

**English** is part of a large family of languages known as Indo-European. Other Indo-European languages are French, German, Russian, Gaelic and Bengali. All ultimately come from a common ancestor language, Proto-Indo-European, which was spoken somewhere in Southern Russia about 5000 years ago.

### Where did English come from?

English was brought to the British Isles by the **Anglo-Saxons**, a group of invaders from Northern Germany who settled in southern Britain from around **450 AD**. After a number of battles, the Anglo-Saxons forced the Celtic-speaking inhabitants into the north and west of Britain, where they still remain.

### The English of the Anglo-Saxons

The English of the Anglo-Saxons looked and sounded very different from English today. In many ways, it was like modern German. Over the last two thousand years, however, English has changed as the result of contact with other languages. These other languages include **Old Norse** (the language of the Vikings, who settled in Britain from the ninth century AD) and **French** (the language of the Norman invaders who came to England in **1066**).



### Phases in the history of English

The history of English can be divided into four periods:

**Old English:** the English used between the arrival in Southern Britain of the Anglo-Saxon people in the fifth century AD and the Norman Conquest of 1066. This form of English is sometimes called **Anglo-Saxon**.

**Middle English:** the English used between the Norman Conquest of 1066 and William Caxton's introduction of printing to England in 1475.

**Early Modern English:** the English used between the introduction of printing to England in 1475 and the emergence of the first British Empire in the eighteenth century.

**Late Modern English:** the English used from the eighteenth century to the present day, when new kinds of English began to appear beyond the British Isles.

➤ *See also* **Language Study** panels on **Old English, Middle English, Early Modern English** and **Late Modern English**.