

## **Through the Medieval Mirror Dimly: An Illumined Path to Enlightenment**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Through a cursory glance at the literature in which their predecessors are featured, it is an almost impossible feat to convince our students that people haven't truly changed through the eons. They look at the language used and the clothes worn, and immediately typecast the inhabitants of the proffered literary world as alien, completely different from them. And we -- the teachers -- soon realize that we are in trouble. For "if it ain't about them, it ain't worth learning," and it doesn't matter if we attempt to cajole, demand, or resort to dragging them screaming to the pages. Their minds are made up, and, but for the rare instance, learning is not going to occur. They have decided that there is nothing here that interests them, and they are not going to invest in the process. They will not delve deeply enough to discover that, indeed, this is their story -- even if it is a story written a millennium before they were born. However, we cannot simply accept this and move on to the next phase. It is our job to bring the knowledge to them. Not only do we have to bring it to them, we have to encapsulate it and make it engaging. We have to encourage them to help us ferret out the pieces of the lives that could have been theirs, and we have to ensure that they enjoy doing so. That is the only way they will retain the knowledge gained -- knowledge rooted in their history and, thus, important.

With this thought as the impetus, and considering that the students I teach are seniors who have "had enough of high school" English, I would like to wrap myself in that which makes the medieval era fascinating -- its people and their lives. If I can first immerse myself in their pleasures, their sorrows, and their everyday tedium, then I can bring to the table the tidbits that will make my students buy into the learning process -- the humanity of the medieval man/woman/boy/girl. Armed with this knowledge, knowledge that puts flesh on the dry bones of the past, bringing blood to the cheeks of its people, I can draw my students into this world. There, I can nudge them so that they will go looking for the similarities between themselves and those denizens of a world they believe long gone. By doing this, they will find the stories of those who lived in their world in its childhood, and it is those stories that will pique their interest.

When a child is interested, he/she allows curiosity full reign. So, once I have engaged the interest of my students, I will permit them to allow their curiosity to gain sway, to let their imaginations run free and wild; and afford myself the opportunity to reap the wealth that will be its inevitable result. It will trickle in, at first, as traditional research papers to provide the details that form the skeleton. Later, it will begin to flow in steadily through projects that give these dry research papers visual appurtenances. Then, from this wellspring of knowledge will come the in-class portrayals of life in costumes and foods, as well as mini-enactments of games, sports, and plays that portray rituals, rivalries, and realities of the medieval world. These activities, preceded and accompanied by discourse in a variety of forms purposed to open wide the minds of my students -- and the mines of thought and philosophy which are uniquely theirs, will reveal the light that ignited and began to flicker during the Medieval Era. This illumination will add to the

wealth of this world, its heir; thus, the treasures of the people of this era will be ours. The students will have in hand, by right of inheritance, records of their ancestors' thoughts and actions in the guise of their literature and their history. Their perusal of these documents will open their eyes to the fact that these people were not so very different from them, and it is then they will know that these once-dim reflections of themselves from the past are worthy of further respect and study. For it is by this study that they awaken and look at history, take its examples to heart, and use them to foster or prevent repeating the past depending on the end results of similar actions during the medieval era. This awakening can then find an outlet -- the projects assigned to make this fascinating era truly theirs.

It is my intent to take the fruit of my students' research and their synthesis of different aspects of the society -- costuming, foods, gaming rules, architecture, art, music, societal structure, etc. -- and work with interested colleagues at my school and at least one other in another school in the district to put on a Medieval Festival to celebrate both this history and the culmination of the students' course of study. This will be a senior class affair. The students will control the festival from the making and decorating of the booths to deciding how the tourneys will be scheduled, from planning the menu and preparing the foods to arranging and playing the music to create the atmosphere, and from arraying themselves in the appurtenances peculiar to a particular segment of the society to taking on the character of the office and performing the duties of the same during the festival.

While the students exhibit their knowledge, I will join the invited parents, faculty, and administration in experiencing their creation to judge how "real" it is and how closely it adheres to the facts they gleaned from their research and presented in their papers. I will enjoy their experience of another culture and their realization that a party in the form of a medieval festival is still a party -- and that people in the medieval era both desired and experienced entertainment just like them. And, I will endeavor to ensure that this culmination of their efforts will positively underscore -- once again -- that British literature based on British history is their literature and their history.

It is, then, about them and not boring. And, because of this, it is not a waste of time. Because of this, it is most definitely worth learning. And, because of this, the past can become a part of the present and open a gateway to the future, a gateway that leads to further study and more learning. Learning then leads to growth and development, and advances civilization's aim to more closely bind the various segments of society.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

"As historians have often noted, our failure to comprehend the beliefs of people in the past is a measure of the distance that separates us from them" (Oldridge ix). So, religion would be a good place to begin understanding the people of the Medieval Era. If we can bridge this chasm for our students, the chasm in question being the core of a society or the central belief system of its people, then the other arenas in our studies should simply fall into place. One of the easiest ways to do this, to begin looking at religious belief, is to initiate a study of the holidays associated with the same. Therefore, I would ask my students to look into the most widely celebrated holidays during the Middle Ages. I would ask them to select the one they find most appealing or interesting and to research it with the object of writing a brief report on it in mind. I would ask them to consider in their paper the inception of the holiday, the reasons for the same, and the rites observed on that day. To make the lesson more palatable and to further hone their research and documentation skills, the students will be asked to prepare dishes associated with this holiday. This task requires that the student find at least one recipe for a dish commonly served on that occasion and include it

in his/her report. He/She will be asked to prepare the dish as an accompaniment to the oral presentation of his/her report on the holiday. The recipes, and the sources from which they are drawn, will be included in the formal papers submitted at the conclusion of the assignment.

This unit will usher in a study of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. We will read the Prologue and discuss Chaucer's view of his society and its beliefs as depicted by his characterization of its members. After reading, the students will be asked to make a mask of the Pilgrim he/she finds most fascinating and to write a short verse that depicts the trait(s) highlighted by Chaucer in the style he introduced in this work. The students will be asked to wear the masks and recite the verses as we reenact the meal the travelers shared prior to commencing their journey to Canterbury. To be accurate, they will have to research the material. This exercise will serve as a dress rehearsal for the Medieval Festival to be held the following semester and give the students a bit of practice portraying their medieval character.

To round off this portion of the unit, the students will read "The Knight's Tale," "The Wife of Bath's Tale," and "The Pardoner's Tale." Then, following a pattern comprised of a series of exercises accompanying pertinent literature, the students will read an excerpt from the "Venerable Bede" and delve into the world of the Church so that they can accurately portray the monks, friars, and priests in a similar manner to demonstrate an understanding of their roles in the medieval world.

Continuing our studies, the students will be assigned to groups. The group members will be further assigned roles. These roles will be the classes peculiar to the medieval period -- lords and ladies, priests and clerics, knights and merchants, landowners and serfs, and those others tied to the land, the towns, the church, and the nobility of the area(s) studied. Each student will be responsible for researching the parts played by each of these groups in the societal structure. They will need to know what clothes were worn, what jobs were performed, what benefits were accorded the position, and what misfortunes commonly came with the class. These areas of research lead to several possibilities for interdisciplinary study.

The first area of learning beyond the literature that will be opened to the students is the area of research. In gathering the data necessary to look at the medieval world, they must use the technology now associated with research -- the computer libraries and databases in which the knowledge is contained. This will result in the students having to learn how to properly cite sources used and how to organize the materials they have found into a concise, clear, and coherent composition. These skills can then be used in a look at the class systems, the institutions, and the wars of the era. These will broaden the students understanding of the people so that they can open themselves to a deeper study of the history and politics of the middle ages.

From history, the students can delve into geography, taking a route now normally seen by the student -- that of the clothing worn by the citizenry. From a discussion on the clothes worn today contrasted with those worn then, the students can be asked to do an in-depth study of the clothes worn by the medieval populace and how the same reflects on their climate, which is directly attributable to the geography of the region(s) in which the citizenry lived. This could lead to a comprehensive study of the means in which they adapted to it or it to them. This study would reveal the people, their everyday lives, and those events that sometimes changed the course of their lives -- like disease.

One of the most fascinatingly terrible aspects of the Medieval Era is the devastating effect of the Bubonic Plague or the Black Death on the population. Vast numbers of the population were wiped out across the world due to this disease, and societal problems sprang up demanding urgent change. Lesson plans centered around the causes and the spread of the disease and the effects of

the same on the people and their actions cross the disciplines of natural science, language arts, and social science. Students with interests in all areas can find something here to fasten onto, dig into, and learn about – from those interested in poetry and music studying traveling troubadours and bards carrying the disease and news of it, to those fully intending to attend medical school studying physicians who recommended their patients carry rose petals in their pockets to prevent or cure it. “The Black Death ... had a signal impact on medieval Europe. It was, however, only the first of many ... involving variations of pneumonic and septicemic plague that recurred” (Pounds xiii). Students will be asked to delve deeply into the incidence of disease and account for others which impacted the medieval society and reveal the “how’s” and “why’s” of the same and, possibly, relate them to diseases which occur today and could affect us in a like manner.

When the students look at the perks and repercussions inherent in social position as shown by their means of adaptation, sociology comes into play; just as a look at the arts, music, drama, and foods associated with their lives call to those disciplines which focus on the same. Architecture requires the consideration of math and problem-solving to bring buildings into being. Studying institutions and facets of society provides a clear picture of a world the student have never thought of beyond the battles of knights for the hands of ladies perceived languishing in the smelly halls and bedchambers of drafty castles and awaiting rescue. Studying all of these segments of the medieval society as part and parcel of the whole will provide a reality the students have never even imagined; a reality through which they can glimpse the beginnings of civilization in the 21st century. Thus, having the students demonstrate their understanding of the medieval society by recreating this reality -- and showing the similarities and differences between it and ours -- will be the ultimate, most relevant, objective of this unit.

### **MEDIEVAL SOCIAL STRATA**

“A number of medieval sources divided their society into three orders: *oratores*: those who pray; *bellatores*: those who fight [and] *labatares*: those who work ... which serves to emphasize a division that concerned social roles rather than wealth ... [This, however,] is a picture that is exclusively rural [with] no place for merchants or craftsmen [and] concerns only respectable society ... [ignoring] the outlaws, the slaves, the disabled, and ... [the] social outcasts such as the Jews or the gypsies ... [all of whom] had a place in medieval society” (Knox). But, to tie this research project to the curriculum which the students study (and to create a bridge that they can easily traverse to make the connection), we will begin the study with the myths commonly held to be true by the society, followed by a look at these three segments of society, commencing with the religious orders which is most closely aligned with the mythology or the attempts to define the peculiar.

“When something appears to be strange, this often means it is outside our normal experience... Our own lives are filled with experiences and beliefs that are peculiar to our culture, and would seem bizarre to anyone outside it ...” (Oldridge 3). In some instances, the beliefs of the peoples of the various countries in the Medieval era were vastly different. For this reason, tensions rose and stretched – to a breaking point. And a study of the Crusades becomes a necessary component of any study of the medieval era. And, along with this study, comes a study of the feudal system and the military – the noble, the knight, the peasant, and the slave... and the clergy that served them.

#### **Oratores: Those Who Pray**

“Priests held a special place within the Church, [and were the only ones who] could administer the sacraments ... Subject to special Church law and generally exempt from secular law, [they] gained ... special status through a special ceremony [and were] set apart from society into a

separate order” (Knox). Among the priests, there was also a social stratum. The students who choose this segment of the society will be required to look into this stratum -- from the village priest through the bishop, detailing the differences between them in terms of duties, education, and economic class. They will also be instructed to look into the reasons why the priests were held to a higher standard than the rest of the populace and the consequences these same priests faced if they were ever deemed to have fallen from grace.

The priests, however, were not the only layer of the clergy. There were also the monks. The monks were laymen “who sought to live a Christian life by entering a monastery and leaving the ordinary world behind. Monks took a vow of poverty, chastity and obedience; they were set apart from the rest of the world, even the secular clergy, and were in theory at least among the most holy and venerated in medieval society” (Knox).

Guibert’s [of Nogent] vocation to the monastic life was determined from the day of his birth (Guibert xiv). The family ... rushed to the altar ... made the ... vow and left is ... at our Lady’s altar: if the child were male, it would be consecrated a cleric in God’s service and hers ... (Guibert xiii).

The students who choose this segment of the religious order will be required to look into the monks who appeared early in the annals of Christian history, beginning with the hermits who first appeared in the Roman Empire. They will be asked to provide examples of the same and the lives they led, the orders they established, and the rules by which they judged themselves:

The early monks lived alone, but the reputation of some for holiness caused other Seekers to come to them for guidance and inspiration. Some of these imitated the Saint and themselves became hermits. Whole colonies of hermits developed in this way and communities became hermits. (Knox) [and] Even in an age when it was common to present a dramatically heightened picture of one’s sinfulness, Guibert seems harsh on himself compared to famous contemporaries like Bernard of Clairvaux, Abbot Suger, Amselm of Canterbury, or Abelard. These religious personalities might have discerned in his hyperbolic professions of abjectness a subtle, familiar form of monastic hubris. (Guibert xxiv)

A third layer of the clergy consisted of friars, “a special kind of monk ... who [lived] in the world rather than trying to withdraw from it” (Knox). The students who look at this particular segment of the religious orders will be required to look at the founders -- St. Dominic and St. Francis -- and tell what each emphasized and how their orders were similar and how they differed, both before and after the founders died:

St. Benedict wrote the Holy Rule for monks ... Those who follow it are Benedictine monks, and this order still exists to this day. The classical ideals of moderation and stability inform this work; there is no heroic asceticism here, only a hard and disciplined life. The ideals of the Benedictine rule are chastity, poverty, obedience, and stability. The aim of the monastic life is to bury one’s will in the life of the monastery. [On the other hand,] The Dominicans dedicated themselves to fighting heresy. Toward this end, they armed themselves with deep learning and became the great Christian scholars of the later Middle Ages. They were preachers and teachers. (Knox)

And we cannot undergo a study of the religious orders of the medieval period without looking into the educational system that was based in the church and had as its foundations the religious institutions of the period. The students will be asked to look at the earliest instances of formal learning within the religious orders and in their monasteries, of the itinerant ecclesiastics who gave

basic and rudimentary instruction during their travels, and at the establishment of universities and colleges where the most learned were those of the religious orders whose education had been gained in the course of their study of the Scriptures. This system of education will be compared with the one with which our students are familiar, and the students will be asked to reflect on why the two differ and what aspects of society promote and reinforce the differences. They will also be asked to consider the other consequences that resulted from societal classes and religion, most notably the Crusades fought by “Christians ... against those they perceived as threats to their faith” (Pounds xiii).

### **Bellatores: Those Who Fight**

“The bellatores were the knights of the Middle Ages” (Knox). They are typically associated with the chivalric code of courtesy and nobility, and with rescuing fair damsels, indulging in courtly love with their ladies fair, and wearing gleaming armor to protect them from their enemies, who were also enemies of the realm. The students who choose to study this stalwart class will be asked to show the difference between the ideal and reality. They will be asked to look at the classic definition of a knight -- a mounted warrior -- and the stereotype they have viewed in movies to discern that the chivalric code was not always the norm:

In the early Middle Ages, just about anyone who fought on horseback might be called a knight, even if he were but a lowly commoner ... By the twelfth century, ... No one could be a knight who was not also a nobleman and all noblemen were expected to be knights (unless they entered the Church). ... Knightly values included the ability to fight well or prowess, honor, generosity, glory, loyalty, and courtesy. They became famous through the auspices of stories and songs. [But], by the late Middle Ages, the European aristocracy began to transform from knights to gentlemen, and the emphasis on warfare and its skills changed to a pursuit of peaceful pastimes. (Knox)

So, because of this fact, and the knight's contributions to the medieval culture, the students who choose to study knights will also be asked to look at aspects of knighthood beyond “the castles, tournaments, and their swords and armor [to] their beliefs and values [and] their daily life” (Knox). And they will be expected to know what befell the knights’ in terms of military status and the reasons why:

The aristocrats continued to fight on horseback, ... [but] laws were passed that forbid anyone but a gentleman to carry a sword. And nobles still wore suits of armor, ... for parades and fine occasions. But not to the battlefield. (Knox)

Students will be asked to look at what contributions to society were made by the knights and why nobility became an integral part of what was once simply a type of warrior. They will also be asked to consider what wrought the change of the knights status from military superiority to what amounted to fodder for the wheels of war or window dressing for street parades and/or the King’s court, and to speak to the issue of what – if any – new “class of warrior” was created by the same and who its heroes were.

### **Labotares: Those Who Work**

“Those who pray were the priests; those who fight were the knights; and then there was everybody else. ... Peasants were what most people meant when they thought of labotares, and peasants made up the great bulk of the population of Europe. There were others, however. In particular, ... the townsmen. [They] dwelt in cities, and ... were no mere laborers, but neither would they be called noble” (Knox). Students who choose to research the peasant will be asked to choose among the peasant, the serf, the yeoman, and the freeholder. As they study these, they will

also have to look at the villages -- the farms, the road(s), and the manor - and the people who lived in or along each and how their lives were spent:

Although largely illiterate and unschooled ... your average Medieval commoner spent his childhood and adolescence learning many practical skills. Most of these people lived on farms and to survive, and get ahead, had to know about crops, raising animals, and using (and repairing) a wide variety of tools. ... While there were some specialists for things like iron working, pottery and thatching, villagers had to possess among themselves the hundreds of different skills that made life possible, and perhaps a little enjoyable. ... Entertainment was where you found it. News was eagerly sought from those passing through the village. ... Gossip was a favorite sport, as were the frequent sexual adventures and misadventures that kept the gossips busy. (Nofi and Dunnigan, "Commoners")

Because the nobles were always on the lookout for resourceful servants, commoners had leverage they could turn into a chance for successful careers. And, for the studious commoner child, the church was a way to go beyond the station to which he/she was born. For though they were called commoners, "there was ... nothing very common about" them. They managed to make much out of virtually nothing, and did so for centuries (Nofi and Dunnigan, "Commoners"). And the society was not totally agrarian.

There were also the townsmen. "The value of the city depended upon its balance of social classes, its need for trade and profit ... and its consequent economic power, its political power ..., and its social role in the rise of literacy and education and in nationalism" (Pounds xviii). Those students who choose to study the city and its inhabitants will be required to look at the occupations found therein, both the dishonorable and the respectable. They will also have to tell why having a job would preclude a person from being a part of the nobility. Along with these glimpses into the life of the medieval townsmen, the students will be asked to consider social mobility and how one's profession could affect it. This study will require that they look at guilds or professional associations. They will also be asked to look at citizenship, and to consider the outcasts of the society -- those who were not a part of mainstream society because of religion, ethnicity, criminal status, occupation, etc.

The first thing that the students will have to consider is the fact that towns were built on trade and their elite were the merchants whose guilds controlled town government and who tended to clash with the craft guilds. They were also predisposed to support the king and the establishment of a strong central government rather than the rule of individual nobles. Their guilds regulated prices, quality, weights and measures, and business practices and, in their domain, their power was absolute. To run afoul of the guild was to untenable and made it impossible to earn a living. Each guild had a patron saint, celebrated religious festivals together, put on religious plays, and looked after the health and welfare of the members and their families. They were separate from the craft guilds who regulated the quality, hours, and working conditions of its members of whom there were three levels -- masters, journeymen, and apprentices (Ross).

## **THE SOCIAL HIERARCHY**

There was a very definite order to the medieval society. Aside from the "types" of societal members previously discussed, the medieval civilization was comprised of classes, and each class had its own set of rules and responsibilities. And, though the system was not locked, it was almost impossible for the "citizenry" to move from one class to another.

The ruling class was comprised of about three percent of the population, and they were not all nobles. They were, however, the educated and wealthy. The lower ranks of this ruling class were not nobles, "but were the people with a lot of money who could, and often did, work their way up into the titled aristocracy. These 'untitled' aristocrats were often wealthier than the titled nobles" (Nofi and Dunnigan, "The Aristocracy").

The most significant factor at this time was not titles, nor was it land ownership. It was control over enough workers to plant and harvest the crops and to pay rents. In fact, most of the nobles did not own the land, but were simply the vassals of either the king or a higher ranking noble to whom they gave an annual payment of money, goods or service (Nofi and Dunnigan, "The Aristocracy"):

However ... during the Medieval period, ... more laws were passed and feudal power was continually curbed. Kings gradually relinquished their claim to control of the land in return for ... money. Cities could purchase degrees of self-government in return for large, one time, payments to the crown. Nobles, and commoners, could purchase outright ownership of more land for cash. [This facilitated the success of the feudal system whose] ... principal function ... was for the nobles to provide military protection and government for their subjects. (Nofi and Dunnigan "The Aristocracy")

However, after the Bubonic Plague, there was a tremendous labor shortage which put the farmers in a very powerful position. To keep farmers on their lands, nobles either allowed them purchase parcels of land or eased up on the rents and feudal obligations. English nobles were most enthusiastic about adopting this policy. This is one of primary reasons the English aristocracy is still in existence (Nofi and Dunnigan, "The Aristocracy"):

[Finally,] while nobles and senior clergy often got involved in lending money, it was the commoners who did most of it. These pools of money were essential for economic growth. All manner of capital improvements ... like iron works, cloth factories and merchant ship fleets were largely built by entrepreneurial commoners. These items produced more wealth, where castles and cathedrals did not. Eventually, this mass of commoner wealth turned into political power ... beginning ... during the Medieval period. (Nofi and Dunnigan, "The Aristocracy")

Those students who choose to look at the systems of social classes will look at the Feudal system from its origin to its changing, and the reasons associated with the same. They will look at the different classes and the responsibilities and duties of each, and how each benefits the other. Students will choose a pair of societal groups to study -- like the King and his Courtiers, the Knight and the Lady, the Merchant and the Landowner, the Guild Members and the Peasantry, and the like. They will speak to the relationship between the pair they choose. To do this, they will research to compare and contrast the pair and their lives from childhood to old age, and they will provide specific examples of real people to demonstrate their conclusions.

For example, if they choose royalty, they will look at the relationship between the King and his Courtiers and speak to the issue of ennobling love by which virtue was assigned and where the success of the courtiers depended on the love they shared with the King and the expression of the same by all parties involved.

They will, also, look at how the members of each class entertained themselves and what interactions there were between the two when it came to entertainment. Also, they will look at tiers within the same class and how the interactions between them are similar to the interactions between members of different classes and attempt to explain this common phenomenon. And, they will look



at the effect of the class system on the economic system and how one system almost mirrors the other. Finally, they will look at how all of these classes lived by looking at where they lived.

A study of the medieval era cannot be undertaken without looking at the medieval castle. It had historical, political and social functions. The students will be asked to consider the castle and “its symbolic role as an idealized construct” (Pounds xvii), and they will be asked to consider it as a military fortification, as well as the government center and economic hub.

## **THE CULTURAL PICTURE**

A study into the lives of the populace of the Medieval Era reveals that far from being the Dark Ages it was often said to be; it had a vastly rich culture. The students will be asked to look at the festivals and other established recreational activities. They will be asked to consider the great cathedrals that preceded the Renaissance, as well as the politics that were alive and flourishing during this era and the revolts they spawned. And, since the literature and the art is a reflection of the culture that creates them, the students will be asked to look at examples of the same.

My students are (or will be because of the established curriculum) familiar with the works of some of the British writers of the medieval era, but they will not have studied any of the women beyond the characters found in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, nor will they have looked at medieval persona from other countries, like France. To broaden their knowledge base, then, I will introduce them to the *lais* (poetic narratives) of Marie de France so that they can see the period from another perspective – not only that of another country, but that of another gender. I will ask them to compare the themes and tone of the works they've read previously with this new material and to analyze any they believe to be gender-based. From this study of gender, we'll stay rooted in areas of controversy (therefore, areas of high interest), and take a stroll along the religious path. We will look at another peculiar phenomenon of the literature - that of the ecclesiastics; and especially those ecclesiastics whose base is broader than that of simply Britain.

In their curriculum, the students are required to study Bede. This will prepare them for a look at another medieval religious writer -- Guibert of Nogent, and his take on the society in which he lived. This account which ranges from women running the family's holdings to monasteries and convents and those men and women who both choose to enter the same and those promised from birth to serve, and the why's associated with such decisions. This literature opens up the family to the scrutiny of the students. And, when we see the family, we can offer the students a chance to study the youth of the medieval period, the educational system of the church for the same period, and the institution of marriage that was virtually denigrated during the era – especially in the satire. And, we cannot stop at literature.

Some of the most fantastic contributions of the Medieval Era are in the areas of industry and architecture. A look at the cathedrals would not be remiss in the least, especially a study of the Gothic, which came into being during this period. Those students interested in art and architecture can study the cathedrals and the art they contain to create treatises on how and what each reflects of this fascinating era in European history. And from the study of the architecture of the cathedral, the student can look at what came out of those going into these buildings, such as drama from the medieval peoples needs “to dramatize the symbolic events of the liturgy.” And, “out of the cathedral and its schools to train new priests ... emerged the ... university ... Around the same time, the community known as a town rose up ... as a consequence of trade and the necessity ... to accompany the development of a ... middle class” (Pounds x). Thus, the medieval era is a rich field of topics to sift through, choose from, and learn of as the students see the reasons for the existence of several aspects of the society in which he/she now lives which first came into being during the medieval era.

## **CONCLUSION**

In their assigned roles as members of a medieval society, the students will need to recreate the mannerisms, the clothing, the diction, the duties, and the pleasures inherent to these people. The students will need to create costumes, dialogue, implements needed to fulfill their responsibilities and those needed to provide the music, the competitions, and the rites associated with the same. They will also need to recreate actual meals through recipes left behind and decorations which lend themselves to reproducing the atmosphere of the hostleries, the inns, the castles, the cathedrals, and the peasants' huts which were found in the medieval period. These trappings and the students' willingness to immerse themselves in the characters to the point that they become them for a period will make the medieval era come alive and all who witness the fruit of the same -- the festival sponsored by the seniors to demonstrate what they learned and what is now a part of them -- will grow from the experience.

### **LESSON PLAN #1**

Pictures of a mounted knight, a priest, and a king holding court will be presented. Students will be asked to study them and to create a short story linking them together. Upon completion of this brief narrative, they will be asked to share it with a partner. This partner will read the narrative, then add another character to it, providing appropriate interaction and dialogue, as the other student does the same to his/her paper. They will then pair with another set of partners and repeat the reading and inputting process until all papers in the group have been worked on by each of the four group members. At this time, each group will share its stories with the class, providing character sketches of the medieval society members who have been named in their papers.

### **LESSON PLAN #2**

Students will be asked to read aloud the Prologue to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and to make notes on the pilgrims and their attributes. Upon completion, they will be asked to choose a traveler with whom they have either an affinity or feel a true repulsion towards. They will then be required to make a mask of this character and to write a verse, using the style introduced in these tales by Chaucer, which depicts the most defining trait(s) of this pilgrim. The mask will be worn and the verse recited in a class reenactment of the meal the travelers share prior to commencing their journey to Canterbury. For the reenactment, the students will prepare a dish typical of the Medieval Era and which might have been prepared at the Tabard Inn the evening prior to the commencement of the journey to Canterbury. The student will submit the recipe used, along with a brief composition detailing which segment of the medieval society most frequently ate the dish and on what occasions. Using the MLA style of documentation, he/she will be required to cite the source(s) from which the information presented is taken.

### **LESSON PLAN #3**

The students will select actual historical figures from the medieval era (like Eleanor or Aquitaine) and prepare comprehensive biographies on them. They will then select highlights from the lives of these persons to create scenarios which might have occurred in them. These scenarios will include dialogue, action, and interaction between the chosen historical figures and other noted personages and/or an environment suitable to the time and place in question. Some of these scenarios will be combined to create narratives and/or short plays for presentation.

### **LESSON PLAN #4**

In preparation for the Medieval Fair which is to be their final senior project, the students will be asked to recreate a Medieval Annual Fair which was one of the market days set aside in most medieval towns. This market was one of the major highlights in the life of a "medievalist" and all

aspects of the society participated – from those on the farms who toiled and tilled to provide the raw material for the cooks to boil and bake so that the servants of the master could sell them at the fair to those townsmen who had wares to bedazzle the eyes of the master, his family, and his servitors and the street urchins intent on seeing that they spent the coins of the same before they had a chance to do so. Therefore, the students will be encouraged to truly recreate that which was before. Those who paint will be asked to prepare backdrops reflecting both the countryside and the buildings of the period. Those who have expertise in woodwork and the like will be asked to prepare booths representative of what would have been found at the fair. Likewise, students will be asked to make aluminum-foil swords and shields, sheath-like dresses with “blooming sleeves,” wooden carts to be pushed by gangly boys, papier-mâché replicas of “dressed” fowl and pork to hang in the open areas in the booths, and so forth. All of these representations of the appurtenances of the medieval era will require that the students perform some form of research. With this in mind, the class will take at least two trips to the library, the first to look into who and what actually comprised the Medieval era from a historical perspective, and the second to look at the same but from an artistic viewpoint. These library jaunts will be followed by watching excerpts from several movies based on people and/or events of the time period. These will include, but not be limited to, Arthurian legend based films. A “Setting Unveiled Chart” will be submitted prior to the creation of the environmental backdrop in question. It will contain all aspects of the particular piece to be presented.

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