

Honig

History Credit

Objectives: This class was designed to explore the evolution of British literature and culture and to integrate history, literature, religion, philosophy and art to build a comprehensive and organic view of the medieval English world and its entrance to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment while enhancing students' reading, analytical and writing skills with college-level material and issues to explore. Students wrote essays exploring different issues in the texts they read for that week.

Methodology: Through essays and class discussion, students were asked to analyze the ideas and institutions that made up this culture as represented in the literary pieces we read. Students were encouraged to seek out contrasts and parallels between texts from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The class analyzed major currents in religion, philosophical thought, social behavior and government. We spent several classes on the history of Christianity leading up to the Middle Ages and a solid day about the history of Renaissance magic, mages and alchemy. Causation, class, gender, religion, magic and science and the diversity of experience in the Middle Ages were some of the main themes on which we focused.

Students read the following:

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight;

Sir Orfeo;

Aucassin and Nicolette;

Thomas The Rhymer;

The Demon Lover;

Dives and Lazarus;

Marie de France: Bisclavret, Eliduc;

Giovanni Boccaccio: Alibech and Rustico from The Decameron;

Geoffrey Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales;

Christine de Pisan: The first third of The Book Of The City of Ladies;

Christopher Marlowe: Doctor Faustus;

William Shakespeare: The Tempest

Peter Ackroyd: Foundations (selections)

John Henry: Knowledge Is Power: How Magic, the Government and an Apocalyptic Vision Inspired

Francis Bacon to create Modern Science (the first half)..

During the trimester, students wrote and revised four essays (denoted exercises) on the following:

- A comparison of elements in Sir Orfeo and Aucassin and Nicolette;
- An assessment of justice in Chaucer focusing on the tales of the Man-of-Law, the Shipman, the Prioress, the Miller and the Reeve;
- An assessment of sin in Chaucer focusing on the tales of the Monk, the Nun's Priest, the Physician and the Pardoner (in class);
- An assessment of views about women in The Middle Ages, focusing on the tales and prologues of the Wife of Bath, the Clerk, the Merchant and the Franklin as well as on The Book Of The City Of Ladies;

There were one more substantial essay:

- An assessment of magic and magicians in The Canterbury Tales, Doctor Faustus and The Tempest.

Students who missed a deadline also had to write the following:

- an essay about causation in Sir Gawain, The Canterbury Tales, Dr. Faustus and The Tempest.