



THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD & LITERATURE

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QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

- The term Anglo-Saxon originated from-----
- Two types of poetry written during the Anglo-Saxon period were-----and -----
- How was cultural history and tradition transmitted?
- What are some of the common conflicts in Anglo-Saxon Literature?
- Define an epic poem.
- What are the characteristics of an epic poem?
- List the characteristics of an epic hero



- The term **Anglo-Saxon** is used to designate the Germanic tribes who invaded the south and east of Great Britain from the 5th century AD.
- The Anglo-Saxon Period denotes the era of English history between about 550 and 1066 AD.
- This term is also used for the language now called Old English, spoken and written by the Anglo-Saxons and their descendants in much of what is now England and some of southeastern Scotland between at least the mid-5th century and the mid-12th century.



- Little writing remains to be studied because England was still developing their written language during many of these years, and storytelling was generally in the oral tradition.
- The two types of poetry that were written during this period were heroic poetry and Christian poetry.
- Only about 30,000 lines of poetry from the age have survived to this time, and the epic poem *Beowulf* makes up a large portion of that. It originated as a pagan saga transmitted orally from one generation to the next.
- Court poets known as 'scops' were the bearers of tribal history and tradition.



- Anglo-Saxon (or Old English) period is broadly defined as extending from the earliest written records (ca. 500) to 1100, when the social and linguistic effects of the Norman Conquest started to become apparent. This was the period when the Germanic peoples traditionally called the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes invaded and settled Britain.



- Most of the Christian poetry is marked by the belief of a simple, relatively unsophisticated Christianity
- The literary materials that have survived are of a high moral tone, including the epic poem *Beowulf* (ca. 900)



- **Anglo-Saxon literature, which is also called Old English literature** comprises literature written in Old English in Anglo-Saxon England, from the 7th century to the Norman Conquest of 1066. These literary genres include epic poetry, sermons, and Bible translations. There are about 400 surviving manuscripts from the period.
- Among the most important works of this period is the epic poem *Beowulf*, which has achieved national epic status in England.



- Anglo-Saxon literature began with spoken verse and songs or poems such as epic poems.
- The purpose of this literature was to pass along tribal history and values to a population that could not read or write.
- Warriors would gather in mead halls where poems or songs were recited for hours or even days as a form of entertainment or ceremonial occasions.
- Literature such as epic poems shows the influence of Christianity and pagan beliefs such as the freedom of decision making and fate handling matters of life and death



- A clash of Christian beliefs and Pagan religion are key in Anglo-Saxon Literature
- Anglo-Saxon people were either Christian or Pagan in their religion. Christians believed in one God and in Heaven. Pagans believed in many gods and in fate, which meant everything in life was predetermined and nobody had control over it. Examples of this religious conflict are in *Beowulf*.
- Violence and gore played a big part in the literature during the Anglo-Saxon age



DEFINITION OF EPIC POETRY

- An epic is a long narrative poem, written in an elevated style. It deals with heroes who go through risky adventures in order to save a nation or a race. This hero embodies the value of his society.



EPIC CHARACTERISTICS

- The hero is a person of significant national or cosmic importance.
- The setting of the poem is ample or large in scale. It may be worldwide or even larger.
- The action involves extraordinary deeds in battle or fights. The hero indulges in very dangerous adventures.
- In these great actions, the gods and other supernatural beings take active interest or active part.
- The epic is narrated in an elevated or a ceremonial style, which is, of course, distanced from ordinary speech. It uses epic similes, which is a stretched comparison.



EPIC CONVENTIONS

- The narrator begins by stating his argument or epic theme. He can as well invoke a muse or guiding spirit to inspire him in his great undertakings.
- The narrator starts in medias res (“in the middle of things”, at a crucial point in the action).
- There are catalogues of some key characters, introduced in formal detail.



E. HERO CHARACTERISTICS(GOES)

- Glorified
- On a quest
- Ethical
- Strong
- Embodies the values of his society
- Of high birth
- Possesses superhuman qualities

