A Literature Approach
for Grades Fifth Through Eighth

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“History is philosophy by example and also by warning.”
—Lord Bolingbroke
Introduction

The Middle Ages. The term probably conjures up images of brave knights and fair ladies, feasts and tournaments, castles and cathedrals. These are the elements of this time period that capture our imagination and may possibly be the reason you wanted to study the Middle Ages in the first place. We will learn about some pretty brave knights—King Richard, King Arthur, Saladin and others, as well as some very fair ladies, among them, Queen Elizabeth, Joan of Arc and Shahrazad. We will also learn about the Tartars who conquered China. We will learn about what life was like for the common people, known as serfs, and lived under a brutal system called feudalism until they decided they had had enough and rebelled. That was the Peasants Revolt and it was the first time, in a long time, that people demanded change. But change came in many ways and one of those ways was how people communicated with God. We will learn about Martin Luther who revealed a new way to approach God that did not involve paying a priest to pray for you. There was also a new way to read the Bible and we have John Wycliffe to thank for that. We will learn about the man who made it possible for people to own a Bible. His name was Johann Gutenberg and he invented the printing press. But even before he had invented the printing press the Chinese were printing paper money, the first to ever do so, and we will learn about that as well. In the midst of all these advancements, people still liked to have fun, none more than a man named Chaucer. Chaucer found people to be very funny, and he wrote down the stories of these funny people for his own amusement. As you can tell, the Middle Ages was a very busy time full of change. Brilliant minds lived between 400 AD and 1522 AD, the years that will be covered in this study. For a long time this period of history was referred to as the Dark Ages because people thought very little had been accomplished during this time. They had come to believe that it was a time of fighting, famine, and feudalism and although those things were very common, we now know that much more took place. Documents were printed, like the Magna Charta that helped shape future democracies, including our own. The Bible was printed on presses in many different languages, including English and German, not just Latin as it had in the past. People were traveling further and further distances and bringing to Europe exotic spices and fabric. Scientists and alchemists were trying to make gold and studying the heavens. Toward the end of the Middle Ages explorers were sailing ships to the far corners of the globe, even to our continent! So as you can probably tell, it was not the Dark Ages at all, but an exciting time to be alive.
Welcome to the exciting world of Medieval History! This curriculum will serve to guide you through some of the best literature available on this fascinating time period. We will be covering over 1000 years of history, the period from 400–1530. As this is a lot of history to cover in one school year it is important to understand how this guide works. Please read the following thoroughly as it will make your study easier and more enjoyable.

First, this study guide is a one–year study geared for grades fifth though eighth. Ideally, the literature will be read aloud for fifth and sixth grades, and junior high students can read independently. While it is understood that reading aloud is not always possible, it is highly recommended that the parent and/or teacher, read as many books as possible with the student. This creates a learning environment that encourages and develops a child’s natural curiosity and allows an atmosphere of inquiry to develop. Secondly, this is a study guide and is meant to be just that, a guide. Do not feel unduly bound to complete each step, do every activity, check out every recommended book from the library. Everything in this guide is meant to be a help to you the teacher, not a burden. The guide is laid out in weekly lessons to allow you flexibility within that structure. Each lesson has reading assignments, activity suggestions, websites for further research, library books—all of which are provided to help you choose the best materials to dig a little deeper if a topic is particularly interesting to you and your students. There are writing assignments, discussion questions, hands-on craft projects—use these at your discretion. If you have a student who loves to research and write, there are lots of essay and paper topics provided in each lesson. You may also want such a student to try some of the craft and hands-on activities in order to stretch their interests and abilities. The same logic can be applied to a more tactile learner. Use the hands-on activities to increase this ability while adding in the traditional writing and research assignments to provide a more rounded approach. Each lesson is structured in a similar way and here are some explanation points for each section.

Topics Covered:
This is a brief listing of the main topics covered in each lesson and is simply provided to allow the teacher and student an introduction into what will be covered in the coming week.

The Portfolio:
Throughout the study there are assignments designed to help the student create a portfolio of their best work. These are usually reports and should reflect the best efforts of the student. These will be collected into a portfolio that can be shown to friends and family. The portfolio can be a dedicated notebook, a website or blog—whatever medium the student feels most comfortable using. This is not a place to put vocabulary lists or answers to the comprehension questions, those can be placed in a separate notebook or binder. At the end of the year the portfolio will have reports, illustrations, poems, illuminated manuscripts and other projects the student has completed. Students should use this to showcase their creativity and hard work. Have fun working on this!
Vocabulary Lists:
A word on vocabulary–although we all have dictionaries at our fingertips (even on our smartphones!) it is of utmost importance that students expand their knowledge of the written and spoken word. Not only is a broad and varied vocabulary a tool and asset in communicating, it also opens worlds that would otherwise be closed. Many of the books used in this study contain arcane and old-fashioned words. In order to ensure that the student understands the material he is reading vocabulary lists have been provided. It is strongly suggested that the student look up each word in a real (not virtual) dictionary and write out the definition. Due to the fact that some words have multiple uses a brief definition of each vocabulary word is provided at the back of this guide. This should be used for the teacher’s reference and not the students. When I was younger I spent torturous hours writing out vocabulary lists wondering when I would ever use words like “pulchritude” but as an adult I am grateful to have reaped the benefits of those long hours. Not only did the exercise help with performance on standardized tests, it makes reading easier and also helps in communication when traveling. Thanks to those 5th grade vocabulary lists, I knew what was meant when I moved to the United Kingdom and was asked to bring a savory to a potluck!

Mapping and Geography:
You will notice that there are a lot of mapping assignments and it is highly suggested that each student have a large blank world map. If you ordered the Medieval History Through Literature pack from Beautiful Feet Books, you received a blank world map to use with this course. When completing the mapping assignments students should use an atlas or an online mapping resource. Becoming familiar with these tools will serve the student well.

Comprehension and Discussion Questions:
As the student reads through the literature they should work on answering the comprehension and discussion questions. Answers are provided in the answer key for the comprehension questions but it will be helpful to use the answers merely as a guide. Different perspectives provide interest and color to the study and relying too heavily on the provided answers may cause frustration. History is open to interpretation and it is important for a student to learn this fact. The discussion topics do not have answers provided as these are designed to develop the reasoning abilities of the student. Being able to converse on topics of history, religion, geopolitical and social events is a skill that students are developing at this point in their education as they formulate their own viewpoint. Encourage this growth by affirming their observations and asking probing questions. This is one of the most enjoyable aspects of studying history and it takes the subject from its dusty and dry reputation and makes it come alive. Encourage your students to think of historical characters as real people with unique beliefs and perspectives and suddenly history is no longer a collection of dates and facts but a fascinating story of the people who came before us. For those teachers who find themselves relying heavily on the answer key, do not be afraid to throw it out! You do not want to squelch a child’s learning process by relying too heavily on the prescribed answers.
Websites:
Throughout the study you will find websites provided for further information and activities. These websites have all been viewed and deemed appropriate and accurate at the time of printing. With the ever-changing nature of the internet I cannot guarantee that they will remain so. If this happens it is often worth digging a bit deeper to see if the site has moved. Simply search for key points in the original address and more often than not you’ll find the information. Beautiful Feet Books also regularly updates the links on our website and you can access the most up-to-date content here: http://www.bfbooks.com/Info-FAQ/Medieval-Intermediate-Website-Links. Always use the internet with care and under adult supervision. Also encourage students to view the information on the internet with a critical eye! While it is a fantastic resource, the web is not always accurate and it is a great life-skill to know how to determine if information is verifiable.

The Medieval History Time Line:
The current Beautiful Feet Books’ Medieval History Time Line can be used with this study. It does not match up perfectly as it focuses more on later medieval events along with the Reformation and Renaissance. Feel free to add pictures as desired.

Hands ON!
Build your own crossbow from office supplies! Create your own illuminated manuscript! The study of history becomes even more exciting when you can enter your subject in a hands-on activity. Throughout the course you will find suggestions for doing just that. Thought has been put into recommending activities that are inexpensive and easy to complete. Resources are suggested for finding materials for some of the more intricate activities. Again, it is not required that all of these projects be completed—they are there to enrich the study as you so desire.

Additional books to check out from the library:
Each lesson has suggested titles to check out from your local library. None of these titles are required, rather they are provided in order to help you sift through the hundreds of books available on the many topics covered in this study. Feel no obligation to include any or all of the library books; you’ll have plenty of information from the required reading, but if you have a voracious reader on your hands, it is my hope that the suggested titles will prove helpful.
TOPICS COVERED: EUROPE FOLLOWING THE FALL OF ROME, FEUDALISM, VIKINGS, CHARLEMAGNE, BEOWULF

1. In order to begin our study it is important that we set up some background information. Begin reading *The European World, 400–1450* by Barbara Hanawalt. Read the Introduction and Chapter 1.

2. It is strongly suggested that the student use or draw a large world map throughout the course. It should be at least 2 x 3 feet and have the outlines of the seven continents. If you choose to draw the map yourself, large format art-quality paper can be purchased at art and craft stores. Throughout the course, you will be marking countries, landmarks, important rivers and charting voyages on this map. Using an atlas and the map at the beginning of *The European World* as guides, mark the following:

- Aquitaine
- the Alps
- Calais
- Constantinople
- English Channel
- Greece
- Jerusalem
- Norway
- Rome
- Spain
- the Alps
- Barcelona
- Canterbury
- Cologne
- Denmark
- England
- France
- Germany
- Ireland
- Italy
- Milan
- Naples
- Scotland
- Seville
- Sweden
- York

Draw the following rivers:

- Danube
- Rhône
- Seine
- Thames

You will also be marking famous trade routes and journeys of exploration. To do this you will need to set up a map key with a different colored lines used for each route or journey.

3. One of the greatest rulers following the fall of Rome was Charles the Great, or Charlemagne, as he is more commonly known. Charlemagne conquered vast areas of Europe and claimed the lands for God, himself and the Pope. He established Christianity as the religion of the land and forced all the people he conquered to convert. He called this new kingdom the Holy Roman Empire and Pope Leo III crowned him Emperor in Rome on Christmas day 800. Do some research on Charlemagne and record your findings in a report on his life. Add report to your portfolio. The following websites will be helpful:

4. Introduce *Beowulf* by Michael Morpurgo. In preparation for your reading, define the following words from *Beowulf*:

- grapple (3)
- lair (9)
- perilous (13)
- fjord (13)
- piteous (16)
- loathsome (23)
- brooding (31)
- steeling (34)

- mead-hall (5)
- mead-horn (8)
- moors (10)
- reprieve (12)
- omens (13)
- whetted (13)
- ringmailed (14)
- thanes (14)
- marauding (16)
- hearsay (21)
- larder (25)
- regal (29)
- sinew (31)
- fitfully (33)
- vise (38)
- callous (38)
fens (38)   asunder (39)
cacophony (39)  banish (40)
strident (40)  pinioned (40)
ebbing (45)  brackish (45)
cavernous (45)  slight (v) (45)

5. Read pages 1-57 of *Beowulf*. This story, like many tales from this time, does tell of violent events. If your student is particularly sensitive, it may be worth reading ahead in order to evaluate the material for appropriateness.

a. What Bible story is also related in *Beowulf*?
b. How is Hrothgar described? What character qualities make him a well-loved king? Are these qualities we admire in our leaders today? How would you describe a good ruler?
c. Beowulf is introduced as the hero of this epic. What qualities does he possess that make him a hero for his time? What qualities do you find heroic today?

Hands ON!

The British Library has a very interesting activity for *Beowulf* on their website. You will learn more about Old English and translate part of the original poem!

http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/changlang/activities/lang/beowulf/beowulfpage1.html

“His spirit did not break and the ancestral blade would keep its edge, as the dragon discovered as soon as they came together in the combat.”—Beowulf
1. Read and discuss Chapter 2 of *The European World*.

2. To prepare for your reading of *Beowulf* it is suggested that you define the following words:

- hag (58)
- bereaved (58)
- ogre (62)
- stag (63)
- grievous (67)
- ghoul (68)
- astride (74)
- rapturous (81)
- raucously (87)
- resplendent (91)
- garb (97)
- fickle (99)
- fraught (99)
- hoard (101)
- flogging (102)
- heathen (104)
- talisman (104)
- vestiges (104)
- gout (115)
- portent (115)
- impending (115)
- shirk (115)
- scything (117)
- flagons (133)
- bier (136)

3. Finish *Beowulf* and consider these questions and topics for discussion:

   a. Discuss Hrothgar’s advice to Beowulf on page 85. What does it tell us about the values and morals of the people living at this time?

   b. The story of *Beowulf* features three heroes: Hrothgar, Beowulf, and Wiglaf. What did Wiglaf do to prove his worth as a hero?

4. Throughout *Beowulf*, pagan ideas (vengeance, hoarding of treasure, admiration of human strength and beauty) sit side-by-side with Christian ideals (humility, courage, defense of the weak and poor). Write an essay comparing these differing ideals citing examples from *Beowulf*. Add essay to portfolio.

5. To learn more about the Anglo-Saxons, visit this website:  
   [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/anglo_saxons/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/anglo_saxons/)

   Hands ON!

   Using the following website as a guide, write a secret message in old Anglo-Saxon runes. Exchange messages with a sibling, friend, or classmate and then translate one another’s messages!  
   [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/english/beowulf/rune.htm](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/english/beowulf/rune.htm)

Additional books to check out from the library:

*Eyewitness: Mesopotamia* by Philip Steele

*The Vikings* by Elizabeth Janeway

*Eyewitness: Viking* by Susan M. Margeson
TOPICS COVERED: KING ARTHUR, EARLY ANGLO-SAXON HISTORY, CHIVALRY

1. Introduce King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table by Roger Lancelyn Green. In preparation for the reading, it may be helpful to define the following words:

- anvil (5)
- joust (6)
- stile (7)
- hilt (9)
- scabbard (9)
- seneschal (9)
- befell (13)
- steed (14)
- wroth (16)
- churl (16)
- leech (20)
- samite (21)
- girdle (21)
- mantle (25)
- homage (26)
- glade (34)
- portcullis (39)
- impious (45)
- plaintive (46)
- ford (47)
- baying (56)
- flank (56)
- palfrey (56)
- cur (60)
- boon (63)
- priory (64)
- buffet (68)
- barque (76)
- craven (82)

2. Read Book One: The Coming of Arthur, pages 1-89 of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. Consider the following comprehension questions:

a. Though Arthur is only sixteen years of age when he pulls the sword from the stone he quickly understands the role he must play as the chosen king. What does he pledge?

b. Merlin finds himself defending Arthur’s right to the throne and he tells the story of Arthur’s birth and lineage. He also relates three gifts that the fairies and elves bestowed upon Arthur. What were these gifts?

c. What was Excalibur?

d. Why did Merlin make Arthur’s famous table round?

e. At the founding of the Round Table Sir Gawain and King Pellinore were sent on missions by Arthur in order that they might learn two important lessons. What were those lessons?

King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table

The legends of King Arthur are well-known and have been powerful forces in shaping the literature, history, culture, and morals of the western world. Debate continues as to whether Arthur was a real historical character or simply a legend. The source of these stories may very well be an early British king named Arthur, or another king-like figure. Whether or not Arthur ruled Britain, fought against German tribes, and had a round table, this story is important because it tells us so much about the people who lived during this time. King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table relates the story of the establishment of a code of chivalry that still influences British law and customs. The stories are an interesting mix of Christian references and pagan lore. Magic coincides with biblical stories, showing how European tribes mixed their ancient pagan beliefs with the newly arrived Christian faith. Nowadays we think of magic in terms of tricks and illusions. But in the days of Arthur people used it to explain things they did not understand. It also helped people distinguish good from evil—the dark arts were something to be feared and avoided at all costs. As you’ll see in these stories, the element of magic is used to warn people of the dangers of evil and encourage right action. Good magic is often explained in terms of generosity, humility, courage, or honesty; whereas bad magic, or the dark arts, cause treachery, pride, greed, anger, murder, lust, and other moral failings.
3. On page 70 of *King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table* you will find Arthur’s Code of Chivalry. Write out this code in your portfolio and decorate. Do you think it is a noble code to live by? What would you change? Do the principles in this code still stand over 1500 years after they were written?

4. For students interested in learning more about the Arthurian legends, the following websites will be of interest:
   - [http://www.kingarthursknights.com](http://www.kingarthursknights.com)

Additional books to check out from the library:
*The Boy’s King Arthur* by Thomas Malory

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**Rule of Law in *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table***

Arthur makes the following declaration: “And if any man or woman, be he or she the greatest or the least of my subjects, be in any trouble, or have complaint against any man, let them come to me, and never shall their sorrow go uncomforted or their wrong unrighted.” As there was no written code of law in England at this time, this statement established two things: 1. The king holds the rule of law in his hands. It is his responsibility to mete out justice and punishment. 2. All people are equal before the eyes of the law. This requires that the king be unbiased and rule fairly. This is a great responsibility for one man to hold and it requires great wisdom to be fair and just. While this system of justice may have worked under Arthur, as he was described as a good and wise man, it does have some flaws. These flaws will become apparent as our study progresses. Discuss the possible difficulties of a system of law held by one man.
Answer Key

ANSWERS TO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Week 1
5.
  a. The creation story in Genesis.
  b. Hrothgar is described as the greatest warrior, fierce in battle, generous with the treasures he brings back from his conquests, and a good father to his people. He conquers the enemies of his land and is able to establish peace.
  c. Beowulf is the greatest and bravest of all princes, with the strength of thirty men in each hand. He is courageous and loyal—two traits highly valued by people at that time.

Week 2
3.
  b. Wiglaf showed both courage and loyalty. These traits were essential for survival in this time period.

Week 3
2.
  a. Arthur makes the following pledge: “I hereby pledge myself to the service of God and of my people, to the righting of wrongs, to the driving-out of evil, to the bringing of peace and plenty to my land.”
  b. Arthur would be the best of all knights, the greatest king this land shall ever know, and he would live longer than any man shall ever know.
  c. Excalibur was Arthur’s sword, made for him by the Dwellers in Avalon. Excalibur was only to be raised in the cause of right.
  d. Arthur’s knights believed that certain places on a long rectangular table were favored and showed who Arthur liked best. In order to eliminate this conflict, Merlin wisely made a round table so none would have favored positions and all could be seen as equal.
  e. King Pellinore learned to never ignore those asking for help. Sir Gawain learned the importance of showing mercy.

Week 7
4.
  c. The purpose of the Crusades, although each differed slightly, was to reclaim Jerusalem and the Holy Lands from the Turks and Muslims. This met with some success but ultimately failed at great cost to human life.
Glossary of Vocabulary Words

abase: to belittle
absolve: pardon, forgive
almoner: a church officer who is in charge of distributing alms to the deserving poor
almonry: a chamber within a church where alms are distributed
anvil: a heavy piece of steel with a smooth, flat top that a blacksmith uses to shape metals on
argosy: large ship or fleet of ships
astride: to sit on something with one leg on each side
asunder: in separate or broken pieces
banish: forbid, exile, usually from one’s nation as a punishment
barque: type of ship or sailing vessel with three or more masts
baying: to cry out
befell: to happen: to come to pass
bereaved: to suffer the loss of a loved one through death or long absence
bier: a frame or stand on which a coffin or corpse is placed before burial
boon: something good, a blessing: benefit
brackish: a mix of salt and fresh water
brooding: to show deep unhappiness of thought: appearing menacing
buffet: a blow with the hand or fist
byre: a barn for cows
cacophony: a harsh, unpleasant, discordant mixture of sounds
callous: insensitive, indifferent, unsympathetic
cavalcade: a procession or parade on horseback
capon: a castrated rooster
cavernous: like a cave: deep and dark
chapmen: a peddler or merchant
chilblains: small, painful, itchy lumps on the skin
churl: a rude, uncouth person
clout: a heavy blow with the hand or hard object
coif: a close-fitting cap
comfit: confectionary made up of dried fruits, seeds, nuts, or spices coated with sugar: similar to sugar almonds
cotte: long sleeved shift or tunic
couler: a sharp steel wedge used to break up soil
cowed: frightened by show of force
craven: cowardly, completely lacking courage
crenellated: having battlements; notched
cur: mixed-breed dog