



LIFE·PAC®

Language Arts

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Alpha Omega Publications®

LANGUAGE ARTS 1205
MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE

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ENGLISH 1205

MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE



One of the reasons Americans study about England is that American literature and history have their roots in England. Through tracing America's cultural heritage, you can come to a better understanding of what America is and what America hopes to become. Many of the standards, ideas, and concepts Americans hold dear are derived from much earlier times. Early settlers brought with them the English tradition, which is actually a blending of ideas from many different societies.

This LIFEPAK® will present the historical changes and developments as well as the literary achievements for three major periods in England. First, you will study the early period in which the Old English language developed. You will discover the relationships between history, language changes, and literary development during this time.

Next, you will become aware of the impact the Norman invasion had upon Anglo-Saxon society in its government, its language, its population, and its literature. This second section will deal with changes occurring between the years A.D. 1066 and A.D. 1300.

Finally, you will deal with fourteenth-century England and its greatest literary representative, Geoffrey Chaucer. You will study the many influences upon the literature of this period. Chaucer's literature is great because it portrays a cross section of medieval society, making these people understandable and interesting. You may be surprised to learn that some of these fourteenth-century characters resemble some twentieth-century people.

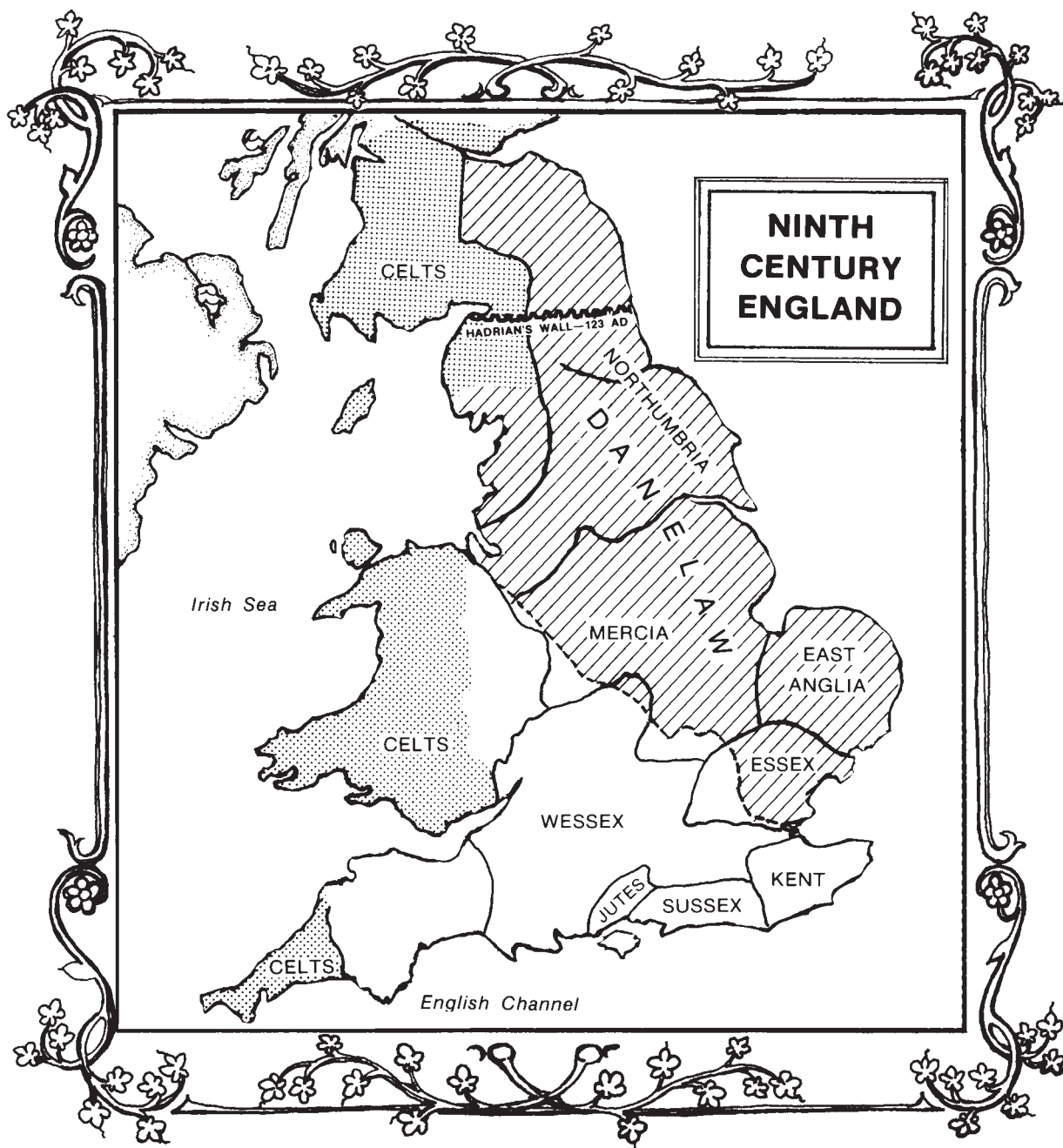
OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this LIFEPAK.

When you have completed this LIFEPAK, you should be able to:

1. Explain the contributions to language and literature made by the early Britons, the Celts, the Romans, and the Anglo-Saxons.
2. Identify characteristics of the Old English language.
3. Explain the role of the poet and the oral tradition in Anglo-Saxon society.
4. Identify and describe the Anglo-Saxon literary forms of epic, elegy, riddle, and gnomic verse.
5. Recognize pagan and Christian elements in Anglo-Saxon literature.
6. Explain the impact of the Norman conquest upon Anglo-Saxon society, language, and literature.
7. Identify the importance of feudalism and the church as reflected by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.
8. Describe the types of literature that dominated the transitional period between A.D. 1066 and A.D. 1300.
9. Recognize the Middle English language.
10. Identify Chaucer's writing and to summarize parts of the *Canterbury Tales*.
11. Identify other literary works of the fourteenth century.

Survey the LIFEPAK. Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.



I. EARLY ENGLAND

The early period of English history is revealed to us primarily through the literature and through certain archaeological discoveries. Before written history, stories about early people—their beliefs, their heroes, and their accomplishments—were preserved through the oral tradition.

In this section you will learn more about the early Britons who settled in the British Isles and the later invaders who brought with them new elements of language, new ideas, new beliefs, and new traditions. You will learn a little about each of the major invading tribes or groups. You will see how the Celts, the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons, and the Jutes influenced the Anglo-Saxon literature. You will learn more about the Old English language; the poet and the oral tradition; the epic and *Beowulf*; the elegy, represented by the “Wanderer” and the “Seafarer;” the riddle; and gnomic verse.

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Review these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able to:

1. Explain the contributions to language and literature made by the early Britons, the Celts, the Romans, and the Anglo-Saxons.
2. Identify characteristics of the Old English language.
3. Explain the role of the poet and the oral tradition in Anglo-Saxon society.
4. Identify and describe the Anglo-Saxon literary forms of epic, elegy, riddle, and verse.
5. Recognize pagan and Christian elements in Anglo-Saxon literature.

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

alliterative

caesura

comitatus

kenning

Note: All vocabulary words in this LIFEPAAC appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given.

EARLY HISTORY OF ENGLAND

The history of England should be fascinating to most Americans because many of the roots of our country are in England. A common misconception is that England has always been populated by people very much like today’s Englishman. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many different people, from the Picts to the Normans, have inhabited the British Isles. The history of England is colorful and often violent. Each major influence or change in her culture and her population has been brought about by an invasion.

Early Britons. Little is known about the earliest inhabitants of the British Isles. This time period is mysterious because no written documents have been found detailing the lives and beliefs of the people. Later discoveries have uncovered certain artifacts, drawings, and manuscripts that have helped historians piece together more information about these early peoples. What is known is that the early Britons mined tin and made bronze tools and weapons. They may have built Stonehenge, a circular arrangement of huge stones. Stonehenge, located in Wiltshire, England, may have served as an observatory and as an astronomical calendar, accurately indicating the seasons and eclipses. Scientists and historians are still puzzled about the manner of construction of such an accurate and complicated calendar by a so-called barbarian people.



The Celts. By 700 B.C. England was invaded by a group known as the Celts. Two groups of Celts developed in the British Isles. The first group was composed of the Irish, Scots, and Manx peoples who spoke a language variation known as Gaelic. The second group made up the Welsh, Cornish, and Britons who spoke Brythonic. These Celtic people were aggressive warriors who worshiped gods of nature. Their religion involved magic and perhaps even human sacrifice. The Celts made and dyed woolen cloth. They set up trade with other areas of Europe. When the Romans invaded England in 52 B.C., the Celts were forced into the hill country of northwestern England, thus escaping Latin influence. The Romans called one group of the Celts *Picts*, because they painted themselves blue. The word *pict* comes from the Latin word *pictus* meaning painted.

The Romans. The Roman Empire spread over most of the known world from northern Africa to most of Europe, from the Middle East to Spain, and even to Britain in the west. The Romans built their empire as a result of many wars. To hold their newly acquired possessions, Rome established outposts and built roads.

After his conquest of Gaul (present-day France), Julius Caesar directed his attentions toward Britain. Perhaps he had heard about the rich tin mines, woolen cloth, and other British resources from traders. Caesar was aware of the aid and protection the Britons had provided to his enemies, the Gauls. Caesar invaded Britain in 52 B.C. The Britons resisted, but they were conquered. England was occupied by Roman troops for about four hundred years. Britain still contains the remains of many Roman structures such as Hadrian's Wall, which was built by Romans in A.D. 120. They also built forts for protection against the inhabitants of Scotland.

England flourished under Roman rule. Roman-built roads encouraged trade and the growth of towns. London became an important port.

→ **Complete these statements.**

- 1.1 A circular monument devised by the early Britons is called _____ .
- 1.2 One tribe of Britons who painted themselves blue were called _____ .
- 1.3 Early British natural resources included a. _____ and b. _____ .
- 1.4 Julius Caesar invaded Britain in _____ B.C.

The Anglo-Saxons. When the Romans withdrew their troops from Britain to repel invaders attacking Rome, Britain was left unprotected. Other invaders threatened British inhabitants. Picts and Scots invaded from the North Sea. The Angles, Saxons, and Jutes invaded and settled in the southeastern part of Britain. The name Angle-Land, later England, was taken from the tribe called the Angles.

The Anglo-Saxon period extends from about A.D. 449 to A.D. 1066. The legendary King Arthur was supposed to have reigned about A.D. 500. The legend may have been based on the life of a real Celtic leader—a leader who organized the Britons against the Germanic invaders.

The Angles, Saxons, and Jutes were Germanic tribes that crossed the North Sea to conquer Britain. By the end of the sixth century, they had conquered the territory. These tribes settled in tiny regions. They had blended into larger kingdoms by A.D. 597 when Pope Gregory sent missionaries to England. An English nationalism came early to these kingdoms. Conversion to Christianity and a common bond to ward off invaders encouraged a national spirit.

The Anglo-Saxons, as these blended Germanic tribes came to be called, were hardy people. They were ruled by the traditional Germanic system of the leader, or chieftain, and his *witan*, or council of retainers. They called assemblies to discuss issues and to interpret laws.