Medieval Period
1066- 1485 A. D.

Significance of dates

- 1066 – Battle of Hastings – William "the Conqueror," duke of Normandy, conquered the Anglo-Saxon King Harold

- 1485 – Henry Tudor (Henry VII) killed King Richard III at the end of the War of the Roses and ascended to the throne – founded Tudor line for royal family

Important Documents of Medieval Era

- *Domesday Book*
  - Complete inventory of all property
  - Served as tax record – basis for property tax
  - Prepared by William "the Conqueror"
- *Magna Carta* ("Great Charter")
  - Signed in 1215 by King John
  - Limited royal authority to levy taxes without consent of barons
  - Granted more power to barons
  - Set the groundwork for future creation of Parliament

Feudalism / Feudal System

- Complicated system of landholding with an elaborate chain of allegiance and loyalties owed to an overlord
  - King owned all of the land in country
  - No one owned land independently
  - Everyone worked as a vassal to an overlord
  - Rent was paid not only in money and products but in military service to overlord
    - King – barons/nobles – knights - etc.
    - Bottom = serfs
      - Chaucer's characters represent the ranks of the feudal system

Feudalism / Feudal System

- Feudal system ordered the social classes
- 3 Classes of Men
  - Men who prayed
  - Men who fought
  - Men who worked
- Social Ladder
  - God – always at the top!
  - King
  - Lord – Knight
  - Peasant - Serf

Role and Influence of Medieval Church

- Church = most important cultural institution of era - unified society
- "Christendom" – belief that all people were sons or daughters of the church and destined for Hell, Purgatory, or Heaven
- Church did the following for mankind:
    - Calmed fear of death
    - Gave hope of happiness after death
    - Built magnificent cathedrals – leading architecture
    - Helped preserve books and became center of learning
    - Promoted high ideals

Wars of the Medieval Period

- The Crusades
  - Series of holy wars to recapture Jerusalem (Holy Land) from the Turks
    - Began with high hopes
    - Ended with raiding and looting
  - Benefits from the Crusades
    - Developed trade with other countries
    - Familiarized people with Eastern culture (Arabic) in mathematics and medicine
    - Learned about customs of other countries/peoples
    - Opened doors of communication
    - Encouraged chivalry and its ideals

Chivalry

- Social code of conduct designed for knights and nobility both on and off the battle field

- Encouraged knights to defend the weak, battle evil, and uphold good

- Encouraged knights to be generous, brave, honest, pious, and honorable

- Plays important role in literature – especially in medieval romance stories

Wars of the Medieval Period

- ## The Hundred Years' War (1337-1453)
  - England vs. France
    - England fought for control on continent over France
    - England won many battles due to longbows that could penetrate armor

- ## The Wars of the Roses (1455-1485)
  - Civil war between the House of Lancaster (red rose) and the House of York (white rose)
  - Families fought for control of the throne
  - Wars ended when Henry VII defeated Richard III, united families through marriage, and founded the Tudor line

Black Death

- Struck England during 1348-1349
- Killed 1/3 of England's population
- Decreased labor force
- Featured prominently in literature of time

Guilds

- Groups of tradesmen banded together by craft to form societies to regulate prices and set standards

- Guilds did the following:
  - Guaranteed good products
  - Trained workers to be skilled
  - Set wages and prices

Literature of Medieval Period

- Miracle Plays – rough dramatizations of Biblical stories performed on large wagons or on platforms in marketplaces or inn-yards

- Morality Plays – elaborate and sophisticated dramatic allegories in which characters representing various virtues and vices confronted one another

- Ballads and folk poetry – sung by wandering minstrels

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400)

- Considered "the father of English literature"

- Name stands second to Shakespeare in English literature

- Held many positions that helped him to develop characters for *The Canterbury Tales*

The Canterbury Tales

- Characters taken from 3 groups of society
  - Feudal – tied to land
  - Ecclesiastical – tied to church
  - Urban – tied to cities

- Reasons people traveled on pilgrimage to religious shrine
  - Seek miraculous or holy cures
  - Penance for sins – seeking remission of sins
  - Satisfying adventure or wanderlust
  - Vow – going for someone who had died or because person had once said he would go ("If I survive this battle…")

The Canterbury Tales

- Facts to bear in mind when reading
  - Dealing with an undisputed masterpiece
    - Chaucer held amused tolerance of people
    - Chaucer respected man as an individual – understood human motivation
    - Chaucer created best picture of Medieval life – commented on social problems of the era
  - Dealing with an unfinished work
    - Plan for telling tales
      - Tell two stories on the way to Canterbury
      - Tell two stories on the way back to London
    - Proposed plan would equal 124 tales
      - (30 pilgrims plus host x 4 tales each)
    - Only wrote 24 tales

Chaucer's Writing Characteristics

- Wrote in Middle English

- Dropped the final "e" on many words

- Wrote in the London dialect

- Used pregnant phrases
  - Pregnant = full, filled of
  - Phrases full of meaning – compactly states something but allows us to draw other conclusions from it
  - Phrases are allusions to other ideas

The Canterbury Tales

- Pilgrimage to shrine of St. Thomas à Becket