



# Communicating in the English Language: A Brief History

## Before Reading

- What is different between the language in rap music and rock music? What is different or similar between the two?
- What difference do you note when you watch a Canadian, American or British movie? Which type of movie do you find easiest to watch and understand? Which one is the most difficult?

## While Reading

See *Take notes*, p. VI

- There are many words written in italics. Why?
- Draw four columns on a loose-leaf sheet. In the first column, write the names of geographical places that are mentioned in the text; in the second, the corresponding nationalities; in the third, the names of the people; in the fourth, the dates and what happened on those dates.

Although it may be hard to believe, people did not always speak English as it is spoken today.

English has evolved throughout history. Here is a short history of the English language.

## OLD ENGLISH

The period in which Old English was spoken lasted from about 450 **CE** to 1100 **CE**. It started with the departure of the Roman legions and the arrival of three tribes from northwest Germany and Denmark. These were the *Angles*, *Saxons* and *Jutes*. They were **belligerent** groups and so aggressive that they pushed most of the original *Celtic*-speaking inhabitants into *Scotland*, *Wales* and *Cornwall* (a southwestern region of Britain). Others crossed the *English Channel* and settled in *Brittany*, on the northwest coast of France, where a variation of the Celtic language is still spoken today.

### CE

Common Era, the years following the birth of Christ

### belligerent

aggressive, hostile, warlike people

## Vocabulary

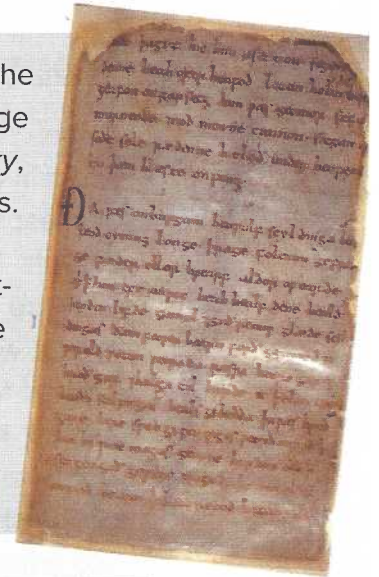
The various languages of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes became mixed and that gave us the *Anglo-Saxon* language, which we refer to as Old English. In the *6th century*, Christianity arrived in the British Isles and introduced Latin words into the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary. Words such as baptism, martyr, bishop, priest and many more had been absorbed into the Latin vocabulary via other languages like Greek.



Around 878 CE, Britain received the visit of another northern group, the Vikings. They came from modern-day Scandinavia and spoke a language known as Old Norse. They enriched the English language with words like *sky*, *egg*, *leg*, *husband*, *anger*, *ugly*, *odd*, *give*, *get*, *take*, *call*, *die* and lots of others.

It was during that period that one of the most famous of **epic** poems was written, *Beowulf*. It dates from around the year 1000, but unfortunately no one knows who the author was. Either the author wanted to remain anonymous or someone tore off the page with a name on it.

Page from  
*Beowulf* manuscript



## MIDDLE ENGLISH

In 1066, *William, Duke of Normandy* decided to organize a small expedition to England. The reason for that “small expedition” was that William simply wanted England for himself. He thought he deserved it and had decided to take it. *King Harold*, who ruled England at that time, was not too pleased about simply handing England over to William. So, they fought at a place called *Hastings* and when it was all over, Harold was dead and William had conquered England. You are probably wondering what all this has to do with the English language. Since William was now King of England and he spoke French, it became the language of the court, administration and culture. The Anglo-Saxon language remained the language of the lower classes and **peasants**. For example, if you belonged to the nobility, you would **dine** on beef, veal, mutton and pork, whereas if you were from the lower classes you would eat cow, calf, sheep and swine.

### epic

Long poem about the actions of great men and women or about a nation’s history.

### peasants

A farmer who owned or rented a small piece of land.

### dine

to eat

## Vocabulary



Bayeux Tapestry depicting the Norman invasion of England, 1066  
w/Shutterstock, Inc.

Since French was now the language spoken at court, new words entered the English vocabulary, such as *crown* (*couronne*), *castle* (*chateau*), *court* (*cour*), *army* (*armée*), *beauty* (*beauté*), *servant* (*serviteur*) and quite a few more. In fact, there were about 10,000 new words borrowed from the Normans.



## MODERN ENGLISH

Some people say that *Shakespeare* wrote in Old English. In fact, the works of Shakespeare were written in Modern English. The language is a little different from the English we are used to hearing or that we read today, but it is still considered Modern English. Shakespeare is said to have added about 2,000 new words to the English language. He did this by changing nouns into verbs, verbs into adjectives, connecting words never before used together, adding prefixes and suffixes, and even devising wholly new and original words. Some of the words we owe to Shakespeare are *assassination*, *addiction*, *bedroom*, *eyeball*, *noiseless*, *champion*, *obscene*, *fixture*, *critic*, *countless* and *moonbeam*.

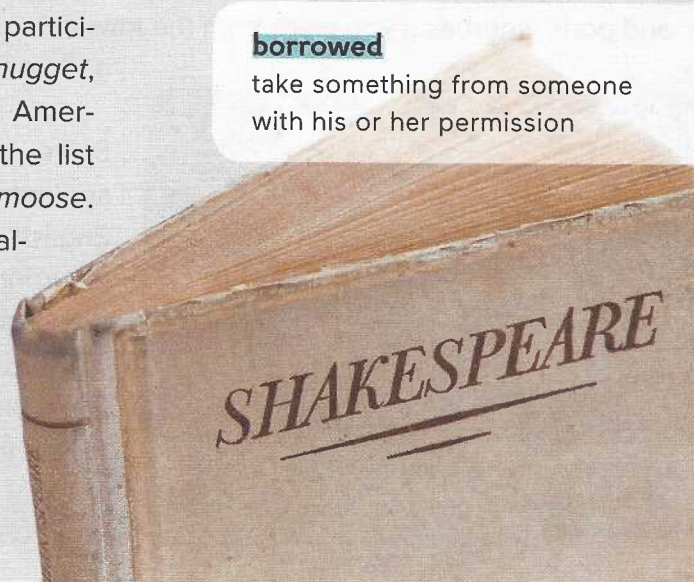
During the 17th and 18th centuries, English explorers travelled the world. As they visited new countries and regions, they also added new words to the English language. From the Caribbean they borrowed *barbecue*, *canoe* and *cannibal*, from India came *yoga* and *bungalow*. Africa gave the English language *voodoo* and *zombie* and Australia participated with words such as *nugget*, *boomerang* and *kangaroo*. The American continent added words to the list such as *raccoon*, *squash* and *moose*. Germany gave English *pretzels*, Italians added *piano*, *radio*, *volt/voltage* and, of course, *pizza* and *pasta*, while the Dutch contributed *coleslaw*.

As you have probably realized by now, the English language has **borrowed** words and expressions from almost every other language in the world. Even today, English is in constant evolution. Words that did not exist 30, 40 or 50 years ago are now in the English dictionary. Words such as *email*, *Internet*, *download*, *upscale*, *downsize*, *toolbar*, *blog*, *website*, etc. With the arrival of texting, writing has also changed; it is getting shorter and shorter. For example; FYI means “for your information”; BTW, “by the way”; FAQ, “frequently asked questions”; and LOL, “laughing out loud,” just to mention a few.

The English language has come a long way since the Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded Britain. Today there are between 375 and 400 million people whose native tongue is English, and approximately one billion people for whom it is a second or third language. Naturally, each English-speaking country has its particular accents and dialects.

### **borrowed**

take something from someone with his or her permission



## After Reading

Answer each question with a complete sentence.

1 How many periods have there been in the history of the English language?

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2 Which tribes are responsible for the Anglo-Saxon language?

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3 In which period was French spoken in England?

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4 After the Norman conquest, Anglo-Saxon was the language of which social classes?

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5 How many new words did Shakespeare give to the English language and how?

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6 Name three countries from which English borrowed words.

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7 According to the text, how has writing changed?

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8 How often has England been invaded and by whom?

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9 Where is the Celtic language spoken outside Great Britain and why?

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10 Before the arrival of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, which language was spoken in England?

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## Abbreviations

As you read in the text, writing in English is tending to use shorter forms. People are texting more and more and to save time, they use a lot of abbreviations. In the following exercise, match the abbreviations in the word bank with their meanings.

AKA • ASAP • B4 • BRB • BTW • CU • CUS • CUT • C&P • CUL8R • DIY • F2F • GR8  
HAK • IDK • L8R • LOL • N/A • OIC • P2P • QT • RU • W4 • 2D • 2MRW • 4YEO • < 3

Example: For your eyes only 4YEO

- |                      |       |                        |       |
|----------------------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| a) See you           | _____ | n) Cutie               | _____ |
| b) I don't know      | _____ | o) Also known as       | _____ |
| c) Hugs and kisses   | _____ | p) By the way          | _____ |
| d) Later             | _____ | q) Copy and paste      | _____ |
| e) Are you?          | _____ | r) Before              | _____ |
| f) Laughing out loud | _____ | s) Do it yourself      | _____ |
| g) Oh, I see         | _____ | t) Person to person    | _____ |
| h) Be right back     | _____ | u) Not available       | _____ |
| i) See you tomorrow  | _____ | v) Love                | _____ |
| j) See you soon      | _____ | w) Today               | _____ |
| k) Great             | _____ | x) As soon as possible | _____ |
| l) Face to face      | _____ | y) See you later       | _____ |
| m) Tomorrow          | _____ | z) What for            | _____ |

## Matching Activity

Match column A with column B.

Column A	Answer	Column B
Example: 10,000	<b>11</b>	<b>1)</b> Invaded Britain
a) kangaroo		<b>2)</b> Word invented by Shakespeare
b) <i>Beowulf</i>		<b>3)</b> King of England
c) Angles		<b>4)</b> Word originally from India
d) Celts		<b>5)</b> Word borrowed from the Australians
e) assassination		<b>6)</b> Number of people who speak English in the world
f) 878 CE		<b>7)</b> Original inhabitants of Britain
g) William, Duke of Normandy		<b>8)</b> Words borrowed from the French
h) bungalow		<b>9)</b> Epic poem
i) 1.2 to 1.5 billion		<b>10)</b> Arrival of the Vikings
j) crown, castle, court and beauty		<b>11)</b> Number of words borrowed from the Normans