

Lesson 9

READ THIS STORY #2, Basic

French Words

Have you ever wondered why there are so many French words in the English language?

One reason is that many years ago, in 1066 to be exact, people from Normandy, an area in Northern France, sailed across the English Channel and invaded England. There was a ferocious battle, called the Battle of Hastings. England was defeated, and the English king was slain.

The victorious Normans spoke French. While Norman kings remained in power, all affairs of the English government were conducted in French. All of the people who held important positions spoke French. But the common people, who lived in the countryside, continued to speak English.

During this time, a horrible scourge, the Bubonic Plague, struck Europe and England and killed twenty-five million people. There weren't enough French-speaking people left to run England, so people were brought from the countryside. Eventually, laws were enacted stating that everyone who lived in England would have to speak English instead of French.

But by the time that happened, many French words had become familiar to everyone—words having to do with government, law, commerce, and cooking. So those words, which were originally French, became part of the English language.