



Introduction

This lesson material provides an historical overview of the Anglo-Saxon period relating to the 'Northern Saints', using local geography.

All Saints' Day (celebrated on 1st November) is the Christian festival for remembering all those who have died in the faith. For your pupils, studying the lives of real-life saints might make for an interesting contrast to other contemporary celebrations of Halloween.

Lesson aims

- To provide an overview to introduce studying the northern saints of the Anglo-Saxon period in British history.
- To explain some of Christianity's early beginnings in the British islands.
- To develop research skills using the Internet.
- To reflect on the possible meanings of the word 'miracle' (More Able).
- To reflect on what it might mean to 'sacrifice' one's home life for a greater goal.

Preparation

You will need to organise your timetable to allow your group of pupils to access either the Internet or the downloaded material through your school's Intranet. As websites and other resources can change or become out of date, always check that any resource offered is age appropriate and accessible for your pupils.

It will help if part of your classroom display involves a large map showing the physical geography of northern England and southern Scotland, and the key locations are indicated, with a large timeline for the years AD 0-1000 - these should be annotated/adjusted as the lesson progresses.

Development

Ask your class to discuss briefly who their real-life 'heroes' are - and why, sharing a few instances. Explain that we are going to be learning about some people who had a powerful effect on our national history over 1000 years ago - they changed the way people thought about themselves and their neighbours, and may still have something to teach us today.

Show a physical map of northern England/southern Scotland in Anglo-Saxon times, if possible with an overlay to show the various 'kingdoms', key locations and Hadrian's Wall. Explain that after the Roman legions left Britain in AD 400, having occupied and ruled it for 470 years, these islands became a patchwork of small kingdoms ruled by powerful families who were often at war with each other. Other peoples such as the Saxons came over the North Sea (add some incoming arrows from the east to show the direction of migration) to settle here too. Christianity had been spreading across the Roman Empire, but the Roman retreat from Britain stopped that. The main religions were

pagan, worshipping gods such as Thor or Woden.

But this changed over the next few hundred years as missionaries came from Ireland and Europe (more arrows from the north-west and south) to spread a different idea - Christianity. For these people, God wasn't someone distant and uncaring but someone prepared to become a human being called Jesus to live among normal people. It was a powerful idea: that God knew what it was like to be hungry, to be thirsty, and to suffer, and that God cared about everyone.

The people spreading this idea were often monks, nuns or priests who were completely committed to serving God. Many of them chose to work in one place, setting up small teams to run schools or hospitals for local people. Sometimes they had the protection of local rulers - and sometimes, not. Gradually, their influence grew until Christianity became the most popular faith across these islands. Many of these 'saints' have stories associated with them, and many people have since called them heroes, because they did amazing things and were often seen as miracle workers. What can you find out about them, today?

Cross-curricular links

1. All subjects

Recap on key information using [Worksheet 1: Who were the northern saints?](#)

2. RE - reflections

Follow up your research on these saints by discussing what it means to be 'committed' to a cause. Can pupils name anyone famous who has dedicated themselves to protecting others or looking after them? These northern saints were determined to serve God and their fellow human beings in a variety of ways - and 1500 years later, their names and deeds are still remembered. Ask your pupils if they would like to achieve something important that makes the world a better place and is remembered in the future - what would it be?

Note that none of these saints was particularly interested in being 'famous'. In fact, some almost ran away from it! See [Worksheet 2: What is a saint?](#)

What are the most important things that somebody could achieve in their life? Set a short writing task about personal ambitions that could really change the world.

3. Literacy and IT

Set your pupils the task of researching the published lives of at least one saint to retrieve some key biographical details. They could record this information in terms of a simple autobiography:

My name is...

I lived in the years...

I am famous for...

I think God wanted me to...

The most difficult choice I ever faced was when...

I am especially remembered at... because...

As pupils may have to decipher or consider downloading masses of irrelevant information, use prompts to clarify the key questions about these people – for example:

- What are they remembered for?
- What did they think God wanted them to do?

Some general websites that might be helpful include:

- wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_saints
- rcdhn.org.uk/about_the_diocese/saints/cuthbert.php

And for particular saints:

- Bede: bbc.co.uk/history/walk/timestrip/bede_al.shtml
- Cuthbert, Aidan, Oswald: lindisfarne.org.uk/general/index.htm
- Oswald, Cuthbert, Caedmon: earlybritishkingdoms.com/adversaries/bios/
- Ideas on the Barnabas in Schools website: [Aidan](#)(see also [Aidan – flame of the north](#)), [Eadfrith](#), [Hilda and Caedmon](#).

Get the pupils to create their own map of northern England at that time and mark on the locations associated with their particular saint, using symbols/small drawings/labels, keeping things as small as possible so more details can be added as needed. They also need to place their ‘time’ (birth dates, significant events, date of death) on a timeline.

4. Geography and History

Use a map to find local place names with Anglo-Saxon roots. Research other words with roots in Anglo-Saxon.

5. Differentiation *a. SEN*

Provide sentence prompts for the research task. Add initial letters to the ‘gaps’ in [Worksheet 1: Who were the northern saints?](#) *b. More Able*

Consider one of the ‘miracle tales’ associated with one of the saints:

- Have you come across any similar stories elsewhere?
- What is a miracle?
- Do you believe that miracles can happen?
- What do you think this story is saying about the connection between the person, the place and God? Write your thoughts under the heading ‘Thinking about miracles’.
- See ‘For reflection’ below.

6. Plenary: Discussion points

What have we discovered about who? Use your large display map and timeline to check pupil understanding of where the key locations are and where different saints’ lives fit into the historical record.

7. For reflection

Imagine you were given a mission to go and do something very important but had to leave



behind everything you have.

- What would it hurt the most to leave?
- Is there anything you could think of now that might make you want to do that?
- What questions would you have?
- Who would you want to say goodbye to most of all?

This is what many of these saints did, but their sacrifice had incredible consequences for the future.