This class will be based on lectures from the documentary series The Adventure of English. There is no required reading, but participants may be interested in the accompanying book, The Adventure of English by Melvyn Bragg (Arcade Publishing, 2011). Other recommended books are The Story of English by Robert McCrum, Robert MacNeil, and William Cran (Penguin 2002) and The Mother Tongue by Bill Bryson (Harper Collins 2001).

Week 1  The Origins of English: Where did English come from? What were the factors that affected its development from the 5th through the 10th century?

Week 2  The Survival of English: How did the Norman Conquest of England affect the English language? Why does English have so many different words in English for the same thing? Why do we perceive some expressions to be more formal than others?

Week 3  The Influence of the Church and the Printing Press: What part did the translation of the Bible into English play in the evolution of the language? What was the influence of the printing press?

Week 4  British Naval Power and the Renaissance: What were the effects of the English maritime trade on the language? How did Shakespeare and other playwrights enhance the language?

Week 5  English in North America: How did English in America grow and change from the Puritan settlement through the westward expansion? Where did the various American dialects come from?

Week 6  The Enlightenment and Standardizing the Language: How did the Age of Reason in the 18th and 19th centuries affect the English language? What efforts were made to codify and standardize English? How did English spelling become so irregular?

Week 7  Colonial Expansion: What were the effects of British colonialism on the English language? Was English an instrument of colonial oppression or the means to introduce ideas such as freedom and democracy?

Week 8  The Rise of the U.S. as a World Power: How did the economic, military, and cultural influence of the United States further the spread of English around the world? How does English continue to evolve today?