

YEAR 5 UNIT 1 - THE ANGLO-SAXONS: Was the Anglo-Saxon period really a Dark Age?

Related units: *Year 4 Unit 2: Roman Britain*

Unit overview

In this unit, the children will learn about the world of the Anglo-Saxons. They will consider why they came to Britain and whether the period deserves to be called the 'Dark Ages'. Links will be made to prior learning, particularly to *Year 4 Unit 2: Roman Britain*. Throughout the unit, there is a strong focus on the range of sources that provide us with evidence about the people living at that time. The children will examine archaeological evidence, such as the Sutton Hoo ship burial and the Staffordshire hoard, while using written evidence from the time, including *Beowulf*, to provide context for the archaeological finds. They will learn about the importance of archaeological evidence and the work of the archaeologist, as well as the accidental finds of metal detectorists. You may decide to incorporate a visit to a museum into the unit, and some ideas have been included on potential locations.

The Big Finish in week 6 is an excavation (or simulated excavation) in the school grounds. This is an opportunity for the children to work as archaeologists in their own environment.

Key vocabulary

Invasion, settle, reconstruction, Dark Ages, pagan, plunder, Scandinavia, grave goods, archaeologist, excavation, function, sceptre, garnet, millefiori, hoard, metal detecting, saga, chronicle, illuminated manuscript, ecclesiastical, conversion, monastery, Old English, proof, evidence, counter argument, decay, excavate, preserved, deduction, interpretation, stratigraphy, classification, cataloguing, strata, shard, site, trench.

Knowledge, skills and concepts

In this unit, the children will:

- develop a chronologically secure knowledge and understanding of British and world history
- develop the appropriate use of historical terms
- understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources
- construct informed responses that involve thoughtful selection and organisation of relevant historical information
- note connections, contrasts and trends over time
- regularly address and devise historically valid questions about significance.

Cross-curricular links

- **Art:** writing in runes, making a rune stick, writing illuminated letters
- **DT:** making a model of an Anglo-Saxon village
- **English:** drama and storytelling, debating
- **Geography:** map work, settlements, how physical geography impacted settlements
- **PSCHE/Citizenship:** making informed, responsible choices
- **RE:** exploring different beliefs, burial practices
- **Science:** how to select materials for a certain job, including weaponry, housing and jewellery

Related books for wider reading

- *Beowulf* by Michael Morpurgo
- *Anglo-Saxon Boy* by Tony Bradman
- *King Arthur & the Knights of the Round Table* by Marcia Williams
- *Anglo-Saxons* by Anita Ganeri (*Writing History*)

Places to visit

- Ashmolean Museum, Oxford
- Jarrow Hall (includes Bede museum and reconstruction Anglo-Saxon farm and village)
- West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village, Suffolk
- British Museum, London (Sutton Hoo artefacts)
- Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (Staffordshire Hoard)
- Local museums may also have a collection of Anglo-Saxon objects

Assessment

Opportunities for assessment for learning are built in throughout the unit through questioning and activities. The children can both self and peer assess as appropriate using approaches familiar to them. The quiz is intended to be used during week 5, and will review knowledge, skills and concepts acquired during the unit. The Rising Stars Progression Framework assessment focuses on: *historical enquiry; planning and carrying out a historical enquiry; construct informed responses that involve thoughtful selection & organisation of relevant historical information*. **Detailed information on the task can be found on the key assessment opportunity sheet.**

Subject knowledge and teaching guidance

The Saxons were not just one people – they included Jutes, Danes, Friesians – but for convenience, historians talk about them as Saxons. After the Romans left, some Saxons were invited to come to eastern England to help protect the country from invasion. As Britain was relatively rich, many more came – making up perhaps one-quarter of the population. In some places, Saxons and Britons co-existed quite happily, but not everywhere. It took a long time for things to settle down; even then, strong kings would expand the areas they controlled, whereas weak kings would lose land. Despite this, England was still a rich country. This is what attracted the Vikings from 793 onwards, and the Saxons had to fight to protect themselves from the invaders. Saxons were initially pagans, but gradually they became Christian, building churches and setting up monasteries, which became centres of learning. There is plenty of evidence of trade with the rest of the world. As ever, Saxon society contained both very rich and powerful people, and many who were poor or slaves.

While studying this unit, there may be opportunities for local links and potential visits to sites of interest. Encourage the children to search the media for news of local and national finds related to the subject. This will help them understand how historians are constantly adding and reviewing their knowledge of a period, and may also teach them some surprising local history. The archaeological excavation in week 6 should also link into finding out about your locality.

The archaeological excavation will require preparation in selecting a site, acquiring materials and securing sufficient support on the day. This may seem rather daunting, but don't let that put you off engaging in a truly memorable experience for the children. You will be amazed to find how many sources of expert help there are in your area, as well as willing volunteers to support you with managing the experience. It is also a great way of developing community links and securing positive media coverage for the school. While we can't guarantee the children will uncover a Saxon ship burial, they may find objects which will add to their understanding of the past in their locality. Most certainly, through carrying out the excavation, they will gain a better understanding of how we find out about the past.