The Anglo-Saxons

Dunn English IV
The Anglo-Saxons

- The Anglo-Saxon period is from 449-1066
- In 449, three groups invaded Britain, which was at the time inhabited by the Celts.
  - Angles (Germany)
  - Saxons (Lower Germany)
  - Jutes (Denmark/Sweden)
The Anglo Saxons
The Anglo-Saxons

- The Anglo-Saxons pushed the Celts from their native land (now known as England) to Cornwall, (SW Peninsula), Cumbria (extreme NW England), and the area known now as Wales
- The name “Wales” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word Wealas, meaning foreigner
- Cumbria comes from the Celtic word Cymru, meaning comrades
- The remaining Celts were assimilated into the Anglo-Saxon culture by being forced into slavery
The Anglo-Saxons: Government

• The Anglo-Saxons organized themselves as tribal units that were governed by kings.
• Each tribal unit had a “witan”, or elder council, that selected the king and dealt with issues of land, tax, etc.
The Anglo-Saxons: Government

• As tribes began to blend, they were left with 7 tribes (Heptarchy):
  – Essex
  – Wessex
  – Sussex
  – Northumbria
  – Mercia & the Midlands
  – East Anglia
  – Kent
The Anglo Saxons: Religion

- Anglo Saxons were pagans that believed in multiple gods (polytheistic)
- Their beliefs most closely matched those of the old Norse people:
  - Woden (god of Wisdom)
  - Thor (god of Thunder)
  - Tiw (god of War)
  - Frig (goddess of fertility)
The Anglo-Saxons: Religion

• The Anglo-Saxons were converted to Christianity around the end of the 6th century (590s)

• Aethelbert, King of Kent, was baptised in 597, beginning the Anglo-Saxon Christian conversion
The Anglo-Saxons: Religion

• The pagan Anglo-Saxons believed in the concept of wyrd, or destiny/fate. This is a common theme in Anglo-Saxon literature.

• Once they converted to Christianity, they became believers in free will.
The Anglo-Saxons: The Mead Hall

• The Mead Hall was the social center of Anglo-Saxon life
  – Mead: Beer w/ Honey

• The hall was built at the expense of the local lord or king for the entertainment of his thanes
  – Thane: warriors/soldiers loyal to the king (think Knights)

• The Mead Hall was typically the safest place in the Kingdom
The Anglo-Saxons: The Mead Hall

• Structure
  – Rectangular
  – Pointed roof
  – Middle trench for fires
  – Two long, low tables on either side of the fire trench
  – Supported by rows of columns
The Anglo-Saxons: The Mead Hall
The Anglo-Saxons: Men and Beliefs

- The Anglo-Saxon man was:
  - Athletic
  - Strong
  - Seafaring
  - Adventurous
  - Had a strong sense of “fair play”
The Anglo-Saxons: Men and Beliefs

• The Anglo-Saxons believed in:
  – Loyalty to the Lord/King
  – Great love of personal freedom
  – Respect for Women
  – Love of glory
  – Honor in the truth
The Anglo-Saxons: Literature

- Mostly oral stories, especially riddles
- Some surviving written work
  - Poetry *(Beowulf)*
    - Doesn’t rhyme
    - Uses heavy alliteration
    - Uses kennings
      - Metaphor often hyphenated (ex: whales-path= sea)
- Symbolism with Seasons
  - Spring: Youth  - Fall: Old Age
  - Summer: Adulthood  - Winter: Death
The Anglo-Saxons: Literature

• Characteristics of Anglo-Saxon Literature:
  – Fatalistic (dealing with death and the afterlife)
  – Melancholy (sadness)
  – Loyalty
  – Bravery
HAET REGARDE

na magsum dozaim. pedd cunnigal

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The Anglo-Saxons: Literature

“Good is the man who keeps his faith to the end.”
—The Wanderer

• **Beowulf** is the only surviving Germanic epic
  – Epic: a long poem that narrates the heroic exploits of an individual central to the beliefs and cultures of his society
• “Beowulf” literally means “intelligent wolf”
The Anglo-Saxons: Literature

- Characteristics of the Epic Style
  - Hero is a figure of national/cosmic importance
  - Setting is usually worldwide
  - Superhuman deeds in battle
  - Gods/Supernatural beings take an interest in hero’s efforts
  - Typically created for ceremonial performance
  - Typically starts in the middle of the action
  - Weaponry, spoils of war are important
The Anglo-Saxons: Literature

• Themes of Beowulf
  – The search to attain a measure of immortality by performing heroic deeds
  – Display of courage in the face of death
  – The importance of maintaining a civilized, orderly society
    • Good=Order, Evil=Chaos
The Anglo-Saxons: Literature

• Anglo-Saxon Poetic Devices
  – Alliteration
    • Two or more words in a line of poetry having the same beginning consonant sound
    • Primary poetic device of Anglo-Saxons
  – Epithet
    • Characterizing word of phrase accompanying or replacing the name of a person or thing
The Anglo-Saxons: Literature

• Anglo-Saxon Poetic Devices
  – Personification
    • Giving human characteristics to animals or inanimate objects
  – Kenning
    • Picturesque metaphorical compound
      – Ex: scholar’s home: school
      – car loaner: parents