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**whose**  (h z)

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*adj.*

1. The possessive form of [who](#).
2. The possessive form of [which](#).

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[Middle English *whos*, from Old English *hwæs*; see **k<sup>w</sup>o-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

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**Usage Note:** The use of *whose* to refer to inanimate antecedents (as in *We could see a building whose roof was painted gold*) has been criticized by usage commentators since the 1700s. The tradition holds that *whose* should function only as the possessive of *who*, and be limited in reference to persons. Nonetheless, *whose* has been used to refer to inanimate things since the 1300s, and it appears in the works of many illustrious writers, including Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth. This use of *whose* undoubtedly serves a useful purpose, since *which* and *that* do not have possessive forms, and the substitute phrase *of which* is often cumbersome. Thus, the sentence *He pointed to a grove of trees whose trunks were coated with ice* is made somewhat stilted by the avoidance of *whose*: *He pointed to a grove of trees, the trunks of which were coated with ice*. As sentences become more complicated, the use of *of which* can be especially clumsy. In our 2017 survey, 64 percent of the Usage Panel approved of an example in which *whose* refers to a river: *The EPA has decided to dredge the river, whose bottom has been polluted for years*. The association of *whose* with people may have influenced the Panel's response to an example that is syntactically similar to the previous one, in which the antecedent is a book, but the subject of the *whose* clause is a person. Some 85 percent of the Panel accepted the sentence *The book, whose narrator speaks in the first person, is a mock autobiography*. See Usage Notes at [else](#), [which](#), [who](#).

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## Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

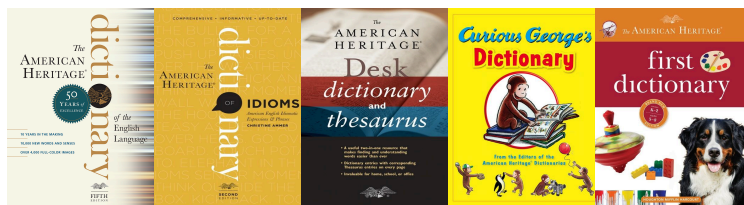
Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

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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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