Old English
Memorization

Before you take the Old English test, you need to have the following passage from *Beowulf* memorized. Work on it a bit every day and you'll be fine.

Throughout this year, poetry memorization is cumulative, so you'll need to know this for every test the rest of the year.

Sovereign king, do not sorrow— it seems better to me
To finish the feud as friends wrecking vengeance
Than sorrow in silence. We simply decide
To abide and endure and exert valor always,
To find dignity in death. When his days are all done,
The worthiest warrior is well-remembered.

You will also be memorizing the very beginning of Beowulf in its original Anglo Saxon.

Hwæt. We Gardena in geardagum,
þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,

Lesson 1:
Kennings

The Anglo Saxons often used a poetic device known as the Kenning. A kenning is a figurative, usually compound expression which is used in place of a name or noun.

A classic example of a kenning which is found throughout *Beowulf* is "Whale-Road" which which stands in for "the sea." There are plenty of others kennings - on this page jot down any kennings as you find them in the reading. (Don't make the mistake of thinking that if it has a hyphen it is therefore necessarily a kenning. Sometimes a hyphen is just a hyphen.)

You don't have to complete this table all in one day. As you make your way through Beowulf, pay attention to the kennings, and when you see a fun one, write it down here.

Kenning:	Meaning:
Whale-Road	The Sea

On this page, come up with some kennings of your own. Begin by inventing some kennings for the assigned meanings, and then come up with one or two more completely on your own. Notice how the Saxon kennings work - they involve looking at things from a different angle and helping the reader to see the object in a new and unusual way, so do your best to be creative and original. Don't, for instance, write "light-dots" for stars. That would be dumb. We are aiming here for Not Dumb. An ideal kenning is one which makes you think for a second, and then say, "Oh that's cool. I never thought of it like that before."

Write at least 8 kennings today. There will be a lot of blank space left for you to add more as (and if) you think of them.

Kenning:	Meaning:
	Stars
	Clouds
	Forest
	Army
	Wind
	Birds
	Storm

Lesson 2:
Caedmon's Hymn

This is a another example of the way the Saxons loved to focus on God as creator. Grendel hated hearing the song of creation going on in the meadhall - here is another Saxon meadhall creation song.

Background of the song: *The story of Caedmon was recorded by the Venerable Bede in the 8th century, but Caedmon himself lived in the 7th century at Whitby Abbey, a now ruined Benedictine monastary which looks out over the North Sea. One evening, while the monks were feasting, singing, and playing the harp, Caedmon (who was a shepherd) had to sneak out in embarrassment because he knew no songs. He went out to sleep with the animals - and had a dream in which he was taught a song. He still remembered the miraculous song when he woke up, and this is the result. He went on to become famed as a poet - and is the earliest English poet whose name is known. Note the use of "middle earth" - obviously picked up by Tolkien. Also note the alliteration (which is always hard to capture exactly in translation.)*

Now we must praise the Protector of the heavenly kingdom,

the might of the Measurer and His mind's purpose,

the work of the Father of Glory, as He for each of the wonders,

the eternal Lord, established a beginning.

He shaped first for the sons of the earth,

heaven as a roof, the Holy Maker;

then the middle earth, mankind's Guardian,

the eternal Lord, made afterwards,

solid ground for men, the almighty Lord.

Lesson 3:
Caesura and Alliteration

Now we're going to learn how a Saxon line of poetry was set up, but before galloping into it, let's stop, drop, and make sure we know some of the basics.

The first important thing is to understand what a "stressed" syllable is. Presumably we're on solid ground as far as knowing what a syllable is - if you're lost on that point, take a time out and do some research. But what is the difference between a stressed and an unstressed syllable? That all comes down to the way we actually SAY the word.

Take, for instance, the word "Because." Do you say it, "BE-cause" or do you say it, "Be-CAUSE"? Try it both ways and decide which one sounds normal. I'm hoping you decided on option two. Do you hear the difference between them? One way sounds completely normal, and the othe way just sounds silly. In the word "because", the second syllable is the stressed syllable. That simply means it's the syllable you naturally emphasize when you pronounce the word.

Now look at *Caedmon's Hymn* at left. Do you see how each line is broken in half, leaving a gap in the middle? That gap is called a **Caesura**, which is a word you have to know, so don't forget it. You may have noticed that there is also a caesura in the middle of every line in *Beowulf*.

The way a Saxon line of poetry was set up, there were 2 stressed syllables *before* the caesura and 2 stressed syllables *after*. There was no limit on the total number of syllables in a line - but there could only be 4 stressed syllables total.

Another feature of Saxon poetry is that Instead of rhyming, the way we tend to do in modern poetry, the Saxons alliterated.

Rhyming is what happens when the *final* sound of two words match: *nation* and *station*.
Alliteration is what happens when the *first* sound of two words match: *nation* and *now*.

Alliteration tends to be more subtle than rhyming. If someone accidentally rhymes when they're speaking, everyone notices, the person laughs sheepishly, and says, "Whoops. Didn't mean to rhyme that." But unless alliteration is heavily exaggerated we tend to not hear it as much. An exaggerated example would be, "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers." A more everyday sort of example would be, "I never noticed before how many needles are in that pincushion."

It can still be a very effective poetic device - it unites a line and makes it sound more smooth. It works well in prose too, since it doesn't jump out at people.

Assignment: Go through *Caedmon's Hymn* at left, and mark the alliteration in every line.

Lesson 4:
Sutton Hoo Helmet

The Sutton Hoo helmet is one of the most famous Anglo Saxon artifacts of all time and is now displayed in the British Museum in London. It was unearthed in 1939 in Suffolk, England. The discovery was rather stunning - it was an entire Saxon ship, buried. If you're at all interested in archeology, or Saxon England, you should really look it up and read about the discovery. It's quite fascinating.

Imagine the burial of Shield Sheafing. As you recall, his body was put into a ship, loaded with treasure, and pushed out to sea. In the case of the Sutton Hoo burial, they appear to have done the same thing - but rather than launching the boat out to sea, they buried it. The burial likely occurred in the early 7th century - right around the time that Caedmon was being inspired to sing.

This was a massive archeological find. The ship was full of treasures, and was clearly the burial of a great king. But the most iconic of all the items they unearthed was this helmet. (About one in every three books that have anything to do with Saxons have a picture of the Sutton Hoo helmet on the cover. Now you'll recognize it.)

The thing to notice about this helmet is the intricate detail. Much of the helmet has corroded and gone - but you can see on the nose piece and over the eyes how many tiny details were worked into it. Think of the poetry of *Beowulf* as Beowulf and his men walked from their ship up to the meadhall,

> "Boar-shapes in bronze, on their battle cheek guards,
> Good were the goldsmiths, who gave them that fierceness."

Or the song the dwarves sing in Tokien:

> *For ancient king and elvish lord, there many a gleaming golden hoard, they shaped and wrought, and light they caught, to hide in gems on hilt of sword. On silver necklaces they strung, the flowering stars, on crowns they hung, the dragon-fire, in twisted wire, they meshed the light of moon and sun.*

Lesson 5:
Finnsburg Fragment

You have just read in *Beowulf* the song that the minstrel sang in the meadhall, telling the story of the fight at Finnsburg. In *Beowulf* it is known as "The Finnsburg Episode," but this is another independant version of the same story which has survived and is known as the "Finnsburg Fragment."

Only a portion of this poem remains (thus the "fragment" in the name), but there are some very notable differences between this particular telling of the story and the *Beowulf* version. In this poem, we are given the story of a glorious and heroic battle. The author of *Beowulf*, however, brings in other elements which aren't mentioned in this version at all - namely the woman.

In the story the minstrel sang in *Beowulf,* we are shown the tragedy of this story as seen through the eyes of the woman who lost everything. She was a peaceweaver, and it turned out to be an ineffective peaceweaving. (The author of *Beowulf* seems to go out of his way several times to stress that peaceweaving was very frequently ineffective.) The clan of this woman's father and the clan of her husband ended up fighting, and she lost everyone she cared about on both sides. We are meant to feel the tragedy of the situation, and see the horrible and seemingly senseless consequences of the blood feud.

In the *Finnsburg Fragment*, we hear only of a glorious battle. As you read through this, you'll notice a complete absence of the woman whom we left weeping at the pyre back in *Beowulf*.

'The gables are not burning.'
Then the king, a novice in battle, said:
'This is no dawn from the east, no dragon
flies here, the gables of the hall are not burning,
but men are making an attack. Birds of battle screech,
the grey wolf howls, spears rattle,
shield answers shaft. The wandering moon gleams
under the clouds; evil deeds will now
be done, bringing grief to this people.
But rouse yourself now, my warriors!
Grasp your shields, steel yourselves,
fight at the front and be brave!'
Then many a thegn, laden in gold, buckled his sword-belt.
Then the stout warriors, Sigeferth and Eaha,
went to one door and unsheathed their swords;

Ordlaf and Guthlaf went to guard the other,
and Hengest himself followed in their footsteps.
When he saw this, Guthere said to Garulf
that he would be unwise to go to the hall doors
in the first rush, risking his precious life,
for fearless Sigeferth was set upon his death.
But that daring man drowned the other voices
and demanded openly who held the door.
'I am Sigeferth, a prince of the Secgan
and a well-known warrior; I've braved many trials,
tough combats. Even now it is decreed
for you what you can expect of me here.'
Then the din of battle broke out in the hall;
the hollow shield called for men's hands,
helmets burst; the hall floor boomed.
Then Garulf, son of Guthlaf, gave his life
in the fight, first of all the warriors
living in that land, and many heroes fell around him,
the corpses of brave men. The raven wheeled,
dusky, dark brown. The gleaming swords so shone
it seemed as if all Finnesburh were in flames.
I have never heard of sixty warriors
who bore themselves more bravely in the fight
and never did retainers better repay
glowing mead than those men repaid Hnæf.
They fought for five days and not one of the followers
fell, but they held the doors firmly.
Then Guthere withdrew, a wounded man;
he said that his armour was almost useless,
his corselet broken, his helmet burst open.
The guardian of those people asked him at once
how well the warriors had survived their wounds
or which of the young men . . . .

Lesson 6:
Writing a Saxon line, part 1

Now you're going to take a stab at writing a few lines of poetry in the Saxon style. It's nowhere near as easy as it seems. The first thing to work on is the counting of accented (or "stressed") syllables. Remember that in Saxon poetry there are only four accented syllables per line, two on either side of the caesura. For the following examples, mark every accented syllable, and in the space at the right, write down how many accented syllables there were, out of how many total syllables there were. Some of these lines are correct, and some are not - see if you can tell which ones are which. Read the line naturally, and mark where the stresses naturally fall.

Example: Round the wall were sprigs of ivy. 4 / 8

1. From in the shadows there were sounds of buckets. _____

3. Before coming home again, I ran to the store. _____

4. The time that we spent there was horribly unfortunate. _____

5. And then there was that other girl who cheated. _____

6. I have to say that food was good. _____

Hopefully you will have noticed that the number of stressed syllables in a line has nothing to do with the total number of syllables. Every combination of words is going to turn out completely differently as far as these numbers go.

Look at your answers. All of the ones that had 4 stressed syllables would be perfectly appropriate lines to put into a Saxon poem, even though some had 8 total syllables and some had 14. The only thing you care about in Saxon poetry is the number of stresses in a line. In other words, that first number you wrote down is the number you care about - the second number is completely irrelevant.

Now you're going to write some lines of your own - each with 4 stressed syllables. Make sure that you vary how many total syllables you put in each one. If it turns out at the end that you've written every line with 4 stresses out of 8 total, go back and change some. You don't want to end up with every line being sing-songy.

At the end of the line, mark how many stresses there are out of how many total.

1. _____ _____

2. _____ _____

3. _____ _____

4. _____ _____

5. _____ _____

6. _____ _____

Lesson 7:
Writing a Saxon line, part 2

Now that you have figured out how many stresses you need per line, we need to sort out the alliteration. As was mentioned earlier, Saxon poetry does not rhyme, it alliterates. There are some very specific rules for how the alliteration works, so buckle up and pay attention.

We know that there are four stressed syllables in each line. The third stressed syllable (the one after the caesura) must alliterate with the first or the second stressed syllable, or both. The fourth doesn't matter.

Example:

Kings had courage then, the kings of all tribes.

The underlined words are the stressed syllables - two on either side of the caesura. The circled words show the alliteration. (Notice that alliteration is based on the sound of the letter, not the letter itself . . . a hard C alliterates with a K.) In this example, the third stressed syllable alliterates with both the first and the second - but it would also have been ok if it had only alliterated with one or the other. So, if the line had been changed to this it would still have worked:

Rulers had courage then, the kings of all tribes.

Mark up the following lines, underlining the stressed syllables and circling the alliteration. Then decide if they are correct or incorrect. If they are incorrect, write what's wrong with them.

1. He rose and in rising, he wrecked all his foes.

Correct? If not, why not? _____

2. He fought in the front and he ran towards the foe.

Correct? If not, why not? _____

3. The whale-road was wide but his warriors still crossed it.

Correct? If not, why not? _____

Lesson 8:
Riddles

The Saxons greatly enjoyed riddles. The *Book of Exeter* is a 10th century collection of Saxon poetry which contains, among other things, nearly 100 riddles. Many of them are religious, and others are obscene, some are obvious and easy, while others are quite difficult to solve. Obviously, Tolkien borrowed from this genre in the *The Hobbit*, as riddling becomes a major plot point in the story.

There are several categories of riddle, but the one we're going to focus on is called a Neck Riddle. This is the kind of riddle which, if solved, will save your neck! This means that something important (like your life) is riding on your answer. Neck Riddles also tend to be much more difficult, and usually require some sort of special knowledge in order to solve them - basically you "had to have been there." This also makes them feel unfair.

One example of a Neck Riddle would be Sampson's famous riddle which he posed to the Philistines in Judges 14:14. Something important hung in the balance, but it also required inside knowledge in order to solve it. Another example would be Bilbo's riddle, "What have I got in my pocket?" In both of these cases, the riddlers were doing something more than just telling a joke - the outcome of the riddle was significant. These riddles are also both quite impossible to solve without additional information.

Here is an example of a neck riddle from the Book of Exeter. Can you guess the answer?

A creature came walking to where men sat,
A great many wise ones, at assembly;
The creature had one eye and two ears,
And two feet, twelve hundred heads,
A back and a belly and two hands,
Arms and shoulders, one neck
And two sides. Say what it is called.

If you can guess the answer, it means you've heard it before. I absolutely refuse to believe you if you say you figured it out by yourself. Once you've tired yourself out trying to solve it, you can look in the back for the answer and as you do, be grateful that you didn't have your life riding on your ability to solve it!

Lesson 9:
Writing a Saxon line, part 3

It's time for you to crank out some Saxon style lines of your own. They don't need to relate to each other - and they can be about whatever you want. Make sure you have a total of four stressed syllables, a caesura, and proper alliteration. Then mark up your lines to show stresses and alliteration.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Lesson 10:
Art and Poetry

If you look at a culture's art, you'll frequently see many of the same characteristics that you find in the culture's poetry. Artists and poets are like two sides of the same coin, and each can help you understand the other. This is why, throughout this book, there are frequent pictures. They're almost like visual aids to help you better understand the poetry you're reading.

This is a Saxon brooch found in Kent, England. It is dated between 550-600 and is now displayed at the British Museum in London.

Just like the Sutton Hoo helment, this shows how much the Saxons loved intricate detail. The stones are garnets, two of which have been drilled and inlaid with gold. (The two round ones that look like eyes.) The white discs are shell with garnet inlay, and all those tiny details are worked in gold and silver.

Saxon poetry, just like their art, is very tight, and very detailed. They didn't write huge, sweeping, moody odes - they focused on the small twists, the kennings, the double meanings, the alliteration. Their lines are short, methodical, structured, and every one of them is ornamented.

Actual Size

Lesson 11:
Writing a Saxon line, part 4

Right then. Expert as you now are in the writing of the Saxon line, it's time to kick it up a notch. This time you need to write four lines, and each needs to incorporate one original kenning. By original, I mean one that you made up yourself. Whale-Road doesn't count.

You can use a kenning you've already written (in exercise 1) or you can make up some new ones. Everything else is the same - stresses, caesura, alliteration, etc. The lines don't need to relate to each other - and they can be about whatever you want. Mark it up just like last time.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

To Study for the Test:

Of course you need to know the answers to all the questions throughout the readings in *Beowulf* - but here is a list of what you need to understand from this workbook before you take the test.

1. Memorization (see page 1)

2. Poetic terminology: Be able to define, produce, and / or corretly identify the following:
    a. Kenning
    b. Stressed syllable
    c. Caesura
    d. Alliteration

3. Understand and be able to explain how a Saxon line is put together (4 stressed syllables, caesura, where the alliteration goes, etc.)

Lesson 12:
Hadrian's Wall

Hadrian's Wall was built by the Roman Emporer Hadrian as the border of his empire, separating the "civilized" portion of England from the barbarians to the north. Construction began around the year 122 and took roughly six years to complete. The wall runs from the west coast of England to the east coast, and was 73 miles long.

Although Hadrian's Wall is very close to the northern border of England, it is not (as many people think) the border between Scotland and England. It is the ancient border of the empire, but does not correspond to current political boundaries.

In the 18th century, people began to dismantle the wall in order to re-use the stones for road-building, and much of the wall has now disappeared. In 1834, a man named John Clayton became interested in the wall and decided to make an effort to preserve it. He began to buy up the land around the wall in order to keep farmers from pulling it down in order to re-use the stones. He managed his new farms himself, and the money he made from the farming he used to fund excavation around the wall and various preservation efforts. Eventually the land was bought by the National Trust, and Hadrian's Wall is now considered a World Heritage Site.

Lesson 13:
Creation Poem

It's now time to launch a complete poem in the Saxon style. You have two days to work on it.

The poem needs to be 8 to 10 lines long, on the subject of creation. That is a very broad topic, and you can be as creative as you want regarding which aspect of creation you decide to write about. Your poem needs to contain two of your original kennings, and have proper stresses and alliteration. Decide ahead of time which kennings you want to work in, and then use them in the final poem.

Kenning 1: _____

Kenning 2: _____

Title: _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Lesson 14:
Stonehenge

You are reading Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of how and why Stonehenge came to be. His explanation, however, is not at all in line with current expert opinions. Giants bringing stones from Africa to Ireland, then Merlin bringing them from Ireland to England . . . this is not a theory that scholars take seriously. Eyebrows are raised and tongues are clicked about Geoffrey and his silly opinions. On the other hand, the current "accepted" position is that this monument was built by pre-iron-age peoples, using tools like antlers and the shoulder blades of cattle. We know for a certainty that the stones had to travel a great distance - the current theory is 240 miles from Wales for the bluestones in the inner ring, and at least 20 miles for the enormous 50 ton sarcen stones in the outer ring. Scholars have worked out that it would take roughly 600 men to move one stone on enormous rollers. It is unclear, however, how they would have quarried the stones in the first place . . . if all they had to work with were antlers.

There are many burial mounds all around the site, as well as holes filled with created human remains near the circle itself, and in the early 20th century a decapitated Saxon man was discovered. There is obviously a heavy astronomical component in how the stones are arranged, but despite everyone's best efforts and guesses, the hows and whys of Stonehenge remain a mystery.

Lesson 15:
Tintagel

As you are reading in Geoffrey, Arthur was said to have been conceived in the castle at Tintagel. In the picture to the left, the island is where the remains of the castle are. The only way of reaching the castle is by means of a very narrow causeway which runs from the mainland across the cliffs, which is why Gorlois thinks it is a safe place to put his wife. He says that three men could defend it agains the entire kingdom, and hopefully you can see why.

In the picture below you can see some of the ruins of the once impressive castle.

Lesson 16:
Poem

You are going to write another poem in the Saxon style, and once again you have two days to complete it. This time you can write about anything you want, but it needs to have the correct stresses and alliteration. Once again, the finished poem should be 8 to 10 lines long, and contain two original kennings. Decide ahead of time which kennings you want to work in, and then use them in the final poem.

Kenning 1: _____

Kenning 2: _____

Title: _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Lesson 17:
Mont Saint-Michel

Just off the coast of France is the small island named for the monastery which has been here since the 8th century. This is a tidal island, which means that at certain times of day you have to take a boat out to it, and at other times of day you can reach it on foot. Historically the island was connected to the mainland by a causeway, which was visible at low tide and underwater at high tide.

Oddly enough, there is another island called St Michael's Mount off the coast of Cornwall, about 60 miles down the coast from Tintagel. It too is a tidal island and is connected to the mainland by a causeway accessible only during low tide. The one in England is named after the one in France, and both islands have giant stories attached to them.

This French one is where Arthur killed the giant which you will read about in Geoffrey, and the English one is where Jack was said to have killed his giant.

Lesson 18:
Avalon

Since the twelfth century, Glastonbury has been associated with the Arthurian Isle of Avalon. Geoffrey tells us that Arthur's sword was forged in Avalon, and he was later taken there after his battle with Mordred. In the old stories, Avalon was an island, which doesn't seem to fit with the current geography around Glastonbury at all. However, the plains around Glastonbury did in fact used to be a lake, and this hill would have been an island.

The hill itself is called Glastonbury Tor, and there is no shortage of strange stories about it. It is said to be the entrance to Faerie Land, or alternatively, the entrance to the Underworld. Joseph of Arimetheia was said to have founded a church on top of the hill, and it was thought to have been the location of the Holy Grail. Some speculate that the terraces on the hillside, if viewed from above, form the ancient symbol of a labyrinth. Many stories indicate that the hill is full of tunnels.

The tor is a stunning place to visit, although unfortunately the mass of Arthurian legends associated with the hill mean that most of the people you meet along the path are wanna-be wizards wearing tunics and carrying pan flutes. That tends to diminish the experience somewhat.

Lesson 19:
Poem

It's time to write another poem in the Saxon style, and once again you have two days to complete it. Once again it can be about anything you want, but it needs to have the correct stresses and alliteration.The finished poem should be 8 to 10 lines long, and contain two original kennings. Decide ahead of time which kennings you want to work in, and then use them in the final poem.

Kenning 1: _____

Kenning 2: _____

Title: _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____