**PREPARAZIONE ESAME: DAI CELTI AL MEDIOEVO INGLESE**

**1. What was the primary social and religious role of the Druids in ancient Celtic society?**

They served as judges, priests, and keepers of tribal law and oral history. The Druids represented the intellectual and religious elite of Celtic culture and were spiritual leaders, educators, and legal arbiters who preserved and transmitted traditions through oral means.

**2. To which major language family do the surviving Celtic languages (such as Welsh and Gaelic) belong?**

The Indo-European family. Celtic shares common roots with other European languages, such as Latin, Greek, and Germanic.

**3. Following the withdrawal of Roman legions from Britain in the 5th century, which Germanic tribes migrated to and settled the island?**

Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. They crossed the North Sea from modern-day Denmark and northern Germany and established the earliest kingdoms that would eventually form Anglo-Saxon England.

**4. In Anglo-Saxon culture, what does the term *comitatus* describe?**

It was the mutual loyalty pact between a Germanic king (lord) and his warriors, called Thanes. The *comitatus* was the foundational social and military bond of the time, in which the lord provided food, shelter, and treasures, and in return, his thanes made an oath to protect him and fight by his side.

**5. Which historic event in 793 AD is traditionally considered the dramatic beginning of the Viking Age in Britain?**

The Viking raid on the monastery of Lindisfarne, a wealthy and undefended sacred site, that shocked Christian Europe.

**6. Which common English pronouns and basic words were introduced or heavily influenced by Old Norse (Vikings)?**

*They, their, them*. After the absorption of Scandinavian vocabulary, Old Norse third-person plural pronouns replaced the native West Saxon forms.

**7. Who defeated the Anglo-Saxon king Harold Godwinson at the Battle of Hastings in 1066?**

William, Duke of Normandy (William the Conqueror) won the decisive Battle of Hastings, ending Anglo-Saxon rule and establishing a new Norman dynasty in England.

**8. Following the Norman Conquest, how was English society linguistically stratified?**

Normans spoke French and represented the upper class, while peasants spoke English and the clergy used Latin. A trilingual social hierarchy emerged, in which Anglo-Norman French became the high-prestige language of the royal court and administration, Latin remained the international language of learning and the Church, while English was spoken only by common people.

**9. Why did London city authorities frequently clash with and try to shut down public theaters during the Elizabethan era?**

Concerns over public health (plague outbreaks), civil disorder, and Puritan moral opposition. Theaters drew massive crowds, dangerous for the bubonic plague, pickpocketing and brawls. Furthermore, religious Puritans opposed the theater as ungodly and immoral.

**10. How does the epic poem *Beowulf* reflect a cultural synthesis of two distinct worldviews?**

By fusing Germanic heroic pagan values with Christian monotheistic references. In fact, the original poem celebrates traditional pagan ideals such as blood-feuds, physical bravery, and the pursuit of earthly fate and glory (*lof*). However, the later monk who wrote down the oral tale added a Christian worldview, frequently referencing God's providence and tracing monsters like Grendel back to the biblical lineage of Cain.

**11. What is a *kenning* in Old English poetry?**

A metaphorical compound phrase used in place of a simple noun Kennings are figurative, condensed metaphors characteristic of early Germanic and Norse verse. Examples: calling the sun the "sky-candle," a sword a "battle-light," or a ship a "sea-steed."

**12. In Anglo-Saxon culture, what does the concept of *wyrd* represent?**

Personal destiny or inevitable fate that rules human lives. *Wyrd* is the ancient Germanic concept of fate: a hero could only assert control over his life by facing his

destiny with absolute, fearless courage.

**13. What structural device is most characteristic of Old English poetry instead of end-rhyme?**

Alliteration and a strong medial pause called a *caesura*. Old English verse does not use rhyming lines, but each poetic line is split exactly in half by a structural pause (the caesura), and the two halves are musically linked together by repeating the same initial consonant sounds (alliteration) on heavily stressed words.

**14. Which stylistic feature is most typical of traditional popular medieval ballads?**

Incremental repetition and dramatic dialogue with an impersonal narrative style. Ballads were anonymous narrative songs transmitted orally among the common folk which had a fast-pace and highly objective plots. They relied on raw dialogue and refrains that repeat with small, progressive modifications (*incremental repetition*) to gradually reveal a tragic twist.

**15. What core convention defines the literary concept of courtly love (*fin'amor*) in medieval romance?**

A knight's idealized, suffering, and often unattainable devotion to a noble lady. Courtly love treated the lady as a sovereign ruler or divine figure. The knight declared total submission to her will and performed perilous deeds of chivalry to prove his worth.

**16. In the 14th-century romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, what theme is tested during Gawain's journey?**

The integrity of the chivalric code, honesty, and the moral temptation of the knight. Sir Gawain's knightly virtues are tested during a game of wits at a mysterious castle, where the host's wife repeatedly tries to seduce him. He needs to prove his truth (*troth*), chastity, and loyalty before he faces the Green Knight.

**17. What framing device does Geoffrey Chaucer use to organize the tales in *The Canterbury Tales*?**

A spring pilgrimage from London to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury, undertaken by 29 diverse pilgrims who meet at the Tabard Inn. To pass the time on horseback, the Host proposes a storytelling contest. This clever literary structure allows Chaucer to combine different genres of stories (romances, fabliaux, sermons) into a single cohesive work.

**18. How does Chaucer utilize the concept of *estates satire* in the General Prologue?**

By exposing how characters from the three traditional medieval orders (those who pray, fight, work) fail their ethical duties. Instead of idealizing society, Chaucer paints realistic, ironic portraits of characters, satirizing the corrupt clergy, and the systemic moral hypocrisy of the late Middle Ages.

**19. Which characteristics best describe the Wife of Bath in *The Canterbury Tales*?**

A vibrant, independent woman experienced in five marriages and extensive world travel. Alisoun (the Wife of Bath) is one of the most progressive and memorable characters in early English literature. She is loud, financially self-sufficient and argues for female sovereignty and sexual independence within marriage.

**20. Why was Chaucer's choice to write *The Canterbury Tales* in Middle English historically significant?**

It elevated English into a prestigious literary medium capable of high artistic expression. During the Middle Ages, high literature was written exclusively in French (the language of the court) or Latin (the language of scholarship). By writing his masterpiece in the East Midland/London dialect of Middle English, Chaucer proved the language could match the poetic sophistication of Italian or French.