

The Medieval Knight and the Rise of Chivalry – Teacher Guide

In this session, we will learn about the medieval knight and the development of the code of behaviour known as chivalry. Knighthood has been much debated by academic historians, but these debates are largely avoided here to prevent confusion for the students. There are 4 optional activities in the session, which can be chosen by the teacher to best suit their students. In some of the activities, we will be working with primary sources from the medieval period. Whilst this might be challenging, it will also be an exciting opportunity for students to have direct contact with writing and images from hundreds of years ago.

This session may also be suitable for students in KS3.

Summary of first video section:

Introduction to session and key questions to explore. Topic is subject to debate and discussion. Two versions of knighthood: warrior/honourable hero. Defining knighthood using *miles/chevalier*. Rise of knighthood. Division of society into three orders. Dubbing ceremonies. Introduction to the *Ordene de Chevalerie*.

[Pause video at 6:21]

ACTIVITY 1 – In this activity, we will be looking at extracts from the Ordene de Chevalerie, an anonymous text from the thirteenth century (these extracts have been edited and abridged from the translation in De Hodenc and Busby, 'Le Roman Des Eles', and the Anonymus: 'Ordene de Chevalerie': Two Early Old French Didactic Poems (Netherlands, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1983). Before commencing the activity, the teacher may wish to explain the difference between primary and secondary sources, noting that this is a primary source that comes from the medieval period.

In the poem, Hue de Tabarie is captured by the Saracen king Saladin. During his captivity, Hue instructs Saladin in the stages of becoming a knight.

Students should read the edited extracts from the Ordene de Chevalerie, and then match the labels to the relevant sections of the text. These labels should assist students with comprehension. Students can then illustrate each step in the comic strip boxes provided and label each step with its symbolic meaning.

Summary of second video section:

Expenses of knighthood. Variety of economic backgrounds of knights. Example of William Marshal and his reputation as an ideal knight. Description of tournaments and development of heraldry.

[Pause video at 8:56]

ACTIVITY 2: In this activity, students can have a go at designing their own heraldry using the resources at the following website: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/guide-to-heraldry>.

Summary of third video section:

Tournaments as opportunity to show off skills, increase reputation, win prizes. Other expectations of medieval knight?

[Pause video at 9:28]

ACTIVITY 3 – These passages are taken from two medieval texts, allowing students to have a go at working with primary sources. This activity may be challenging for students who have not engaged with primary sources in the past, so the teacher may wish to guide discussion.

The first passage is taken from Stephen of Fougères's Livre des Manières (Book of Manners), which was written around 1174x1178. The extract is found in Crouch, The Chivalric Turn: Conduct and Hegemony in Europe before 1300 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp.287-288. Stephen was a household clerk to Henry II, king of England, before becoming the Bishop of Rennes. The second passage is taken from Ramon Llull's Book of the Order of Chivalry, written in the mid 1270s. The extracts are abridged from Price (trans.), Ramon Llull's Book of Knighthood and Chivalry and the anonymous Ordene de Chevalerie (Union City, California: The Chivalry Bookshelf, 2001). Ramon lived a worldly life before experiencing religious visions and giving his life to Christian missionary activity.

In this activity, students should read each of the passages and try to identify what qualities make an ideal knight according to the texts. Students may wish to look up some of the vocabulary in a dictionary. Key vocabulary has been highlighted in bold. In pairs or groups, students can discuss the two passages and the qualities/behaviour that they have identified. The teacher or a student could then write up a list of key qualities on the whiteboard.

If the teacher wishes to take this activity further, students could consider the similarities and differences between the two passages, and how the authors might have been influenced by their own beliefs and position in society. The teacher could also ask students to think about modern behaviour – do we still value the same qualities and manners? Can the students think of any examples of modern people who behave like ideal knights?

Summary of fourth video section:

Importance of behaviour and manners. Courtliness distinguishing elite from lower status people. Expectations of behaviour in battle. Moral responsibility to protect weak and vulnerable. Claim to nobility, based also on birth. Ideals sometimes in conflict with practicalities. Literature as space to explore chivalry and courtliness eg. romance literature.

Knighthood as important aspect of noble identity, reflected in material culture. Definition of material culture. Introduction to coins and seals. Seals attached to documents as form of authenticity. Images on coins and seals chosen deliberately eg. knight on horseback.

[Pause video at 13:56]

ACTIVITY 4 – Students can use the template to design their own seal. In the centre, they should draw an image to represent themselves. Around the outside of the circle, they can add a short text – this could be a motto or it could be their name. See the image of the seal in the presentation for an example of the layout.

When designing their seals, students should think about how they want to be represented. What image best reflects their identity? What do they want other people to think about them? Do they have a motto that means something to them? By thinking about their own seal design, students should start to think about how individuals choose to represent themselves through personal imagery or by linking themselves to social groups or ideals – both in the medieval period and today. This exercise will also encourage students to think more broadly about how we can access the past through a wide range of sources.

Summary of fifth video section:

Conclusion to session.