

## A (VERY, VERY) BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Of more than 3000 languages spoken in the world today, the single language which has had the most amazing, rapid and widespread growth is unquestionably English. It is spoken as a native language by well over a billion people in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. In addition, English is spoken as a second language by many more millions of people in many other countries, Malaysia is one of them.

The story of the English language, a West Germanic tongue, began when the Romans, whose empire included Britain, abandoned the island to self rule under the Celts, its native inhabitants in 410 AD. The Romans abandoned Britain because Rome was being attacked. For a while, the terror of the Roman name served to protect the Celts but as time went on, the Celtic King Vortigern had to ask for help from the hardy Germanic tribes when they were attacked from the North by a group of people called the Picts. In 449 AD, the Germans came firstly to help the Celts but when they saw the richness and fertility of the land and the clear weakness of the Celts, they decided to take the island for themselves!

The Germanic invaders brought their separate dialects to different regions of Britain. The Germans were divided into three main tribes, the Jutes who settled in Kent spoke the Kentish dialect, the Saxons who settled in the rest of southern England spoke the Saxon dialect and the Angles who settled in the north spoke both the Mercian and Northumbrian dialect. It was the southern region which witnessed the beginning of English literary history for after a while, the Saxon dialect was lifted into wider use by the Saxon King Alfred. At that time that dialect became standard for the whole country and gradually trade and public interest transferred to London where the English language slowly developed like a living organism.

The history of the English language is divided into three periods, Old, Middle and Modern English. Old English more like Modern German than Modern English and is full of inflections which meant that nouns were either masculine, feminine or neuter like Arabic. During Middle English, the main change that happened was the development of the schwa sound. Modern English is well, the language that you and I are using today. English has been steadily gaining worldwide popularity until today and if there is a best choice of a truly international language, English would be it. But be forewarned, language is like fashion because once a language is seen as unpopular, another language will take its role. Some linguist even believe that Chinese, German or Spanish will become the next international language, what do you think?

### QUIZ QUESTIONS:

1. How many changes are spoken in the world today?
2. How many people speak English as a first language?
3. Give three examples of countries where English is a second language?
4. English is really a variant of which European language?
5. Why did the Romans leave Britain?
6. From whom did the Celtic King Vortigern asked for help from?
7. What happened then?
8. How many main tribes were they that came to Britain?
9. Can you name one of them and the dialect that they spoke?
10. Which dialect became the major dialect then?
11. Who helped to make Saxon the major dialect?
12. Which city then became the major source of English language development?
13. The history of English can be divided into three parts, can you name all of them?
14. What happens when a fashion becomes out of date? What about a language?
15. Name the languages linguist believe to be able to take the role of English as an international language.