The Anglo-Saxon 449-1066

The British Legacy
- The U.S. was influenced by the legacy of British common law – with its emphasis on personal rights and freedom
- The island of Great Britain has been invaded & settled many times: Iberians, Celts, Romans, Angles and Saxons, Vikings, Normans

The Spirit of the Celts
- Settled by tall blond warriors – Celts
- Their religion was a form of animism – they saw spirits everywhere (rivers, trees, stones, ponds, fire & thunder_\)
- Druids served as kind of priests
- Stonehenge – possibly used for religious rites having to do with solar & lunar cycles

The Celtic Heroes & Heroines: a Magical World
- Celtic legends are full of strong women
- Celtic stories are full of fantastic animals, passionate love affairs, and incredible adventures

The Romans: The Great Administrators
- Romans provided armies & organization that prevented further serious invasion
- Built a network of roads
- Built a defensive wall 73 miles long
- Old Celtic religion began to vanish
- Romans left b/c trouble at home, & left no central government behind – so Britain was weak

The Anglo-Saxons Sweep Ashore
- Angles & Saxons from German and Jutes from Denmark drove out the old Britons & settled the greater part of Britain
- Celts retreated into Wales – in the far west of the country – but left traces of their cultures

Unifying Forces: Alfred the Great & Christianity
- King Alfred of Wessex (Alfred the Great) led the Anglo-Saxons against the invading Danes
- The Danes eventually took over & settled in parts of northeast and central England (plundering & destroying everything in their path)
- Christianity provided a common faith & common system of morality and right conduct: it also linked England to Europe
Anglo-Saxon Life: The Warm Hall, the Cold World

- Warfare was the order of the day
- Fame & success, even survival, were gained only through loyalty to the leader
- Success was measured in gifts from the leader
- Loyalty was essential to A-S life
- Mead Halls encouraged the A-S folks to participate in community discussion & rule by consensus

The Anglo-Saxon Religion: Gods for Warriors

- The old Anglo-Saxon religion with warrior gods persisted
- A dark, fatalistic religion (originally from Germany) – similar to Norse or Scandinavian mythology
- Odin, god of death, poetry, magic
- Thor, Norse god of thunder & lightning
- Dragon – protector of treasure – guardian of the grave mound
- It was more concerned with ethics than with mysticism – with the earthly virtues of bravery, loyalty, generosity, and friendship

The Bards: Singing of Gods and Heroes

- The mead hall provided a place for shelter & council meetings & a place for storytellers & their audiences
- These singers (bards) were called scops and were not considered inferior to warriors!
- To A-S, creating poetry was as important as fighting, hunting, farming, or loving
- Poets sang to the strumming of a harp

Hope in Immortal Verse

- Lots of A-S literature is mournful – “life is hard & ends only in death”
- For non-Christians, only fame and its commemoration in poetry could provide a defense against death

A Light from Ireland

- Ireland (isolated & surrounded by wild seas) was not overrun by the Germanic invaders
- From 432-750 – while Europe & England sank into constant warfare, confusion, and ignorance, Ireland experienced a golden age!
- In Ireland, Christianity, “burned and gleamed through the darkness”

The Christian Monasteries: The Ink Froze

- Monasteries served as centers of learning in this period
- Monks assigned to the scriptorium, or writing room, probably spent almost all of their daylight hours copying manuscripts by hand
- In winter, the ink could freeze!
- These monks wrote on vellum (a sheepskin “paper”)
- The monks obeyed a rule of silence – learning was SERIOUS
The Rise of English Language

- Latin alone remained the language of serious study in England
- King Alfred prompted the use of English & it began to gain respect as a language of culture