

from A History of the English Church and People

Historical Writing by the Venerable Bede

How do dreams **INSPIRE** you?

Have you ever had a new idea or insight come to you in a dream? In the next selection, the author tells about an ordinary man named Caedmon (kăd'men) who awoke from a dream to find that he had become an accomplished poet overnight.

QUICKWRITE Write a short explanation of how a dream helped you discover something about yourself. For example, you might have dreamed you were in a band and decided you wanted to play the guitar. If no dream has inspired you, describe how something else has, such as a conversation or a daydream.

What I Discovered

Text Analysis: Historical Writing

Historical writing is a organized account, often in narrative form, of the past of a nation, of a group of people, or of one important figure. Historical writing generally has the following characteristics:

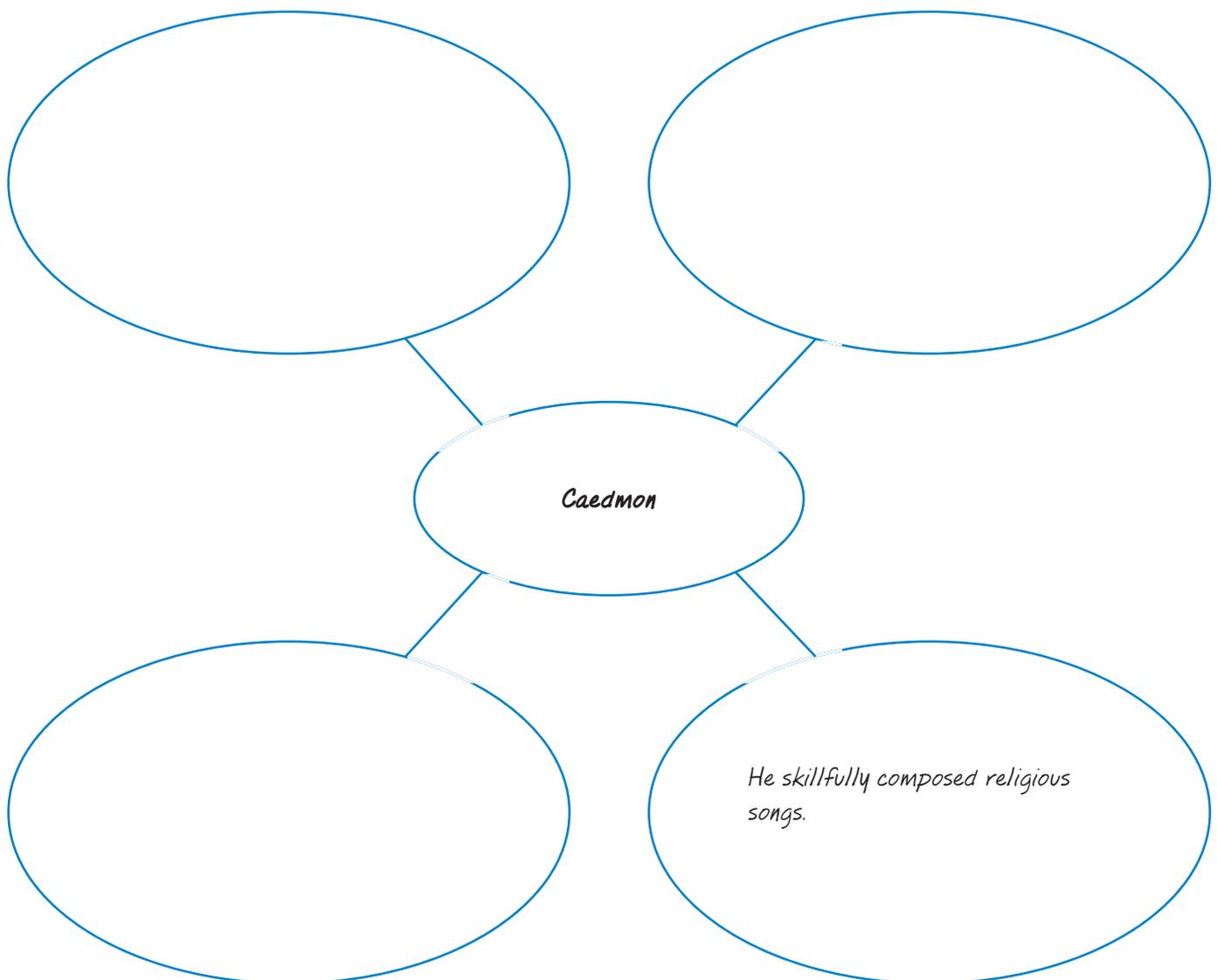
Historical Writing	
Focus	It is concerned with real events in the relatively distant past.
Text Organization	The events are told in chronological order.
Author's Style and Purpose	It is usually an objective retelling of facts rather than a personal interpretation. However, the author may have a specific purpose in mind, such as teaching a moral lesson.
Features	The author may incorporate literary devices such as anecdotes (brief stories that focus on an event in a person's life to illustrate a point).

Bede was one of the first individuals to write about English history. As you read the selection, 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

This section of *A History of the English Church and People* is a biography of the poet Caedmon. The author's purpose for writing a **biography** is usually to inform readers about its subject's life. But an author can have more than one purpose for writing. Bede once said that writing about important Englishmen from the past gives people examples of good role models to emulate and bad behavior to avoid. In this excerpt, Bede wants to present Caedmon as a positive role model.

As you read, take notes about Caedmon on the web diagram below. Decide which details of Caedmon's life Bede emphasizes to present him as a positive role model.



**SET A PURPOSE
FOR READING**

Read this selection to learn how a dream inspired the life of an important historical figure.

A HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH AND PEOPLE

Historical Writing by

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 wrote 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. (An abbess oversees a religious community.)

A AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

Reread lines 1–12. Underline details that present Caedmon as a positive role model. Add these details to the chart on page 19.

In this monastery of Whitby there lived a brother¹ 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
10 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 his devout lips. And **A** although he followed a secular occupation until well advanced in years, he had never learned anything about poetry: indeed,

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



Monitor Your Comprehension

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 harp² approaching him. **PAUSE & REFLECT**

PAUSE & REFLECT

Pause at line 17. What do you learn from this paragraph about the importance of poetry in Caedmon's time?

On one such occasion he had left the house in which the entertainment was being held and went out to the stable, where it
20 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," 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 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
30 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 another³ without losing much of their beauty and dignity. When Caedmon awoke, he remembered everything that he had sung in his dream, and soon added more
40 verses in the same style to the glory of God. **B**

B HISTORICAL WRITING

Reread lines 18–40. What do you learn about Caedmon's ability to compose poetry in this anecdote?

Early in the morning he went to his superior the reeve,⁴ 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

- 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.
- 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.



Monitor Your Comprehension

C AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

Reread lines 55–68. Underline the subjects that Caedmon sang about, and circle his purpose for singing. Think about what Bede wants readers to learn about Caedmon from this passage. Then complete the chart below.

Author's Purpose
<u>to inform readers about Caedmon</u>



Detail: _____

What it communicates: _____

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 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.⁵ 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 race, and the whole story of Genesis.⁶ 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, 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,⁷ and firmly resisted all who tried to do evil, thus winning a happy death. **C**

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.

Text Analysis: Historical Writing

Use information from the background paragraph and this excerpt from *A History of the English Church and People* to complete the chart below.

Historical Writing Elements	
Focus	Subject: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____
Text Organization	_____ _____
Author's Style and Purpose	Style: _____ _____ Purpose: _____ _____
Features	_____ _____

Review your notes for *A History of the English Church and People* and the completed chart above. What does the Venerable Bede's narrative tell you about life in seventh century England? Be sure to discuss aspects of religious life and language and literacy.

Reading Skill: Analyze Author's Purpose

Review your web diagram on page 19, and then complete the chart below. In the first column, record significant details from the text. In the second column, write down the author's purpose for including this detail. In particular, consider whether Bede included the detail to inform readers about the poet's life or to explain why he is a positive role model. An example has been done for you.

Detail	Author's Purpose
<i>He skillfully composed religious songs.</i>	<i>To inform readers about the way Caedmon became an accomplished poet.</i>

What is the Venerable Bede's primary purpose for writing the biography? Support your answer with details from the chart.

How do dreams INSPIRE you?

Before you read this selection you thought about the role that dreams have played in your life. Reread what you wrote on page 18. Based on the Venerable Bede's account of Caedmon's life, what are some other ways in which dreams can inspire people?

Academic Vocabulary in Speaking

concept

culture

parallel

structure

section

TURN AND TALK The **structure** of a selection is the arrangement or organization of the information it presents. What is unusual about the organization of the biography of Caedmon in *A History of the English Church and People*? Explain this to a partner. Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your response. Definitions of these words are on page 1.

Assessment Practice

DIRECTIONS Use *A History of the English Church and People* to answer questions 1–6.

- Which phrase from *A History of the English Church and People* reveals one of Bede's purposes for writing the biography?
 - in this monastery of Whitby*
 - a brother whom God's grace made remarkable*
 - he followed a secular occupation*
 - took it in turns to sing and entertain the company*
- Based on lines 1–17, the reader can conclude that religious people in Caedmon's time —
 - objected to the writing of poetry in the English language
 - believed godly people should not write profane verses
 - enjoyed both religious and profane songs and verses
 - thought working hard was part of being godly
- What is the main idea the author conveys in paragraph 2 (lines 18–40)?
 - Caedmon gained his talent for poetry in a miraculous way.
 - God rewards people when they avoid frivolity.
 - God deserves praise for creating the world.
 - Translating poetry from one language to another is difficult.
- Which characteristic of historical writing does paragraph 3 (lines 41–71) clearly demonstrate?
 - The author has a specific purpose in mind.
 - The writing is a systematic account of the past of a nation.
 - Events are treated in chronological order.
 - One time period is compared to another.
- The author probably included this biography in his history of the English church and people to —
 - criticize religious values of the time
 - prove that dreams can inspire people
 - entertain readers with a lively narrative
 - show that most people in Caedmon's time were very religious
- According to Bede in lines 69–71, Caedmon's death would have been happy because he —
 - lived a disciplined life and resisted evil
 - wrote songs and verses all his life
 - entertained many people through the years
 - became a monk at Whitby Abbey