

The Anglo Saxons 449-1066

CHAPTER OPENER
Chapter 1, Grade 12



California Standards

Reading Standard 3.7c

- Evaluate the philosophical, political, religious, ethical, and social influences of the historical period that shaped the characters, plots, and settings.



Preview

Think About

Before you begin reading this introduction:

- make a list of all of the essay's subheadings.
- read the Fast Facts box on p. 14.



Direct Teaching

Content-Area Connections

Geography: Great Britain

- Great Britain, is an island comprising England, Scotland, and Wales.
- The modern nation is now known as the United Kingdom.
 - » It includes Great Britain and Northern Ireland.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Historical Period

Iberians

- The earliest settlers in Britain were called Iberians because it is thought they originally came from the Iberian Peninsula (the peninsula of present-day Portugal and Spain).



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

The Celts and their Descendants

- From about 700 B.C., the Celts dominated most of western and central Europe.
- Skilled artisans, they introduced the use of iron to the rest of Europe.
- They also had a highly developed religion and a legal system that specified individual rights.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

The Celts and their Descendants

- The language of the Celts was dominant in Britain until around the fifth century A.D.
- Descendants of the Celts still live in Cornwall, the highlands of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Brittany (in northwest France).
- Welsh, Scots Gaelic, and Irish are forms of the Celtic language that may still be heard today.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

The Celts and their Descendants

- The Welsh refer to themselves as *cymry*, meaning “fellow countrymen,” emphasizing their role as the true native Britons.
- Cymraeg, the language of Wales, shares origins with languages still spoken in geographic areas that range from the Hebrides in the northwest Atlantic to Brittany.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

The Druids

- Druids are known to have existed since the third century B.C.
- The word *druid* means “knowing the oak tree” and may derive from the fact that these Celtic priests seem to have performed their religious ceremonies in oak groves.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

The Druids

- They considered oak trees sacred, as well as the mistletoe that grows on oaks.
- The custom of kissing under mistletoe apparently originated with the Druid.

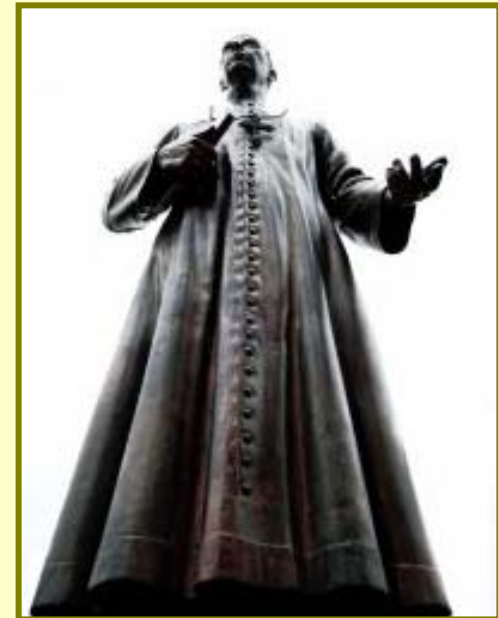


Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

The Druids

- The Druids constituted a priestly upper class within Celtic society.
- They may have studied to become priests for as long as twenty years, learning great numbers of religious verses by heart.



Direct Teaching

Content-Area Connections

Literature: Irish Myths and Folk Tales

- Irish folk tales are also full of fairies, the good folk, and the wee people.
- These tales reflect the ancient Celtic storytelling tradition and love of magic.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Historical Period

Roman Roads and Walls

- The five thousand miles of stone roads in the Romans built in Britain linked tribal capitals and towns, especially London, York, and Winchester.
- The roads facilitated trade, the collection of taxes, and the movement of troops.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Historical Period

Roman Roads and Walls

- The great defensive wall referred to in this text is Hadrian's Wall, a seventy-three-mile wall that linked the North Sea and the Atlantic near the present-day border between England and Scotland.

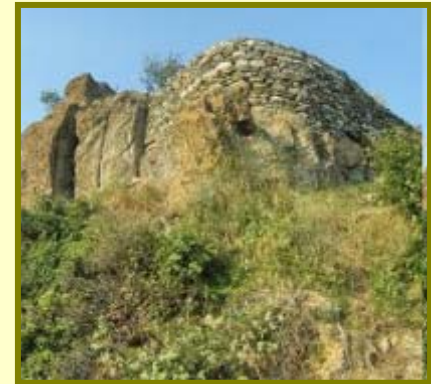


Direct Teaching

Exploring the Historical Period

Roman Roads and Walls

- Hadrian's Wall held back the marauding Picts and Scots for 250 years.
- Along this wall were seventeen large stone forts used to house the Roman legions that were guarding the frontier.



Direct Teaching Reading Skills

Monitoring Comprehension

- The “old Briton” and the “Celts” are the same people.
- The terms are used interchangeably.



Direct Teaching

Content-Area Connections

Literature: King Arthur

- You can read more about King Arthur in:
 - » Sir Thomas Malory's treatment of the Arthur legend, *Le Morte d'Arthur*. (c.1469)
 - » Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885)
 - » T.H. White's novel *The Once and Future King* (1959)



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Historical Period

King Alfred The Great

- King Alfred really deserves the appellation “the great”.
- Not only did he help save Wessex and other kingdoms in England from the Danes, but he also created a cohesive English society from a collection of small, fractious kingdoms.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Historical Period

King Alfred The Great

- In addition, he restored cities destroyed during invasions, and revived interest in learning and in the English language.

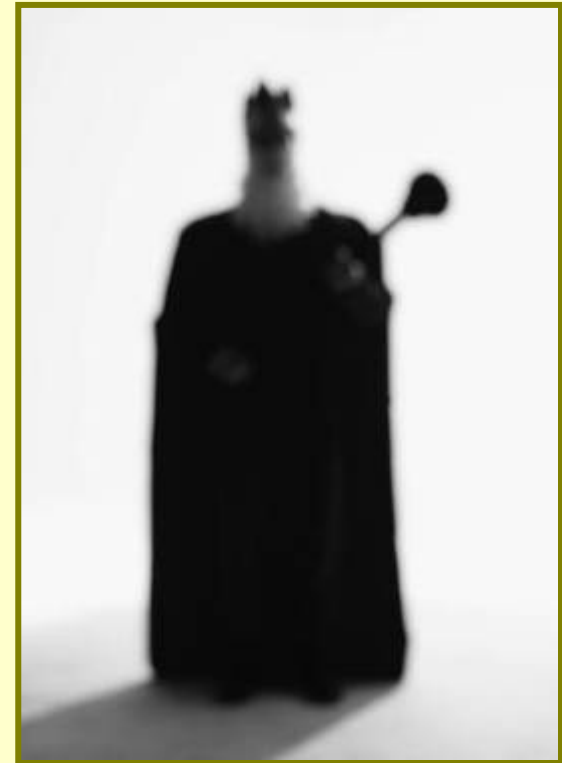


Direct Teaching

Exploring the Historical Period

Alfred's Successors

- By the middle of the tenth century, the Wessex kings had become the kings of all England.

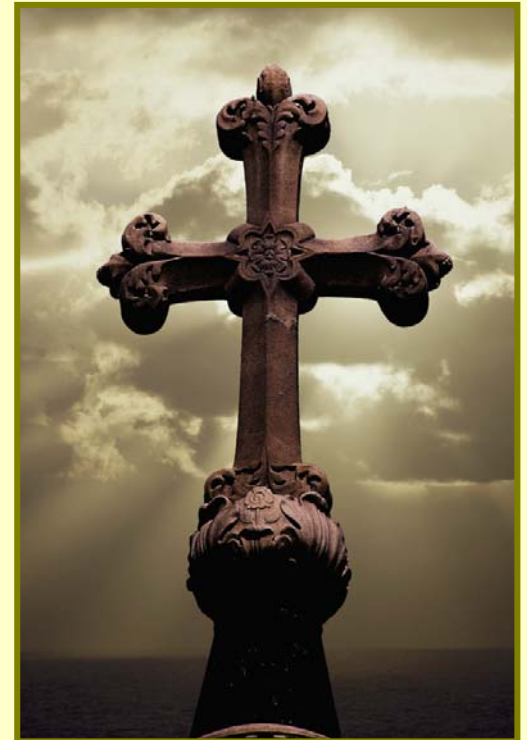


Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

Christianity

- The gradual emergence of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxons was to a great extent due to the work of the Irish and continental Missionaries, the most important of whom was probably Saint Augustine.

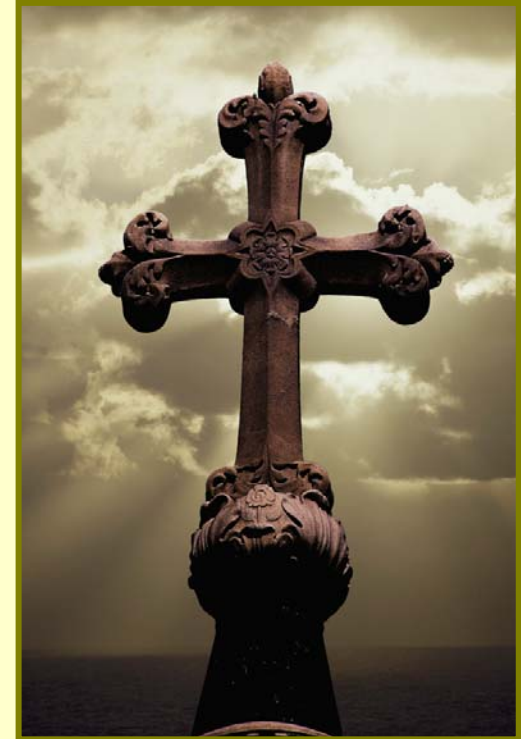


Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

Christianity

- His mission, however, was not immediately or permanently successful, since the old Pagan Anglo-Saxon religion persisted.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

Anglo-Saxon Social Classes

- The Anglo-Saxons had a two-class society:
 - » the *thanes*, or earls, who ruled and were related to the leader of the tribe.
 - » the *churls*, or bondservants, whose ancestors had been captured by the tribe.
- Although they admired their warriors, the Anglo-Saxons insisted on a social organization based on more than courage, a society with strict laws and a sense of obligation to others.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

Anglo-Saxon Social Classes

- An absolute ruler and mighty warrior, the Anglo-Saxon king nevertheless consulted with the *witan* (“wise men”), an assembly or respected earls.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

Anglo-Saxon Social Classes

- The churls provided the hard labor for this society and were bound to the earls' service unless they could earn possessions and special royal favor to become freemen (independent landholders).
- An upper-class woman would supervise the weaving and dyeing of clothes, the slaughter of livestock, and the brewing of mead.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

The Role of Women

- Mead is an alcoholic beverage made from fermented honey and water.
- Because honey was so essential, beekeeping was also an important chore.



Direct Teaching Background

Whitby Abbey

- Hild, sometimes called Saint Hilda, originally founded Whitby Abbey for both monks and nuns.
- Until it was destroyed by the Vikings in 867, the abbey was the chief school of learning in the north.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

Chieftains and Followers

- The chieftain and his followers were bound to each other until death.
- If the lord was killed, his warriors had to avenge his death or die beside him.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

Chieftains and Followers

- After a battle, the warriors gathered in the mead hall of the lord and feasted at trestle tables and mead benches studded with gold.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

Fate and Glory

- The word *wyrd* was used by the Anglo-Saxons to represent one's fate in life.
- The early Anglo-Saxons did not believe strongly in an afterlife.
 - » Instead, they believed that immortality, or *lof* – fame that survives death – could be earned through heroic action.



Direct Teaching

Content-Area Connections

Mythology: Odin

- In Norse mythology, poetry was originally a sacred mead brewed from the blood of a wise god, Kvasir.



Direct Teaching

Content-Area Connections

Mythology: Odin

- After he was murdered by dwarfs, this mead came into the possession of a giant but was then stolen by Odin, who assumed the shape of an eagle and carried it to the world of the gods.
- Poetry was known as “Odin’s theft” or “Kvasir’s blood.”



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

Dragons

- To the Anglo-Saxons, the dragon was the living embodiment of evil and death, in part because it was associated with the fierce Vikings (Danes) who wailed boats with prows carved in the shapes of dragons' heads and fangs.





Direct Teaching

Exploring the Culture

Dragons

- In 793, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records:
 - » “In this fierce year, forbidding omens came over the land of Northumbria and wretchedly terrified the people.
 - » There were excessive whirlwinds, lightning storms, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the sky...
 - » Shortly after in the same year, on January 8th, the raving of heathen men [Vikings] destroyed God’s church at Lindisfarne...”

Direct Teaching

Literary Focus

Elegy

- An **elegy** is a poem that mourns the death of a person or laments something lost.
- A literary work written in an elegiac strain has a mournful, lamenting tone.



Direct Teaching

Content-Area Connections

Literature: Anglo-Saxon Scops

- The literature of the Anglo-Saxons was handed down orally by scops who sang in the lords' mead halls, where warriors gathered to celebrate the events of the day.
- These scops, like the Greek poets before them, remembered their stories by using accentual meter and many stock phrases called kennings.



Direct Teaching

Exploring the Historical Period

Saint Patrick

- A famous legend about Saint Patrick concerns the shamrock, the three leaf plant that is the national flower and symbol of Ireland.
- Patrick used the shamrock to explain the doctrine of the holy Trinity (the three-person godhead of Christianity).





Direct Teaching

Exploring the Historical Period

Irish Civilization

- The golden age of Irish civilization was eventually disrupted by the arrival of Scandinavian invaders near the end of the eighth century.



Direct Teaching Reading Skills

Recognizing Cultural Assumptions

- You might be offended by this view of Christianity as a force of light gleaming against “the darkness.”
 - » What kinds of cultural assumptions did Churchill’s words reflect?

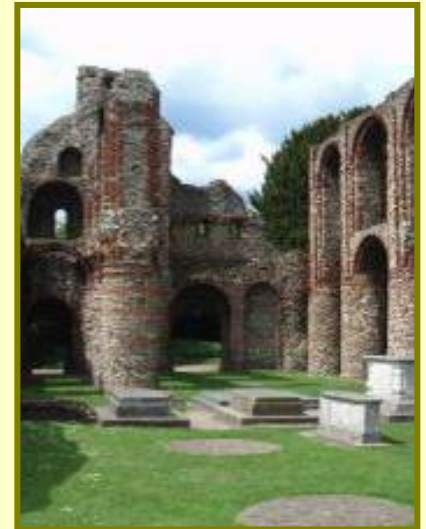


Direct Teaching

Exploring the Historical Period

Monasteries

- Before Henry VIII destroyed the English monasteries in the early sixteenth century, there were, in Yorkshire alone, twenty-eight abbeys, twenty-six priories, twenty-three convents, thirty friaries, and thirteen cells.
- All are in ruins today.





Direct Teaching

Exploring the Historical Period

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

- This chronicle, kept by generations of anonymous scribes, tells of weak kings, greedy abbots, and proud barons.
- Although kept in the British Library, an electronic edition is available on the Internet.
- This chronicle was the first important prose work in English.