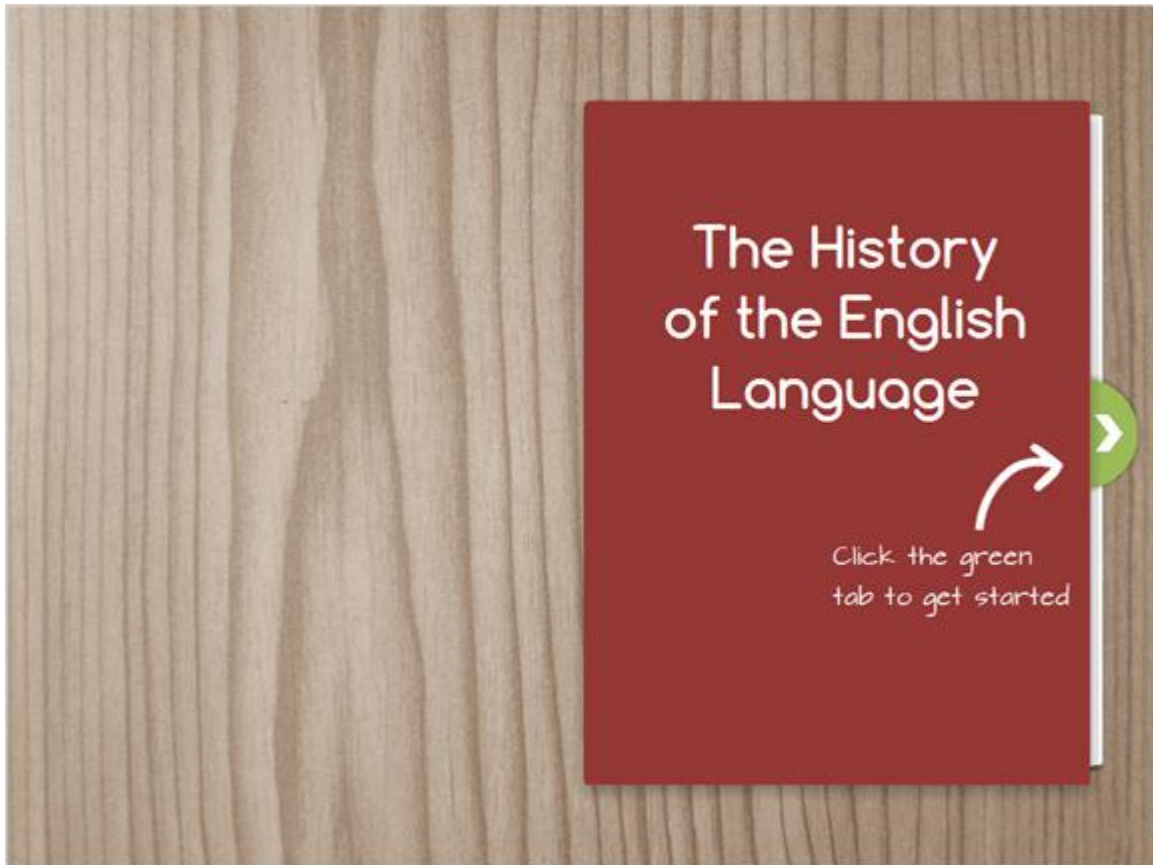


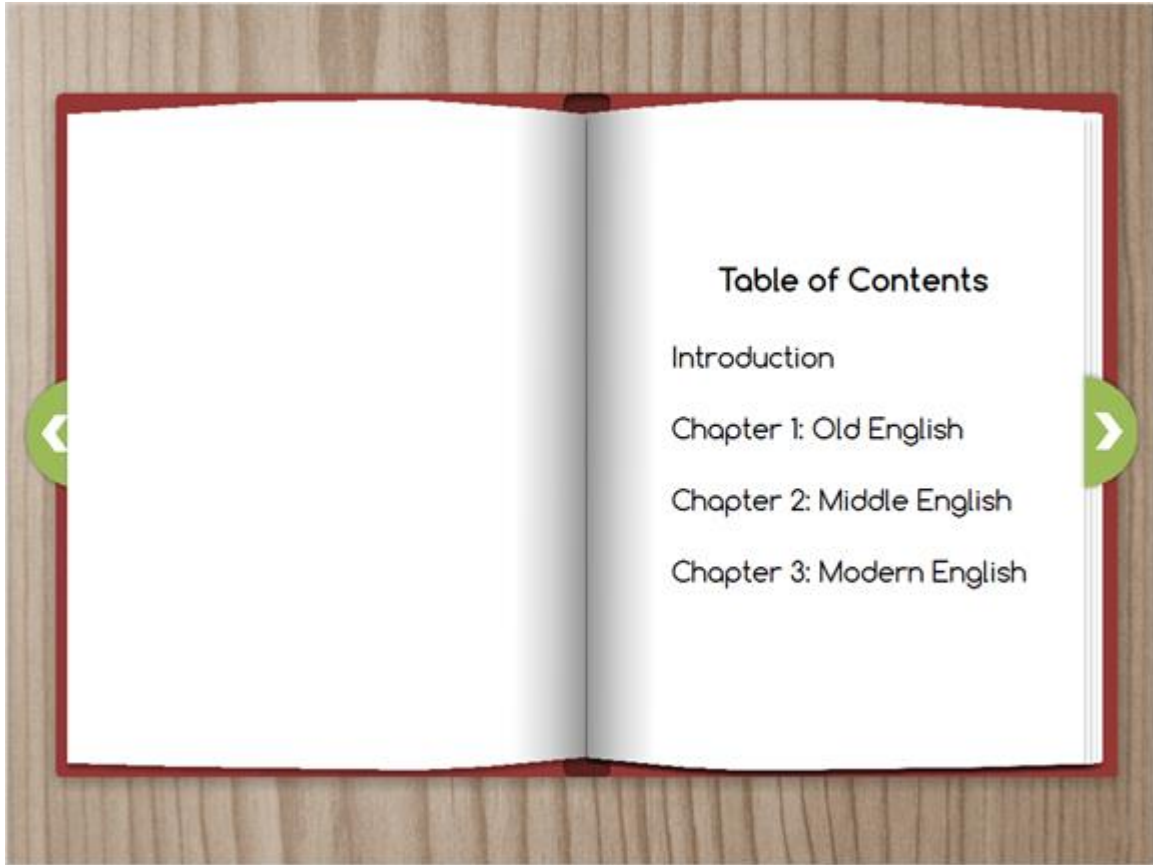
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The History of the English Language

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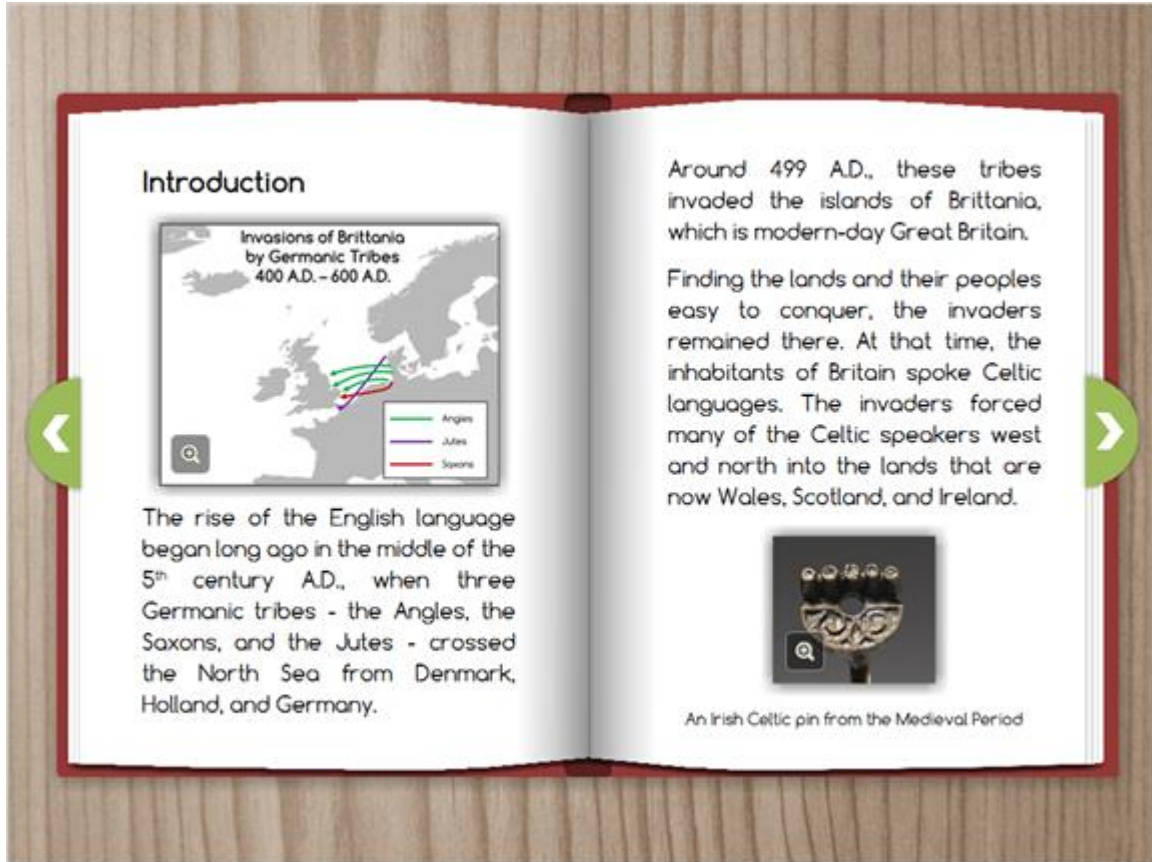
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The English language has evolved over time. Click the green tabs in the book to move through the interactivity and learn more about the development of the English language.

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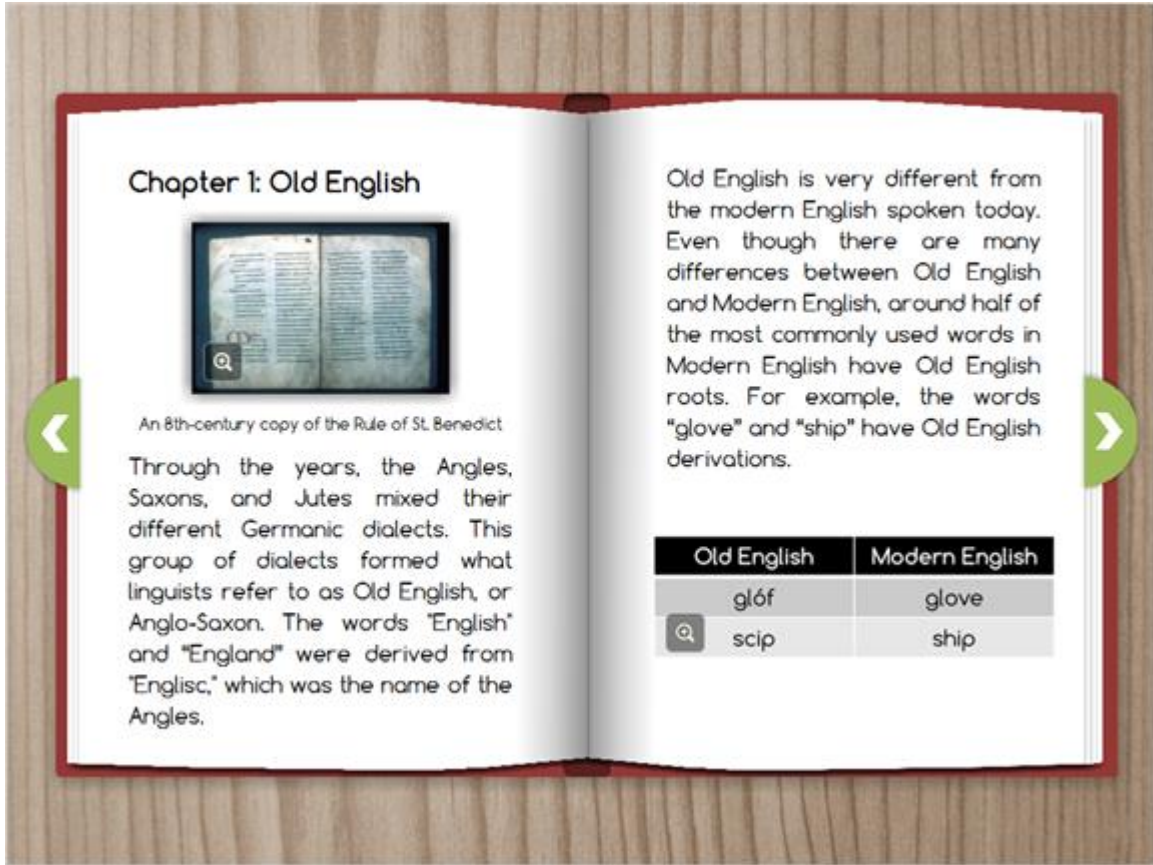


The rise of the English language began long ago in the middle of the 5th century A.D., when three Germanic tribes - the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes - crossed the North Sea from Denmark, Holland, and Germany. Around 499 A.D., these tribes invaded the islands of Britannia, which is modern-day Great Britain.

Finding the lands and their peoples easy to conquer, the invaders remained there. At that time, the inhabitants of Britain spoke Celtic languages. The invaders forced many of the Celtic speakers west and north into the lands that are now Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.

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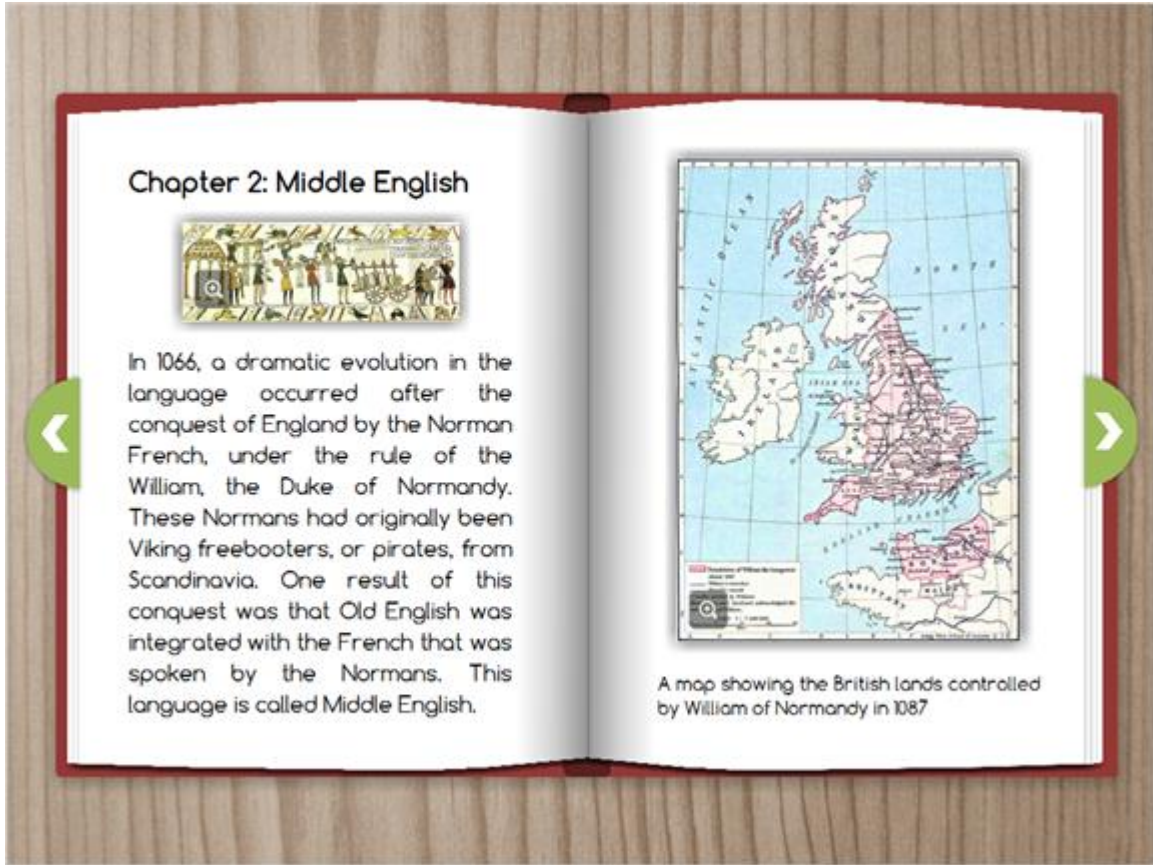


Through the years, the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes mixed their different Germanic dialects. This group of dialects formed what linguists refer to as Old English, or Anglo-Saxon. The words "English" and "England" were derived from "Englisc," which was the name of the Angles.

Old English is very different from the modern English spoken today. Even though there are many differences between Old English and Modern English, around half of the most commonly used words in Modern English have Old English roots. For example, the words "glove" and "ship" have Old English derivations.

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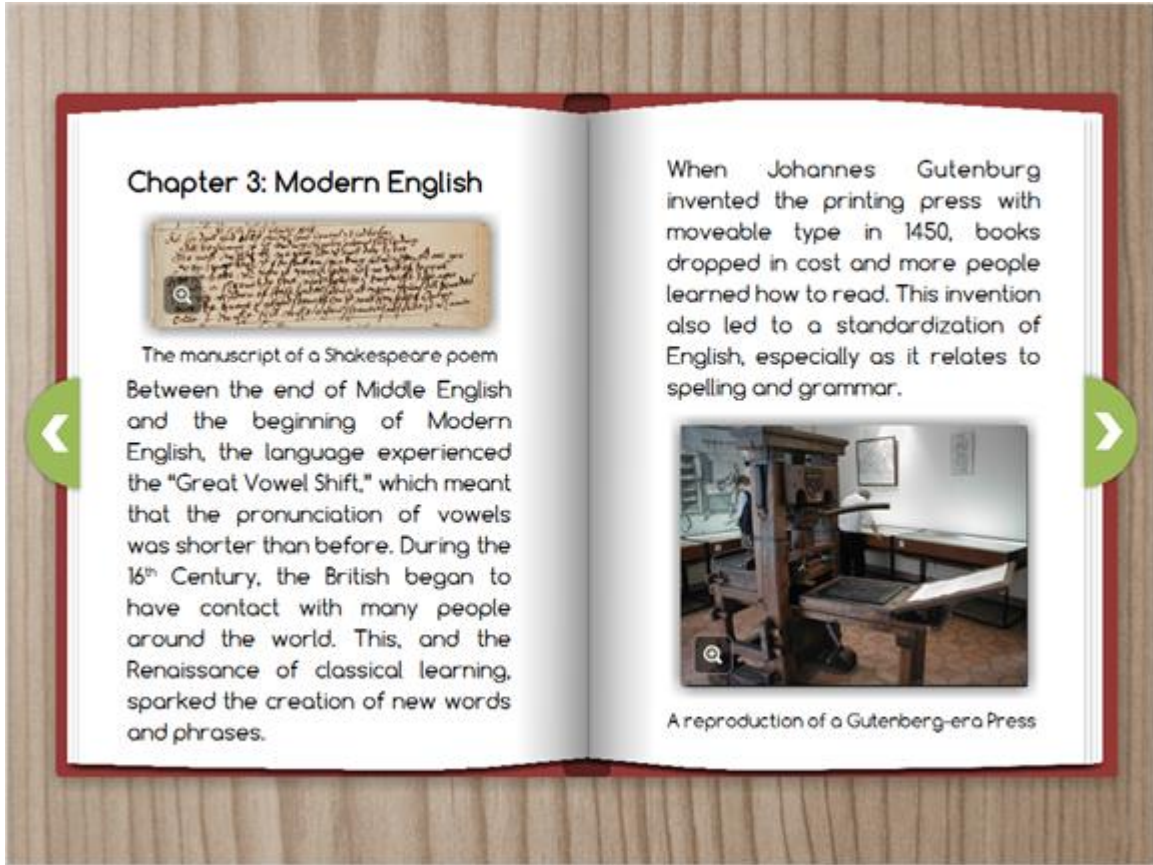
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In 1066, a dramatic evolution in the language occurred after the conquest of England by the Norman French, under the rule of the William, the Duke of Normandy. These Normans had originally been Viking freebooters, or pirates, from Scandinavia. One result of this conquest was that Old English was integrated with the French that was spoken by the Normans. This language is called Middle English.

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Chapter 3: Modern English

The manuscript of a Shakespeare poem

Between the end of Middle English and the beginning of Modern English, the language experienced the "Great Vowel Shift," which meant that the pronunciation of vowels was shorter than before. During the 16th Century, the British began to have contact with many people around the world. This, and the Renaissance of classical learning, sparked the creation of new words and phrases.

When Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press with moveable type in 1450, books dropped in cost and more people learned how to read. This invention also led to a standardization of English, especially as it relates to spelling and grammar.

A reproduction of a Gutenberg-era Press


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Module 2: Literature and Language Throughout History

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1.5 Modern English Periods

Modern English is often divided into two periods. The main difference between the two periods is vocabulary. During the Industrial Revolution, people invented new technology, and this created a need for new words. In addition, at its height, the British Empire covered one quarter of the earth's surface; therefore, the English language adopted foreign words from many other languages.



The Thames Tunnel opened 1843. It was one of the first uses of modern cement.

This timeline shows the chronology of the evolution of the English language.

Year	Language in England
55 B.C.	Pre-Invasion Celtic Languages
449 A.D.	
450 A.D.	Old English
1066 A.D.	
1066 A.D.	Middle English
1400 A.D.	
1400 A.D.	Early Modern English
1800 A.D.	
1800 A.D.	Late Modern English
Present	

THE END ✕

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