

Voices from the Past

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INTRODUCTION

I am an English and reading teacher at Grady Middle School. I work with approximately eighty to ninety sixth graders, who comprise half of Grady's sixth grade population. My students come from very diverse backgrounds, ethnically and economically. I have been teaching in the Houston Independent School District for fifteen years, with the last nine years spent at the middle school language arts level. I work with students who are gifted and talented as well as students identified as at-risk. I am certified K-12 in English as a Second Language, Gifted and Talented instruction, and Pre-Advanced Placement curriculum and instruction. It has been my privilege to see the excitement of learning on the faces of my students as they discover new concepts and gain new academic skills. It is my hope in designing this curriculum unit to create that excitement for all students as they continue to master reading and writing skills necessary for future academic success.

Students at the sixth grade level are continuing to learn and master the basic skills of reading and writing. Because each student comes with his or her own individual needs as language arts learners, instruction must meet multiple levels of learning. Reading and writing gains can move rapidly with direct instruction and high-level interest texts. This becomes a challenge at the middle school level. To meet that challenge, I look closely at core novel selections, choosing texts that will appeal to the interest level of both male and female students. I also consider the author's style so that the reading of the core text leads directly into the writing component of the curriculum. I have observed that students who love to read are successful writers and that the reverse also holds true. Therefore, it is always my goal to "hook" my students with the novel studies I use in class in order to give them highly challenging and highly successful experiences in language arts instruction.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Overview

"Voices from the Past" is a unit focused on reading and writing through an experience in historical fiction based on Medieval life. In a unit collaboration to coincide with the social studies teacher, students will read a core novel entitled *Catherine, Called Birdy*. The narrator of the text is a young girl of fourteen who is dissatisfied with her life as the daughter of a nobleman and lady. Her diary reflects her life, thoughts, and actions during the year 1290. Read-alouds will emphasize the narrator's voice from this time period. Students will begin by reading for evidence of medieval beliefs, customs, and superstitions. This unit will also include expository text with topics selected for research by the teacher. Using a literature circle format (where each student is assigned a role and responsibility for learning) students will collect research with a focus on daily life to include food, health, recreation, and the relationships between students and teachers. Students will read *Catherine, Called Birdy*, as part of their literature circle group. After the reading is completed, students then choose a role from Medieval life and their remaining work is written and presented from a Medieval point of view within their literature circle group.

Working in their literature circle groups, students will use reading strategies to monitor group comprehension, such as predicting, making inferences, and identifying tone and mood through a collection of evidence from the novel text. As students begin to produce their Medieval journals, they will focus on voice, word choice, and sentence fluency. Students will also incorporate strategies for reading for research as they collect information on the origin of European surnames, the use of parchment, and the importance of the game of chess in the Middle Ages. Students will be reading to write and writing to read as they produce a five-day journal using a voice from the Medieval period, present research findings in their literature circle groups, and demonstrate games.

This unit will be taught over a three week time period. Curriculum objectives allow this unit to be presented during the final three weeks of the fall semester. The unit is divided into three stages. Week one will focus on activating background knowledge, modeling reading strategies, and forming literature "fortress" groups. The first stage will begin with a short book talk to introduce the novel. A K-W-L chart¹ can be used to activate students' background knowledge of the Medieval period in history. Short read-alouds will be presented for two to three days at the beginning of the first week to transport students back into this time period. Quick writes will follow the read-alouds as journal responses. Students will have opportunities to share their quick writes during the course of the first week. The teacher will also read the first several diary entries aloud with a focus on the narrator's voice in the text. Students will then begin a reading log, gathering notes on beliefs, customs, and superstitions to be continued throughout the reading of the core text.

Week two will focus on reading for research as well as a continuation of the core novel text. During the second week of the unit, students will begin jigsaw research² activities focusing on the origin of European surnames, the use of parchment, and the importance of games during the Medieval period. Each student will bring his or her individual learning back to his or her group, reporting in-group think-pair-shares³ and data collection charts. Students will also continue their independent reading of the core novel documenting beliefs, customs, and superstitions.

Week three will include preparations for the final project presentation. Beginning the third week of the unit, students will design a "fortress" presentation⁴ to include journal readings, character analysis, research findings, and game demonstrations. Each fortress group will be responsible for guided questions/products through their assigned literature circle role as discussion leader, question leader, vocabulary leader, connections leader, or illustrator.

Unit Objectives

This curriculum unit meets district and state language arts objectives to include listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and can be correlated to the Houston Independent School District's model lesson scope and sequence for fall semester, sixth grade. The unit also addresses the needs of gifted and talented students as well as those students who are still mastering English as a second language.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

It seems only appropriate before introducing students (and teachers) to the core novel, *Catherine, Called Birdy*, that both will come to the novel with some historical understanding of daily life during the Medieval period. Catherine, a fourteen-year-old daughter of a noble man, is a typical teenager who is extremely dissatisfied with her life, including her parents and siblings. Students will readily identify with the attitudes and emotions of this narrator. However, beliefs, customs, and superstitions will require some background knowledge. Throughout the novel, Catherine allows the reader to glimpse what life might have been like during the Medieval period.

In a very brief summation, an introduction to daily life during the Medieval period will follow to include learning, playing, feasting, and healing. This background knowledge should allow both teachers and students to use this historically based novel not only as a springboard for literary analysis but also as a “mirror,” allowing students to look back in time, which in many ways is not that different from the present day.

Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Children in the Middle Ages

Through a study of secular writing of the time, attitudes toward children reveal negative feelings because “they are a source of trouble, worry, financial expenditure, and suffering” (Shahar 10). Most writers at this time were men. Cultural attitudes supported procreation for political or economic reasons. Children were considered to be “a trust from God rather than the property of their parents” (Shahar 13).

At the onset of the twelfth century, the Virgin Mary was considered to be an example for all mothers through art and in sermons. Women were praised for “providing their children with a Christian education but also for nursing them and raising them devotedly” (Shahar 13). The infant, Jesus, was also viewed as a human child, “small, weak, laughing, weeping...innocent and pure” (Shahar 18). Artists often used images of children to symbolize the soul’s flight to heaven. Children were also the leaders in many religious processions. Guibert of Nogent wrote about “the ignorance of little children! Being protected by the absence of lust, it enjoys the security of angels” (Shahar 19).

Childhood was divided into three stages during the Middle Ages. The first stage, *infantia*, included birth to seven years of age. The second stage, *pueritia*, ended for girls by age twelve and boys by age fourteen. Maturity for males was somewhere between the ages of fourteen and twenty-eight during the third stage of childhood or *adolescencia*. The age at which a man would reach maturity was different from region to region. In England, for example, a man at the age of fifteen could “realize his inheritance...urban property was released to an heir from the age when he was able to count money and to distinguish true from counterfeit coins, or to measure cloth (usually at fifteen), or, in the case of a fief, only from the age of twenty-one” (Shahar 29). Reaching adulthood clearly differed between males and females. Married life began much earlier for girls where little to no transition was noted after the second stage of childhood. Males, on the other hand, were almost exclusively mentioned in the third stage of *adolescencia*.

During the first stage of childhood, it is noted that boys were most often weaned later than girls. Girls were believed to be physically inferior and as a result, needed less food. Males were considered to be “hotter and dryer” with “more strength, courage, and reason” than a female (Shahar 81). The female was considered to be “smaller in body, colder and moister, and less perfect” (Shahar 81). Paolo of Certaldo summarized the belief in this way, “...nourish the sons well. How you nourish the daughter does not matter as long as you keep her alive. Do not allow her to wax too fat” (Shahar 81). Females were sent more often to wet nurses than males and suffered a higher infant mortality rate because of inferior nutrition (Shahar 82). The importance of bathing children and infants was also discussed in detail during the Middle Ages. Later in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, bathing was believed to be harmful and “that the layer of filth accumulating on the body (particularly the skull) protected the infant or small child, dirt serving also as a shield against the evil eye” (Shahar 85). Because royalty as well as the lower classes held to this belief during this time, it can also be inferred to be present during the Middle Ages even though physicians spoke against the theory (Shahar 86). From birth until two, greater detail was written on the care of infants. From two to seven, the mortality rate dropped so less instruction on the care of children was available. Bathing several times a week, exercise, and freedom along with supervision were the responsibilities of the parents during this time in a

child's life. Physicians left the discussion of education to the moral philosophers of the time (Shahar 98).

Learning in the Medieval World

At the onset of the second stage of life at age seven, education became the focus for males and females of the upper classes. Scholars believed that the nature of a child was a combination of the "substance of his parents" as well as the "humours" that were believed to exist in man and determined his temperament (Shahar 163). Because this temperament was present during infancy, medical writers of the time concluded that it could not be changed. However, temperaments could be moderated through "physical or spiritual counter-remedies" such as rubbing salt on melancholy infants or oil on those who were choleric (Shahar 163). The goal of education during the Middle Ages was to raise a "Christian human being" and morals were valued more than knowledge or skill (Shahar 166). Education was an expression of faith and in combination with the fear and love of God would lead to "redemption in the next world" (Shahar 166). As stated by Shahar, children during the Middle Ages were believed to "learn both good and evil rapidly, and one should hasten to teach them to do good" (170). Class, occupation, and sex determined the appropriate education of the child. Differences were also noted between the education of "knights, merchants, or artisans" (Shahar 167). Young aristocrats were taught chess, backgammon, and to hawk, hunt, and fence. Females, by the end of *pueritia*, became companions to a lady of a household and learned to spin, weave, embroider, and manage the household. Parents continued to be responsible for the majority of the child's education, "but priests and tutors were also expected to play their part" (Shahar 171).

The elementary school was known as the "reading school" or the "song school" (Shahar 187). Most males continued their elementary studies until age ten or twelve. In both schools, Latin was the basis of the curriculum and students learned to read before moving into the intermediate or grammar school. Students at this stage began to study Latin seriously and were also introduced to rhetoric and dialectics. Students were expected to obtain written and oral fluency along with reading and comprehension of classical and Christian texts (Shahar 187). Instruction was verbal, relying on reading and learning through repetition.

Based on the Latin idea of seven liberal arts, the *trivium* was introduced during the grammar school years while the *quadrivium*, which included arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music, was the basis for study in the university. Students entered university studies between fourteen and sixteen years of age. A student who completed his studies was expected to display "a perfect knowledge of Latin, a knowledge of scriptures, of the tenets of faith, and of Christian morality, and a limited knowledge of science and law" (Shahar 187). Students who studied writing and intended to become scribes usually ceased other instruction because of the technical nature of their field, which required specialized training with quill on parchment. Students were many times sent far from home to study around the age of sixteen.

Shahar discusses the education of children in four areas: service, nobility, urban society, and peasants. Up to the twelfth century, both male and female children who were dedicated to the service of the church were placed in monastic life as early as 5 to 6 years old. However, after that time it was declared illegal and children were allowed to leave the monastery after reaching an appropriate age. Some monasteries would not accept young children because of their active and disruptive nature (191). As also noted, however, the choice for females to dedicate one's life to the church "remained, almost without exception, the sole way of acquiring an education, realizing organizational and educational skills, and the only refuge from undesired marriages" for females of the lower classes (208).

Both male and female children were educated among the nobility. Children destined to become knights usually left their mothers at the age of seven to nine. Males, upon arriving at the

court of a *seigneur*, would become pages and were dressed in adult style clothing. Serious military training began at the age of twelve and was usually completed by fifteen. These future knights were enveloped in adult society and most took part in battles as early as fifteen to seventeen years of age (Shahar 211). Future knights were immersed in adult tales about “heroism, the brotherhood of warriors, fidelity, and the honour of the family” (Shahar 213). To complete one’s training for knighthood was costly. Each knight must have his own horse and armor as well as the monetary fee to enter the ranks (Shahar 223).

Females of nobility were less expensive to educate. Their education included “reading and writing, poetry, foreign languages, as well as etiquette, playing an instrument, singing, and music composition” along with “a little arithmetic, excerpts from the Scriptures and from the *Lives of the Saints* as well as prayers and psalms in Latin” (Shahar 222). Girls were generally married as early as twelve and an increasing age gap between husbands and wives was noted during the twelfth century (Shahar 224). Females of nobility were well educated and cultivated in order to be able to defend and manage the large industrial and agricultural estates in the absence of their husbands. Because of the age difference, many noble women became very powerful managers of these estates upon the death of their husbands.

The education of the laboring classes in urban society began in the elementary “reading” or “song” schools. Those children destined to work as merchants or bankers continued their education at “schools of commerce” (Shahar 225). Many attended these schools for a very short period of time in order to pursue their apprenticeships with their masters. Apprentices were usually required to leave home, and the duration of their training lasted anywhere from three to ten years. The responsibility for the apprentice became the responsibility of the master. When their apprenticeship was completed, males enjoyed “a large degree of liberty, particularly if they succeeded in business. If they failed...they often required parental assistance” (Shahar 228). Females, on the other hand, received a limited education with the exception being those who were sent at an early age to be educated in convents. Girls did not train for a profession, and their roles as wives and mothers were their primary goal. It was argued that those females in urban society who knew how to read and write would use those skills to communicate with their husbands and sons while traveling for business. In urban society, girls were usually educated in household responsibilities by their mothers.

Peasant children received little to no education. Their parents and the village priest were in charge of preparing their children for adulthood and its responsibilities. Peasant children, as early as age seven, would begin to help their parents with agricultural responsibilities. Older children would work beside their parents and care for younger siblings. Because of these adult responsibilities, it is noted that children were many times injured at work. Injuries also occurred because of lack of adult supervision. Adulthood for peasant children came at the age of fourteen. Both males and females “were full partners in the function of their class—namely, work on the land” (Shahar 247).

Playing in the Medieval World

Play is an important developmental part of any child’s world, and what is considered today to be appropriate play was also seen during the medieval period. Toys and games were possessed and played by children across social classes. Baby rattles were common, made of a lead-tin alloy with a bead to make a noise. Care was taken to make sure there were no sharp edges that might injure the infant and that the bead was kept out of reach. Older children played with “windmills” made from paper that were cut and pinned to create the whirling effect of a windmill. Children today continue to play with similar windmill toys. Wooden tops were also common toys among children. Tops were played at home and also in the streets. Words used to describe this toy during the medieval period were: “*prill* (from the verb ‘to twist’), *spilcock* (meaning ‘a little

plaything'), *whirligig*, *scopperil* (from a root meaning to 'jump about'), *spilquern* (a variant of *spilcock*, from its quern-like shape), and *whirlbone* (apparently relating to an animal bone—knee-bone or vertebra—that could be spun)" (Orme 168).

Dolls were common as well, used in play as "an imitation of adult life." As noted by Orme, "*Doll* itself is a late word, a pet-form of *Dorothy*, which first meant a mistress or favourite and came to be applied to dolls only in the seventeenth century" (168). Earlier references to dolls appeared in the form of a *poppet*, which "comes from the Latin word *pupa* or *puppa*, originally meaning a girl but also used of small images, such as one might offer at a shrine" (Orme 168). Dolls were made from earthenware, wood, wax, and cloth. Many were sculpted and painted. Dolls were generally made to resemble infants or children, but adult figures were also noted. Consideration was also given to the clothing of the doll according to social rank (Orme 170). Dolls were not strictly limited to children alone. Examples of female adults carrying or possessing dolls are also noted during the medieval period. Children also must have played with whatever was at hand. Although recordings are rare, sand, dust, sticks, flowers, and rags could have been used across all social classes to construct toy houses, dolls, and even military play-weapons.

Games were noted as an important part of childhood during the medieval period. Common objects such as cherry-stones were used to play games like *cherry pit* where the stone was tossed into a hole. Waste items were often used to play games referred to as "*cherry-stone, marrow bone, buckle-pit, spurn point, cobnut, or quouting*" (Orme 176). These items could have been used as markers or currency for the game. *Bowling-stones*, or marbles, were also common during this time. Games were played to teach strategies and increase memory such as "dice, tables (or backgammon), draughts, chess, and cards" (Orme 178). The game of chess was considered to represent society, with the "king, queen, knights, judges, rooks (executive officers), and common folk, each having its own function and all being effective when working together" (Orme 178). Running, jumping, chasing, and throwing were also popular physical games among children of the Middle Ages. Croquet and tennis, which was originally played against a wall, were ball games of this time period as well.

Playing at war was very common during the Medieval period. Because England was a military society, playing at war was encouraged at a very young age. Children played with bows and arrows. A statute in 1512 required that "all men with boys in their houses, aged between seven and seventeen, should provide them with a bow and two arrows, and bring them up to shoot" (Orme 183). Towns even provided butts for target practice on holidays. Military and mechanical toys were common among children of the noble classes. Imitation horses and even sticks with carved heads are documented through illustrations of the medieval period (Orme 175). Noble boys were taught to hunt at age fourteen, the beginning of adulthood, and hunting was considered training for war. Boys also created imaginary military games, as children continue to do today.

Feasting in the Medieval World

Feasting in the medieval world can be observed today through cookery books, courtesy manuals, household and court documents, legal records, Medieval texts, and works of art (Cosman 1). Festivals of food were signs of God's blessings. Courtly feasts were also signs of political power. Feasting led to fasting and fasting led to feasting according to the Medieval Christian calendar. Medieval Christians believed "to taste sin is to know and crave it; depriving the self of the desired is sterner test and keener triumph than ignoring the forbidden without tasting it" (Cosman 37). Because of this strong connection between food and spirituality, Christian moralists also viewed feasts as a way for the devil to recruit disciples. Man was

believed to be able to eat his way into sin and the reverse was also true through the body and blood of Jesus Christ (Cosman 117).

The **great hall**, or banquet hall, was the social center of the household. It contained a raised floor for musicians and functioned as a living room as well. Because this room was the social center, furniture had many purposes. The **high table** was always positioned perpendicular to the other tables in the hall and the hosts and their special guests dined here. **Sideboards** were tables that were parallel to the side walls of the great hall where all other guests sat in descending social rank. Many times these tables were temporary; using large boards sitting on top of saw horses so that they could be taken down easily. The temporary tables were referred to as **treble tables** or **horse-and-saddle tables**. Other furniture included a cupboard where serving pieces were displayed, a surveying board where foods were brought for final preparation, and a trencher board where breads were cut. Meat was usually carved on the banquet table itself (Cosman 15-16).

Banquet tables were covered with a white cloth with a saltcellar placed before the most honored guest on the high table. Goblets and **mazers** (bowls used for drinking) along with silver and gold spoons and knives became the place settings for the guests. Forks were not fashionable in England until the late Renaissance. Spoons were used for soups and puddings and knives for meat from platter to mouth, but fingers were used for everything else. Before food was eaten, hands were washed in warm fragrant water with the most honored guest first. Although food was served on chargers, place settings were rarely used (Cosman 16). Instead, stale bread was cut and used as a **trencher**. Once the bread absorbed the gravies or sauces, it was kept as leftovers for the next day in wine or milk, fed to the dogs, or given to the poor at the gate (Cosman 16-17).

Service of food began at the **high table**, and then continued according to social rank. Music would accompany the serving of food. Noblemen and sons of gentlemen served the foods in the court as a means of political and/or professional advancement. The **steward** supervised the serving of food while the **chamberlain** was the food taster. The **panter** served bread with the upper crust going to the lord. He carried four knives and also controlled the salt. Fresh bread was for the lord alone; day-old bread from the pantry was for the guests; three-day-old bread was for the household; and four-day-old bread was used for **trenchers**. Other food servitors were the **scullions**, **varlets**, and **quistrons** (performing the rough kitchen work); the **carver** (carving and serving the meat); the **ewerer** (bringing water and towels for hand washing); the **cupbearer** (fetching the wine); the **sewer** (arranging the dishes of food); the **almoner** (in charge of the Alms Dish where first crusts of bread and left-overs were placed for the poor); the **surveyor** (who controlled the surveying board); the **cook** (directing where platters were to be brought); the **saucer** (who prepared garnishes for the food); and the **marshalls**, **squires**, **ushers**, and **sergeants-at-arms** (who carried platters to the feasters) (Cosman 26, 28-29, 31).

An abundance of choice was preferred during the Medieval period over quantity of food. Selection for the lord and his guests was extremely important (Cosman 18). **Course** in Latin means to run or flow in time, so Medieval feasts became a series of foods over time during a single meal. Fruits and/or **potages**, which were thick soups, comprised the first course. Dishes were also ordered based on the humoral theory of hot/cold or wet/dry. Foods might be presented in a zoological hierarchy or symbolically served to represent the four seasons or four stages of man's life (Cosman 20). Fantastic presentations were expected. Jugglers might even jump out of large puddings. The well-known nursery rhyme, "Sing a Song of Sixpence," was a reference to a Medieval recipe for *Four and Twenty Singing Blackbird Pie* (Cosman 204) where tethered birds or frogs were placed in a baked pastry shell to surprise guests when cut and served. Presentations of foods suggested the "Medieval fascination with things being seldom what they seem...Illusion was a necessary corollary to medieval cookery" (Cosman 33). Sculpted and painted foods were meant to be eaten (Cosman 63). Herbs used to paint foods included parsley (green); saunders (red); saffron (amber); ginger and saffron (gold). Blood was used for coloring sauces brown or

black and for flavor mixed with wine or broth (Cosman 42). Salt was a staple in every kitchen. Spices were obtained from the East and were a sign of wealth. Milk and eggs were also used in abundance. Chicken eggs were smaller and sparrow eggs were preferred as an aphrodisiac (Cosman 42). Herbs were grown in gardens and honey was used over sugar in many recipes. Maps of gardens and orchards dispute the myth that vegetables and fruits were not consumed in the Medieval period; however, cookery manuals have very few recipes for vegetables (Cosman 47). Even though most Medieval recipes have an absence of measurements, calibrated scales, measuring containers, and sandglass timers were used (Cosman 55-56).

During the Medieval period, markets were referred to as *cheaps*, “from the Anglo-Saxon word ‘*ceap*,’ meaning ‘to buy’” (Cosman 80). Market laws controlled raw materials and protected the lower classes. Monasteries and manors grew or produced much of what they ate, but the lower classes bought more than they were able to grow (Cosman 67-68). Laws controlled the price of wine, where fish could be sold, and the price and weight of bread. Commercial breads had to be stamped with the baker's seal. *Innkeepers* and *hostelers* were limited in profit from the bread they would sell (Cosman 71-72). *Searchers of Wines* regulated wine and its price as well as vinegars and sauces. London taverns were required to allow one person in the drinking party to inspect the wine cellar and examine the wine measures (Cosman 73-74). Prison could be the penalty for failure to follow the law. Laws were related to the humoral-balance theory of disease. Ale was considered a natural drink while beer was “a maker of fat men and killer of those troubled with colic or the stone” (Cosman 77). Brew was measured out by the gallon or quart and coopers had to be watched carefully. They could sell a vessel made of faulty wood or one of recycled wood that was tainted with soap or dye that would ruin the brew (Cosman 77). Evening markets had problems with *thieves*, *rowdies*, and *cutpurses* so time rules were enforced. The eight hours of daylight were separated into time rules within the food ordinances (*matins*, *lauds*, *prime*, *terce*, *sext*, *nones*, *vespers*, and *compline*). Bells were rung to call for prayers in the town and also to regulate the work of the day. Sellers were required to stay in their assigned market spaces or risk losing their produce or even their freedom (Cosman 80, 83). Punishment for *victualing* crimes included burning the objects of dishonesty or wearing a necklace of the underweight bread or ale as the town crier announced the crime (Cosman 91).

Healing in the Medieval World

Medicine during the Middle Ages was practiced in much the same way as the Greeks and Romans. Universities focused on the study of the classical medical texts rather than “confirming or disproving the information presented as facts” (Newman 242). However, much of what modern medicine considers primitive in some respects is in other respects part of good medical practice today. For instance, Medieval practitioners believed it was much better to look after your health on a regular basis than wait until one was ill and then attempt to cure the illness. The humoral theory was influential in that regard and yet absurd in other respects. The humoral theory proposed that the human body was governed by four humors—*blood* (hot and wet), *phlegm* (cold and wet), *yellow bile* (hot and dry), and *black bile* (cold and dry), and each of these humors affected the human body in different ways depending on their characteristics (Newman 242).

People were believed to have a combination of all four humors, with the most desirable humor to be the *sanguine*, or *blood* humor. People who had a dominance of *blood* were believed to have “healthy complexions and were cheerful, warm, and generous” (Newman 242). A noble was used to portray a person who had this humor in medieval health books. If a person's dominant humor was *phlegm*, they were considered to be “generally sluggish, dull, and slow to act on anything regardless of the motive” (Newman 242). Merchants were often used as an example for this humor. Persons with a dominance of *yellow bile* were easy to anger and were “supposed to be thin, presumably as a result of their constant state of agitation” (Newman 242).

Black bile was thought to make a person melancholy as well as "cowardly, pale, envious of others, and covetous of their possessions" (Newman 242). Scholars were used to illustrate this dominance in a person of the Medieval period. Because everyone contained a different balance of the four humors, physicians during the Medieval period would "analyze a patient's humoral balance and devise a regimen to adjust the balance to maintain or restore the patient's well being" (Newman 243). Physicians also considered other contributing factors including the environment, diet, and the position of the stars. Food, objects, and even clothing were considered to have humoral characteristics as well. All of these factors were taken into account before advising a patient during the Middle Ages.

The spread of disease was also a major concern during the Medieval period. Microbes had not yet been discovered and so physicians would blame diseases on "God visiting His righteous wrath on sinful mankind, or conversely, witches, demons, and other agents of Satan inflicting suffering on the virtuous" (Newman 244). The planets, as well as accusations against lepers and Jews, were also used to explain the spread of disease. Physicians did, however, recognize that the spread of disease could be contained, and so ships were required to remain offshore for up to "forty days before being allowed to land to ensure that they were not carrying any plagues" (Newman 244). This became known as "quarantine from the Italian words for a period of forty days" (Newman 244). This practice of **quarantine** began in Italy and southern France during the late fourteenth century to prevent the continued spread of the bubonic plague.

Medical care during the Medieval period was provided by a variety of people from university-trained doctors, surgeons, barbers, **empirics**, monks and nuns, daughters of physicians, to noble women. **Empirics**, or healers, were the largest group of health care providers. **Empirics**, who were not university trained, relied on home remedies as well as incantations, prayers, and their own experience (Newman 250). Women were also expected to provide basic medical care for their families and those under their care, whether they were noble women or of lower social class. Surgery was a last resort and many times prayer and incantations were performed asking for divine intervention.

LESSON PLANS

Overview

Lesson plans for "Voices from the Past" are divided into three weekly mini-units that are constructed using the "backward by design" approach to planning.⁵ The first week is spent activating background knowledge, implementing reading strategies, and forming literature "fortress" groups. During this time, learning experiences and instructional presentations are the focus. The second week moves students into reading for research and completion of the core novel. Determining acceptable evidence of learning begins to take shape during the second week. The third and final week of the unit involves completion of learning outcomes and group presentations. Students are required through presentation rubrics to demonstrate evidence of learning.

Care should be taken at the beginning of this unit to group students appropriately for maximum learning outcomes. This unit works well with varied abilities including ELL (English language learners) students and advanced academic students. This unit can easily be adapted to block scheduling and extended or shortened as time allows.

Week One

Focus: Activating Background Knowledge

Backward by Design Concept: Worth Being Familiar With⁶

Students are asked to complete a K-W-L chart (see reference in introduction) about the Medieval period. Books about the Middle Ages may be displayed in the room, both fiction and expository text, and a quick book talk might be appropriate before asking students to write about what they think they know. Students must also write a least one question about the Medieval period they would like to have answered before the end of the unit. The teacher then allows students to share their knowledge. This can be done with the whole group or in partner “think-pair-shares” as described in the introduction.

Students are then given a copy of the core novel, *Catherine, Called Birdy*, and asked to browse the book for unique features. Students will notice that it is written in a diary format. The teacher will read aloud the beginning entries over the course of several days to help students focus on the voice of the narrator. After each read aloud, the teacher will direct students to respond with a *quick write*⁷ recording their personal thoughts and feelings about the text. After the voice of the narrator becomes more familiar to the students, students may then be instructed to continue the reading of the core novel through independent reading or with reading partners. The teacher will also model the documentation of beliefs, customs, and superstitions that may be noted in the novel. Students will be instructed to create a data collection chart to document this evidence for each month in the diary. The remaining time during the first week will be spent reading, responding to quick writes as selected by the teacher, and collecting evidence from the text noting beliefs, customs, and superstitions.

By the end of the first week, the teacher begins to form literature “fortress” groups as described in the introduction. Students assume the role of discussion leader, connection leader, vocabulary leader, question leader, and illustrator. As the unit progresses, responsibilities will be assigned to each student’s assigned role as evidence of learning for the group.

Week Two

Focus: Reading for Research

Backward by Design Concept: Important to Know and Do⁸

As students begin the second week of the unit, they will continue to document beliefs, customs, and superstitions through the completion of the core novel, *Catherine, Called Birdy*. Students will begin to work in their literature “fortress” roles as a cohesive group. Students will break into research groups using jigsaw research (as described in the introduction) and each “fortress” member will complete a mini-research activity to bring back to their group. Each role’s responsibilities are detailed as follows:

- The discussion leader is responsible for creating a data collection chart for the group detailing important beliefs, customs, and superstitions during the medieval period. Each student within the group is responsible for contributing their personal collection from week one. The discussion leaders will meet together to complete a rough draft of their research as a mid-point assessment.
- The connection leader is responsible for research on the development of surnames during the Medieval period. The connection leaders from each group will take notes from Internet and text sources on this topic. The teacher should have Internet sources book marked and text sources available beforehand. This group of students will also complete a rough draft of their findings as a mid-point assessment.

- The vocabulary leader’s responsibility includes researching the use of the quill and parchment during the Medieval period. Again, Internet and text sources should be available beforehand. This group will also use their information as a mid-point assessment.
- The question leader is responsible for the investigation of the types of games played by children of the Medieval period. Information on indoor and outdoor games should be made available through Internet and text sources. The teacher might want to narrow the focus of research to the game of chess and its relevancy to the Middle Ages.
- The illustrator in his/her research group will look at the artistic style of the period with a focus on illuminations in literature. Again, Internet and text sources should be made available. Internet museum tours might be helpful along with examples from picture books. Students in this group will bring back sketches to be shared with the “fortress” group.

By the end of the second week, each literature “fortress” group should have detailed information on: beliefs, customs, and superstitions; the appearance of surnames during the Medieval period; the use of the quill and parchment; the game of chess; and the use of illuminations during the Middle Ages. This research data will become the basis for each group’s fortress presentation in week three.

Week Three

Focus: Fortress Project and Performance Tasks

Backward by Design Concept: “Enduring” Understanding⁹

The third and final week of the unit will involve project and performance tasks as evidence of learning. Students in their literature “fortress” groups will create the following, assuming leadership responsibilities in their assigned areas. Assessments may take the form of rubrics and observation logs. Students should be given project rubrics and observation guidelines as they begin their final products.

Day one of the final week will focus on communicating jigsaw learning from week two to the literature “fortress” groups. The discussion leader will be responsible for creating a graphic organizer to represent his/her group’s collection of beliefs, customs, and superstitions. This student will also keep the group on track, coordinating time for discussion and production. The connection leader will inform the group of his/her research findings and act like an “expert” as each group member selects a new surname to be used in their journals. The vocabulary leader is responsible for the group’s parchment supply, helping each member prepare their paper bag parchment for their final journal entries. The question leader is responsible for communicating his research findings on games and play during the Medieval period. This student will also help each member of the group brainstorm a list of board games to be used as a guide for the design of their final board game product. The illustrator in each group is responsible for communicating information regarding the use of illuminations in text during this time in history. Each student should share several examples with the group for use in their individual game designs.

Students are also responsible for a five-day journal. This should begin on day one of the final week as well. Students will choose a role from the Medieval period, such as a knight, a lady, and a peasant, etc. Using their chosen role, students will write on their paper bag “parchment” documenting their daily life over a five-day period with a focus on the “voice” of their chosen role.

Beginning on day two of the final week, students are also responsible for a board game, easily created with folders. Students should plan a rough draft of their board and use their illumination as part of the design for their game. Their game should have a Medieval theme, and

the title and board should communicate research gathered by their “fortress” groups. Each student’s game should be playable by at least two players and have clear directions for winning.

Days three and four will be spent in groups completing game boards and journals. Day five of the final week will come together in a tournament fashion, where board games are played (and hopefully won). If time allows, students may also share their final Medieval journals. Depending on scheduling, students may want to dress their part or at least include a hat as a costume.

ENDNOTES

¹ A K-W-L chart helps students activate their background knowledge. Using a three-column format, students list what they **Know**, what they **Want** to know, and what they have **Learned**.

² Jigsaw research allows students to research smaller ‘chunks’ of information and bring what they have learned back to their group. All group members are responsible for a ‘chunk’ of knowledge.

³ Think-Pair-Share is a partner activity where student “A” shares learned information while student “B” listens, and then roles are reversed as student “B” shares as student “A” listens.

⁴ “Fortress” presentations are designed around a literature circle format where each student in the group is assigned a leadership responsibility culminating in a final group presentation.

⁵ “Backward by design” planning involves the identification of the desired results through the design of performance tasks and/or projects.

⁶ According to backward by design theory, common knowledge or concepts are needed as the foundation for critical thinking and this foundation is referred to as “worth being familiar with.”

⁷ A quick write is a very brief (2-3 minute) response springing from a shared piece of text.

⁸ The middle stage in backward by design presents those concepts that must be mastered in order to produce evidence of learning.

⁹ The final stage in backward by design, and the stage at which all planning for learning begins, is referred to as enduring understanding because projects and performance tasks should communicate the highest level of critical thinking skills.

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