

### COMMON CORE

**RI 6** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text. **RI 9** Analyze documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features. **L 5b** Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Venerable Bede . . .

- invented the footnote.
- popularized the dating of events from the birth of Christ—the B.C./A.D. system.

### Meet the Author

## The Venerable Bede c. 673–735

The Venerable Bede (bēd), regarded as the father of English history, lived and worked in a monastery in northern Britain during the late seventh and early eighth centuries. His most famous work, *A History of the English Church and People*, is a major source of information about life in Britain from the first successful Roman invasion (about A.D. 46) to A.D. 731. The book contains many stories about the spread of Christianity among the English.

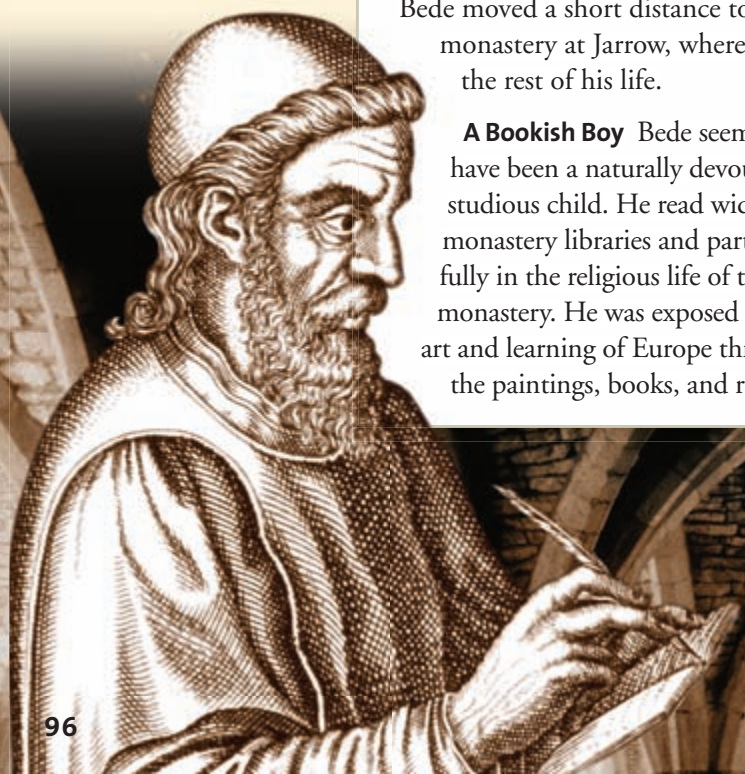
**Raised By Monks** At the age of seven, Bede was taken by his parents to a monastery at Wearmouth, on the northeast coast of Britain, where he was left in the care of the abbot, Benedict Biscop. It is not known why the boy's parents left him or whether he ever saw them again. When he was nine, Bede moved a short distance to a new monastery at Jarrow, where he spent the rest of his life.

**A Bookish Boy** Bede seems to have been a naturally devout and studious child. He read widely in the monastery libraries and participated fully in the religious life of the monastery. He was exposed to the art and learning of Europe through the paintings, books, and religious

objects brought from Rome by Abbot Biscop. Bede became a deacon of the church at the age of 19—six years earlier than was usual—and was ordained to the priesthood when he was 30.

**Multitalented Scholar** Bede was a brilliant scholar and a gifted writer and teacher. He was also a careful and thorough historian. He sought out original documents and reliable eyewitness accounts on which to base his writing. Working in a chilly, damp, poorly lit cell in the monastery, Bede managed to write about 40 books, including works on spelling, grammar, science, history, and religion.

**Still Venerable Today** Bede's reputation as a scholar and a devout monk spread throughout Europe during his lifetime and in the centuries following. (The honorific title "Venerable" was probably first applied to him during the century after his death, as an acknowledgment of his achievements.) Although Bede was influenced by the outlook of his time—as is evident in the miracle stories he included in his *History*—his carefulness and integrity are still respected and valued by scholars today, almost 1,300 years later.



Author Online



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## ● TEXT ANALYSIS: HISTORICAL WRITING

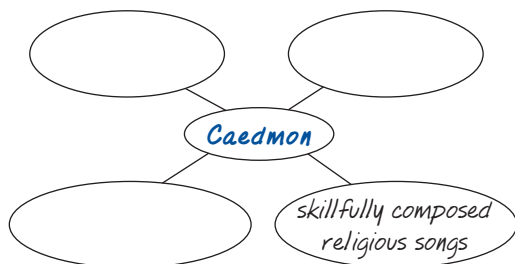
Bede was one of the first to write about English history. **Historical writing** is a systematic account, often in narrative form, of the past of a nation or a group of people. Historical writing generally has the following characteristics:

- It is concerned with real events in the relatively distant past.
- The events are treated in chronological order.
- It is usually an objective retelling of facts rather than a personal interpretation. However, the author may have a specific purpose in mind, such as teaching a moral lesson.
- The author may incorporate literary devices, such as **anecdotes**, or brief stories that focus on an episode or event in a person's life to illustrate a point.

As you read the selection about the poet Caedmon (kăd'mən), consider Bede's use of narrative to tell Caedmon's story and what it tells you about life in Caedmon's time.

## ● READING SKILL: ANALYZE AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

The excerpt that you will read is an early **biography**; one of Bede's purposes is to inform readers about Caedmon's life. But there is a second purpose. In the Preface to Bede's *History*, he explains to King Ceolwulf (chāl'wōōlf') his reason for writing about important Englishmen of the past. He believes that they serve as good role models to imitate or examples of bad behavior to avoid. As you read, take notes about Caedmon on a web diagram. Determine which details of Caedmon's life Bede emphasizes to present him as a positive role model.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

## *How do dreams* **INSPIRE** you?

History is full of stories of people who received a flash of inspiration during a dream. For example, the 19th-century German chemist Friedrich August Kekulé (kā'kōō-lā) said that the ringlike structure of the molecule benzene presented itself to him when he dozed off and dreamed of a snake holding its tail in its mouth. In the following selection, the Venerable Bede recounts a tale of a humble man who fell asleep one night and woke up the next morning an accomplished poet.

**QUICKWRITE** Write a description of a memorable dream that helped you discover something about yourself, solve a problem, or unlock a hidden talent. If no dream has ever inspired you in this way, describe something else that has, such as a conversation or a daydream.



# A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH AND PEOPLE

The Venerable Bede

**BACKGROUND** Caedmon is the earliest English poet known to us by name, and Bede's *History* is the only source of information about him. According to Bede, Caedmon composed many poems written in English, his native tongue. However, only his first poem, a hymn to God the Creator, has survived. Caedmon lived at Whitby Abbey, a religious community on the coast of England. It was founded in 657 by St. Hilda, who in Caedmon's day was still the abbess in charge.

In this monastery of Whitby there lived a brother<sup>1</sup> whom God's grace made remarkable. So skillful was he in composing religious and devotional songs, that he could quickly turn whatever passages of Scripture were explained to him into delightful and moving poetry in his own English tongue. These verses of his stirred the hearts of many folk to despise the world and aspire to heavenly things. Others after him tried to compose religious poems in English, but none could compare with him, for he received this gift of poetry as a gift from God and did not acquire it through any human teacher. For this reason he could never compose any frivolous or profane verses, but only such as had a religious theme fell fittingly from  
10 his devout lips. And although he followed a secular occupation until well advanced in years, he had never learned anything about poetry: indeed, whenever all those present at a feast took it in turns to sing and entertain the company, he would get up from table and go home directly he saw the harp<sup>2</sup> approaching him. **A**

On one such occasion he had left the house in which the entertainment was being held and went out to the stable, where it was his duty to look after the beasts that night. He lay down there at the appointed time and fell asleep, and in a dream he saw a man standing beside him who called him by name. "Caedmon,"

## Analyze Visuals ►

What ideas about Caedmon are conveyed through this image?

## **A** HISTORICAL WRITING

What do you learn from this paragraph about the importance of poetry in Caedmon's time?

1. **brother:** a man who lives in or works for a religious community but is not a priest or monk.

2. **directly he saw the harp:** as soon as he saw the harp. In Anglo-Saxon times, poetry was often recited to the accompaniment of a small harp.



Caedmon

## Language Coach

**Synonyms** Identify the five words Caedmon uses to name God in his song (lines 23–27). Why does he use so many? Starting with *Creator*, rank the words on a numbered scale showing how closely related they are as synonyms (words with the same meaning).

he said, “sing me a song.” “I don’t know how to sing,” he replied. “It is because I cannot sing that I left the feast and came here.” The man who addressed him then  
 20 said: “But you shall sing to me.” “What should I sing about?” he replied. “Sing about the Creation of all things,” the other answered. And Caedmon immediately began to sing verses in praise of God the Creator that he had never heard before, and their theme ran thus: “Let us praise the Maker of the kingdom of heaven, the power and purpose of our Creator, and the acts of the Father of glory. Let us sing how the eternal God, the Author of all marvels, first created the heavens for the sons of men as a roof to cover them, and how their almighty Protector gave them the earth for their dwelling place.” This is the general sense, but not the actual words that Caedmon sang in his dream; for however excellent the verses, it is impossible to translate them from one language into another<sup>3</sup> without  
 30 losing much of their beauty and dignity. When Caedmon awoke, he remembered everything that he had sung in his dream, and soon added more verses in the same style to the glory of God. **B**

Early in the morning he went to his superior the reeve,<sup>4</sup> and told him about this gift that he had received. The reeve took him before the abbess, who ordered him to give an account of his dream and repeat the verses in the presence of many learned men, so that they might decide their quality and origin. All of them agreed that Caedmon’s gift had been given him by our Lord, and when they had explained to him a passage of scriptural history or doctrine, they asked him to render it into verse if he could. He promised to do this, and returned next morning with excellent  
 40 verses as they had ordered him. The abbess was delighted that God had given such grace to the man, and advised him to abandon secular life and adopt the monastic state. And when she had admitted him into the Community as a brother, she ordered him to be instructed in the events of sacred history.<sup>5</sup> So Caedmon stored up in his memory all that he learned, and like an animal chewing the cud, turned it into such melodious verse that his delightful renderings turned his instructors into his audience. He sang of the creation of the world, the origin of the human **C**  
 race, and the whole story of Genesis.<sup>6</sup> He sang of Israel’s departure from Egypt, their entry into the land of promise, and many other events of scriptural history. He sang of the Lord’s Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven,  
 50 the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the teaching of the Apostles. He also made many poems on the terrors of the Last Judgment, the horrible pains of Hell, and the joys of the kingdom of heaven. In addition to these, he composed several others on the blessings and judgments of God, by which he sought to turn his hearers from delight in wickedness, and to inspire them to love and do good. For Caedmon was a deeply religious man, who humbly submitted to regular discipline,<sup>7</sup> and firmly resisted all who tried to do evil, thus winning a happy death. **D**

**B HISTORICAL WRITING**  
 Reread lines 14–32. In this **anecdote**, to what does Bede attribute Caedmon’s ability to compose poetry?

**C HISTORICAL WRITING**  
 Reread lines 33–46. According to this passage, what role did dreams play in real life during Caedmon’s time?

**D AUTHOR’S PURPOSE**  
 What does Bede want readers to learn in lines 52–56 about how Caedmon’s life changed?

3. **impossible . . . another:** Caedmon’s verses were composed in Old English, but Bede wrote his history in Latin.

4. **reeve:** the officer who oversaw the monastery’s farms.

5. **sacred history:** the narratives of the Christian Bible.

6. **Genesis** (jĕn’ĭ-sĭs): the opening book of the Bible, which tells of God’s creation of the universe and the first human beings.

7. **regular discipline:** the rules of monastic life.

### Comprehension

1. **Recall** What was Caedmon's gift?
2. **Recall** How did Caedmon receive his gift?
3. **Clarify** How did Caedmon's life change because of his gift?

### Text Analysis

4. **Draw Conclusions** What would be the reason for including Caedmon's story in a history of the English church?
5. **Analyze Author's Purpose** Review the notes you took about Caedmon as you read. What is the moral message that can be taken from his story? Does presenting Caedmon's story as a narrative of personal transformation help or hinder Bede's purpose?
6. **Analyze Historical Writing** What do you learn from Bede about life in seventh-century England? Discuss facts about each of the following:
  - religious life
  - language and literacy
7. **Apply Themes** What does Caedmon's story suggest about how creativity was viewed during his time?

### Text Criticism

8. **Historical Context** Discuss ways in which Bede's purpose and worldview shape the way he presents information. How might a modern historian present information differently?

*How do dreams **INSPIRE** you?*

A dream inspires Caedmon to change the way he lives. What other factors might inspire a dramatic shift in the way someone lives?

#### COMMON CORE

**RI 2** Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text. **RI 6** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text. **RI 9** Analyze documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.