Level: 1st Year – Licence

Subject: British Culture and Civilisation

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**Lesson One: British Ancestors**

The United Kingdom, also known as Britain or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, is a European region with a long and storied history. The first modern humans (Homo sapiens) arrived in the region during the Ice Age (about 35,000 to 10,000 years ago), when the sea levels were lower and Britain was connected to the European mainland. It is these people who built the ancient megalithic monuments of Stonehenge and Avebury. Between 1,500 and 500 BCE, Celtic tribes migrated from Central Europe and France to Britain and mixed with the indigenous inhabitants, creating a new culture slightly distinct from the Continental Celtic one. This came to be known as the Bronze Age

The Romans controlled most of present-day England and Wales, and founded a large number of cities that still exist today. London, York, St Albans, Bath, Exeter, Lincoln, Leicester, Worcester, Gloucester, Chichester, Winchester, Colchester, Manchester, Chester, and Lancaster were all Roman towns, as were all the cities with names now ending in -chester, -cester or -caster, which derive from the Latin word castrum, meaning"fortification”. In the fifth century, the Romans progressively abandoned Britannia, as their Empire was falling apart and legions were needed to protect Rome. With the Romans vacated, the Celtic tribes started warring with each other again, and one of the local chieftains had the (not so smart) idea to request help from some of the Germanic tribes from the North of present-day Germany and South of Denmark. These were the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, who arrived in the 5th and 6th centuries.

When the fighting ceased, the Germanic tribes did not, as expected by the Celts, return to their homeland. In fact, they felt strong enough to seize the whole of the country for themselves, which they ultimately did, pushing back all the Celtic tribes to Wales and Cornwall, and founding their respective kingdoms of Kent (the Jutes), Essex, Sussex and Wessex (the Saxons), and further northeast, the kingdoms of Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria. (the Angles). These 7 kingdoms, which ruled over the United Kingdom from about 500 to 850AD, were later known as the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy.

Towards the dawn of the 10 century, the Danes invaded the Northeast of England, from Northumerland to East Anglia, and founded a new kingdom known as the Danelaw. Another group of Danes managed to take Paris, and obtain a grant of land from the King of France in 911. This area became the Duchy of Normandy, and its inhabitants were the Normans (from North Men' or 'Norsemen', another term for 'Viking').

After settling in to their newly acquired land, the Normans adopted the French feudal

system and French as the official language. During that same period, the Kings of Wessex had resisted, and eventually vanquished the Danes in England in the 10th century. However, the powerful Canute the Great (995-1035), king of the newly unified Denmark and Norway and overlord of Schleswig and Pomerania, led two other invasions on England in 1013 and 1015, and became king of England in 1016, after crushing the Anglo-Saxon King, Edmund II.

During the 11 century, the Norman King Edward the Confessor (1004-1066) nominated William, Duke of Normandy, as his successor, but upon Edward’s death, Harold Godwinson, the powerful Earl of Wessex, crowned himself king. William refused to acknowledge Harold as King and invaded England with 12,000 soldiers in 1066. King Harold was killed at the battle of Hastings and William the Conqueror became William I of England. The Norman rulers kept their possessions in France, and even extended them to most of Western France (Brittany, Aquitaine...). French became the official language of England, and remained that way until 1362, a short time after the beginning of the Hundred Years' War with France. English nevertheless remained the language of the populace, and the fusion of English (amixture of Anglo-Saxon and Norse languages) with French and Latin (used by the clergy) slowly evolved into the modern English we know today.

**Words to Define**

Megalithic

BCE

Indigenous

Fortification

Legion

Seize

Heptarchy

Feudal

Populace

Clergy

**Task I** Draw a timeline of British ancestry

**Task II** Using your previous answers and extra research; write a short summary to express in your own words the most important events in British history.