

Listen to a talk given about the Welsh language.

Optional activity:

How much do you know about Welsh? Before you listen, try to answer the questions below, then listen and check your answers.

Sentence	A, B or C?
1. From which root did the Welsh word for Wales originate? (a) Germanic; (b) Spanish or (c) French.	
2. How many people speak Welsh? (a) 1 million people; (b) half a million people; (c) less than a quarter of a million people inside Wales.	
3. How many letters are there in the Welsh alphabet? (a) 26; (b) 24 or (c) 28	
4. Compared to 15 years ago is the number of Welsh speakers (a) growing; (b) declining or (c) the same as it was?	

The language of Wales is Welsh – or – if we are going to be correct about this – Cymraeg. The word Cymraeg is actually a Germanic word that means foreigner. Welsh – or Cymraeg – is spoken by half a million people inside Wales and a few hundred thousand people outside Wales – in England and overseas.

Welsh is an Indo European language. It belongs to a branch of Celtic. The Welsh people are descendents of the Galatians. If we travel back through History we can find links with Irish and Scots Gaelic and also to Breton.

These days everybody in Wales speaks English – and in the major cities and urban centres of the south it is not that usual to hear Welsh spoken. But there are parts of Wales – especially in the north and west – where the Welsh language is more widely spoken, where people use Welsh as their first language and where, in some cases, English is hardly ever spoken.

Welsh is not as difficult to learn as you might think. It has regular spelling and is phonetic. It is easier than English – much easier. Spelling is straightforward in Welsh and pronunciation too – because every letter is pronounced.

The Welsh alphabet has 28 letters. Most are the same as the letters of the English alphabet but there are a few extra letters and there are others that we don't use – such as J or Z. Sometimes though you *will* come across these other alien letters in Welsh – as borrowings from the English. In fact one of the most common Welsh surnames is Jones – with a J. This is actually a borrowed name from the English – where it was traditionally a Christian name and not a surname. Another example of a borrowed word is zw – Z – W- from the English zoo.

But although for many years Welsh was dying out as a language – these days it's seeing quite a spectacular revival. In 1931 more than 36% of the population spoke Welsh. Over the following year this figure gradually dropped down to around 18% in 1991. But during the following decade the Welsh language was given a tremendous boost. Money was invested in Welsh learning projects and Welsh language schools and the figures started to rise again. This was because of initiatives set up at government level, either from the Welsh Development Agency – or from the Welsh Assembly itself – when it was elected after a referendum in 1999. Two of the Assembly's responsibilities are Education and The Welsh Language – promoting the Welsh language. In 2001 the number of Welsh speakers had gone up to around 20%. That percentage is probably even greater now. We still have a long way to go before we reach the pre-war percentages – but we are certainly moving in the right direction.

Answer key:

1. a; 2.b; 3.c; 4.a.