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○ 69-70 The Medieval Period

Words Worth Knowing
○ **Romance**: medieval verse narrative chronicling the adventures of a brave knight or hero who must undertake a quest and overcome great danger for love of a noble lady or high ideal
The Medieval Period [IN 70]

| Points | Notes | About | Key Points |
|--------|-------|-------|------------|------------|
|        |       |       |            |            |
By establishing a social structure called **feudalism**, William created a hierarchy of rulers under one lord and a network of thousands of **knights** sworn to serve him.

To squash revolts, William divided the land among his loyal barons and built castles around the country.

In the Norman invasion of 1066, **William the Conqueror** defeats the Anglo-Saxons.

By establishing a social structure called **feudalism**, William created a hierarchy of rulers under one lord and a network of thousands of **knights** sworn to serve him.
The Normans Invade Britain

William the Conqueror

- a duke from Normandy, France, claimed the English throne had been promised to him
- crosses the English Channel with a huge army
- defeats King Harold and the Anglo-Saxons at the Battle of Hastings
The Normans Invade Britain

The Normans Change England

- land divided among William’s followers from Normandy
- more contact with European civilization
- French replaces English as language of the ruling class
- Normans add law and order to Anglo-Saxon’s democratic and artistic achievements
Feudalism

- social, economic, and military system
- based on a religious concept of rank
- some vassals appointed by king in return for loyalty
- lords (powerful vassals) appoint their own vassals

KEY POINT

King

Lords
powerful landowners

Vassals
did work or military service for feudal lords in exchange for land

Serfs
servants to lords and vassals, bound to their master’s land
Knights in Shining Armor

- provided military service to lords
- often the sons of nobles
- began training at an early age
- wore very heavy armor into battle
- followed a code of chivalry
History of the Times

- Medieval society was dependent on strictly defined social classes—nobility, knights, priests, merchants, and peasants.
- The contributions of each group affected how well villages and towns prospered.
- Villages, built around castles, were the fundamental center of medieval society.
- Social mobility was nearly impossible in the Middle Ages. Social rank remained fixed.
The Middle Ages

This illustration from the *Golf Book of Hours* shows peasants taking a break from their work in the fields.

The bulk of society consisted of laborers. Peasants owned their land; serfs did not. Serfs were little more than slaves to their overlords.
Life in Medieval Society

Growth of Cities and Towns

• most merchants and artisans lived in villages
• merchant class—people earn their own money
• villagers viewed themselves as having more freedom for art
• townspeople’s tastes influence arts, ballads, plays, and so on
Life in Medieval Society

Social Status

• Regardless of how hard a merchant worked or how much money an artisan earned, social status was fixed.

• A family’s only hope was to apprentice a son to a higher vocation or “marry up” a daughter to a husband from a higher class.
Literature of the Times

- Old English disappears from laws and literature after William makes French the language of the state.
- Reflecting the chasm between the British masses and the Norman rulers, literature was usually written in Latin or Norman French after 1066.
- Bibles and gospels created in monasteries were celebrated for their brilliant illuminated manuscripts, all created by hand.
Literature of the Times

- Some medieval writers began to use the vernacular, or language of the people.
- Works written in English, such as ballads and romances, helped to define England’s identity.
- A new literary form—the romance—becomes popular, reflecting the concepts of courtly love and chivalry.
- Scholarly works from monasteries and universities reflect society’s interest in moral instruction and morality plays.
Key Concept: 
Life in Medieval Society

The Romance

• new genre of literature
• inspired by legends of chivalrous knights
• hero goes on quest to conquer evil enemy
• hero often has magical help
• includes stories of distant, idealized courtly love

Malory’s Le Morte d’Arthur (from a 14th c manuscript)
Courtly Love

The knight
• adored the lady and was inspired by her
• glorified the lady in words

The lady
• remained pure and out of reach
• was set above her admirer
Key Concept: Life in Medieval Society

Code of Chivalry
A code of conduct that covered:

- whom to defend—knight’s lord, the king, and the Christian faith
- how to treat a lady—courtly love
- how to help others
- how to resist the urge to run away if captured
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=T855W1RFYE0&LIST=PLIKWA0XOCU5J9NZNOCKAZHYCS8F16YVFM&INDEX=2&NOHTML5=FALSE
The Medieval Period [IN 69]

**Numbers** are important Christian symbols and therefore have an important place in medieval study.

- **3** Trinity: God-Father-Holy Spirit, nature of God
  Redeeming: 3 days to rise from grave and conquer death

- **5** Virtues of Knights: friendship, generosity, chastity, courtesy, piety

- **7** Perfect: 7 days to create

- **12** Balanced: 12 tribes of Israel, 12 disciples, 12 knights of Round Table
The Medieval Period [IN 69]

**Colors** are also important religious symbols and again have a place in medieval study

- **Red**: Blood, Sacrifice
- **White**: Purity, Clean
- **Green**: Nature, Wild
- **Gold**: Kingly, Wealthy-fortune

*Keep an eye out for these symbols as you work with medieval texts!*
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◦ 71-72  Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
## Sir Gawain and the Green Knight [IN 72]

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