

Eighth Grade Humanities
2017-2018
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Course Description

This course examines the time period from the 4th through 15th centuries (the twilight of the Roman Empire to the Hundred Years' War). Given the myriad events that take place during that time, we do not seek to cover every detail; rather, we aim to cover major themes and events. We also read literature that pertains to the areas of history that we are studying in order to round out the picture of medieval thought and daily life.

Course Aims

God helping, in this course each student will:

- o develop a love of reading through historical and literary analysis;
- o construct a timeline of the major people and events of the Middle Ages;
- o better understand contemporary life through a grasp of the medieval world;
- o think critically about historical themes, events, and their significance.

Finally, it is my hope that we will gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and our God through the study of history and literature.

Course Texts

We will read some books in their entirety; from other books we will read selections. The major works we will examine this year are as follows:

- o *The Hobbit* (summer reading)
- o *The Rule of St. Benedict*
- o *Beowulf*
- o *Song of Roland*
- o *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
- o *The Adventures of Robin Hood*
- o *Romeo and Juliet*
- o *Edict of Toleration*
- o *Edict of Milan*
- o *Apostles Creed*

Assignments

You will have assignments for this class almost daily. While some assignments may require you to turn something in, a majority of the assignments will be readings*. I will regularly give small quizzes on reading assignments, and those quizzes may be unannounced. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what work you need to make up. Students should be ready to make up quizzes and missed work upon returning to class. If a missed quiz or assignment is not made up within two class days (for *each day* missed), the grade will be recorded as an INCOMPLETE, which will register as a zero until made up. Exceptions can be made for special circumstances.

*I am not concerned merely with the quantity of pages that you read; reading is about more than simply passing one's eyes over words! I care especially about the quality of reading you are doing. I will provide you with reading guides and marginalia expectations at the beginning of each literary unit. Not only do I want to know that you have comprehended what you have read, but I also hope that you will develop a sincere love of reading.

Grading

Grading will be on a points system and can be broken down as follows:

- Major assessments will typically be worth around 100 points. These may include tests, writing assignments, projects, presentations...
- Minor assessments will be worth around 25 points. These will be quizzes or involved homework assignments that are graded for accuracy.
- Daily work is usually worth about 10 points. These are typically graded on completion and can include reading checks, class work, and other small tasks that require some accountability.

Classroom Civility

Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (1 Peter 2:17)

We will have ample opportunity to flesh this out in a number of ways this year.

Harkness Discussions

A good discussion is a great way to learn. It helps you fine tune what you do know and come to terms with what you don't know. And since you are working with others, it's always possible they will know something you don't or understand it in a way you hadn't considered. These kinds of discussions are as old as education. In ancient Greece it was practiced by Socrates and has come to be known as the Socratic Method. In more recent times, elite prep schools like Phillips-Exeter have taken their cues from Edward Harkness, a philanthropist who advocated teachers conduct class around large oval tables (like the one in the Legacy Room) where students would find it easy and natural to converse about their subject matter. This has come to be known as the Harkness Method.

Whatever the title, a good discussion requires three things: good listening, good thinking, and good speaking. First, you have to listen to the ideas of others and consider the ways they understand the issues. Second, you have to process what others are saying and develop your own opinions. Third, you have to contribute in a thoughtful, helpful, and courteous manner. In this way, a good discussion can cultivate both wisdom and eloquence.

But it requires more still. To fully participate, you must also know the text because most conversations will be based on readings. So make sure you are reading carefully and keeping good marginalia so you can find helpful references quickly in a discussion setting.

Getting a 100% on a discussion will mean you contribute a reasonable number of times, complete your prep work thoroughly and thoughtfully, and contribute to the discussion meaningfully.

Reading Guides

There are three components to good reading: anticipation, active participation, and reflection. The reading guides are designed to assist you in working through these three stages. First, I will usually provide you with a preview of a reading. Read this carefully, making sure you know the major characters I mention. Second, I give you some guidance on what to look for in using marginalia. Remember, this is a bare minimum. I will occasionally check for marginalia, and I'll be looking for at least one or two marks per page. Third, I will give you questions. Do NOT stop and answer these along the way. They are designed to help you assess your reading AFTER you have finished. You may and should read the questions ahead of time, and you may want to mark a capital Q in the margin when you notice an answer. But don't interrupt the flow of reading to write an answer, this is the opposite of what the reading guide is meant to help you with.

Marginalia

Practicing marginalia allows you to better focus on what you are reading. By making notes as you read, your mind is actively engaged in the text and not wandering about. The “notes” and “scribbles” you make in a book can help you remember details, find patterns, and connect ideas. Marginalia also allows you to look back and easily find certain elements in the text for your own use during open book tests, class discussions, and paper writing. By writing in the margins, you are turning your book into a tool that will help you remember and process. Think of marginalia as leaving “thinking tracks” through a book. There are many joys to be found in reading and writing in the margins. Marginalia is a discussion, a talking-back to the book, which can also lead to better discussions with others, another joy of reading.

So what should you write? Each of you will develop your own style, so feel free to experiment. One word of caution though: all emphasis is no emphasis. Avoid underlining half a page of text. Sometimes your excitement might get the best of you, I understand, but generally make precise marks that will guide your attention to important information. Here are some examples:

Underlining for 2-3 lines of important text (usually the wording itself somehow stands out to me)

Brackets for longer passages

Stars (★) or checks (✓) for striking or important material (stuff to remember)

Exclamation points (!) for material I disagree with or find shocking or disturbing

ALL CAPS for important themes I am tracking

Written reactions or comparisons or questions

Additionally, you may want to mark information for questions in the reading guide (possibly a capital Q).

Academic Integrity

Each student is expected to do his or her own work on each assignment. Misrepresentation of someone else’s work as your own will carry serious consequences, which may include a zero on the assignment, a detention, or any response deemed appropriate by the administration.

As to getting help on an assignment, there are times when students need their peers’ assistance on homework. This should be no problem as long as it is *help* and not the peers’ *answers*. I want each student to strive towards his own understanding, but not in isolation from the class altogether. **This should mean learning from one another on a regular basis.** There is a difference between getting answers and getting help, and in this class we want to maintain that difference.

Late Work

For minor written homework assignments, due dates must be met unless the student has an excused absence, otherwise no credit will be given. For major assignments (papers or projects), lateness will be penalized at the rate of 11 points per day. If a student is absent for this class but is on campus at different times and attends other classes, it will be that student’s responsibility to turn in assigned work for that day before leaving school that day.

Please sign, detach, and return:

I have read and understand the syllabus for **Medieval Humanities (8th)**

Student Signature: _____

Parent Signature: _____