

## Unit 4—Medieval Era I: Days 21-46

### Assigned Texts:

Selected ballads from *An Introduction to Poetry*

Selected tales from *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer. Nevill Coghill, translator. London: Penguin, 1977.

“Chivalry” by Barbara Tuchman (handout)

### Overview:

Students will continue their study of British literature by examining various works from the medieval period (1066-1485). After opening with a small-group research assignment and presentation of various aspects of the historical period, students will study the ballad form of narrative poetry and then read an essay on the medieval concept of chivalry, taken from Barbara Tuchman’s narrative history of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The unit will culminate with readings of various selections from *The Canterbury Tales*.

### Objectives:

- Study medieval era of British literature and historical context through handouts, lectures, and an essay by Barbara Tuchman
- Research one aspect of medieval era in small group and present findings to class
- Analyze the ballad form of poetry
- Examine medieval world of *The Canterbury Tales*: social values and concepts (wheel of Fortune, the Church, the pilgrimage, the Three Estates), Christian elements, and medieval literary forms (*exemplum, fabliau, chivalric romance, beast fable, mock epic, miracle tale*)
- Analyze Chaucer’s use of satire

### Skills Attained:

- Understanding medieval thought and world views
- Working in small groups researching historical facts and presenting results to class
- Understanding historical essay and applying to literature
- Analyzing ballads for both narrative elements and form
- Understanding varieties of medieval literary genres
- Recognizing elements of fantasy
- Understanding concept of courtly love
- Understanding characterization
- Making inferences based on a narrator’s words
- Writing focused responses to study questions on readings
- Understanding the use and purpose of satire
- Developing an essay topic and writing a literary essay on *The Canterbury Tales*

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### The Unit Lessons:

**Day 21.** Introduction to medieval time period, dated here as 1066 (the Battle of Hastings and the Norman Conquest) to 1485 (the end of the Wars of the Roses). Have students give their impressions of the Middle Ages—either adjectives or short phrases—and list them on the board.

While the medieval world was far less hospitable than our own, it was a richer and more diverse world than many people understand. To that end, students in groups of three are going to do some research on particular aspects of the Middle Ages over the next few days and present their findings. **Study Sheet 4:1** explains the assignment and lists the various topics. No group should research the same topic. Allow the rest of this period and all of next class for students to research their topics. Briefly review with the class the *MLA Handbook* with regards to Works Cited pages and research practices. Internet web sites are fine for this assignment; however, ***at least one source must be a regular print source (book, articles, essay, etc.) not on the Internet.***

A word on Internet research, I myself use the Internet regularly for research, but the Internet is not like an encyclopedia. Anyone who knows how to use the proper software can create a web page, which means that if I wanted to write a scholarly-sounding essay about how Shakespeare was really Queen Elizabeth and put it on the Internet, I could do it without anyone checking my factual accuracy. Briefly explain to students how books are edited by several people (and checked and rechecked according to their factual accuracy) before publication, while Internet web sites have no such editorial controls and can therefore contain any number of factual errors. To that end, make sure every student group that does use the Internet provides you with a printed version of the web site when they make their presentations. Also, if your school has Internet access, use your school's librarian, electronic media person, computer lab person or any other appropriate staff member to assist you in helping your students use the Internet as a research tool and avoid bogus web sites.

**To the Teacher:** Group work like this always runs the risk of having one or more people in a group doing less work than others. This is why the note about teacher discretion in assigning grades is included on the grade sheet in **Study Sheet 4:1**. During research days, check in several times with each group and ask students what they are doing, both together and individually. When presentations are turned in, ask each member of a student group what they did. You might consider having students keep a log of their activities as they will for the *Hamlet* Video Project in **Unit 8—Renaissance Era**.

**Day 22.** Allow students to continue their group research work. Presentations begin next class period. Make sure to remind students to bring in all of their presentation's components so they can receive a complete grade.

**Days 23-24.** Student group presentations. Use the grade sheet on **Study Sheet 4:1** to grade group presentations. Invite questions from the audience at the end of each presentation (1-2 minutes max). If necessary, use **Day 23** as an additional research day, or use **Day 25** as an additional presentation day. However, you shouldn't need more than three full class periods, and two ought to do it