Reading Test # 1

Full name _____

Read the text and choose the best words to complete the sentences.

1) The number of languages in the world

_____

a) is increasing all the time.   b) has hardly changed since 1066.

 c) is not precisely known.

2) Anglo-Saxon invaders spoke

_____

a) Old English.   b) a dialect from their own country.

c) a Brythonic language.

3) The reason there are so many words in English is

_____

a) Old English was a rich language.   b) the Vikings influenced the language.

c) the Normans introduced a lot of new words into the language.

4) The Normans

_____

a) didn't bother to learn Anglo-Saxon.

b) spoke a very formal form of English.

c) continued to use their own language.

5) There was a major change to the English language in the 15th century when

_____

a) some sounds became more like modern English spoken today.

b) vowels were introduced.

c) all English-speakers started using the same pronunciation.

Language is a form of communication, unique to humankind, which allows us to pass on and understand information, through a system of symbols which have meaning. There are currently between 3,000 and 8,000 natural languages in the world. The reason this number is so unspecific and seemingly inaccurate is that it is extremely difficult to define what a language actually is. The difference between a language and a dialect is not always an obvious one. Sometimes it's to do with similarity of vocabulary and grammar, or pronunciation. But sometimes distinctions are based on geographical, political, or religious factors. Moreover, languages are constantly changing. Evolutionary linguistics is the scientific study of how languages originate and how they evolve and change over time. Changes in language are usually extremely slow. One reason is interaction with other languages, through trade, for example, or because one dominant culture takes over a smaller one, such as when England was invaded and conquered by the Normans in 1066. Modern English as we now know it is made up of many different languages.

England was originally inhabited by indigenous peoples, who spoke a variety of languages called Brythonic languages, which are related to modern-day Irish, Welsh, Gaelic, and Breton. Anglo-Saxon invaders from what are now modern Germany and the Netherlands brought a dialect, Late West Saxon, to English shores. This spread and eventually came to dominate, and evolved into a language which linguists call "Old English." Vikings from Scandinavia further influenced the English language when they invaded and then settled in England during the 8th and 9th centuries. So, by the time the Normans, who spoke "Old Norman," arrived, they introduced yet another layer of language to English. This is the reason that in modern English there is an enormous and varied vocabulary, and there is often more than one word for the same thing; the original Germanic origin word, and then the later Norman/Latin-based word.

Following the Norman Conquest, the ruling aristocracy used their own language, which evolved into Anglo-Norman, for governance. English was the language of the common people. Many of the phrases which entered the English language during the Anglo-Norman period still have more formal connotations today, such as "a cordial reception" (from French) as opposed to "a hearty welcome" (Germanic). The Latin influence on the English language produced a variety of the language which is known as "Middle English." The written language flourished during this period, producing works such as Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales. Early modern English is often dated from an event during the 15th century, known as the Great Vowel Shift. This major change in pronunciation is characterized by a shift in vowel sounds. For example, in Middle English the word "date" was pronounced like the modern word "dart." The vowel sound in the modern word "house" used to be more like that in current-day "whose." Interestingly, the vowel shift didn't happen in all parts of the UK, which is why the modern Scottish accent sounds the way it does today.

GOOD LUCK

2