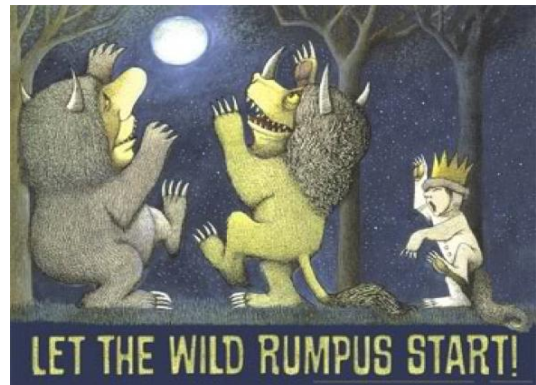


ENGL 4501:

## History of the English Language

T/TH 2:40 – 4:05



How did an obscure language that was spoken by relatively few people on a little island in the Atlantic Ocean become the most powerful language in the world? In this class, we'll explore that question, tracing the development of English through wars and scientific discoveries from the time of the Anglo-Saxons to the Modern era of computers and digital media. Along the way, we'll explore questions like this:

- Why do Brits spell words like colour and humour with a 'u' while Americans write 'color' and 'humor'?
- Why do they reverse the *e* and *r* in words like centre (center) and litre (liter)?
- Why does it sound 'low-class' to say you 'ate some cow (or pig)' for dinner last night but it sounds much classier (or maybe just snootier) to say you ate beef or pork?
- Likewise, why do Americans sometimes see British English as high-class and refined while American English seems less swanky?
- Why do we just add *-ed* to make some verbs past tense (like *look/looked* or *wait/waited*) but have others that are more complicated (like *swim/swam/swum* or *write/wrote/written*).
- How did we get the modern English alphabet from the Greek alphabet that was all triangles and squares and straight lines?
- Why do romance languages like Spanish say *the girl pretty* (la muchacha bonita) but English says *the pretty girl*?
- How come we don't all (thank goodness!) still talk like Shakespeare?
- How have computers changed the English Language?
- How did English get from the way it was in the time of the Anglo-Saxons to the way it is today?

These are just some of the questions we'll ask in this course. We'll explore how language works – the ways and reasons that English has changed, the ways we make up new words, how technology has changed the ways we use language, the reason we can understand sentences (even when we've never heard them before), and the ways that our culture affects how we communicate with one another.

The course will require regular readings and exercises, along with a short project on the ways that digital media have affected modern English.