a single word. Scholars, scientists, and codebreakers have tried for over 100 years to read it. Even today, the book remains a mystery. This puzzling object is called the Voynich Manuscript, and it has confused experts longer than almost any other book in history.

The Voynich Manuscript is an ancient book made of parchment, which is dried animal skin used for writing. Scientists believe it was created in the early 1400s, based on tests done on its pages. The book is about 240 pages long and filled with handwritten text and unusual illustrations. These drawings include strange plants, star charts, and tiny people bathing in green liquid connected by pipes.

The manuscript is named after Wilfrid Voynich, a book dealer who bought it in 1912. Today, the book is kept at Yale University, where it has been carefully studied and protected. What makes the manuscript so confusing is the writing. The symbols look like a real language, but they do not match any known one. No one has ever been able to translate it.

Theory 1: A Lost Language

Some experts believe the Voynich Manuscript is written in a real language that has been lost over time. According to this idea, the author may have used a writing system that never spread or survived. Supporters

point out that the text follows patterns similar to known languages, which suggests it was written with purpose and structure.

Theory 2: A Secret Code

Another theory is that the manuscript is written in code. The author may have wanted to hide the information inside the book, possibly to protect medical, scientific, or religious knowledge. Many codebreakers have tried to solve it, including experts who cracked important military codes during World War II. However, none of them succeeded.

Theory 3: An Elaborate Hoax

Some people think the book is a trick. According to this theory, the author created meaningless symbols to make the book seem important or expensive. Still, this idea is debated because creating such a long and detailed fake book would have taken an enormous amount of effort and knowledge.

The Voynich Manuscript continues to interest researchers because it challenges what we know about language, history, and human creativity. It reminds us that not everything from the past has been explained yet. Even with modern computers and technology, some mysteries remain unsolved. This book shows that curiosity and questioning are just as important today as they were hundreds of years ago.

Works Consulted: Voynich Manuscript. Yale University Library, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. "The Voynich Manuscript." British Library. Why the World's Most Mysterious Book Has Never Been Deciphered. *Smithsonian Magazi*

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(1) Main Idea & Key Details

What is the **central mystery** of the Voynich Manuscript, and which **details from the article** help explain why it has remained unsolved for so long?

(2) Inference & Text Evidence

Based on the information in the article, why do you think many experts believe the Voynich Manuscript is **not just meaningless writing**? Support your answer with **specific evidence from the text**.

(3) Text Structure & Author's Craft

The author organizes the "Theories & Explanations" section by presenting **multiple possible explanations** for the manuscript. How does this structure help readers better understand the mystery?

(4) Vocabulary in Context

In the article, the word "**manuscript**" is used several times. Using clues from the text, what does the word *manuscript* most nearly mean, and how do you know?

TEACHER ANSWER KEY - The Voynich Manuscript

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(1) Main Idea & Key Details

What is the **central mystery** of the Voynich Manuscript, and which **details from the article** help explain why it has remained unsolved for so long?

The central mystery is that no one has been able to read or translate the Voynich Manuscript. Details that support this include the unknown symbols, the unusual illustrations, and the fact that experts—including professional codebreakers—have tried and failed to understand it. The article also explains that the writing does not match any known language, which adds to the mystery.

(2) Inference & Text Evidence

Based on the information in the article, why do you think many experts believe the Voynich Manuscript is **not just meaningless writing**? Support your answer with **specific evidence from the text**.

Many experts believe the manuscript is not meaningless because the text follows patterns that look similar to real languages. The article explains that the symbols repeat in organized ways, which suggests structure and intent. The effort it would have taken to create such a long and detailed book also supports the idea that it was written with purpose.

(3) Text Structure & Author's Craft

The author organizes the "Theories & Explanations" section by presenting **multiple possible explanations** for the manuscript. How does this structure help readers better understand the mystery?

By organizing the section into different theories, the author helps readers see that there is no single agreed-upon explanation. This structure allows readers to compare ideas and evaluate evidence for each theory. It also reinforces the idea that the manuscript is still unsolved, since no theory fully explains it.

(4) Vocabulary in Context

In the article, the word "**manuscript**" is used several times. Using clues from the text, what does the word *manuscript* most nearly mean, and how do you know?

The word *manuscript* most nearly means a handwritten book or document. Clues from the text include references to parchment, handwriting, and its creation in the 1400s, which all suggest it was written by hand before printing was common.