

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

449 - 1066

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

“In reading great literature, I become a thousand men and yet remain myself.”

~ C. S. Lewis

Novelist and Essayist

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

449: Traditional date of Anglo-Saxon invasion in Britain.

1066: The Normans conquer the Anglo-Saxons.

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

## Anglo-Saxon Life:

- They built small towns with only two or three families.
- Houses were made of wood with thatched roofs.
- Each house had only one room with a hearth for cooking.

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

## The social status of the Anglo-Saxons

- All Anglo-Saxons were either freemen or slaves.
- Freemen owned land and slaves.
- The richest freemen were called “thanes”

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

## Entertainment:

- They loved stories. The most popular was *Beowulf* - was first written down in the 8th & 9th centuries – many years after it was first told.
- They also loved music and songs.

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

## Crime and Punishment:

- There were no prisons.
- Most criminals were punished with fines. A murderer would have been fined to pay money to the victim's family.
- For minor crimes, a person's nose or hand may have been cut off.

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

## Anglo-Saxon Influence:

- The six centuries of Anglo-Saxon rule left a lasting influence on England.
- Many places are still called by their Anglo-Saxon names.
- Many Anglo-Saxon words are still used.
- Our current system of law is also based on the Anglo-Saxon ideas.



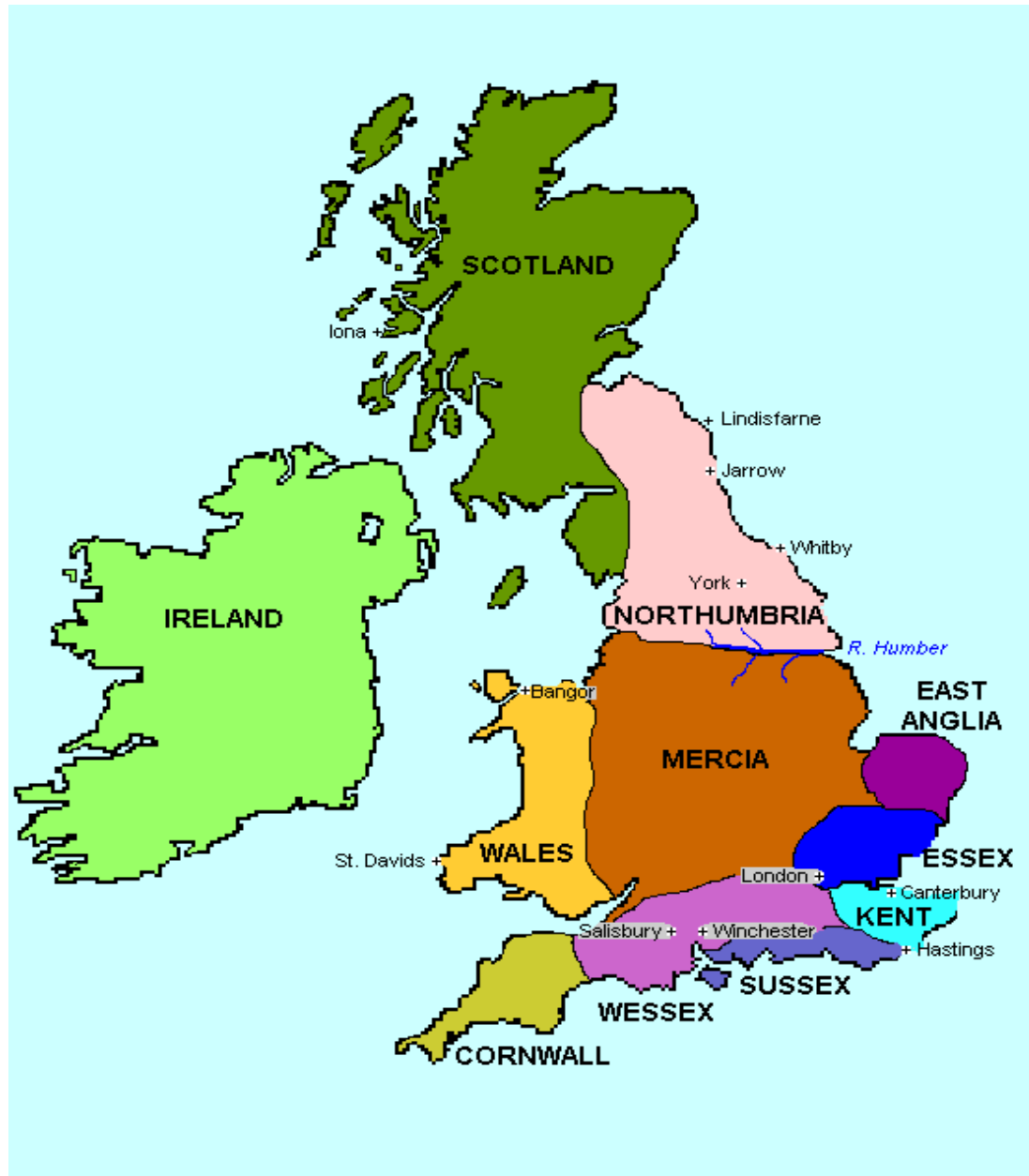
# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

- \* A-S were made up of three tribes: the Angle, the Saxon, and the Jute tribes. These tribes crossed the North Sea to reach Britain.
- \* The Angles and Saxons came from Germany.
- \* The Jutes came from Denmark.
- \* The tribes became known as the Anglo-Saxons and took control of Britain.

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes



# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes



# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

Who lived in Britain before the invasion of the Anglo-Saxons?

- The Romans – we know the Romans were there as early as 55 B.C.
- Names of British cities developed from Roman military camps survive today with names ending in –*caster* and –*chester* (such as Lancaster and Manchester), both of which derive from Latin *castra*, meaning “camp.”

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

- Britain's 5th century invaders united into a nation called England.
- Their Germanic dialects evolved into a language called English – usually referred to as Old English to distinguish it from later forms of the language.
- Old English was very different from the English we speak today: harsher in sound, written phonetically, and with no silent letters.
- The most valuable characteristic of the language was its ability to change and grow, adopting new words as the need arose.

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

- Early Anglo-Saxons did not have a writing system, but they did have an alphabet called the runes (or the runic alphabet).
- Mainly used for inscriptions on things such as coins, monuments, jewelry, weapons, stone, and other objects.
- Their literature was composed and transmitted orally rather than in writing.
- Runes were believed to possess magical powers.

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

feoh

(cattle, weath)

f

ur

(aurochs)

u

þorn

(thorn)

þ

ōs

(god)

o

rād

(journey/riding)

r

cen

(torch)

c

giefu

(gift)

g[]

wyn

(joy)

þ

hægl

(hail)

h

nied

(necessity/trouble)

n

is

(ice)

i

gear

(year)

j

ēoh

(yew)

3

peor

(?)

p

eolh

(sedge?)

x

sigel

(sun)

s

tiw/tir

(Tiw - a god)

t

beorc

(birch)

b

eoh

(horse)

e

man

(man)

m

lagu

(water/sea)

l

Ing

(a god)

ng

eþel

(land/estate)

ce

dæg

(day)

d

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

- Early A-S were pagans, meaning they believed in many gods and reincarnation.
- The dead were cremated or buried with their belongings to use in the next life.
- A-S were slowly converted to Christianity by monks that built many churches and monasteries.



# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

- The spread of Christianity in Britain was accompanied by a spread of literacy.
- Poetry remained an oral art, but the poems were now more likely to be written down.
- Only a fraction of Anglo-Saxon poetry survives.
- Manuscripts were often produced centuries after the poems were composed.

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

- The most famous epic poem is *Beowulf*.
- Most Old English poems are anonymous.
- Most poems were written in Latin. The scribes were often monks – Latin was the language of the church.

# Anglo-Saxon/Beowulf Notes

- Vikings from Scandinavia began invading Britain in the 8th & 9th centuries, but could never completely take-over control of the area.
- The Anglo-Saxon period ended in 1066 when the Normans defeated the A-S (the Norman Conquest).

# Vocabulary – Literary Terms

## 1) Alliteration:

- Repeated consonant sounds (any letter besides a, e, i, o, u) that must be at the beginning of the word(s).
- Example: Sam sent his shoes to the shoe repair shop.

# Vocabulary – Literary Terms

## 2) Assonance:

- Repeated vowel sounds (a, e, i, o u) that can be anywhere in a word.
- Example: Jim hit a homerun in the fourth inning.

# Vocabulary – Literary Terms

## 3) Kenning:

- Phrase that replaces (or renames) a noun.
- Examples: Battle = storm of swords  
Teacher = educator of students  
Pencil = writing utensil

# Vocabulary – Literary Terms

## 4) Caesura:

- Any type of punctuation that allows the storyteller to pause and/or take a breath

# Vocabulary – Literary Terms

5) Theme – page 1484

6) Epic Tale – page 1467

7) Epic Hero – page 1470



# Vocabulary – Reading Terms

- 1) Talon – a claw
- 2) Prow – pointed projecting front part of a ship
- 3) Hilt – the handle of a sword or dagger
- 4) Scabbard – a sheath for a sword or dagger
- 5) Lair – the den of a wild animal
- 6) Sinews – the tendons that connect muscle to bones
- 7) Spawned – born
- 8) Writhing – twisting and turning in pain
- 9) Forged – heated and wrought (worked) metal

# Vocabulary – Reading Terms

- 10) Mail Shirt – flexible body armor made of metal links
- 11) Infamous – having a bad reputation; notorious
- 12) Mead Hall – beer hall; banquet hall
- 13) Lament – an audible expression of grief; wail
- 14) Shroud – cloth in which dead bodies are wrapped
- 15) Deep-Keeled Ship – deep bottomed ship
- 16) Spit – a narrow point of land extending into a body of water