

# A Brief History of English

...or why this language is so difficult to master...

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# Overview of English Influences

## Pre-History-1066 A.D.

### C.R.A.V.N.

- Celts (Brythons and Gaels) → up to 55 B.C.
- Roman Conquest → 55 B.C. - 407 A.D.
- Anglo-Saxon Period → 407 A.D. - 787 A.D.
- Viking Invasions → 787 A.D. - 1066 A.D.
- Norman Conquest begins in → 1066 A.D.



# “The Common Source”

- ✧ **Sir William Jones**- a British judge stationed in India in 1780 discovers that Sanskrit bears a striking resemblance to Latin and Greek.
  - ✧ Indo-European “the common source” (languages now spoken by 1/3 of the human race include Latin, French, Spanish, Slavic language, Russian, the Celtic languages, Irish, Scots Gaelic, and the offshoots of German- Dutch and English.
- ✧ **Jacob Grimm**, one of the famous Brothers Grimm, established that the German *vater* (and English father) has the same root as the Sanskrit/Latin *pitar/pater*. Words such as me, new, seven, and mother were also found to share common ancestry.
- ✧ INDO-EUROPEAN IS THE COMMON SOURCE OF LANGUAGE



# Indo-European languages





# Pre-Historical/Pre-Roman



# The Celts/Pre-Roman

- The island we know as England was invaded by two groups of people: 1. Celts: known as Bythons (now spelled Britons) and 2. Gaels (who settled on the island now known as Ireland).
- The Celts were Pagans and their religion was known as “animism” a Latin word for “spirit.”
- Druids were their priests and when clans had disputes, they intervened to settle them.



# Roman Occupation

## Hadrian's Wall





# Important Events During Roman Occupation

- Julius Caesar begins invasion/occupation in 55 B.C.
- Occupation completed by Claudius in 1st Century A.D.
- Romans “leave” in 407 A.D. because Visigoths attack Rome (this leaves Britain defenseless)
- St. Augustine (the “other” St. Augustine) lands in Kent in 597 and converts King Aethelbert (King of Kent, the oldest Saxon settlement) to Christianity; becomes first Archbishop of Caterbury

# The Most Important Results of the Roman Occupation

- Established camps that eventually became towns.
- Maintained relative peace.
- Latin heavily influenced the English language.
- Christianity begins to replace Paganism, especially after St. Augustine converts King Aethelbert in 597.



# The Anglo-Saxon Period 410-787 A.D.









# Important Events in the (First) Anglo-Saxon Period

- 410-450 Angles and Saxons invade from Baltic shores of Germany, and Jutes invade from Jutland peninsula in Denmark, thus driving out the Celts.
- Nine Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms eventually become the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy (England not unified) or “Seven Sovereign Kingdoms”.
- King Alfred “the Great” managed peace against the Danes for about a generation, until William of Normandy defeated them in 1066.

# Anglo-Saxon Literature

- Germanic ethos that celebrated the warrior and his exploits.
- Most storytelling was oral.
- **Old English Poetry** became distinctive...
  1. **Alliteration**- repetition of consonant sounds
  2. **Kenning**- a metaphor expressed as a compound noun - “whale-path” for the sea  
**Caesura**- a break or pause in poetry
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**RUNES: Anglo-Saxon alphabet/OLD ENGLISH.** Runes were probably brought to Britain in the 5<sup>th</sup> century by the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians, and were used until about the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Runic inscriptions are mostly found on jewelry, weapons, stones and other objects. Very few examples of Runic writing on manuscripts have survived.



# Anglo-Saxon Poetry and Riddles

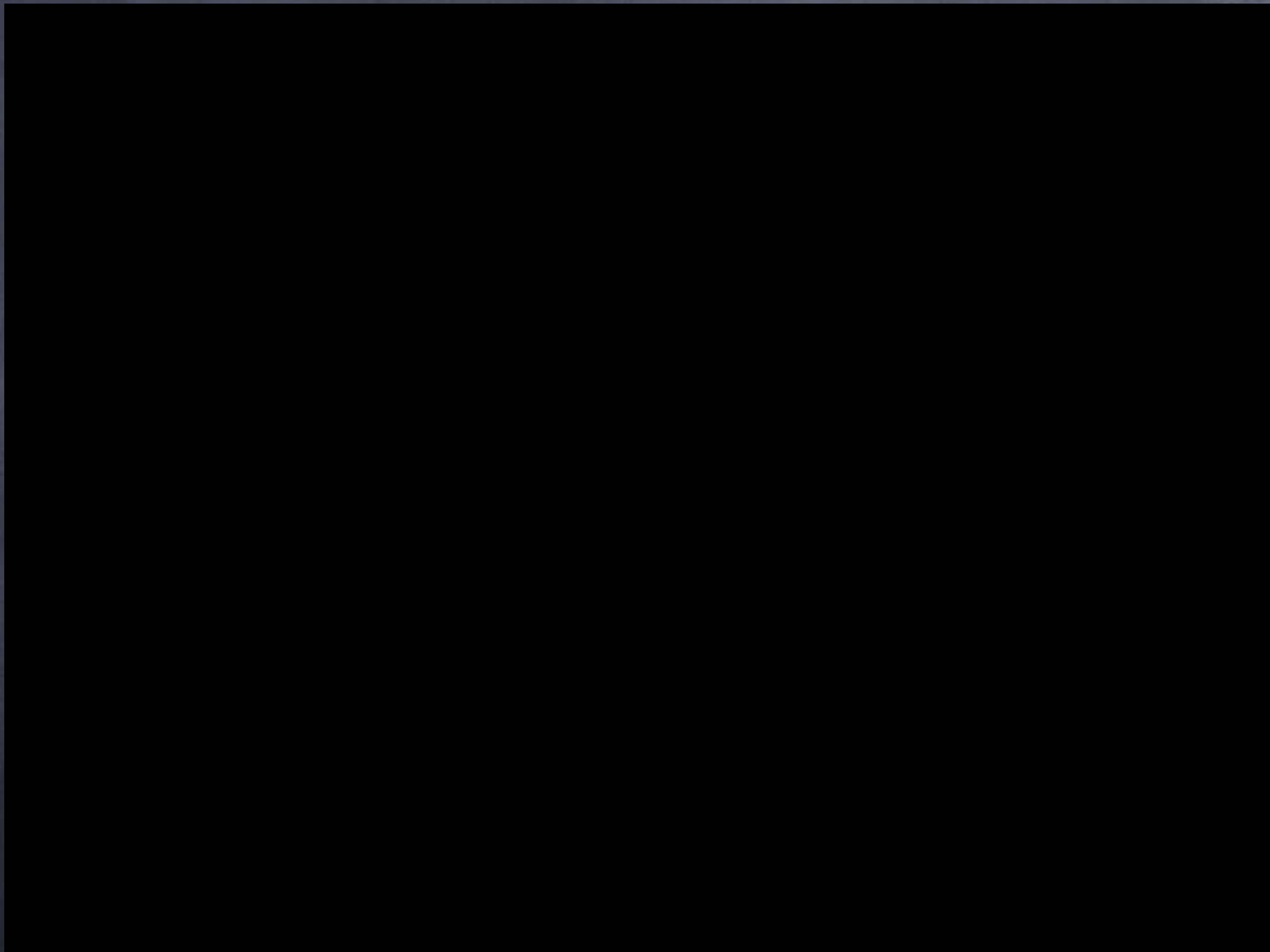
## *The Book of Exeter*

- Contains more than 30 poems and 90 riddles.
- Written down by monks in about 975, our primary source of Anglo-Saxon poetry
- Dominant mood in poetry is elegiac, or mournful
- Dominant tone of riddles is light and somewhat bawdy (for entertainment purposes- think SNL).

# *Beowulf...*

- The major text we will read from this period is the EPIC *Beowulf*. It is the story of a Scandinavian (GEAT) warrior or knight probably in the sixth century, who comes to help a neighboring tribe, the Danes, who are being attacked by a monster.
- We study English history to understand the CONTEXT of *Beowulf*, and we study *Beowulf* to understand the world which was OLD ENGLISH.
- Consider the fighting, hunting, farming and loving Anglo-Saxon heritage. The Non-Christians only hope was for fame and commemoration in poetry.
- *Beowulf* is considered the shining star of Old English literature.
- *The Book of Exeter* is the largest surviving collection of poetry.





# Viking Invasion

- The Vikings were sea-faring, explorers, traders and warriors, Scandinavians during the 8th-11th centuries.
- Expeditions that plundered and ended in conquest and settlements of Britain.
- King Alfred “the Great” in 871 was able to use the language to appeal the English and his efforts saved the language.



# Importance of the Viking Invasions


- Politically and Culturally- there was no central government or church\* BUT The Anglo-Saxon Code is evident in *Beowulf*.
- Linguistically
  - Old English is born- mainly Germanic (although even Germanic languages are derived from a theoretical Proto-Indo-European language, the grandparent of classical languages such as Greek, Sanskrit, Latin and German).
  - LOTS of dialects of Old English- because there are several separate Kingdoms, many founded by essentially five or six different cultures: Angles, Saxons, Frisians, Jutes, Danes and Swedes.
  - \*King Alfred “the Great” (ruled approx. 871-899 A.D.) was one of the first Anglo-Saxon kings to push Vikings back; in fact, he was one of the first kings consolidating power, unifying Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

# Norman Invasion

- In 1066 at the Battle of Hastings, the Normans (powerful Northern Frenchmen) defeat the English and start a century-long conquest of England.
- William (Duke of Normandy) crowns himself the ruler of England (1066) and establishes a social system: Feudalism- a hierarchy of rulers under one lord; individuals gave military and other services to their overlords in return for protection and land.
- Cultural/Political/Literature Influence:
  - French becomes official language of politics and power and exerts enormous influence on Old English, which becomes obsolete.
  - William maintains efficient system of government of Anglo-Saxons, but replaces the English nobility with Normans, and creates a great class division that oppressed the Anglo-Saxons.



# A Brief Glimpse of the History of English from “Our Father”

<p><b>OLD ENGLISH</b></p> 	<p>400-1066</p>	<p><b>Beowulf</b></p>	<p>Fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum          si þin nama gehalgod tobecume þin rice gewurþe þin willa on eorðan swa swa on heofonum          urne gedæghwamlican hlaf syle us to dæg          and forgyf us ure gyltas swa swa we forgyfað urum gyltendum          and ne gelæd þu us on costnunge ac alys us of yfele soþlice.</p>
<p><b>Middle English</b></p>	<p>1066-1485</p>	<p><b>Chaucer</b></p>	<p>Oure fadir þat art in heuenes halwid be þi name;          þi reume or kyngdom come to be. Be þi wille don in herþe as it is doun in heuene.          yeue to us today oure eche dayes bred.          And foryeue to us oure dettis þat is oure synnys as we foryeuen to oure dettouris þat is to men þat han synned in us.          And lede us not into temptacion but delyuere us from euyl.</p>
<p><b>Early Modern English</b></p>	<p>1485-1800</p>	<p><b>Shakespeare</b></p>	<p>Our father which art in heauen, hallowed be thy name.          Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heauen.          Giue us this day our daily bread.          And forgiue us our debts as we forgiue our debtors.          And lead us not into temptation, but deliuer us from euill. Amen.</p>
<p><b>Modern English</b></p>	<p>1800-present</p>	<p><b>Austen</b></p>	<p>Extra Credit! Write “The Our Father” in Modern English.</p>

# So, what do I need to know about the History of the English Language?

- Major dates
  - 55 B.C.
  - 43 A.D.
  - 410 A.D.
  - 597 A.D.
  - 1066 A.D.



## Major people...

- Julius Caesar
- St. Augustine
- King Ethelbert of Kent
- King Alfred “the great”
- William the Conqueror
- William, Duke of Normandy

# What I really need to know about “the making of the English language”

- Major cultural/linguistic influences
  - Celtic
  - Roman
  - Anglo-Saxon
  - Viking
  - Norman



# Stephen Colbert

## Satire and “The Word”

### English

[http://colbertnation.mtvnimages.com/images/shows/colbert\\_report/video\\_archive/season\\_2/cr\\_02123\\_03\\_wrd\\_v6.jpg?width=80](http://colbertnation.mtvnimages.com/images/shows/colbert_report/video_archive/season_2/cr_02123_03_wrd_v6.jpg?width=80)

# Runic Writing...

- Write Your Name in Runes at Nova
- Runes were used by early Germanic tribes on documents in stone, wood and metal. They relied on these symbols not only for writing but also to tell fortunes, cast spells, and provide protection.
- The runic alphabet, or Futhark, gets its name from the first six sounds, much like our alphabet “A,B,C’s”.
- Can you write your name in Runes?
- Check out the Nova website:  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/vikings/runes.html>



Thank you