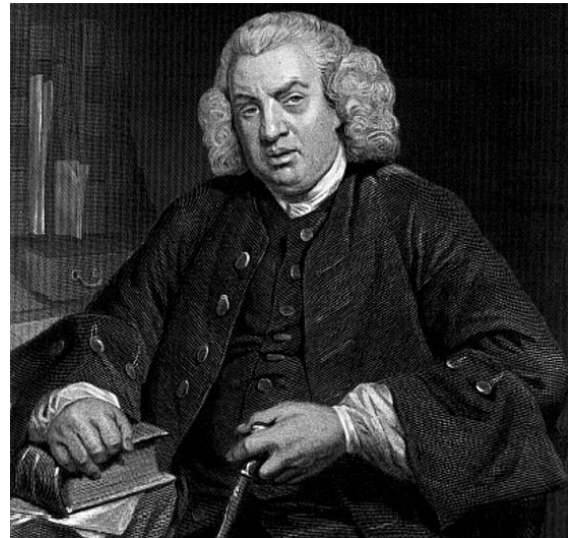


“When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life.” This is a famous quote from a man who was born over 300 years ago. The man’s name is Samuel Johnson and his life was the subject of the first modern biography ever written.

You recently wrote a report on someone who inspires you – you wrote a biography!



As you know already, a biography is a piece of writing that gives an account of someone’s life. *What sort of people might have biographies written about them? Why would someone want to read a biography? Do you know the difference between a biography and an autobiography?*

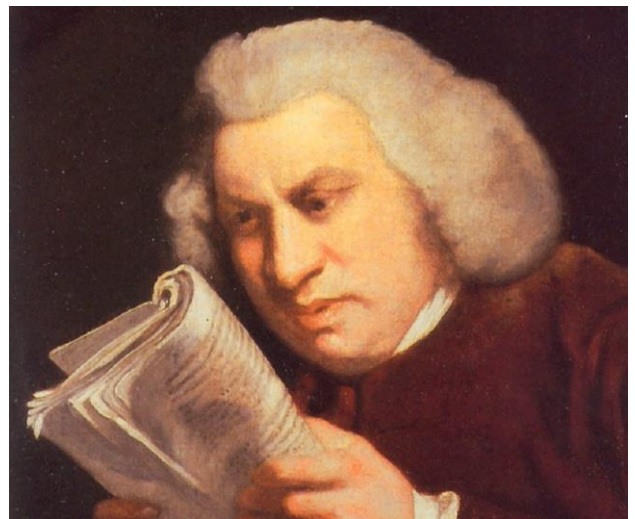
Samuel Johnson was born on 18th September 1709, in Lichfield, Staffordshire. As a baby, he contracted a serious disease called scrofula, which left him blind in one eye, deaf in one ear, and deeply scarred across his face and body. The sight in his other eye was also considerably weakened by the effects of the disease.

Because of Johnson's poor sight, a nursemaid was sent every day to collect him from school. On one occasion, the nursemaid was late. Rather than ask for help, Johnson dropped to his hands and knees and began to crawl, following the line of the gutter to guide him home. When a teacher noticed what he was doing and hurried over to offer assistance, Johnson flew into a rage. He was an extremely proud and determined child, and did not want anyone's pity.

As well as being proud, Johnson was also remarkably intelligent. His father happened to be a bookseller, which was a stroke of good fortune, as it gave the young Johnson access to a wealth of books and knowledge. He read hungrily, and his phenomenal memory meant that he learned many passages and poems by heart.

By the time he was 19, Johnson's intelligence meant that he won a place at Pembroke College, Oxford. He studied there for a year, but he struggled to keep up with the university fees. On one occasion, a kindly fellow student noticed that Johnson's shoes had worn out. Guessing that Johnson could not afford to replace them, the student left a pair of brand new shoes outside his door in the middle of the night. Far from being pleased when he woke up and discovered the gift, Johnson was furious! He loathed the idea that someone had felt he needed their charity.

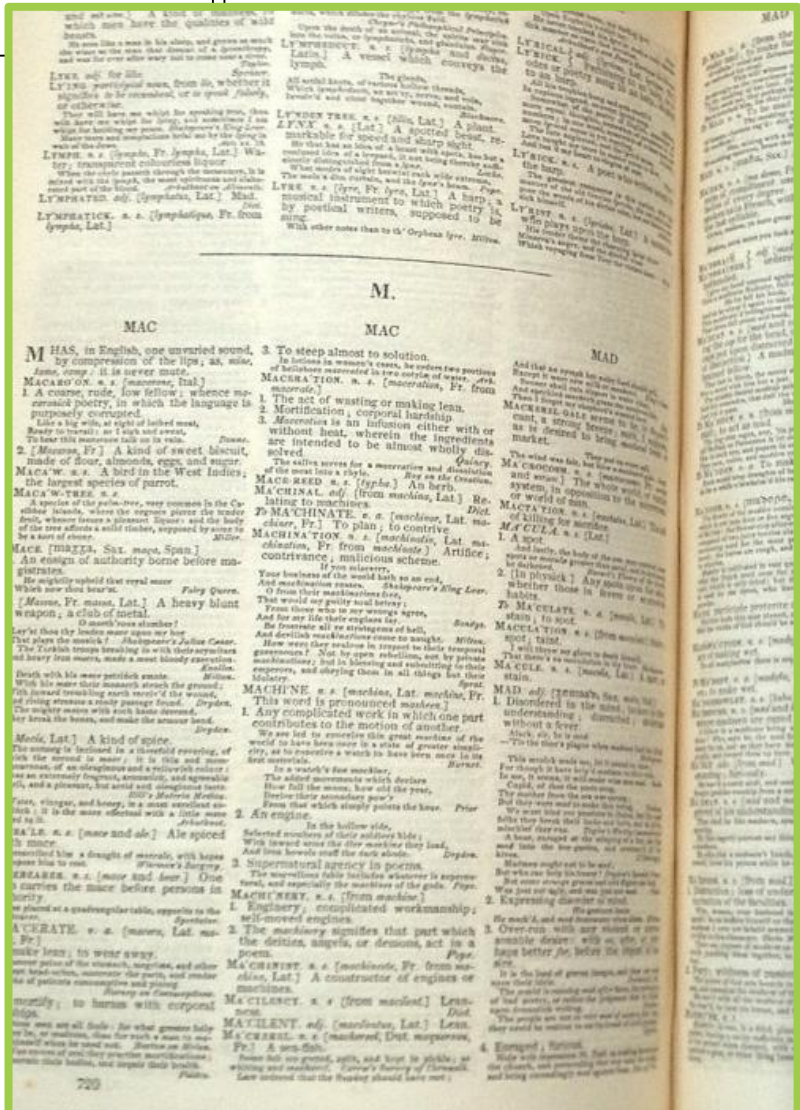
In the end, Johnson's poverty forced him to leave Oxford without finishing his degree. In 1735, when he was 25 years old, he married a widow named Elizabeth Porter. Two years later, he travelled to London, where he began to work as a journalist.



Over the next several decades, Johnson would write many books, poems and essays. His most famous work, though, was undoubtedly his great Dictionary of the English Language, published in 1755. The dictionary was an immense labour, taking him eight years to complete – and no wonder, as it contained the definitions of 42,773 words! It was not the first dictionary ever published, but it was the most popular dictionary of its time, and remained so for a staggering 150 years. It was an enormous book, too – nearly half a metre tall, and more than half a metre wide.

The publication of the Dictionary brought Johnson fame – and some fortune, too! King George III granted Johnson a pension of £300 a year, in recognition of his work on the Dictionary. Although he had never managed to go back to Oxford to finish his degree, in later life Johnson was awarded two honorary doctorates, and became known as Dr Samuel Johnson.

Dr Johnson died on December 13th, 1784, and was buried at Westminster Abbey.



## Comprehension questions

1. What were the consequences of the scrofula Johnson suffered from as a baby? Name **two**.

1. ....

2. ....

2. Look at the paragraph which begins: *'Because of Johnson's poor sight ...'*

Why was Johnson angry when his teacher offered him assistance?

.....

3. What qualities did Johnson possess as a child? Name **two**.

1. ....

2. ....

4. *'He loathed the idea that someone had felt he needed their charity.'*

Which of the following is closest in meaning to **loathed**?

Loved    Appreciated    Hated    Understood

5. What was the name of the lady who became Johnson's wife?

.....

6. What was the reason that Johnson became famous?

.....

7. Look at the paragraph beginning: *'Over the next several years ...'*

Find and copy a word which means **unquestionably**.







