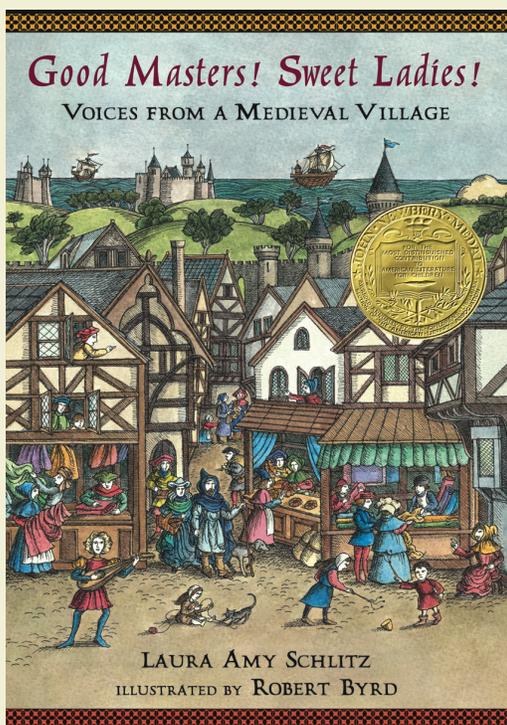


CANDLEWICK PRESS TEACHERS' GUIDE

Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!

VOICES FROM A MEDIEVAL VILLAGE



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INTRODUCTION



Guide your students on a lively tour of a medieval village through the magic of *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* Laura Amy Schlitz's nineteen monologues and two dialogues are remarkably adaptable—whether you use them over the course of months of study (as they do in the Park School, where the author is a librarian) or take a more abbreviated, but nonetheless memorable, tour of her English medieval village.

Most of the activities and discussion questions included in this guide were gleaned from interviews with teachers at the Park School who have worked with these monologues for years (even before they were published) and have watched firsthand as students discover the characters for themselves. Use this guide as a departure point for your own exploration of this rich resource.

❧ A WORD ABOUT READERS' THEATER

The author structured *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* in the form of monologues and dialogues in part because they allow every student an opportunity to be the star. Although costumes and sets can enhance a performance, they are certainly not required. Since the reader's theater approach is more pared down than a full production, students must rely on their ability to communicate through their voices, faces, and body language to convey the emotions, attitudes, and motives of the characters. As the text becomes internalized, they become freer in their expression of the character they are portraying.

❧ BEFORE CASTING

Before assigning roles, it is a good idea to work through the monologues with the entire class. This will help establish the relationships woven throughout the book. Take four monologues at a time and read them round-robin style, inviting students to discuss the lives and feelings of each character.



❧ A WORD ABOUT CASTING

Sharen Pula, a Park School teacher who has used the monologues in her curriculum for twelve years, suggests letting students pick their own parts, even if it results in multiple people playing the same role. She herself covers any roles not selected by the students.

Oh, God makes the water, and the water makes the river, / And the river turns the mill wheel / and the wheel goes on forever.

(OTHO, THE MILLER'S SON)

It made me think / how all women are the same— / silk or sackcloth, all the same.

(BARBARY, THE MUD SLINGER)

❧ CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Once each student has selected his or her role, the real character analysis begins. Ask each student to describe the following for the monologue they have selected:

- Main idea
- Mood of the monologue
- Character's class or place in society

Next, ask the students to describe their character's personality traits by selecting three adjectives and citing words, phrases, or references from the monologue that support their choices.

Now broaden the analysis by asking them to note five things they have learned about the Middle Ages through this monologue.

Last, ask them to select a favorite quote from the monologue and explain why they chose that particular quote.

Once the basics are established, ask the students to dig a little deeper and use their imagination by asking the following questions from their character's viewpoint:

- Where are you?
- What just happened?
- What are you doing?

For example, perhaps Jack's eggs were just smashed, and he's actually talking to the animals in his monologue. This provides an emotional context for his piece.

Ask students to rewrite a section of their monologue in today's language to help them think critically about what is being said and what the subtext of the monologue might be—what feelings or facts might be hinted at but not directly expressed. You might suggest that they choose the lines that seem most difficult to them.

Through careful reading of the monologues, students can learn a great deal about medieval society. Ask each student to list four topics related to their individual character. Giles, for example, illustrates attitudes about begging, religion, physical disabilities, and family relationships.

❧ ACTIVITIES

Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! provides a launching point for learning more about the Middle Ages. Several research projects at the Park School have proved especially effective in helping students walk in medieval shoes—that is, if their character even had shoes.



❧ CREATING A COSTUME

Ask each student to write down their character's name and class in society, then note six to eight costume elements or props that would be appropriate for that character. For example, what would Edgar, the falconer's son, need so that a hawk could perch on his wrist? Remind the students to look at related monologues for clues, such as the description by Barbary, the mud slinger, of the fine blue dress worn by Isobel, the lord's daughter. Kids should be asked to research and design their own costumes. The completed costumes should be as authentic-looking as possible—they didn't have sneakers in the Middle Ages!

A CHARACTER'S LIFE

What was it like to be a child in the Middle Ages? With their character in mind, ask students to research and answer the following questions:

- Where was that person's place in the feudal system?
- What was his or her economic status?
- Where did the character live, and why?
- What was his or her clothing like?
- What did the parents do, and what does this mean for the character?
- What was that character's context? What was happening in the world?
- What was a typical day like for this person?



*"Send us more fools
for our food and our keep.
Forgive us our trespasses,
pardon our lies;
look after your foxes
as well as your sheep."*
(GILES, THE BEGGAR)

MAKING A MONOLOGUE MUSEUM

Using the related topics explored under Character Analysis, ask each student to build a diorama-like display illustrating some aspect of his or her character's life in the village. For each related topic, students should then find four or five pieces of information to use in writing several solid paragraphs. This activity illustrates an angle of scholarship that serves as an effective alternative to the traditional research paper. The project also allows students who express themselves best through art to shine as they implement their research. Using materials natural to the time is an important part of the project.

An activity such as this may require resources beyond those of your school library. Consider partnering with a local college or university for a loan of appropriate resources to be borrowed for the span of the project.

*I don't know why
the fields have the right to
rest when people don't.*
(WILL, THE PLOWBOY)

PRESENTING THE MONOLOGUES

The students have become their characters, their costumes are ready, and the monologue museum is complete. It's time to throw a party! Teachers at the Park School have students present their monologues as part of a parent potluck dinner, so that parents can see the result of their children's hard work while also getting a sense of what they have been learning. Invite the community (and even local media if you like) to come to your school and witness the Middle Ages for themselves. Be sure to capture each student on film, and use the photographs to create either a scrapbook or a website.

BEYOND Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!

Now that your students have gained an understanding of an individual medieval character, done some research, and presented a dramatic monologue, invite them to branch out to explore more of the medieval world. Sharen Pula asks her students to select a medieval building from anywhere in the world and create a conversational travel guide from the medieval perspective. As part of the project, students imagine someone who might have lived in that building, then write an original monologue for that character based on their research. Students may even be asked to re-create their structure in miniature, obtaining a better understand of math and architecture in the process.



*I have known more
sorrow than tears
can tell. /
There are times when
I wish I had never been
born, /
But I will be healed at
Saint Winifred's well.*
(CONSTANCE,
THE PILGRIM)

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Think about the inequities of medieval society. Villeins and women were treated as property. Which people portrayed in the monologues have the best lives and the most freedom? Who seems the most hopeless? Why? Who in today's world might be living lives similar to those of the characters in the book?
- Illness and death were always close at hand in medieval life, as seen in some of the pieces in the book. Who in the book has experienced loss? How does the death of a family member affect those still alive?
- Laura Amy Schlitz provides footnotes throughout the book that shed light on the characters' lives and circumstances. Which footnotes did you find most interesting, and why?
- Did you notice that there is no mention of school in the book? What kind of education did children receive in medieval times? How did education differ according to class and gender?

FURTHER READING

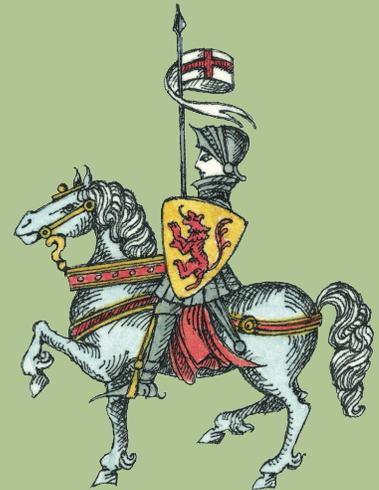
Henrietta Branford, *Fire, Bed, and Bone*.

Geoffrey de Lance, *Knight: A Noble Guide for Young Squires*.

Catherine Jinks, *The Pagan* series.

Richard Platt, *Castle Diary*.

Marcia Willams, *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*.



Teachers' Guide prepared by Ellen Myrick, who studied the Middle Ages at the University of Manchester, in England, and has written teachers' guides for Avi's *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*, *Crispin at the Edge of the World*, and *The Book Without Words*.



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