

TEACHERS' COPY A BRIEF MEDIEVAL VOCABULARY:

Feudalism and Knighthood

Chivalry-- knighthood, knights collectively, or the characteristics expected of a knight: valor, nobility, fairness, courtesy, respect for women, and protection of the weak.

Fealty-- solemn oath between a vassal and his liege, pledging service in return for protection.

Fief-- lands held as a result of fealty. The obligation of service and lands granted in return sometimes passed from father to son.

Joust-- mock warfare; generally begun on horseback, combat could continue on foot and might only end when one participant surrendered or was killed... An *extremely* rough sport.

Liege-- overlord, to whom a vassal swore loyalty and support, who (in return) pledged to honor and protect his vassal or "liegeman".

Mail--armor composed chiefly of small, inter-locking metal rings.

Plate-- armor composed of several, over-lapping or connected sections of metal, shaped to the contours of the wearer's body.

Scutage-- money a vassal might substitute for the actual service pledged his liege, i.e. the amount it would cost to hire someone else to do the job.

Tilting-- form of jousting, in which opponents tried to knock one another from the saddle using long lances. The match ended when a fighter fell, but if the lances were sharp, tilting could be as dangerous as regular jousting!

Vassal-- one who pledged service (usually military) to a feudal lord in return for land, support, or political favors.

Social Standing and Education

Apprentice-- a beginner or novice who agrees to work for a master in his trade or craft in return for instruction and support.

Fostering-- sending children to live with friends, relatives, or political allies to learn necessary social skills, rather like boarding school.

Gossipry-- choosing Godparents for children; a way to cement alliances, as children were often fostered to their Godparents, which created lasting ties between households.

Page-- a young person in the process of learning social etiquette by waiting on his/her elders.

Quadrivium-- the major studies: math, music, geometry and astronomy.

Seneschal-- a noble's chief administrator, or business manager.

Serf-- a farm laborer, one step up from a slave. Serfs could not come and go as they pleased, but they could not be sold away from their homes and families.

Squire-- an apprentice knight, often an elder page in training to become a knight.

Trivium-- the lesser studies: grammar, logic and rhetoric.

Villein-- a villager, freeman, or city dweller.

Clothing

Barbe (Barbette)-- woman's veil, in time a simple strip of fabric that framed the face, covering the ears.

Chausses-- the forerunner of trousers. They consisted of two pant legs, which weren't necessarily joined.

Chemise-- loose undergarment worn by men & women as underwear, nightgown & (on rare occasion) swimsuit.

Favor-- item that a lady presented a lord to show her esteem and support. Lords wore them to indicate that they fought for a particular lady's honour.

Gambison-- quilted jacket first worn as armor, later worn as padding under other armor.

Girdle-- generic term for belt, some were very wide and tight, others were long, & metal or jewel encrusted.

Surcote-- an overtunic, often richly decorated with furs and/or heraldic designs. Styles varied over the course of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

Arts and Sciences

Calligraphy-- ornamental handwriting.

Cupping-- blood letting, either by leeching or bleeding, thought to be a cure for many ills.

Heraldry-- science of creating, recording, and reading Coats of Arms which identified members of the nobility.

Humors-- four body fluids which were believed to govern an individual's health and personality: blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile.

Illumination-- illustration and colorful ornamentation appearing on manuscript pages.

Maquillage-- makeup, based on medieval ideals of beauty, could be poisonous, e.g: some ladies used white lead to make their skin look pale.

Hearth and Home

Dungeon/Donjon-- fortified central building of a castle.

Garderobe--a 'closet' where wastechutes were located because the smell discouraged moths.

Mead-- alcoholic drink made with fermented honey.

Oubliette-- pit or cell under a donjon, where prisoners might be thrown and forgotten.

Subteltie (Subtelty)-- rare dish, exotic in taste, preparation, or appearance. Illusion foods were a type of subteltie which looked like something they were not.

Trencher-- horizontal slice of bread used as a plate. If you weren't too hungry, your uneaten trencher would be collected and given as alms to the poor.

Slang

Anon-- instantly, right away, it came to mean 'eventually'.

Awful-- full of awe, awe inspiring, a compliment.

Knave-- male child, boy, servant or man of low birth.

Oyez-- call for attention, essentially: "All of Ye" listen!

Varlet-- knave, attendant, youth acting as page to a knight. {Like *knave*, this eventually acquired negative connotations equivalent to calling a man: "boy".}

Zounds-- a serious oath (swear word), short for "God's Wounds".