

**The Legend of English,  
Timeline of English and  
The Body of English.**

### **Preparation for “The Legend of English”**

**W**arm Up: Tell the children that every thing can be characterized as having a beginning, a development, and eventually, an end. (And that end is often the stuff of new beginnings.) Flowers are “first” sprouted seeds, etc.... Ask for two examples. The story of that beginning, development, and end is called the “history” of any thing.

Then tell them that even languages have a history. A famous language, LATIN, the language of the Romans for over a thousand years and for another thousand years with the smarty-pants of Europe, is now a “dead” language, (but there are thousands! of words in English that come from Latin). **Tell them** that they are going to learn something that most grown-ups don’t know: how “English” came to be. **Tell them** that knowing this story will give them a power like they could pull a sword out of stone.

1) Have the students make a timeline that stretches from 44 BCE to the present. I distribute paper rolls in ~4’ lengths and instruct/demonstrate to them the marking in scale. Tell them you will make a few marks on the timeline together, then as they read the story, they can make other demarcations.

Demonstrate and instruct them in delineating -44 0, 500, 1000, 1500, 2010, 416, 1066, 1609, and 1776.

**H**ave the students make their first mark on the extreme left side of their timeline and label it *44BCE*. **Ask** if anyone knows what BCE means. **Explain** the evolution of BC and AD into BCE and CE. (Then, use your pull-down map to show Rome, the extent of the Roman Empire and Britain):

“The Roman Empire spread order and writing across the Western World. They built excellent roads and protected them so people could enjoy widespread *commerce* (what does this word mean?); they built ships and protected the seas, spreading order and growing stronger and bigger all the time. Sometimes they were smart and kind and sometimes they were mean and selfish, but they usually brought order.

“One of the things the Romans needed was the metal *tin*, which, when melted with copper, makes an alloy, or mixture of metals, of *bronze*. *Bronze* is *much* stronger than regular copper (why would this be important? — elaborate as ye wish). In “minus 44”, or 44BCE, the Roman Army established one of their grand encampments on the Thames river, *Londonium*, here.” [Point to map of England and indicate the mouth of the Thames.]

**W**arm Up: Tell the they “will learn that English is cool in that it is made up basically of four languages: very old German, ancient Latin, old French, and ancient Greek. There are other languages too, but those four make up almost all of English. That’s why English is so strong. It has the strengths of four languages. It can be exact and poetic, simple and intellectual, sweet and strong, elegant and clear.

“English wasn’t always around. The four languages merged together over time. How German, French, Latin, and Greek came together is the history of English.

“Think about it. This language wasn’t always around. This is the legend of how English came to be, grew up, and became very powerful.

**R**eview with them how to pre-view a reading. Tell them that one of the secrets of understanding is knowing all the words *really well*. What’s one of the secrets of understanding?

For five minutes, the students should **skim** the following pages and **create** a class list of problem words and questions (like the “Clues, Problems, Wonderings” activity in the Open Court Reading system). Have the students **then look at** the following glossary (words that were collected by English Learners), read all the definitions, see the blanks, and colons(:). Tell them that their job is to finish the glossary, but they can find many of the words defined in the story.

Tell the children that they will learn about 4,000 new words this year! You will teach them maybe a thousand and their family and friends will teach them another thousand, and how do they think they will learn the other 2,000? Themselves! By reading! **Review** the three strategies: ***appositive; context; word structure***. Tell them that learning the story of English will supercharge their ability to understand word structure.

### Vocabulary Development and Preparation for *The Legend of English*

(some words are defined, others are defined in the story, some need elaboration or research)

*legend*: a famous or great story, mostly or probably true.

*tin*: a metal \_\_\_\_\_

*decade*: ten years

*alloy*: when metals \_\_\_\_\_

*brass*: \_\_\_\_\_

*Brittans, Wales, Scotland* (Review the Map: Britain and the Continent)

*Frisians, Angles, Saxons, Jutes* (see enclosed maps)

*invaded*: \_\_\_\_\_

*thorough(ly)*: \_\_\_\_\_

*Beowulf*: A story over a thousand years old, written in the Old English style.

*Vikings*, Norse, Scandinavian (review on map)

*Normans*: the Norse who invaded, then settled and integrated into the French north shore.

*discourse*: talking back and forth

*Britain*: what the original Celts called their land, now including England, Wales, and Scotland.

*bilingualism*: speaking two languages

*Canterbury*: the center of religion in England.

*Renaissance*: the \_\_\_\_\_ of Greek ideas and intellectual freedom.

*resurgence*: \_\_\_\_\_

*philosophical*: “love of wisdom”, thinking deeply about things.

*Shakespeare*: \_\_\_\_\_

*reinherited*: got it back again; received again that which is yours.

*intellectual*: Thinking deeply about ideas.

*Romance languages* (sprouted from **Rome**: Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese)

*poetic*: like poetry, like you were there

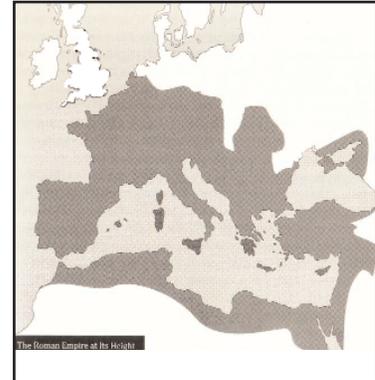
*rational*: makes sense

## The Legend of English

*Pre-Read Questions: Why did Rome want to conquer Britannia? What language did the Romans speak across their empire? After the Romans left, who invaded Britannia?*

*English is made up mainly from what FOUR languages?*

Over two thousand years ago, the biggest empire in the Western world was the Roman Empire. (See map to the right: what is now Italy, France, Spain, Northern Africa including Egypt, the Middle East and Mesopotamia, and Turkey and Greece.) They needed to make lots of the hard metal called brass, which is made by melting softer copper (like in pennies or electric wire) and soft tin together, making a hard alloy. While the Romans had lots of copper, they didn't have much tin.

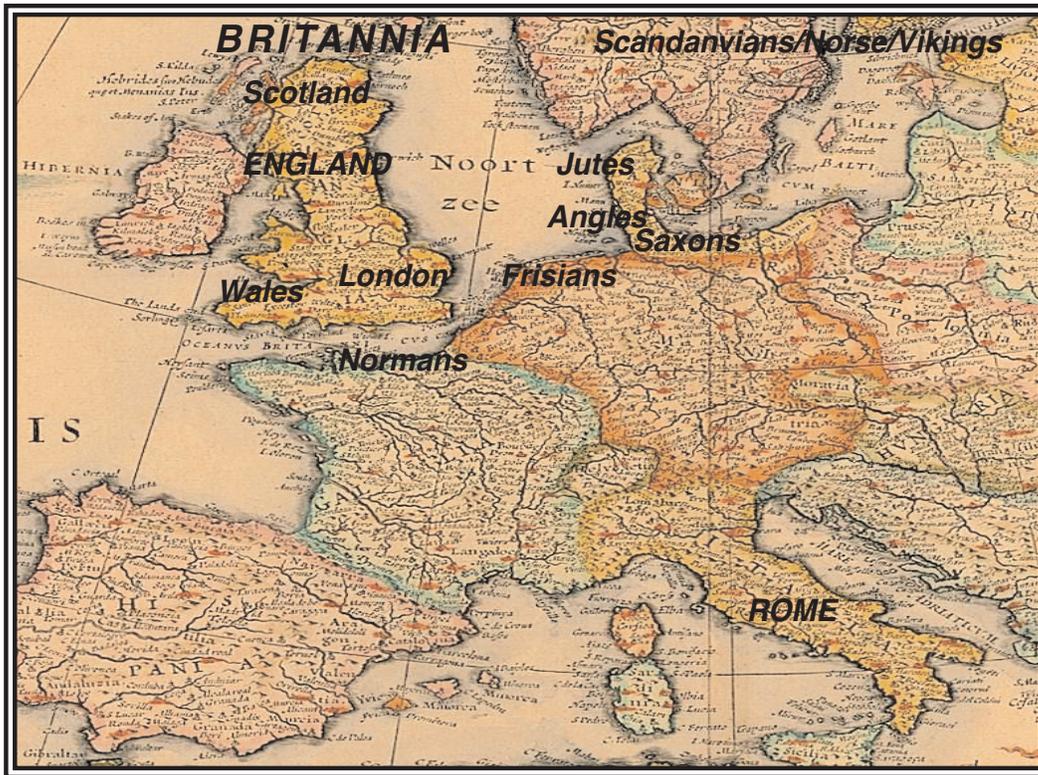


*The Extent of the Roman Empire before taking Britannia*

Britannia were famous for its tin. So in 44BCE, or minus 44, the Romans under Julius Caesar established a military camp at Londonium, what we now call \_\_\_\_\_ . Over the next decade or so, the Romans finally drove the Celtic Brittons west into the lands we now call Wales and north into the lands we call Scotland, giving the mighty Romans full access to the tin they needed. We retain almost no Celtic in English, save the heart-sounding names of towns and rivers.

For over four hundred years, Latin was spoken in Roman-ized Britain (as well as in the rest of the West). It was the language of business, education, and politics. But an overpopulation of Germans combined with a prolonged corruption in Roman politics and the Empire began to fall apart. Rome withdrew its troops in the year 406, and by 476 Rome itself was overrun by the German Vandals, Visigoths, and other "barbarians". Imagine what it would be like if suddenly there were no police, no army, no widespread order. The next five hundred years were so diminished by lack of sustained wide-spread order and growth that it was called "The Dark Ages." [Discussion: how would this affect: business, education, food choices, arts +?]

After the withdrawal of Roman soldiers, Britain was ruled for a generation by the legendary Arturo, King Arthur. But after Arturo, there was not a sufficient coalition of Celtic fighters and so the old Roman Britannia was successfully invaded by the West Germanic tribes



of Angles (or Engles), Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians. These Germanic dialects partially merged in Britannia and became known as *Englisc*.

Soon thereafter, Christian missionaries returned the Latin alphabet to Britain, displacing the Scandinavian system of lettering, but the spoken language remained thoroughly Germanic. The “Anglo-Saxons” defended Britain (Engles’-land) against the Vikings for several hundred years, developing their own dialect. These Dark Ages were the time of OLD ENGLISH.

*[Note: Looking at the chart, THE BODY OF ENGLISH (at the end of this story), we see Germanic is written across the trunk. This is a metaphor to say that the Germanic tongues is the trunk of our language. Thus we inherit from the Old English: “mind, brain, body, hands, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, house, rooms, doors, windows, worked, played, spoke, ran, leaped...”.]*

Beowulf’s Kingly adventures were written at the end of this period. Old English looks and sounds like this:

*Hwæt!*

*We Gardena            in geardagum,  
peodcyninga,        prym gefrunon,  
hu ua æpelingas        ellen fremedon.*

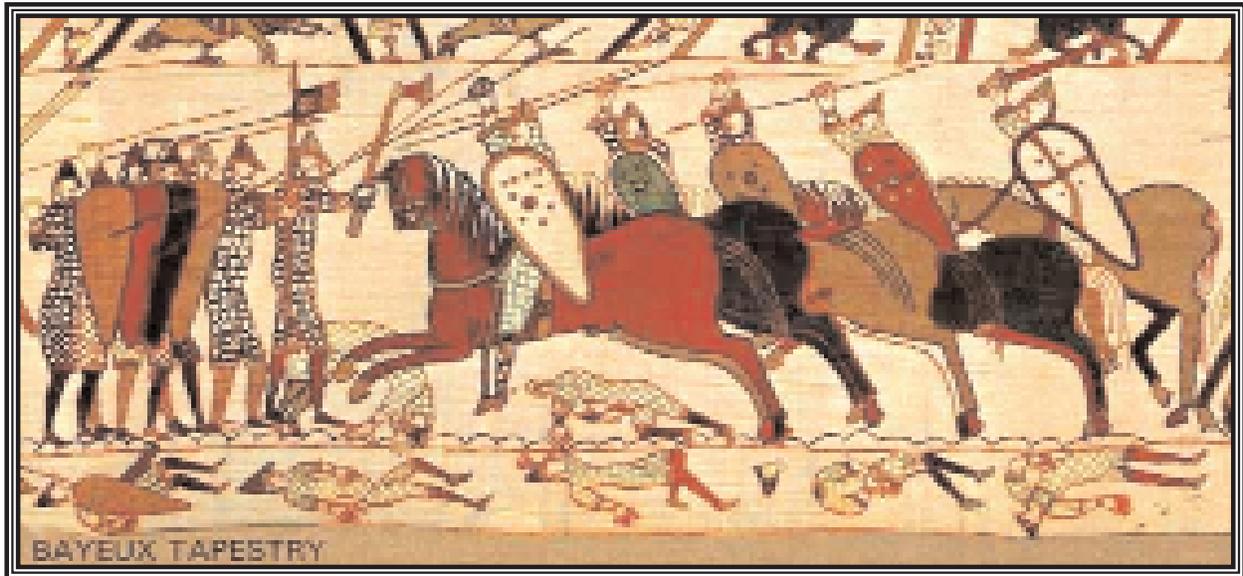
meaning:

*Listen!*

*You have heard of the Danish Kings  
in the old days and how  
they were great warriors.*

About a thousand years ago, the Vikings were swarming out of Scandinavia. They took over Greenland, Iceland, founded a colony in Newfoundland, attacked England again and took over the north of France. But in France, they settled in nicely, married the wonderful French women and within a generation were all speaking French, though they kept many words from Norse (*Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday*).

*Bayeux Tapestry Illustrating the Norman Conquest*



Then in the year 1066, the Norman (NORSEMAN) Conquest of England brought copious amounts of French, Latin and Norse into English, especially in the Royal Court and government, sweetening the rougher Germanic discourse.

*[Note: Looking at the chart, THE BODY OF ENGLISH, we see French is written across the throat. This is a metaphor to say that the French language sweetened the sound of Old German. “A Journey of Surrender; a Royal Labour of Courage...”]*

In Britain during the eleven-hundreds, bilingualism (speaking both French and English) became common, but in 1204, the English kings lost Normandy to the French and England began to re-establish English as the official language. But by now, the sweet French had infused rougher English with thousands of words, both French and Latin. This sweetening time was the period of MIDDLE ENGLISH. English began to have three words for many, many things, the “triplets” from Old English, Old French, and Old Latin: e.g. kingly/royal/regal, ask/question/interrogate, fast/firm/secure, holy/sacred/consecrated, work/labour/exertion, etc.

The greatest writer of the Middle English period was the great poet Geoffrey Chaucer. He wrote a book called *Canterbury Tales* (in the year 1380, and illustrated below) that made fun of almost everybody and was written in the most beautiful speech that had ever appeared in English. Unfortunately, the sound of all the vowels has changed so much that it is hard to appreciate the literary brilliance any more.

- 1: Whan that aprill with his shoures soote
- 2: The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,
- 3: And bathed every veyne in swich licour
- 4: Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
- 5: Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breath
- 6: Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
- 7: Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
- 8: Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,
- 9: And smale foweles maken melodye,
- 10: That slepen al the nyght with open ye



(Go to [www.CanterburyTales.audio](http://www.CanterburyTales.audio) to hear it spoken.)

Thus, English was half rooted in the Germanic languages (German, Norse, Scandinavian) and half in the Romance languages (French and Latin), and so we find the BODY OF ENGLISH to have a “German” trunk framed by the “Romance” languages -- French throat, Latin legs.

With the Renaissance, Europe was reborn as it re-inherited the wisdom of the Ancient Greeks and the re-liberation of intellectual inquiry. This rebirth had many repercussions; including the resurgence of scientific and philosophical thought and, in English, the Great Vowel Shift of the Sixteenth Century, announcing the end of Middle English. Nobody really knows why, but the middle part of the 1500’s the vowels all changed. It was like the short vowels became long and the long became short.

But in addition to Germanic English, Old French, and older Latin, more old Latin and ancient Greek was stirred in and as they all melted together into a new language; perhaps the most powerful language ever appeared; strong and supple, sweet and exact, poetic and logical, practical and abstract, feeling and philosophical.

Upon this new stage, the genius Shakespeare stepped forth to show the glory and power of many languages at once. Most people can’t read Old English or Middle English, but we can start understanding English starting around the time of Shakespeare. It sounds weird or funny, and lots of words need to be explained, but even kids can get it.

*All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,  
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;  
Then the whining school-boy, with his satchel  
And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad*



*Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation ....*

*Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.*

(For more lessons on Shakespeare, see <http://www.shakespeare4kidz.com/teachers/teachers.htm>)

As the Greek wisdom tradition was reinherited, it infused English with a developed brilliance and logical insistence, and we find that our intellectual concepts and newly created words are often Greek. Thus, looking at the BODY OF ENGLISH, the logical and noetic head thinks and speaks most often in Greek. From Greek we get *democracy, philosophy, theater, mathematics, school, athletics, therapy, skeptical, music, authentic, paradoxical, logical ....*

This melding of Germanic, Romance and Greek languages began the period of MODERN ENGLISH, which rode upon the deck of the expanding British Empire to affect and be affected by a host of other languages around the world.

Thus, English has the largest vocabulary of any language and draws strengths and subtleties from many tongues: it is the language of science, travel, business, diplomacy, and aviation. English can be complex and simple, supple and exact, useful and poetic, religious and rational.

Knowing this story will make you stronger and help you learn new words faster.