

Beowulf Project

The Anglo Saxons



Stonehenge (c. 2000 BC)

Early Anglo-Saxon Life

- ✠ Anglo-Saxons: the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes.
- ✠ The Angles, Saxons, and Jutes came from Denmark, Holland, Germany, and Scandinavia.
- ✠ The Britons resisted the invaders for a number of years under the leadership of a great king, possibly the inspiration for the legendary King Arthur.

Anglo-Saxon Society

- ✠ highly organized tribal units (kingdoms)
- ✠ Each tribe ruled by a king chosen by a council of elders (*witan*)
- ✠ Thanes: the upper class, earls, or free warriors
- ✠ Thralls: slaves who did the farming and domestic work
- ✠ Freemen: small group who earned possessions and special favors

Anglo-Saxon Society (con't)

- ✦ The Anglo-Saxons farmed, maintained local governments, and created fine crafts, especially metalwork.
- ✦ Eventually, the small kingdoms developed into seven large ones: Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex, Sussex, Essex, East Anglia, and Kent.
- ✦ This development produced a new language: Old English.
- ✦ Lived close to their animals (to protect animals and provide warmth)
- ✦ Lived in single-family homes surrounding a communal hall and protected by a wooden stockade fence



Characteristics of the Anglo-Saxons

- ✦ Hard fighters and bold sea warriors
- ✦ Admired physical strength, bravery, loyalty, fairness, and honesty
- ✦ Great love of personal freedom
- ✦ Boastful, reckless, cruel, and bloodthirsty
- ✦ Enjoyed conflict, swimming matches, horse races, banqueting, drinking mead, singing songs, and storytelling
- ✦ Also **flyting**, a conflict of wits between two warriors where each praises his own deeds and belittles the other's

Role of Women

- ✦ The wife of an earl or thane supervised weaving and dyeing of clothes, the slaughter of livestock, the making of bread, beekeeping, and the brewing of mead (fermented honey).
- ✦ Women inherited and held property.
- ✦ Married women retained control over their property.
- ✦ With the coming of Christianity, many women entered religious communities, and some became powerful abbesses.

Required Assignment # 3

- ✦ Movie and Handout
- ✦ Michael Wood's The Story of England
- ✦ Romans to Normans

The Scops

- ✦ The communal hall offered shelter and a place for council meetings.
- ✦ The communal hall was also a place for storytellers or bards (**scops**) who shared (orally) the stories of the Anglo-Saxons and their gods and heroes.
- ✦ The Anglo-Saxons valued storytelling as equal to fighting, hunting, and farming.
- ✦ A line of Anglo-Saxon or Old English poetry is characterized by **four main stresses** and is divided in half by a pause (**caesura**).

Types of Anglo-Saxon Verse

- ✠ Heroic Poetry: recounts the achievements of warriors involved in great battles
- ✠ Elegiac Poetry: sorrowful laments that mourn the deaths of loved ones and the loss of the past
- ✠ Anglo-Saxon poets: Caedmon, Cynewulf

Anglo-Saxon Beliefs

- ✦ Pagan, polytheistic
- ✦ Very pessimistic view of life (due to the ever-present dangers of death by accident or warfare)
- ✦ Human life in the hands of fate (**wyrd**)
- ✦ Did not believe in an afterlife
- ✦ Immortality only earned through heroic actions
- ✦ Sharp contrast to the Christian belief in an individual's free will

Anglo-Saxon Beliefs (con't)

- ✦ The early Anglo-Saxons worshipped ancient Germanic or Norse gods:
- ✦ Odin/Woden: chief of the gods, god of death, poetry, and magic
- ✦ Fria: Woden's wife and goddess of the home
- ✦ Tiu: the god of war and the sky
- ✦ Thunor/Thor: god of thunder and lightning
- ✦ Frijz/Frigga: queen of the heavens
- ✦ The names of these gods survive today in our words *Tuesday*, *Wednesday*, *Thursday*, and *Friday*
- ✦ The dragon: personification of evil and death and the protector of treasure (the grave mound); also associated with the Vikings

The Coming of Christianity

- ✦ In 432, the whole of Celtic Ireland was converted by Patrick, a Romanized Briton.
- ✦ In 563, a group of Irish monks led by a soldier and abbot named Columba established a monastery on the island of Iona off the West coast of Scotland.
- ✦ Later, the Roman church began to send missionaries throughout Europe.
- ✦ In 597, Saint Augustine converted the King of England and establish a monastery at Canterbury.
- ✦ By 650, most of England was Christian in name, if not in fact.

Christianity and Literature

- ✦ The church brought education and written literature to England.
- ✦ Monks established churches, monasteries, and libraries.
- ✦ Monks recorded and duplicated illuminated manuscripts, at first only written in Latin.
- ✦ Oral literature was transcribed into written form.
- ✦ Monks preserved not only Latin and Greek classics but also popular literature (*Beowulf*).

The Venerable Bede (673-735)

✦ A monk

✦ Considered the “father of English history”

✦ Wrote *A History of the English Church and People*: the clearest account we have of Anglo-Saxon times

Anglo-Saxon
Manuscript

of gefræmede pillum in þisse worulde fremot pulorist
onam in haligra hylc harnan asagan on tregla arto
nebiþ þam oþru þa seþe on oþru medum turgū de
þam laraþ in lahtum nebað þa laan gelic mid pul
wor eunng pte þe beþurum gif þu and modne wyl
þeate þe gū on þæwe þambid þimle gif ge geodepad
godst agn bearn pilsum in worlde gif me se ptege ne
lang forþon perculon a hcegarde hælo næost gūmunan
in mode mæla gehwilecum þone welftan þigora pal
daro AMEN

V ID SIÐ MAÐOLAD
þoro hord on læc seþe mæst mæst þa oþru
wifan folca goro fæde oþhe flette gehah
myne licne mæstum hanc þrom myrgingum æþe
le on pocon he mid alhilde wæle þæst þe bban
foruman siþe hied eunngst ham ge wite tustan
of ongle wuman wicst þæst þæst logan ongon þa
þom þæcan wela ic monna gefrægn mæstum wæl
wan wæl þæwa gehwile þæwum lifgan wyl oþru
oþrum edle wædan seþe hif þæwa stol gehwone wile.

Required Assignment # 4

- ✦ The Seafarer
- ✦ The Wanderer
- ✦ The Wife's Lament

The Danish Invasion

- ✦ Due to rising population and limited farmland, many Scandinavians (the Norse and the Danes) took to the seas—the Vikings.
- ✦ In 800, Danish raiders attacked Britain.
- ✦ The Norse settled in Northumbria, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.
- ✦ The Danes targeted eastern and southern England.



Helga Holm
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Restored Viking Vessels

Viking Raids: “From the Fury of the Northmen, O Lord, Deliver Us”

- ✦ Sacked and plundered monasteries
- ✦ Stole sacred religious objects
- ✦ Burned entire communities
- ✦ Murdered villagers
- ✦ Halted the growth of learning

By the middle of the ninth century, most of England had fallen. The Vikings called their territory **Danelaw**.

Alfred the Great

- ✦ Only the Saxon kingdom of **Wessex** managed to fight the Danes to a standstill.
- ✦ In 871, **Alfred** ascended to the Wessex throne.
- ✦ Alfred resisted further Danish encroachment.
- ✦ A 886 truce formally divided England: the Danish ruled the east and north; the Saxons ruled the south.
- ✦ Alfred translated the Bede's *History* and other works from Latin into English to make them more accessible, as well as instituted the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a history of England from the earliest days through 1154.



King

Alfred

the

Great

Danish Contributions

- ✦ Built their Danelaw communities as military fortresses and trading centers
- ✦ Generated growth of English towns
- ✦ Expanded English vocabulary as Norse words crept into the language
- ✦ For example, *law* is Danish, and its use reflects the Danes' interest in legal procedures.

Terms to Know

- ✦ Caesuras- rhythmic breaks in the middle of lines, where the canter could pause for breath.
- ✦ Kennings- two-word poetic renamings of people, places, and things, such as the kenning: *whale's home* for the sea
- ✦ Assonance- the repetition of vowel sounds in unrhymed, stressed syllables (for example: batter those ramparts”).
- ✦ Alliteration- the repetition of initial consonant sounds in accented syllable

Kennings

✧ There are three types of kennings.

✧ Compound

◆ Sky-candle

◆ Whale-road

✧ Prepositional phrases

◆ Storm of swords

◆ Guardian of people

✧ Possessives

◆ Seabird's bath

◆ Ocean's face

Required Assignment # 5



✦ Kennings Handout

Vocabulary

- ✦ Admonish- advise, caution
- ✦ Sentinel- person or animal that guards
- ✦ Fervent- having or showing great warmth of feeling
- ✦ Rancor- ill will, to have bad feelings for someone or something
- ✦ Compassionate- sympathizing
- ✦ Grievous- causing sorrow; hard to bear
- ✦ Winsomeness- charm, delightfulness
- ✦ Rapture- joy; great pleasure
- ✦ Redress- compensation, as for a wrong
- ✦ Blithe- cheerful

Vocabulary

- ✦ Reparation- something making up for a wrong or an injury
- ✦ Solace- comfort; relief
- ✦ Purge- purify; cleanse
- ✦ Writhing- making twisting or turning motions
- ✦ Massive- big and solid; bulky
- ✦ Loathsome- disgusting

Dichotomy

✦ Opposites on the same spectrum.

✦ Examples:

- ◆ Light/Dark

- ◆ Good/Evil

✦ Non-examples

- ◆ Apples/oranges

- ◆ BMW/Mercedes

Epic

- ✦ The epic is a long narrative poem, that celebrates the deeds of a legendary or heroic figure.
- ✦ Epics are some of the earliest forms of literature.
- ✦ Epics give us insight into a people's cultural and religious beliefs.
- ✦ Epic heroes often battle forces that threaten the order of the world.

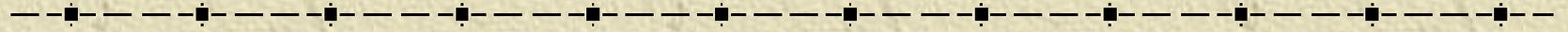
Characteristics of an Epic Hero

- ✦ Strong- strength of mind and body
- ✦ Ethical- conforms to standards of conduct- does what is right.
- ✦ Quest- journey of significance or importance
- ✦ Glorified- honor and fame, stories are told about the hero long after death

Legendary Hero

- ✦ A legendary hero is a larger-than-life character whose accomplishments are told in tales.
- ✦ Beowulf's confidence, strength, and victories make him a legendary hero.
- ✦ He embodies the things his culture holds dear: loyalty, bravery, and honor.

Required Assignment # 6



✠ Epic Hero Poster Assignment

The Beowulf Legend

- ✦ *Beowulf* is an **epic**, a long, heroic poem, about a great pagan warrior renowned for his courage, strength, and dignity.
- ✦ *Beowulf* is the national epic of England, because it is was the first such work composed in the English language.
- ✦ The poem includes references to Christian ideas and Latin classics but also present are the values of a warrior society, dignity, bravery, and prowess in battle.

Beowulf

- ✦ Written c. 700 C.E.
- ✦ Author unknown
- ✦ Often called the beginning of English literature
- ✦ Written in what is now called Old English
- ✦ Only one complete original copy remains

The Mead Hall

- ✦ The society they lived in hinged on the mead hall as its center of life.
- ✦ It was the place where the warriors could be with their lord in peace and safety.
- ✦ During this time period having a lord to serve was the way society worked. To not have a Lord or a mead hall was to not have a home.
- ✦ Social, governmental, emotional center of the village
- ✦ Mead = honey-based wine