

The Medieval literature

Historical and social background

I. Read the text “The Reign of William the Conqueror and the Feudal System” and decide whether the statements are true or false.

William the Conqueror ruled England with strength and efficiency. Within four years he established his rule all over the country, maintaining it through his barons and lords. An intelligent, energetic administrator, William centralized power by appointing representatives to collect taxes, supervise legal and administrative matters, and organize the military. These representatives were directly responsible to the king, bypassing the Anglo-Saxon earls. To eliminate arguments and establish a firm basis for awarding confiscated lands, William ordered an extensive survey of all property, the results of which were recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086. William introduced into England the system of reciprocal loyalties called feudalism. Under feudalism the land is the property of the king, not of the tribe. He kept huge areas for himself, but made grants of land for his nobles (barons and lords) and the great princes of the church to use (but not to own) in return for their acceptance of his rule. Land was also granted for use to the king's military elite, called knights, in return for their army services. These people all rented out part of their lands to others below them in rank in return for their services. In William's system all vassals, or holders of land, owed military service directly to the king, an innovation that assured the continued strength of the monarchy. About one person in thirty belonged to the nobility or clergy. A small percentage of the population was made up of freemen who were independent farmers, shopkeepers, tradesmen, and hired laborers. Most people were serfs, a class consisting of slaves and lower class freemen under the old Anglo-Saxon system. Serfs worked for a lord in exchange for protection and the right to farm a small plot of land. They lived in wretched poverty, doomed to remain on the land on which they were born, unable to marry or even to visit a relative without permission of the lord, required to "donate" labor and a portion of their crops to the lord and his family.

The Roman Catholic Church was the unifying force of the age, as well as one of England's most powerful institutions. The religious writings were very popular during the medieval period. The church had the great influence, both as an institution and a judicial instance. The conquest resulted in the change of English – speaking upper class with French -speaking one, a new Anglo – Norman ruling class. Within 10 years of the Conquest only one bishop, of Worcester, and only 2 major monasteries remained under control of English abbots, the rest were Normans appointed by the king, who controlled the wealth of these church estates.

1. The Domesday Book of 1067 was the result of an extensive survey of all property which included the names of all the landowners and how much land they owned.
2. William introduced into England the system of reciprocal loyalties called capitalism.
3. Under feudalism the land is the property of the tribe.
4. William's nobles and the great princes of the church owned some land in return for their acceptance of his rule.
5. Land was granted for use to the king's military elite, called knights, in return for their army services.
6. About one person in fifty belonged to the nobility or clergy.
7. Freemen worked for a lord in exchange for protection and the right to farm a small plot of land.

II. 2.1. Using the information from the text prove that William the Conqueror was the most powerful individual in the country. Make a cluster to present your ideas.

•the King

2.2. Using the information from the text complete the table “Distinction between social classes”

Aristocracy	Middle class	Lower class (the majority of the population)	Slaves (one tenth of the population)

Read and complete the text “The first “parliament”

The nobles, who were the main contributors of money to the monarchy, felt that in return for their generosity they should have some say in the government of the country. Under pressure from them, King John agreed to consult a representative council of the aristocracy in 1215. **1.** _____

In 1240, for the first time, the council of aristocrats which advised the king was called “a parliament”. **2.** _____

However, tax money from the nobles was not enough to finance the upkeep of the administration and pay for the wars against France; the middle classes were then asked to contribute as well. **3.** _____

From a situation in which the king enjoyed almost absolute power, by the end of the Middle Ages, two councils, one made up of aristocrats and the other of commoners, had a say in the running of the country. **4.** _____. In many ways the councils of the aristocrats and commoners were the prototype for today’s House of Lords and the House of Commons.

A. They complied, but in 1349 knights, yeomen and merchants united to form the Council of the Commoners and demanded, in turn, to be consulted by the king when important decisions had to be taken.

B. England became the first country in the world where the principle that representatives of the people had a right to participate in government was accepted.

C. England was on the road of becoming the first and only parliamentary monarchy in Europe.

D. This historic agreement was written down in a document known as the **Magna Carta**.

The Middle English

French (a dialect of old French that we call now Anglo- Norman)	Latin	English
was the language of the rulers. The language of the government. Words which came from Norman-French: Government, parliament, king, court, judge, legal, state, country, crown, power, authority, people	was the language of the clergy and scholars	was the language of the servants and serfs

The native English language and culture continued side by side with, and heavily influenced by, the language and culture of the Anglo-Norman ruling class. The loss of Normandy in 1204 encouraged the nobles to stay in England and to learn English. By 1300 English was used by all classes, having been greatly enriched by the huge number of French words imported into the language by the new users.

By 1476, when William Caxton introduced printing to England, the language had been greatly simplified grammatically and enriched lexically. Old English had been transformed into a language which would form the basis for modern English.

Match the genres of medieval literature with their descriptions.

1. Ballads	A. The courtly tradition of the Medieval Period was written in French mainly in the 12 th -13 th centuries; it was courtly in nature, not heroic. It was intended for a refined Christian aristocratic society in which women played an important role, and knights obeyed their king. The forms of this literature were <i>love songs</i> ("chansons courtoises") and <i>romances</i> or fantastic tales of the adventures of chivalrous knights.
2. Chivalry and ‘Courtly’ Love Literature.	B. This type of Medieval literature appeared in dramatic form. Mystery plays , based on stories from the Bible, and Miracle plays , which portrayed the lives of saints were popular. The Morality Plays arose in the fourteenth century and were sermons in dramatic form about the lifestyle of the good Christian. The best known is the anonymous fifteenth century <i>Everyman</i> . Although these plays probably were written first in Latin for special church services, they eventually were written in English and performed outside churches, in towns, and in inns.

3. English Lyric Poetry	C. One of the most popular forms of literature in the Medieval period was a narrative song. It told of common folks and of characters and events from legend and folklore.
4. Religious Literature and Drama	D. It was written in the 13th, 14th, 15th centuries and remains anonymous. They are love-lyrics, French – inspired. They render a new fascination with service to a fair lady rather than to a feudal king.