

Beowulf Notes

Middle Ages (“Dark Ages”)

- 400-800 AD
- Wars were common
- Most people couldn’t read or write
- Nothing was being invented
- Gloomy period

Five Languages that Contributed to the English Language:

1. Celtic Language

- first known people to inhabit England (about 600 B.C.)
- mixture of Irish and Scottish people
- lived simply
- pagan (believe in magic, mystical gods)
- farmers headed by a chieftain

2. Latin Language

- Romans (55 BC) overtook Celts
- ruled by Julius Caesar
- built roads, baths, water ducts

3. German Language

- Anglo Saxons (400-1066 AD) came from Germany
- fierce warriors
- called England “Angleland”
- brought oral literary tradition with them
- **scops** (story tellers) composed songs/poems about brave deeds of heroes
- as stories were told, they got exaggerated
- **epic poems** boosted tribal pride and taught code of values

4. Scandinavian Language

- Vikings (Norsemen) from Scandinavia attacked from 700-1000
- most feared warriors
- couldn't overtake the Anglo Saxons, but did influence language
- looked like giants compared to other people in this time period

5. French Language

- William the Conqueror conquered the Anglo Saxons and took over England (1066 A.D.)

Two Types of Religion

1. **Pagans**

- believe in many gods
- fate dictates what happens in your life
- magic and mystical creatures

2. **Christians**

- believe in one God
- good wins over evil
- you could change your fate

Beowulf

- no one knows when it was written, but first written down in 700's
- first epic poem written in English (Old English)
- about a brave warrior named Beowulf from Sweden (Viking)
- Beowulf means "bee wolf," which is a kenning for "bear"
- went to help the King of Denmark whose kingdom was being terrorized by a flesh-eating monster

- **Names to remember:**

- Beowulf: warrior from Sweden who goes to Denmark to help the king

- Hrothgar: King of the Danes (Denmark)
- Grendel: monster who has been terrorizing the kingdom for 12 years
- Herot: the name of the mead hall Hrothgar built to help protect his people from Grendel
- Wiglaf: Beowulf's faithful soldier
- Unferth: a Danish soldier who doubts Beowulf

The Law of Threes

- In British Literature, things tend to happen in 3's
- based on the Trinity in the Christian religion
- 3 is considered to be a lucky number

Literary Terms:

- Kenning: a compound word that takes the place of another word (ex. "war-net" means chain mail armor)
- Epithet: series of descriptive phrases that relate to a person (ex. Beowulf is "leader of men," "slayer of beasts")
- Alliteration: series of words that begin with the same consonant sound (ex. "grim and greedy, the gruesome monster")