Letters on the Move

Trace how a complete alphabet became an ancestor of Latin writing.

AWH.C.6.4.F "Language: development of a complete alphabet, ancestor of the Latin alphabet."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle the first occurrence of Latin, Etruscan, Greek, and Phoenician in the passage. Number those four names 1 through 4 to show the order in which each writing system contributed to the next, starting with the earliest.

A Journey Written in Letters

1. Imagine a trader recording a shipment of purple cloth across the Mediterranean. Around 1000 BCE, Phoenician merchants used a writing system with signs that generally represented consonant sounds. Readers supplied most vowels from context. A small set of reusable signs could spell many words without requiring a new sign for each word. Yet a sequence of consonants could leave several pronunciations possible. When Greek speakers borrowed this system, they reassigned some signs to vowel sounds. Their writing gave regular signs to both consonants and vowels, a key feature of a complete alphabet.

2. Now picture a name scratched on a pottery cup in ancient Italy. The Latin letters used in Rome did not spring directly from Phoenician writing. The Romans learned letters chiefly from the Etruscans, a people whose cities lay north of early Rome. Etruscan writers had adapted a version of the Greek alphabet brought to Italy by Greek settlers. As writing passed between communities, people kept some signs, changed others, and matched letters to sounds in their own languages. The letter shapes familiar today therefore reflect choices made in more than one place, not a single inventor's plan.

3. Calling an alphabet 'complete' does not mean every language must use identical letters or spell every sound perfectly. Here it means that both consonants and vowels have letters rather than leaving most vowel sounds for the reader to guess. Latin writing changed as Rome expanded and later as other languages adopted it. Modern English, for example, uses Latin letters but has spellings unlike those of ancient Rome. That difference does not erase the history of borrowing behind the letters. When you read an inscription, a street sign, or a message, you use a distant descendant of choices once made around the Mediterranean.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What made Greek writing a complete alphabet in the sense used in the passage, unlike Phoenician writing?

2. Whose alphabet did Etruscan writers adapt, and how did it reach Italy?

3. Why is Phoenician writing an ancestor of Latin writing even though Romans did not learn letters directly from Phoenicians?

4. What does the history of Latin letters show about how alphabets change as they spread?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Invent two different two-syllable names that have the same consonants but different vowels. In three or four sentences, explain how writing the vowels keeps the names distinct and connect that feature to the history of Latin letters.

ANSWER KEY

Letters on the Move

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.6.4.F

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle the first occurrence of Latin, Etruscan, Greek, and Phoenician in the passage. Number those four names 1 through 4 to show the order in which each writing system contributed to the next, starting with the earliest. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What made Greek writing a complete alphabet in the sense used in the passage, unlike Phoenician writing?	**Greek writing used regular signs for both consonants and vowels. Phoenician writing generally represented consonants and left readers to supply most vowels.**
2	Whose alphabet did Etruscan writers adapt, and how did it reach Italy?	**They adapted a version of the Greek alphabet brought to Italy by Greek settlers.**
3	Why is Phoenician writing an ancestor of Latin writing even though Romans did not learn letters directly from Phoenicians?	**Greek speakers borrowed the Phoenician system, Etruscan writers adapted Greek letters, and Romans learned letters chiefly from the Etruscans.**
4	What does the history of Latin letters show about how alphabets change as they spread?	**Communities borrow letters, keep or change signs, and match them to sounds in their own languages.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I invented the names Mivu and Mavu. Without vowel letters, both would be MV, so a reader might confuse them. Greek writers adapted Phoenician signs and reassigned some to vowel sounds. Etruscan writers adapted Greek letters, and Romans learned letters chiefly from them, so the Latin letters I used can show the difference.

The marking order is Phoenician, Greek, Etruscan, Latin. For Your Turn, accept any two distinct two-syllable names with the same consonants and different vowels if the explanation accurately connects written vowels to the development of Latin letters.