

**Literature of the Middle Ages**  
**English 371:001**  
Dr. Snelson

Spring 2012 MWF 9:00 – 9:50 AM    <http://faculty.frostburg.edu/engl/snelson/>    [gsnelson@frostburg.edu](mailto:gsnelson@frostburg.edu)  
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Hours MW 8:30-10:00, TR 10:45 – 11:45 and by appointment

**Catalog Description**

Literature of the Anglo-Saxon and Medieval periods. *Prerequisite: C or better in ENGL 101 or 111 or equivalent.* Satisfies NCTE Standards 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 3.4, and 3.5.

**Departmental Description**

The period of history between the collapse of the Roman Empire (ca. 400 CE) and the Renaissance (ca. 1485 CE) is called the Middle Ages, and the term "medieval" refers to works created during the Middle Ages. Set against the backdrop of one abiding constant, the Christian (Roman Catholic) church, the period experienced great historical, social, and linguistic development. This course will examine texts that are identified with Anglo-Saxon authors as well as texts by Anglo-Norman (after 1066) writers. The earliest writers may include Bede and the Beowulf poet. Authors who dealt with the Arthurian legend and developed the narrative genre called "romance" include the Gawain poet, Marie de France, Sir Thomas Malory, and others. A look at early drama includes "mystery" plays. The literary age will find its flowering in the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales.

**Outcomes**

Students who successfully complete the course will be able to

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the period of history between the collapse of the Roman Empire (ca. 400 CE) and the Renaissance (ca. 1485 CE), called the Middle Ages.
2. Demonstrate a knowledge of texts that are identified with Anglo-Saxon authors as well as texts by Anglo-Norman (after 1066) writers.
3. Make appropriate additions to their writing Portfolios, as described in **PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENT FOR ENGLISH MAJORS**, below.

**Texts**

**Required:** *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Middle Ages; Volume A.* Stephen Greenblatt, General Editor  
Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, (a modern edition by Nevill Coghill), Penguin Classics

**Highly Recommended:**

*The Little, Brown Essential Handbook for Writers*  
Handouts and duplicated supplementary texts  
(Naturally, you should also have a college dictionary.)

## Papers and Assignments: policy on lateness

When you are word processing, always back up your document in *at least* two places (e.g., you can email it to yourself in order to have at least one back up) and save any drafts or revisions at regular intervals. Problems with computers will not be legitimate excuses for a late paper. Keep in mind that the only way to insure that I receive your paper is to give it to me in class, on paper, in person. (Remember the old Zen question: if you email a paper but your professor didn't receive it, then did it really exist? Dr. Snelson's answer: Nope!)

### PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENT FOR ENGLISH MAJORS

A major goal of the English Department Assessment Program is to enable the faculty to assess the effectiveness of the English major and its requirements. By adhering to the following guidelines, you will help us to make improvements when they are needed. If your college curriculum is governed by a catalog prior to the 1999-2001 Undergraduate Catalog, you must submit at least one course paper from each of your English major classes for inclusion in your writing portfolio. These papers can be graded versions or freshly revised versions. If your program of study is governed by the 1999-2001 (or later) Undergraduate Catalog, you are required to maintain a writing portfolio on your own. **You must include in this portfolio at least one graded paper from each of your major courses. Be sure to preserve the instructor's comments.** Since your writing portfolio will provide a major focus for your work in ENGL 489, English Capstone, be diligent in your efforts each semester to identify and collect your best writing. This collection will also provide you with a body of work to support future applications for jobs and graduate school admission.

### Attendance and Participation

You are expected to attend every class meeting. The real value of a university course such as this one lies in the opportunity to share your own ideas and insights derived from the readings and to test your reactions against those of the instructor and other members of the class. There is no way to "make up" this experience or recapture a discussion once it is past. On the other hand, emergencies arise. You are allowed to miss two classes for emergencies during the semester. Reserve your allotment for real emergencies. Your semester grade will be penalized five percentage points for each absence after the two (emergency) absences. Special exceptions, such as touring with a FSU theatre production, can be worked out between you and the instructor if your attendance is otherwise exemplary. If you miss a quiz, please see the instructor privately to discuss the possibility of a make-up. You may discuss an upcoming paper at any time, but scheduling a conference on the day before a paper is due is strongly discouraged. A missed conference (one that you have scheduled) counts as a missed class meeting unless you reschedule in advance. Three late arrivals count as one absence. If your absences exceed six (6), you are no longer a member of the class and you will receive a failing grade in the course. If you are absent from class, you are still responsible for the work assigned for the day you were absent, as well as any information or assignments given out that day. Please attempt to contact classmates to discover what you missed.

### Classroom Citizenship:

Successful students are engaged and prepared. Such behavior contributes to a positive classroom environment, which is essential to learning. Therefore, a student whose behavior prevents other students from learning will be given one warning and after that will be asked to leave. Distracting behavior includes but is not limited to the following: not silencing cell phones, carrying on private conversations, walking in and out of the classroom, etc. Disengaged behavior includes but is not limited to the following: sleeping in class, coming unprepared without textbooks or materials, texting, etc. Students who are asked to leave due to distracting or disengaged behavior will be counted absent. Repeated disruptive behavior will be addressed using the policy in the most recent edition of the *Pathfinder*.

### Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. According to the student handbook (see *Pathfinder* for full text), plagiarism is “the presentation of written or oral material in a manner which conceals the true source of documentary material; or the presentation of material which uses hypotheses, conclusions, evidence, data, or the like, in a way that the student appears to have done the work which he/she did not, in fact, do.” If you plagiarize, you will certainly fail the assignment and the course.

**English department policy is to refer cases of intentional plagiarism for Judicial Board action, which may result in sanctions as severe as expulsion. Don't Plagiarize!**

### Paper Assignments

Two typewritten (word-processed) analytical papers of 1000 words, based on primary materials and secondary materials, are due (complete) at the beginning of class on the dates shown on the tentative schedule. For any paper to be graded at least a C, minimal English 101 standards must be met. Late papers are penalized at the rate of **5%** per day.

**In each paper you will state and defend an argumentative thesis and defend it in body paragraphs, each of which develops the argument through its own argumentative topic sentence and its support sentences, which by using ideas and images, develop the topic sentence.**

### Grading

Paper #1	=	15%
Paper #2	=	15%
Quizzes	=	50%
Final	=	20%

Your final grade will be calculated according to the following scale:  
90-100%=A; 80-89%=B; 70-79%=C; 60-69%=D; and 59% or less=F  
Applicable grades will be A, B, C, D, F, FX.

### Standards for Essays

To receive an **A**, a paper must achieve excellence in analysis (content) and presentation (conventions). The analysis is original and complex, and that complexity is handled deftly, without confusion. Such analysis may involve, for example, recognizing subtle patterns and nuances of meaning, dealing with multiple interpretations of a work, and/or drawing subtle connections between ideas. Presentation is also excellent: the essay is logically coherent; all ideas are precisely and gracefully expressed; the style is fluent, concise and graceful; varieties of sentence structure are used to give ideas appropriate emphasis.

To receive a **B**, a paper may attempt the same degree of sophistication as an A paper but fall slightly short in either organization, mechanics or clarity. A "B" paper might also be somewhat less complex in interpretation but extremely competent in organization, mechanics and clarity; it will still have some degree of originality, penetrating well beyond the surface meaning of the work(s). Varieties of sentence structure are used, and relatively complex sentence structure is capably employed

To achieve at least a passing grade (**C** or better), an essay must meet the following criteria:

1. **Development of Ideas.** The essay must offer a well-developed analysis of the literary work(s). It should not read, in part or in whole, as merely the recounting or retelling of plot, narrative, etc. Rather, the focus of the essay should be on your interpretation. Generalizations must be convincingly supported by the analysis you do of details (or other specifics) in the literary work.
2. **Coherence and Organization.** The essay should have a clear focus governed by a central idea (thesis). The reader should be able to follow the logical development of your ideas without difficulty; therefore, each paragraph should have a clear focus, ideas should be in a logical order and you should provide clear transitions between ideas within a paragraph, between paragraphs and between major sections of an essay.
3. **Clarity.** Your ideas should be expressed clearly and precisely. Avoid terms so general they will confuse the reader or, where general terms are necessary, define your particular use of the term.
4. **Mechanics.** Grammatical, syntactical and typographical errors must be kept to a minimum. While some errors (i.e. those of sentence structure) are more significant than others, all mechanical errors can distract and confuse the reader. A significant pattern of errors (more than approximately 8 per 500 words) will cause the paper to fail.
5. **Documentation.** When you incorporate research in your essay or make other citations, you must document your source(s) correctly, using the MLA style of parenthetical citation. The reader should be able to see the distinction between your ideas and those of another author, whether you summarize, paraphrase or quote him/her. Failure to document correctly may result in plagiarism and thus cause the paper to fail; if the problem is serious enough, you will fail the course.

These are criteria for achieving at least a **C** in an essay; a **C** grade is not punitive, but rather represents competent, satisfactory work. **A** (excellent, superior) and **B** (above average) papers are distinguished by the depth and complexity of analysis as well as precision and grace with which ideas are expressed.

### **Tentative Class Schedule**

#### **Week One:**

- 25: Introduction to the course
- 27: Introduction to the Middle Ages; Bede
- 30: Beowulf: Norton, 1-14, 24-27, 29-55, 61-69, 80-100

#### **Week Two**

- 1: Marie de France: Lanval and Chevrefoil
- 3: Quiz 1; Geoffrey of Monmouth: The Story of Brutus and Diana's Prophecy 117-120
- 6: Gawain and the Green Knight, 160-213

#### **Week Three**

- 6: Chaucer: Bio and General Prologue
- 7: Quiz 2; The Knight's Tale
- 8: Reports

**Week Four:**

13: Miller's Prologue and Tale  
15: Quiz 3; Discussion of Paper 1  
17: Conferences

**Week Five:**

20: The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale  
22: Quiz 4; **Paper # 1 thesis due**  
24: Reports

**Week Six:**

27: **Paper #1 due**; The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale  
29: Quiz 5  
2: Reports

**Week Seven:**

5: The Nun's Priest's Tale  
7: Quiz 6; The Merchant's Tale  
9: Conferences

**Week Eight:**

12: The Reeve's Tale  
14: The Friar's Tale; The Summoner's Tale  
16: Reports

**Week Nine:**

26: John Gower's selected works  
28: Quiz 7; William Langland's The Vision of Piers Plowman  
30: Reports

**Week Ten:**

- 2: The Book of Margery Kempe
- 4: Quiz 8
- 6: Conferences

**Week Eleven:**

- 9: The Second Shepherds' Play; The York Crucifixion
- 11: The Brome Abraham and Isaac; **Paper # 2 thesis due**
- 13: Reports

**Week Twelve:**

- 16: Everyman
- 18: **Paper # 2 due**
- 20: Reports

**Week Thirteen:**

- 23: Quiz 9, Morte Darthur
- 25: Middle English Lyrics
- 27: Conferences

**Week Fourteen:**

- 30: Quiz 10; Course Evaluation
- 2: Review for Final
- 4: Wrap up

Final Exam: Wed. May 16, 2010; 2:30 PM