

BRITISH LITERATURE

Britain's history has been a dramatic one. It has gone from an occupied land to a major colonial power. Throughout this time, its poets, dramatists and novelists have created an outstandingly rich body of work.

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The Romans occupy England and Wales.

100-400

So far there's no recorded literature, but the very earliest Irish and Welsh texts, such as the Taliesin poems (containing the first reference to the wizard Merlin) and pagan Irish stories were probably being passed down by word of mouth.



400-1066

The Anglo-Saxons **invade**, driving the native British westwards. They bring their own literature with them and compose some more after they arrive. Around 800 AD Vikings begin to **raid** the coast, eventually settling and ruling the north of England and parts of Scotland and Ireland.

Beowulf is written. It has all the necessary ingredients of war, women, wine and the supernatural. Thousands of lines long, it is made up of a series of cliffhangers, the worst being the last one, because the end has been lost. The hero is actually Danish. It may have been composed in Denmark, the Netherlands or England, **depending on** which scholar you believe.



The Normans invade, bringing the French language with them, and introducing new words into English.

1066

The Anglo-Saxons also wrote a lot of poetry and religious texts, most of which survive only as **tiny scraps** of probably much longer works.



1347

The Black Death **gruesomely** kills a third of the population and the feudal system begins to break down as there are too few **peasants**.

1370s

Geoffrey Chaucer writes *The Canterbury Tales*, a rude, funny collection of stories in verse that **mock** most sections of **medieval** society, including the Church. They're still read today. John Wycliffe, a Protestant, begins to **preach** mainly in English. His **sermons** are written down.



1534

Henry VIII declares himself head of the Church of England.

1540s

Dissolution of the monasteries

Libraries are burnt and destroyed. A lot of medieval and Anglo-Saxon literature is lost.

1558-1603

The Elizabethan era

England becomes wealthier, mainly due to the wool trade. There are probably more sheep than people. It's also a time of sea exploration and the start of colonies in the US. Britain established itself as a Naval power after defeating the Spanish navy.

William Shakespeare writes his plays and poems. This time is sometimes called 'The Golden Age of Poetry' as England produces a lot of brilliant poets and playwrights, such as Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spenser and John Donne, **who are overshadowed** by Shakespeare.

1611

The King James Bible is published. This is the first English translation.

1642-1651

The English Civil War

The war between the Parliamentarians and the Royalists.

1660

1667

John Milton publishes *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem concerned with the early stories of the Book of Genesis.

The Restoration

The monarchy is restored under Charles II

