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AMERICAN  
HERITAGE®

dictionary

of the  
English  
Language

  


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Some compound words (like *bus rapid transit*, *dog whistle*, or *identity theft*) don’t appear on the drop-down list when you type them in the search bar. For best results with compound words, place a quotation mark before the compound word in the search window.

[guide to the dictionary](#)



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**-gene**

*suff.*  
Variant of [-gen](#).

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**gene**  (jēn)

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*n.*  
A hereditary unit consisting of a sequence of DNA that occupies a specific location on a chromosome and is transcribed into an RNA molecule that may function directly or be translated into an amino acid chain. Genes undergo mutation when their DNA sequences change.

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[German *Gen*, from *gen-*, begetting, in Greek words (such as *genos*, race, offspring); see **gena-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

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## Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[Indo-European Roots](#)

[Semitic Roots](#)

The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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