The background of the cover is a collage of various British-themed images. At the top left is the Tower Bridge. In the center is Big Ben. To the left of Big Ben is a marching band in red uniforms. To the right is a guard in a black uniform and bearskin hat. At the bottom is a large stone castle with multiple towers. A portion of the Union Jack flag is visible in the top right corner.

Implications of Literature

*An Integrated
Literature / Language Arts Program
for High School Students*

Trailblazer Level



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HISTORICAL FOCUS: THE ANGLO-SAXONS

449-1066

In the 4th century, warriors from the Angle, Saxon, and Jute tribes filled the vacuum left by departing Roman forces, who had returned to Rome to defend it against the Goths. The Anglo-Saxons established their own rule in numerous small "kingdoms in England."

A united kingdom in the south and west of England was established by Alfred the Great around the year 878. Viking tribes had settled in parts of England, and the country was divided into two parts: the northern and eastern regions were ruled by the Danelaw,* while the southern and western parts were subject to Saxon law.

In 937, many Danish lands came under English rule when Alfred's grandson, Aethelstan, was victorious at the Battle of Brunanburgh. Yet numerous Scandinavian laws remained in place in the eastern counties of England even under the rule of the Anglo-Saxon king. A rudimentary jury system was also initiated about this time, in which twelve thegnes (thanes) would observe a trial impartially. However, the suspect was still tried by ordeal.*

By 1040, the Danes and the Anglo-Saxons had united to become one nation, combining aspects of each culture. The Scandinavian jarls (earls) replaced the Anglo-Saxon aldermen as the king's advisors and assistants. A civil service was established to collect taxes and communicate the king's will to the people, and to assert the royal authority.

In 1066, however, William the Conqueror and the Norman conquest changed England once again.



LITERARY FOCUS: EPICS AND ELEGIAC POETRY

The literature of the Anglo-Saxons consisted of the oral tradition, in which **scops**, as the Anglo-Saxon minstrels are known, recited epic poetry to entertain both the nobility and the peasantry. The **epic** *Beowulf* (page 15) was transcribed in Old English between the eighth and tenth century, but it takes place some time in the centuries before the Anglo-Saxon invasion "created" the basis of the English language, and is set in Scandinavia, the original homelands of the Germanic forebears of the English people.

The earliest existing Old English work is a short religious poem written in Anglo-Saxon, known as "Caedmon's Hymn." The Latin equivalent is included in a history written by the Venerable Bede, a monk who describes the earliest days of the Anglo-Saxon conquest. **Elegiac poetry** that nostalgically mourned the past, was also popular during the Anglo-Saxon period.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

Danelaw — the system of laws established by the Danish Vikings.

tried by ordeal — the accused person and the plaintiff engaged in hand-to-hand combat, and the winner was declared the victor.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

English is the language that is used most frequently internationally. It is a living language, rich, expressive, and constantly adjusting to accommodate the changing world in which we live.

How did the English we speak develop and what makes it such a complicated language? The answer lies in the history of England itself. Linguists theorize that English is one of the many languages descended primarily from the Germanic branch of an ancient family of languages called Indo-European, spoken many centuries ago in Europe and parts of Western Asia. However, before the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons who brought Germanic to England in the 5th century, the Celts had settled in England some 2400 years ago from various locations in Europe. They spoke Celtic, a language derived from the Celtic branch of Indo-European. Very few words from the original Celtic language still survive, except for the names of rivers such as Avon and Thames, and the names of locations such as Bryn Mawr and Kent. The languages of Southwestern England, Ireland, and Wales (Cornish, Gaelic, and Welsh, respectively), in somewhat limited use today, are descended from Celtic.

The original Celtic language was radically shaped and molded into what we now call Old English by the successive conquests of Britain that occurred from the time of the original Celts until 1066. The first of these invasions occurred about 2100 years ago when Julius Caesar invaded Britain and introduced numerous Latin words that ultimately entered the Celtic language. Words such as *mile*, *street*, and *wall* are remnants of the Roman occupation. Names of cities that end in *-chester* are derived from the Latin word *castra*, meaning camp, and indicate where the Romans camped during that period.

In the 5th century, following the collapse of the Roman Empire, the first invasions by Germanic tribes, identified as the Angles and the Saxons from the European continent, as well as the Jutes from Denmark, marked a major change in the language spoken in Britain. All these new invaders spoke a dialect of Germanic, a harsh-sounding, guttural language that eventually combined over the centuries with Celtic, Latin, Norse (an older form of Norwegian), and Gothic (an extinct Germanic language), to become Old English. The dialect spoken by the Germanic invaders became known as *Angleish* and preceded the English we speak today. In fact, the word *England* derives directly from the *land of the Angles* — *Angleland*.

During the next few hundred years, the ever-changing language that would eventually become modern English received new infusions from a variety of sources. In the sixth century, Latin was re-introduced into the developing language when the Anglo-Saxons were converted to Christianity. In the ninth century the Vikings, Norsemen from Denmark, attacked the Anglo-Saxons, and were ultimately beaten back into the northeast of England. However, some of their language, Norse, also found its way into English. Examples include *leg*, *kilt*, and the names of most of the days of the week.

Finally, in 1066 William the Conqueror, from Normandy in present-day France, invaded and ultimately conquered Britain, marking the end of the Anglo-Saxon era, and heralding major changes in the development of the English language. French became the language of the aristocracy and of legal and business dealings, even though the lower classes still spoke the English that had developed over the previous centuries. During the next few hundred years, thousands of French words were incor-

porated into the language. Words such as *government*, *revenue*, *tax*, *prison*, *mortgage*, *attorney*, *comedy* and *music* originate from French. Tradition has it that had it not been for the poet Geoffrey Chaucer (1342-1400), French might have become the mother tongue in England. In 1387, however he chose to write his masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*, in the vernacular Middle English used by the lower classes of the period. Chaucer's action earned him a permanent place in the annals of history as "The Father of the English Language."

The history of the development of the English language can be divided into three periods. The period during which *Old English* developed extended from approximately 449 to 1066. *Middle English* was used from approximately 1066 until the early 1500's, while the *Modern English* that we speak today has been evolving steadily since the middle of the 16th century. It is interesting to note that for most of us, Old English appears to be a totally foreign language, with few words that we can recognize, let alone read or pronounce, in their original written version. Middle English, while somewhat more recognizable, still is extremely strange both to the eyes and ears of a contemporary English-speaking person. Even Modern English, of which (believe it or not) Shakespeare is a representative author, is still often difficult for the modern reader. On the following pages, you will find samples from each period.

Old English

Author Unknown

Excerpt from *BEOWULF*, a folk saga about a Danish hero, first written down c. 1000

HWÆT! WE GARDENA IN GEARDAGUM,
 ÞEODCYNINGA, ÞRYM GEFRUNON,
 HU ÐA ÆÞELINGAS ELLEN FREMEDON.
 OFT SCYLD SCEFING SCEAÞENA ÞREATUM,
 MONEGUM MÆGþUM, MEODOSETLA OFTEAH,
 EGSODE EORLAS. SYÐÐAN ÆREST WEARÐ
 FEASCEAFT FUNDEN, HE ÞÆS FROFRE GEBAD,

Translation:

Indeed, we have heard praise of the men who were kings
 Of the Danes, warriors of long ago, armed with spears,
 And what honor the princes won!
 Often Scyld Scefing took the mead-benches
 From enemy troops of many tribes,
 Terrifying their nobles. Since he was first found,
 A friendless orphan child, fate has repaid him:

Middle English

Geoffrey Chaucer (1342-1400)

Lines 20-27 from the "General Prologue" of *THE CANTERBURY TALES*, c. 1387

Bifel that in that seson on a day,
 In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
 Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage
 To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
 At nyght was come into that hostelrye
 Wel neyne and twenty in a compaignye
 Of sundry folk, by aventure yfalle
 In felaweshipe, and pilgrims were they alle,
 That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.

Paraphrase:

It happened that one day in that season
 In Southwerk as I rested in the Tabard Tavern
 Ready to make my way on my pilgrimage
 To Canterbury, with full religious fervor,
 At night, into the hotel came
 A group consisting of fully twenty-nine
 Various types of people, by chance come together
 In companionship, and they were all pilgrims
 That intended to ride to Canterbury.

Modern English

16th Century Sample:

Edmund Spenser (1552-1599)

Excerpt from a book dedication

Goe little booke: thy selfe present,
As a child whose parent is unkent:
To him that is the president
Of noblesse and of chevalree,
And if that Envie barke at thee,
As sure it will, for succoure flee
Under the shadow of his wing.

Paraphrase:

Go, little book, present yourself
Like an orphan whose parent is unknown
To him who represents the best
Of nobility and chivalry,
And if Envy barks at you,
As it surely will, for succor flee
Under the shadow of his protective wing.

FYI In the 16th century, authors often dedicated their books to patrons — wealthy, usually noble individuals — who paid for publication.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Excerpt from "SONNET 73"

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west;
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self that seals up all in rest.

Paraphrase:

In me you see that time of year
When a few yellow leaves — or none — hang
On those branches which tremble with cold,
Empty ruined podiums, where birds used to sing sweetly.
In me you see the twilight of a day
When the sunset fades in the west,
And eventually night,
Death's substitute, ends the day and encloses everything in rest.

17th Century Sample:

John Milton (1608-1674)

Excerpt from a sonnet titled, "How SOON HATH TIME"

How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stol'n on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!
My hasting days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.

Paraphrase:

How quickly Time, the cunning thief of youth,
Has stolen my twenty-third year!
My rapidly passing days fly by at full speed,
But my late youth has not shown any productive fruit.

18th Century Sample:

Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

Excerpt from *AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM*

Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.
In every work regard the writer's end,
Since none can compass more than they intend;
And if the means be just, the conduct true,
Applause, in spite of trivial faults, is due.

Paraphrase:

Whoever thinks that he will see a perfect piece of writing
Imagines something that never was, nor is, nor ever can exist.
Always consider the author's goal,
Because no one can accomplish more than they planned;
And if the method is correct, the manner honest,
Praise should be awarded, in spite of minor errors.

19th Century Sample:

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)

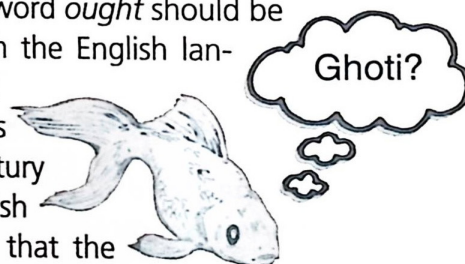
THE EAGLE: A FRAGMENT

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

It is fascinating to note how words that we now use every day can be tracked back to Old or Middle English, or to Old or Middle French. Many of these words can then be traced even further back to Gothic, Danish, Norse, Germanic, Greek, or Latin. However, the linguistic contributions of the many cultures that affected the development of the English language are mostly vocabulary-related. The basic grammatical structure of the English we speak today has remained very close to the original native English structure. Sentence patterns — that a preposition usually precedes its object, and that a subject usually precedes its verb — have remained similar, and our verbs still retain many of the original tense forms.

Perhaps the most significant change to the language has been the change in **inflections**. In Old English, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs and the definite article *the* were modified according to case, gender, and number. Languages such as Latin, French, Spanish, and Hebrew still employ inflections to clarify meaning, and even English has not eliminated them entirely. Replete with exceptions to its own rules, English certainly challenges even those who have been raised to consider it as their mother tongue. Inconsistencies in the use of plurals abound, as in the case of box: boxes but ox: oxen. Verbs that are regular such as *sing*, somehow don't work the same way as verbs like *bring* or *see*, to the eternal confusion of those to whom English is a second language. An example of the confusion that arises in learning how to pronounce this multi-faceted language appears below:

Consider, the word *ought*. How should it be pronounced? The word *bough* rhymes with the word *now*. Perhaps, *ought* should be pronounced *out*? On the other hand, the word *cough* rhymes with the word *off*. Perhaps the word *ought* should be pronounced *off*. Those of us who are familiar with the English language are seldom troubled by its idiosyncrasies, but the same cannot be said of those who pursue its study. George Bernard Shaw, the famous 20th-century playwright, called for a standardized, phonetic English spelling format, and suggested, tongue in cheek, that the word *fish* should be spelled *ghoti* — the letters *gh* would be pronounced as in the word *laugh*, the letter *o* would be pronounced as in the word *women*, and the letters *ti* as in *association*!



After all is said and done, however, this rich, varied language that we call English has served the world well, acting as an almost universal medium of communication.

Before You Read...

Anglo-Saxon Riddles

Author Unknown

Translated by Professor Craig Williamson

English Department, Swarthmore College, PA

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Early Anglo-Saxon literature can be divided into three categories: **epic** poetry, **lyrical poetry**, and riddles. All three groups feature **alliteration**, four-stressed lines, **caesuras**, and **kennings** (see page 16). Epic poems tell of a hero, lyrical poetry gives expression to the woes and joys of life, and riddles, much like those you are about to read in this selection, leaven the Anglo-Saxon literary canon with a touch of lightness. As with other early Anglo-Saxon literature, the riddles are of unknown authorship.

ABOUT THE SELECTION

Using the literary technique of **personification**, each of these riddles describes a subject familiar to the Anglo-Saxons, ending with the implied question "Who am I?" Play along with the scop's of long ago who presented these brain-teasers for the entertainment of kings and warriors, and see how many you can solve.



But mark ... we live amongst riddles and mysteries ... and even the clearest and most exalted understandings amongst us find ourselves puzzled and at a loss in almost every cranny of nature's works.

Lawrence Sterne (1713-1768)



Anglo-Saxon Riddles

Author Unknown

Translated by Craig Williamson

FOCUS: PERSONIFICATION

RIDDLE 1

What puzzle
is presented
in the
first three lines?

What man is so mind-strong and spirit shrewd
He can say who drives me in my fierce strength
On fate's road when I rise with vengeance,
Ravage the land, with a thundering voice
Rip folk-homes, plunder the hall-wood: 5
Gray smoke rises over rooftops — on earth ...
Sometimes I plunge through the press of waves
To men's surprise, stalking the sea-warrior's
Fathomed floor. The white waves whip,
Foam-flanks flaring, the ocean rips, 10
The whale's lake roars, rages —
Savage waves beat on the shore, cast rock,
Sand, seaweed, water on the high cliffs
As I thrash with the wave-power on my back
And shake under blue, broad plains below 15
Yet I shake the home-stones of men:
Horn-gabled mead-halls tremble,
Walls quake, perch over hall-thanes,
Ceilings, cities shake.
The air is quiet 20
Above the land, the sea broods, silent
Till I break out, ride at my ruler's call — ...
Cruel and killing
On the savage road — who stills us?
Sometimes I rush through the clouds riding 25
My back, spill the black rain-jugs,
Rippling streams, crack clouds together

What does
the power
described seem
not to be?



With a sharp shriek, scattering light-shards.
 Sky-breakers surge over shattered men,
 Dark thunder rolls with a battle-din,
 And the black rain hums.

30

There is fear
 In the cities in the souls of men when dark
 Gliding specters raise light-sharp swords.
 Only a dull fool fears no death-stroke; ...
 Sometimes I storm beneath the land,
 Sometimes rage in the cavern of waves,
 Sometimes whip the waters from above,
 Or climb quickening the clash of clouds.
 Mighty and swift — say what I'm called

35

40

RIDDLE 45

A moth ate songs — wolfed* words!
 That seemed a weird dish — that a worm
 Should swallow, dumb thief in the dark,
 The songs of a man, his chants of glory,

HELPFUL
DEFINITIONS

wolfed — ate greedily and quickly.

Their place of strength. That thief guest
Was no wiser for having swallowed words.

5

Identify the paradox
in Riddle 45.

RIDDLE 48

On earth this warrior is strangely born
Of two dumb creatures, drawn gleaming
Into the world, bright and useful to men.
It is tended, kept, covered by women —
Strong and savage, it serves well,
A gentle slave to firm masters
Who mind its measure and feed it fairly
With a careful hand. To these it brings
Warm blessings; to those who let it run
Wild it brings a grim reward.

5

10

To facilitate
understanding,
read riddle 48
according to the
punctuation marks,
rather than stopping
at the end
of each line.

What are the
"two dumb creatures"
that are referred to
in line 2?



LITERARY CRITIQUE

1. What irony is implied in Riddle 45?
2. Which words in Riddle 48 are examples of paradox?
3. What literary technique is utilized by the first-person narration in Riddle #1? What is the effect of the use of this technique?



WRITING WORKSHOP

Riddle #1 uses many examples in order to enable the reader to guess the correct answer. In two to three paragraphs, list the clues that are given, and, using each one, visualize a scene that could result from the uncontrolled power that is described in example after example. Use dramatic language to describe the scenes of destruction.



JOURNAL WORKSHOP

Create two or three riddles following the technique used in the selections above. Choose your topics, and then see if you can describe paradoxical points that bring life to your choices. Examples might include **a.** a pair of shoes — paradox: they protect feet, but sometimes cause pain. **b.** ice cream — paradox: 1. icy, but most popular during warm weather; 2. nutritious, but deleterious at the same time.