

RADICAL ROOTS!

The Greek and Latin Roots of English

Instructor: Alfia Wallace – alfiawallace@yahoo.com

Welcome to Radical Roots!: The Greek and Latin Roots of English. In this class you will learn a little bit about the history of English, how Greek and Latin roots came to be a part of English, and how we can tell if an English word is originally from Greek and Latin. In addition, you will learn something about Greek and Roman civilization. In practical terms, you will learn to identify common Greek and Latin prefixes, roots and suffixes which will help to expand your English vocabulary.

History of English: **Anglo-Saxon** (circa 450 – 1066 AD)

Germanic tribes settled in what is now England in the **5th and 6th centuries** of our era. They spoke a language which became what is known as **Anglo-Saxon** or **Old English**. This language is very different from modern English in alphabet, vocabulary and grammar. You cannot understand it without studying it as a foreign language. Here is an example of what it looked like, from **King Alfred**'s translation from Latin of the Preface to the Pastoral Care (late 9th century):

Swā clæne hīo wæs oðfeallenu on Angelcynne ðæt swiðe
fēawa wæron behionan Humber ðe hiora ðēninga cūðen
understandan on Englisc, oððe furðum ān ærendgewrit of
Lædene on Englisc āreccean; ond ic wēne ðætte nōht
monige begiondan Humber næren.

Another famous work from the Anglo-Saxon period is the epic poem, **Beowulf**.



Map courtesy of englishclub.com

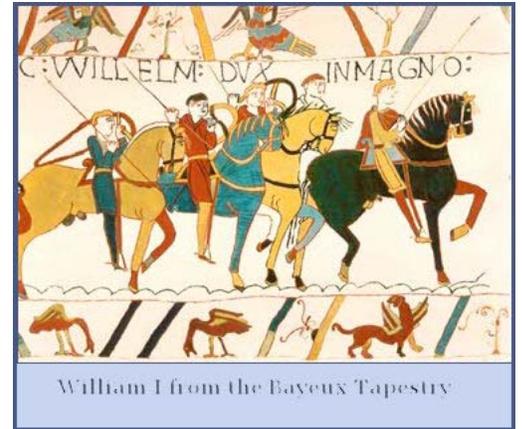
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1066 – The Norman Conquest: **Middle English** (c. 1067 – 1450 AD)

In **1066**, England was invaded by **William the Conqueror**, a Norman king from France. The Normans originally came from Scandinavia (the word ‘Norman’ comes from word ‘norsemens’ or ‘north men’). They originally spoke a Germanic language but after settling in France, their language became mixed with **Old French, a Romance language which evolved from Latin**. Middle English lost much of the Anglo-Saxon grammar and added an enormous number of **loanwords from Latin**. After the **Norman Conquest**, and for several hundred years thereafter, many people in England were trilingual in English, French and Latin. Latin words came into English through French and Latin. Greek words came into English through Latin. Latin was the language of education and scholarship in England during this period and up until the modern period. One of the most famous writers of this period was **Geoffrey Chaucer** (c. 1343 – 1400). Here is an example from his famous Canterbury Tales:



Seint Valentyne! to you I réovele
My woful lyf, as I can, compleyninge;
But, as me thinketh, to you a quarele
Right greet I have, whan I, rememberinge
Bitwene, how kinde, ayeins the yeres springe,
Upon your day, doth ech foul chese his make;
And you list not in swich comfórt me bringe,
That to her grace my lady shulde me take.



A Middle English illuminated manuscript of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales

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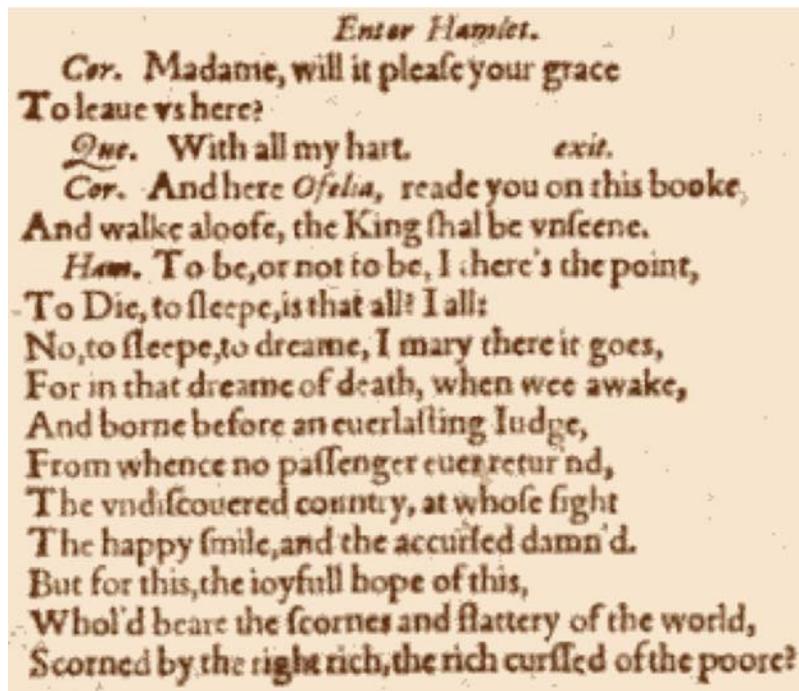
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1400's – The Great Vowel Shift: **Early Modern English** (c. 1450 – 1800 AD)

In the 15th century, a great change took place in English's vocalic system which led to a form of English which we can more easily recognize and understand. This was known as the “**Great Vowel Shift**”. As England became a global empire, it added vocabulary from Indian (guru, jungle, mango), African (jazz, banana, bongo) and Native American languages (chipmunk, avocado, totem). During the **Enlightenment** period (c. 1640 – 1800), many more words from **French** came into the English vocabulary. Early Modern English is the English of the **King James Bible**, **William Shakespeare**, John Milton (*Paradise Lost*), and Jonathan Swift (*Gulliver's Travels*). Below you can read some of the famous “To be or not to be” speech from Shakespeare's play Hamlet.



1800 AD – Present: Modern English

The **Industrial Revolution** of the 1800's expanded English vocabulary with many new words created for new and emerging technologies and ideas. Most of these words were created **from Greek and Latin** roots. The continued expansion and influence of English in the world led to more borrowings from global languages such as Chinese (ketchup, kung fu, gung-ho), Japanese (futon, origami, haiku) and Russian (vodka, tsar, pogrom). In 1828 Webster published his first dictionary, the American English Dictionary.

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What do these words have in common?

photograph	transport	speak, say, talk
geography	proverb	handle
thermometer	revolution	house
microscope	contribution	opening
democrat	invisible	flower
philosophy	video	bring, brought
sympathy	nominate	mouth
drama	republic	feel
logic	unpopular	shipping
kilogram	legal, legislate	sky
physician	jury	rider
cardiology	senate	pestering
femur	congress	glimmer
isotope	religion	flashed
megabyte	August	brother
synonym	astronomy	wedding
thermal	sonic	fifteen
photosynthesis	automobile	laugh

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The Indo-European Family of Languages

English belongs to the Germanic sub-family of Indo-European. Latin and French belong to the Romance sub-family of Indo-European. Greek comprises its own sub-family of Indo-European languages. Because all these languages originated from the same mother language, many of their words have similarities, such as the word for ‘mother’ and the numbers one to ten.

