

*A Medieval Woman's Companion:
Women's Lives in the European Middle Ages*

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About the Book

A Medieval Woman's Companion: Women's Lives in the European Middle Ages. By Susan Signe Morrison. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-78535-009-2. Available in paperback.
Ages: Adult and Young Adult

Book Summary

What have a deaf nun, the mother of the first baby born to Europeans in North America, and a condemned heretic to do with one another? They are among the virtuous virgins, marvelous maidens, and fierce feminists of the Middle Ages who trail-blazed paths for women today. Without those first courageous souls who worked in fields dominated by men, women might not have the presence they currently do in professions such as education, the law, and literature. Focusing on women from Western Europe between c. 300 and 1500 CE in the medieval period and richly carpeted with detail, *A Medieval Woman's Companion* offers a wealth of information about real medieval women who are now considered vital for understanding the Middle Ages in a full and nuanced way. Short biographies of 20 medieval women illustrate how they anticipate and shape current concerns, including access to education; creative and emotional outlets such as art, theater, romantic fiction, and music; marriage and marital rights; fertility, pregnancy, childbirth, contraception and gynecology; sex trafficking and sexual violence; the balance of work and family; faith; and disability. Their legacy abides today in attitudes to contemporary women that have their roots in the medieval period. The final chapter suggests how 20th and 21st century feminist and gender theories can be applied to and complicated by medieval women's lives and writings. Doubly marginalized due to gender and the remoteness of the time period, medieval women's accomplishments are acknowledged and presented in a way that readers can appreciate and find inspiring. Ideal for high school and college classroom use in courses ranging from history and literature to women's and gender studies, an accompanying website invites you to visit and view educational links, images, downloadable curriculum guide [<http://amedievalwomanscompanion.com/curriculum-guide/>], and blog: amedievalwomanscompanion.com.

A Note About Susan Signe Morrison

Professor of English at Texas State University, Susan writes on topics lurking in the margins of history, ranging from recently uncovered diaries of a teenaged girl in World War II to medieval women pilgrims, excrement in the Middle Ages, and waste. Her novel, *Grendel's Mother: The Saga of the Wyrd-Wife* (Winchester, UK: Top Hat Books, 2015), just shortlisted for the Sarton Literary Award for Historical Fiction, it is a feminist reimagining of *Beowulf*. Susan grew up in New Jersey by the Great Swamp, a National Wildlife Refuge with terrain not unlike that of Grendel's Mother's mere in *Beowulf*. Committed to bringing the lives of medieval women to a wider audience, Susan can be found at amedievalwomanscompanion.com, homefrontgirl diary.com, grendelsmotherthenovel.com and tweets @medievalwomen. She lives in Austin, Texas with her husband, daughter, son and a very barky Welsh corgi. You can read all about her other books at susansignemorrison.com.

Teacher's Guide Contents

Pre-Reading Activities

Chapter Guides

Chapter guides are meant to encourage class discussions and provide structure for individual or group work for students to undertake. Students are not expected to be assigned the entire guide.

Each Chapter Guide includes:

Discussion Starters

The guide facilitates the deepening of curriculum standards and objectives. Students will:

Master a broad body of knowledge

Demonstrate an understanding of historical chronology

Use historical data to support an argument or position

Interpret and apply data from primary sources

Effectively use analytical skills of evaluation and compare and contrast

Work effectively with others to produce material and solve problems

Create their own imaginative and artistic creations

Learn to use a variety of primary and secondary source material to explain historical methodology and assess interpretations of the past, including multiple points of view and historical context

Form opinions and judgments about the historical and literary characteristics of various forms

Develop the ability to discuss popular culture and the arts in conjunction with historical and political events

Using textual evidence, learn to support an argument

Research the lives of women in the Middle Ages

Analyze the vocabulary, figurative language and metaphors as they are used in the text; analyze the impression such a word stock and narrative choice has on the reader

Consider political events from a single narrator's viewpoint and to place that perspective in the context of others' opinions

Compare aspects of medieval Europe from a number of perspectives

Curriculum Connections

There are **shorter activities** directly linked to a particular chapter

Vocabulary: convenient and easily accessible for classroom use

Culminating Activities

These activities, appropriate for high school students and college students, involve both research and creative work

Be sure to visit **amedievalwomanscompanion.com** for many **useful links and resources** concerning the **women's lives in the Middle Ages**.

A Q & A with Susan Signe Morrison

Pre-Reading

Look at the title and cover of *A Medieval Woman's Companion* by Susan Signe Morrison. What terms are familiar to you? Which aren't?

Read the description of the book on the back of the volume. What do you think the book will be about? Is it a true story?

What do you know about medieval women? When were the Middle Ages?

Write down what you know about the Middle Ages and about women in that time period.

Write down what questions you have about women in the Middle Ages.

Introduction (pages 1-16)

Key Words/ Word Study

charm, Middle Ages, medieval, nun, contemplation, chivalry, knighthood, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Iberian, Pre-Raphaelites, Protestant Reformation, heretics, primary source, *wergild*, cathedral, feminist, paleopathology, patroness, artisan, relic, peasant, literacy, primer, purgatory, allegorically, saint's life, virgin martyr, feminist, visionaries, hermit, anchorite, "Dark Ages", BCE, CE, Bibliography

Discussion Starters

Describe Virginia Woolf's idea about Shakespeare's (imaginary) sister.

Do you need a room of your own to write and create?

Define the Middle Ages.

What stereotypes do we have about the Middle Ages?

How can learning about medieval women help us understand women today?

What is a primary source? Does it need to be a written text?

What is the difference between a queen-regent and a queen-regnant?

How did women get educated? Which women were more likely to get an education?

Why are some words on page 10 in Latin? What do they mean?

What are the "Dark Ages"? Is it an accurate or useful term?

Connections

How can we connect more recent writers like Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf with the past?

Discuss how medieval themes are in popular culture.

What is feminism? Compare feminism in the medieval period and now. Is it appropriate to use a modern word for the past? Why or why not?

What does it mean, "It's the questions that make us scholars?" (page 8). What questions do you have about women in the Middle Ages?

How does education for children today differ from that in the Middle Ages?

What objects do ABC books today cite as opposed to those in the medieval period (p. 11)?

Part I: PIONEERS

1.Gudrun Osvifsdottir: Viking Vixen (pages 18-25)

Key Words/ Word Study

vixen, Viking, trolls, genealogy, saga, claimants, archeology, burial site, Althing, Poetic Edda, Scandinavian, Germanic, infanticide, revenge, compensation, kinsman, capital punishment, Valkyrie, spectre, Psalter, nun, anchoress

Discussion Starters

What part of the world did the Vikings travel to? How did they travel and why to these areas?

What is the relationship between Norway and Iceland?

Is a saga historical fact?

What is the Althing?

What were women's rights in marriage?

What are Valkyrie? Did they really exist?

Discuss the contrast between pagan and Christian.

Connections

Think about the popular tv show *Vikings*. Does Gudrun's life seem similar to this modern view of that world?

Are there associations you can make between the settling of Iceland and the settlement of the west in the U.S.? If so, what are some differences and similarities?

What can archeology teach us about women?

2. Gudrid Thorbjarnardottir: Fearless Explorer (pages 26-31)

Key Words/ Word Study

Greenland, Vinland, L'Anse aux Meadows, inheritance, skald, retaliation, shirked, prophetess, warlock, Freyja, pilgrimage, holy orders, bishop, anchoress, Inuit, First Nation

Discussion Starters

Who "discovered" America? Is it a valid question?

Who does Gudrid give birth to? Why is this noteworthy?

Discuss the relationship between *skald* and *scold*.

What is the role of language for women in this Viking world?

Discuss the contrast between Gudrid and Freydis.

Do we understand the history of the "New World" differently if we take into account the journeys of these early Scandinavians? How does it alter?

Connections

Discuss the similarities and differences between Columbus's arrival in the "New World" and that of the Scandinavians centuries earlier.

Discuss the limits pregnancy did--or didn't--place on women then and now.

Discuss what DNA evidence can teach us about the past. Connect DNA from the medieval period with scientific insights today.

3. Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: First Woman Playwright (pages 32-38)

Key Words/ Word Study

reliquary, relic, dramatist, Saxon, Benedictine Rule, trivium, quadrivium, Roman pagan authors, abbey, refectory, Terence, misogynist, chaste, modesty topos, persecution

Discussion Starters

What did Hrotsvit's education consist of?

Why would a Christian study pagan texts?

How did Hrotsvit alter Terence's plays for her own purposes?

What is the modesty topos? Why did Hrotsvit have to use it? Do we still use a form of it today?

In *Dulcitius*, the girls die. Yet they are seen as triumphant. How can that be?

What does Perpetua argue about her identity to her father?

Why does milk instead of blood pour out of Fides upon being wounded?

Connections

Look up the Benedictine Rule. What does it require? Do people still follow it today? Could you follow its requirements?

Explore the educational aspects of the trivium and quadrivium. Do elements of these subjects still get taught today?

Imagine you are a girl or teenager in the Middle Ages and read these works. How might they influence you? Would you find the young women in these plays inspiring? Who is an inspiring fictional character today and why?

4. Anglo-Saxon and Norman Women: Political Power Dynasties and Steadfast Sovereigns -- Emma of Normandy; St. Margaret of Scotland; Matilda of Scotland

(pages 39-48)

Key Words/ Word Study

kin, massacre, Anglo-Saxon, Norman, Dane, Channel, peace-weaver, chronicle, illegitimate, legacy, exile, pious, biography, propaganda, largesse, tumultuous, Scriptures, vestments, hospice, canonized, commission, Pope, baron, minting coins, posthumous

Discussion Starters

What is the role of women in marriage alliances?

What do the names of Emma's children suggest?

What is a peace-weaver?

How could Emma co-rule with Harthacnut?

Initially St Margaret of Scotland wants to devote her life to the Church. Why would a woman wish to do so? What advantages did a holy life offer women?

What are Christian wives sometimes credited with doing with their pagan husbands in the earlier Middle Ages?

What worthy acts are credited to St Margaret of Scotland? Was she called a saint in her lifetime or only later?

Describe Matilda of Scotland's early education.

Why did Matilda of Scotland commission a life of her mother, St Margaret of Scotland?

Discuss Matilda's correspondence with the Pope. What does this suggest about women's acts at the highest level of society?

Connections

Get out a map from today. Can you find the areas mentioned in this chapter? They are quite close to each other.

See the references to the Old English epic poem, *Beowulf* (p. 41, 43, 44-5). How can that be linked to political intrigues and complications of the late Anglo-Saxon period of England?

Think of women today, such as recent female Secretaries of State. Are they a form of "peace-weaver"?

Read about Aethelflaed (p. 42). What does her story tell you about the possibilities for women's action in the Middle Ages? Can you contrast her with Edith (p. 43)?

5. The Importance of Language (pages 49-54)

Key Words/ Word Study

legacy, wordstock, remnant, Latin, miracle, Germanic, Indo-European, Old English, coronation, Middle English, infiltrate, theological, vernacular, patriarchal, cultural power

Discussion Starters

Read about the Anglo-Saxon women on the top of p. 50. How could women achieve holy fame?

Discussion the violent battles taking place in 1066 in England. Why were they so important, ultimately, for the development of the English language?

Discuss the differences between Old English and Middle English.

What language did Shakespeare write in?

Were illiterate peasants utterly unaware of Latin?

What gender implications were there between Latin and the vernacular?

Why was it significant to have medical texts written not just in Latin, but also translated into the vernacular?

Connections

Notice the chess piece on page. 49. Why do you think the *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* film director chose to model the chess game pieces on this medieval artifact?

What connections can you make between medieval languages and what you speak today?

Connect the translation of Latin medical texts into the vernacular to something equally controversial, such as WikiLeaks.

Part II: FEARLESS FEMALES

6. St. Christina of Markyate: Resolute Virgin (pages 56-64)

Key Words/ Word Study

anchorite, patron saint, contemplate, confine, enclose, sanctuary, Norman Conquest, saint, vision, Holy Spirit, sanctuary, pilgrimage, concubine, calamitous, betrothed, frivolous, martyr, convert, spurn, conflagration, prior, penitential, crone, hermit, rapt, epilepsy, priory, Psalter, papal decree

Discussion Starters

Why does Christina run away?

Why does Christina carve graffiti?

How does she avoid being sexually assaulted?

How do her parents try to get her to marry?

How is St. Cecilia inspirational to Christina?

What is her relationship with her betrothed, Beorhtred?

What did church law in a penitential say about girls' rights with regards to marriage?

How did the devil attempt to punish her?

What is an anchorite?

Read about Christine Carpenter on page 62. What does her story suggest?

Connections

Runaways abound in literature and film -- as well as, tragically, in reality. Link Christina's plight to those you know in cultural works.

Who would your patron saint be?

Could you have withstood being a closet for four years only released once at night? What other heroic people in history likewise had to suffer enclosure for religious or political reasons?

Look at Christina's psalter online (see p. 63). What do you discover in it?

7. Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen and Cougar (pages 65-73)

Key Words/ Word Study

chroniclers, troubadour, Santiago de Compostela, Crusade, conceive, canon law, illicit, indiscretion, besieging, consanguinity, annulment, sagacious, regent, regnant, charter, double abbey, leper Book of Hours,

Discussion Starters

Why was Eleanor so desirable?

How could women go on Crusade?

How does Eleanor get out of her marriage with Louis?

Read about Queen Melisende (p.67). How did she rule in Jerusalem?

How large was the realm of Henry II and Eleanor?

What was the cultural life reputed to be like at her court?

Read about Adele of Normandy (p. 69). What duties did she perform while her husband was on Crusade?

Discuss the fraught relations among the men in Eleanor's family. What was her role?

Why did Henry II lock Eleanor up?

What happened to Richard the Lionheart while returning home from the Crusades? How did Eleanor try to help?

How did widowhood affect women's power? Use the extraordinary example of Eleanor.

Connections

Explore the word "crusade" and how it has been used lately in terms of the West's involvement in the Middle East.

What literary and cultural achievements have lasted until today thanks to Eleanor's courtly support and patronage?

See a film or read a novel about Eleanor (p. 72). How does she seem in the imaginary work you examine?

8. Margaret of Beverley: Fighting Crusader (pages 74-82)

Key Words/ Word Study

Crusader, Sepulchre, rack, Saracens, chapel, veneration, Gaul, Holy Land, Flight into Egypt, entourage, Archbishop of Canterbury, Cistercian, Saladin, Muslim, siege, rampart, catapult, millstone, ransom, lice, inviolate, penury, namesake, patron saint

Discussion Starters

Read about the lives of Isolda Parewastel and Egeria (p. 74). What did they endure to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land? Why did they go there?

What miraculous event took place when Margaret was a baby, suggesting an extraordinary life to come?

What happens to Margaret during the siege of Jerusalem? How does she behave?

Who was Saladin and how was he thought of in the Middle Ages?

Discuss women and fighting possibilities during the Crusades.

How does Margaret finally make it back to Europe?

What other pilgrimage sites does she visit? Find them on a map.

Why does her brother write her life story?

Read about Medieval Women of Color (p. 80; also 81). What does this suggest?

How can staying behind be considered a type of pilgrimage? What would you have to do to make it worthy of being called a crusade?

Connections

Read about Christian and Muslim love encounters (p. 77) as imagined in fictive works from the Middle Ages. Why would an Christian author at that time suggest unions between two warring religions?

Margaret visits a number of pilgrimage sites. Make a chart or map indicating where she and other women in *A Medieval Woman's Companion* travel to.

Part III: WOMEN OF WISDOM

9. Anna Komnene: Dutiful Daughter (pages 84-87)

Key Words/ Word Study

St Anne, dutiful, Byzantine/Byzantium, epic, forays, palatial, Constantinople/Istanbul, Aristotle, Plato, *quadrivium*, Homer, *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, secular, posterity, irrevocably

Discussion Starters

What was St Anne renowned for in connection with the Virgin Mary?

What was Anna's education like?

What was the status of women like in Anna's time?

What did her brother do?

Where did Anna end up after her father's death? What did she do there?

Why did she like history?

What are women-identified activities? Why? What did Anna choose?

Connections

What was Istanbul called Constantinople in Anna's day? Find it on a map and research when the name change occurred and why.

What other famous women historians existed before the 20th century?

Play the video game (rated T for Teen) *Medieval II: Total Warfare*; Anna appears as the character Anna Comnenus, the Byzantine princess and diplomat.

10. Understanding the Female Body: Misogyny and Sympathy (pages 88-95)

Key Words/ Word Study

Adam and Eve, the Fall, philosophy, Plato, Aristotle, Arabic, form, matter/flesh, misogynist, Torah, Galen, virago, celibacy, chastity, default, Saint Jerome, salvation, hierarchy, humors, bile, choler, phlegm, empirical, sinister, holy anorexics,

Discussion Starters

In the Western philosophical tradition, what distinctions have been made between *form* and *matter* or *flesh*? How and why does this affect attitudes towards women?

What new idea did Galen introduce?

What is the difference between celibacy and chastity?

Why was the Virgin Mary so important in medieval Christianity?

Discuss the hierarchy of women: virginity, widowhood, marriage, and prostitution. Why did this hierarchy exist?

Discuss the theory of the four humors.

Why was menstrual blood problematic for medieval thinkers?

Discuss medical attempts to help women, ranging from the empirical to the superstitious.

Read about bodies being hot and dry or cold and moist (p. 93). Which is male and which is female according to medieval thought?

Name a way to give birth that did not include lying down.

Discuss the holy anorexics (p. 94).

Connections

Think about the Western philosophical tradition wherein distinctions have been made between *form* and *matter* or *flesh* and how this affected attitudes towards women. Are there remnants of these attitudes still in culture to this day?

Is the Virgin Mary still important in some cultures? Find some examples.

How can the holy anorexics be connected to suffragettes (p.94)?

11. Trota of Salerno: Compassionate Physician (pages 96-103)

Key Words/ Word Study

presentations (p. 96), shrine, gynecology, hub, empirically based treatments, incontinence, depilatory, fumigation, physiology, menses, post-partum, fistula, mortifying, apprentice, Fourth Lateran Council, stipulation, subdeacon, deacon, amputation, apothecaries, barbers, bureaucratized, uroscopy

Discussion Starters

Look at the images on page 96. What do you remark about them?

Who was Trota? What do we really know about her?

Discuss the manuscripts ascribed to her, the so-called *Trotula*. What kinds of treatments are included?

Did people really not bathe in the Middle Ages? What do medical texts suggest?

Why is touching a patient important? What could she do that a male doctor could not?

How were Arabic texts important for the Christian West?

Discuss the work of female healers among Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

What is the difference between a surgeon in the Middle Ages and now?

What began to limit women's options as healers?

Connections

Why was it important to have a female doctor (p. 98)? Is this still the case?

Fistula are still a dangerous problem for women giving birth today. Research this vital topic.

Link limited options for women's medicine--in terms of practitioners and patients-- in the Middle Ages and now. Name similarities and differences.

12. Hildegard von Bingen: Audacious Innovator (pages 104-112)

Key Words/ Word Study

meditate, vision, audacious, Sibyl, Rhine, haven, enclosure, anchorhold, pauper, revelation, ecstasy, erudition, mysticism, cosmology, lucid, excommunicate, Eucharist, Holy Office, vestment, *viriditas*, microcosm, macrocosm, fractal

Discussion Starters

What was Hildegard's childhood like?

What were Jutta's and Elizabeth of Schönau's childhoods like?

Why would women gather around a holy woman like Jutta or Hildegard?

How did Hildegard experience her visions? What bodily manifestations would she go through? How did she describe them?

Although she uses the modesty topos, discuss her bold statement on p. 107.

What did she think parents should do with regard to dedicating their children to the church?

How did Hildegard defy the church?

Name all the fields in which Hildegard innovated.

How did Hildegard take misogynist ideas about body and matter and make them positive for women?

For Hildegard, how was music essential to spirituality?

How many female Doctors of the Church are there? Research them.

Connections

Hildegard invented a language. So did J. R. R. Tolkien (*The Lord of the Rings*). Why and how would one do so?

Discuss St. Paul's comments about women teaching (p. 107). Did Hildegard abide by his thoughts? Does it still influence people today?

Connect Hildegard's ideas about *viriditas* to the environmental movement today.

How did Hildegard function like a scientist of today?

13. Heloise d'Argenteuil: Scandalous Nun (113-118)

Key Words/ Word Study

alienate, clergyman, chastity, logician, carnal, Astrolabe, celibate, misogamy, squalor, nuptials, Paraclete, prostitute, Fortune, erotic, daughter house, interred, sarcophagus

Discussion Starters

How did the affair begin between Abelard and Heloise?

Why would marriage ruin Peter's career?

What is the difference between misogamy and misogyny?

How can a philosopher attend to scholarly pursuits and marriage? Discuss the way this tension is resolved in medieval Jewish texts (p. 115).

What role does Heloise uncle, Fulbert, play in their lives?

How does Fulbert punish Peter?

After his castration, what contact do Peter and Heloise have?

Discuss Astrolabe, their child.

What do their letters to one another suggest?

Who are the true prostitutes, according to Heloise?

Heloise explains their love in terms of Classical ideals of passion. What development does she predate that explores erotic love?

Connections

Teacher-student relationships are still frowned upon. Why is this important?

Connect medieval European women's love writings to those in medieval Japan (p. 117).

14. Marie de France: Rhyming Romancer (119-124)

Key Words/ Word Study

Breton, animal fable, purgatory, tittle-tattlers, *Lais*, courtly, feudal, werewolf, bestial, counselor, Queen Guenevere, proposition, physic, vigilance

Discussion Starters

What language did Marie write in and where?

Does Marie use the modesty topos?

What is a *lai* (English word: lay)?

What innovations does Marie introduce into her romances?

What was romance important for, Marie shows?

How is Queen Guenevere an important figure for many Arthurian tales?

What can save women in loveless marriages?

How do we know Marie's work were popular?

Connections

What connections can be made between Marie's writings and popular phenomena like *Twilight*?

Compare Marie's werewolf story, *Bisclavret*, to a more recent one.

Part IV: NON-CONFORMISTS

15. Women Troubadours/Trobairitz: Clever Composers (pages 127-134)

Key Words/ Word Study

despondent, chastise, troubadour, trobairitz, Occitan, Provençal, secular, courtly love, *fin' amors*, feudal, Moors, *domna*, *trouvères* or *troveresses*, Occitania, *vida*, prosopography, heresy, Inquisition

Discussion Starters

Why were the Trobairitz so innovative?

What is courtly love or *fin' amors*? Did it really exist?

Discuss the word origin of *Troubadour*. What does they imply about poetic language?

Why did the Trobairitz become so prominent at this time and in the area of Occitan?

What is prosopography? How can it help us understand a certain group of people?

What poetry did Arabic Muslim women write?

Discuss examples of female friendship and same-sex love (p. 131).

Why did this outpouring and flourishing of women's poetry in this area come to an end?

What woman became the object of love and devotion after the heyday of the Trobairitz and Troubadours faded out?

Connections

Discuss the themes of the music of the Trobairitz. Who can they be connected to today?

16. Marguerite Porete: Heroic Heretic (pages 135-142)

Key Words/ Word Study

heretic, orthodox, promulgate, Beguine, beguinage, voluntary poverty, Eucharist, laywomen, crucifixion, contemplation, absolution, relapsed heretic, relapsed Jew, penitence, decree

Discussion Starters

What is heresy?

What could the motivations of heresy accusation stem from?

Discuss various heresies and what constituted their beliefs. Why, for instance, would voluntary poverty be threatening?

How did Beguines differ from nuns?

How could Beguines gain approval from the Church?

What was a Christ doll? How might it have functioned?

Why did Marguerite come under attack? What happened to her book and why?

What beliefs did she espouse in her book? What was so controversial?

Did Marguerite use the modesty topos?

See what Na Prous Boneta said. How was this shocking?

How did viewers react to Marguerite being burnt at the stake?

Connections

Compare attacks by the Church on those who deviated from its orthodox or standard beliefs. Do we have evidence of similar condemnations today in various realms (religious, political, cultural, etc.)?

Explore the history of the Beguines after Marguerite. When did the last Beguine die?

Are books still burned? Why?

17. St. Birgitta of Sweden: Righteous Reformer (pages 143-151)

Key Words/ Word Study

reformer, canonized, sanctity, pious, Saint James, pilgrimage, St Olaf, religious order, clergy, papal approval, Jubilee Year, stigmata, holy anorexia, Black Plague, secular authority, Hundred Years War, Holy Family, hospice, Birgittine House

Discussion Starters

What incidents in her childhood suggest that Birgitta will live a remarkable life?

When does she marry? What is her family life like?

What role did education play in her and her children's lives?

How does she manage to found her own religious order? What are its tenets?

What did Birgitta write? How were her assertions bold?

What interactions did she have with the Pope?

Why did she go to Rome and, later, the Holy Land?

Read about St Clare of Assisi and St Catherine of Siena (pp. 146, 158). What remarkable things did they achieve?

Discuss Birgitta's attempt to reform the Church and stop corruption.

Who were the Holy Family and how did that resonate with Birgitta?

Were pilgrims free from crime and attack on their ritual journeys? How do we know this?

How was she a role model for married women?

Who was skeptical of her?

What is Birgitta's legacy today?

Connections

Read about St Catherine of Siena (p. 158) and works exploring Holy Anorexics. Read the suggested book and make connections--differences and similarities--between holy anorexia and contemporary anorexia nervosa.

Look up the patron saints of Europe.

18. Margery Kempe: Peerless Pilgrim (pages 152-158)

Key Words/ Word Study

Annunciation, post-partum depression, damnation, buttry, autobiography, Walsingham, lactation, denomination, parish priest, Mount of Calvary, countenance, pilgrimage badge, Lollard, John Wyclif

Discussion Starters

What literary genre did Margery innovate for the English language? How did she come to "write" it?

How many children did she have?

What happened to her early on before she asked to lead a chaste life with her husband?

Why does John say she is "no good wife"? Why does he want her to eat with him on Fridays?

Discuss Margery's pilgrimages.

How did Margery react to visiting places associated with holy people, including Christ?

Who was Julian of Norwich? Why does Margery visit her?

Why did Margery cry and emote?

Discuss the range of reactions Margery's behavior elicited.

Why was John Wyclif so important?

Connections

Why was Walsingham considered an important shrine? Research Walsingham's revival in the 20th-21st centuries. What happens there now?

Discuss Julian of Norwich's theology of Christ as Mother.

Find out what the Lollards believed. Explore how their beliefs differed--or not--from those of Protestant Reformers.

Part V: “MOST HONORED LADIES”

19. Christine de Pizan: Vocal Feminist (pages 160-168)

Key Words/ Word Study

feminist, astrologer, rhetoric, notary, Fortune, scribe, plague, *Romance of the Rose*, allegory, notorious, Rectitude, Reason and Justice, divulge, vellum, illuminator

Discussion Starters

Discuss Christine's father--his position at the French court and his influence on her education.

How was Christine's marriage arranged? Did she feel oppressed in her union?

Who is the figure of Fortune? What role does she play in Christine's life?

What tragedies strike Christine?

What does she say about economics and what women should know about?

What job does she take to support her family?

Discuss the importance of the letter exchange she participates in. What is this exchange called?

How does Christine employ the modesty topos?

Who are Reason, Rectitude and Justice?

What does *The Book of the City of Ladies* argue? Why can this city never be destroyed?

How do we know Christine was well-known in her own time?

What was the Hundred Years War?

To what amazing woman did Christine dedicate her last known work?

Connections

Christine is considered the first professional woman writer. What women in the more recent past have also innovated in terms of writing?

The printing press is only used in the West starting in the mid-fifteenth century. How does this affect literary production? What technological innovations in the more recent past have likewise affected writing and how?

20. Joan of Arc: Savior of France (pages 169-176)

Key Words/ Word Study

savior, mystic, armor, heretic, shepherdess, miraculous, *la Pucelle*, Hundred Years War, civil war, siege, ethereal, crossbow, surcoat, Burgundians, cahoots, illiterate, blaspheme, apostate, idolater, saint

Discussion Starters

What do we know about Joan's childhood?

What compels her to go to meet the king of France?

What political crisis occurs during her lifetime?

What did Joan hear? Why was this controversial?

How did Joan dress and keep her hair? How did different groups react to this?

What does she tell Charles she can do?

What does her language suggest about her?

What military successes does she achieve?

Why was the civil war in France so fatal for Joan? Who captures her?

How do her enemies attempt to trick her?

Which of her beliefs were problematic for her accusers?

How did her dress and hair likewise make her threatening?

Describe the heart-breaking series of events in the final week of her life.

Why was she burnt at the stake?

What happened to her reputation after her death in the 15th century and then in the 20th?

Connections

Joan remains a powerful symbol today. Find how she is used in art and advertising even now. Why would she still be used?

How did some 19th and early 20th-century skeptics respond to Joan?

21. Textile Concerns:

Holy Transvestites and the Dangers of Cross-Dressing (pages 177-184)

Key Words/ Word Study

transvestite, cross-dressing, mills, Bayeux Tapestry, chastity belts, sumptuary laws, sartorial, tippets, dagged, pompous, hairshirt, breeches, martial, Athena, consummate, idolater

Discussion Starters

Why was the development of water mills so crucial to women's work in textiles?

What evidence do we have for women's textile work?

Did chastity belts really exist?

What did clothing signify in the Middle Ages?

What kind of allegorical meaning could clothes have?

How did sumptuary laws work?

What did white clothes symbolize?

Name some instances in history and literature where women wore male clothing. What happened to them? When do cross-dressers get in trouble?

Who was Pope Joan?

Who were the holy transvestites? What was their cross-dressing endorsed?

Connections

Sumptuary laws stipulated proper--and legal--dress codes. Examine the dress code at your school. What does it stipulate? What does it suggest about gender/class dynamics?

Read *Le Roman de Silence (The Story of Silence)*. The heroine is raised as a male. What happens at the end? How does that make you feel?

Part VI: "EXPERIENCE IS RIGHT ENOUGH FOR ME"

22. Teresa de Cartagena: Foremother of Deaf Culture (pages 186-194)

Key Words/ Word Study

Deaf culture, *converso*, disability, rabbinical, "passing," conciliatory, anti-Semitism, contaminated, cochlear implants, autism, *infanta*, medulla, Ju-Jitsu, plagiarism

Discussion Starters

Look at the image of the very famous Wife of Bath (p. 186). She was partially deaf and said, "Experience is right enough for me." What does that mean?

What strikes does Teresa have against her?

Describe the religious situation in medieval Spain over the course of the Middle Ages.

What are the feelings towards the Jews there by those in power?

Why does Teresa write *Grove of the Infirm*?

How did her deafness bring her *closer* to God?

Why do some men not believe Teresa wrote *Grove of the Infirm*?

How does Teresa respond to their skepticism in *Wonder at the Works of God*?

How does Teresa use the modesty topos?

Why does she call the male skeptics blasphemous?

Why is the Jewish heroine Judith so important to Teresa's argument?

Connections

How was conversion a form of "passing" for Spanish Jews?

Teresa asks why divinity allows suffering. What are some answers that have been given over time?

23. Margaret Paston: Matchless Matriarch (pages 195-203)

Key Words/ Word Study

matriarch, smallpox, marriage negotiations, Prudence, Circumspection, Docility, Providence, heiress, gentry, voluminous, moveable goods, War of the Roses, civil war, dynastic, troth, amending, ruffians, executor, bailiff, dowry, gentlewoman

Discussion Starters

On page 195, what is the plight of Elizabeth and why? How does her situation predate Jane Austen by over 300 years?

How did the Paston family rise from the farming class?

What can we learn from an extensive letter collection like that of the Pastons?

Margaret knew the law intricately. Did she have a law degree? Why or why not? And why was it in her interest to know the law?

How did the War of the Roses affect the Pastons' circumstances? Discuss plunder and attacks on their estates.

What do we learn about healing and medicine from the letters?

What kind of mother is Margaret?

Discuss the love stories of Margery Paston and of John III with Margery Brews. What constitutes a binding vow? Why and how is Margaret involving herself in these unions?

Connections

Read a Jane Austen novel and the Paston Letters. How are marriage negotiations similar or different?

Read about Licoricia (p. 198), a Jewish businesswoman. What similarities are there between her and the Paston matriarchs?

Examine the royal family tree in the 15th century. How is it connected to the English royal family today?

The first known instance of "Valentine" being used as addressed to one's beloved in a letter (Chaucer introduces it decades before) begins a tidal wave of instances as we see in our own time. What is a Valentine today?

24: Looking Forward:

Contemporary Feminist Theory and Medieval Women (pages 204-217)

Key Words/ Word Study

literary theory, canon, canonical, intersectional feminism, signifyin(g), homage, double-voicedness, lucid, unrefined ore, the "Other," traffic/trafficking, status, patriarchy, class mobility, docile bodies, materialist feminist, cross-pollinate, affinity, *A Room of One's Own*, Bechdel test, queer theory, performative, drag, moral development, emancipatory, consumption, Protestant Reformation

Discussion Starters

How can literary theory help us to understand medieval women better?

How can intersectional feminism help us understand medieval women's lives better?

How have women been seen as aligned with nature and men with culture? Why is this a problem?

How is mothering complicated in the Middle Ages in terms of the queen's role as leader and producer of an heir?

How does material from the Middle Ages complicate recent theoretical gender understandings and insights?

How do the holy anorexics play into--or not-- Susan Bordo's concept of the docile body?

How does Alice Walker complicate the concept of *A Room of One's Own*?

Connections

How can medieval women's lives and writings enhance feminist and gender approaches to literature and culture?

How have men helped women fulfill their literary ambitions in the Middle Ages and later?

Compare the experiences of Christina of Markyate and Harriet Jacobs.

What is the Bechdel test? Apply it to medieval works and then more recent ones.

Discuss the similarities and differences between men's attitudes to women's education in the medieval and post-medieval periods.

How are medieval women's concerns similar to ours today?

Bibliography

Primary Sources (pages 233-236)

Secondary Sources (pages 236-243)

Websites (pages 243-244)

Curriculum Connections and Culminating Activities

Be sure to visit the **WEBSITE**, amedievalwomanscompanion.com. There are many **LINKS** to historical and cultural sites useful for research and fun. Also check out the **BLOG** for those interested in the Middle Ages and medieval women in the Middle Ages.

Language Arts/English

- Donna Jo Napoli's *Hush: An Irish Princess' Tale* (NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2007) tells the story of the teenager Melkorka, daughter of the Irish king, when she was kidnapped and enslaved by Vikings. Melkorka's father ultimately offers the throne to her son. While the *Laxdaela Saga* dealt with Melkorka's later life, this Young Adult book explores her teenage years in a gripping and poignant adventure.
- To find out more about the tantalizing and legendary Gudrun, check out the J. R. R. Tolkien website dedicated to the author of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. <http://www.tolkienestate.com/sigurd-and-gudrun/>.
- Watch and listen to the famous operatic "Ride of the Valkyrie" by Richard Wagner: <http://youtu.be/xeRwBiu4wfQ>.
- The beautiful and classic *D'Aulaires' Book of Norse Myths* (NY: The New York Review of Books, 1967) by Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire captures the thrill of Norse mythology.
- Visit <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook3.asp> to read saints' lives from the Middle Ages, including those of male and female martyrs, transvestite saints, and the life of St. Mary of Egypt. The story of Perpetua can be found here: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.asp>.
- For good YA novels about the Anglo-Saxon period, see Rosemary Sutcliffe's *Beowulf: Dragonslayer* and Rebecca Tingle's books about Aethelflaed as a teenager, *The Edge on the Sword* and *Far Traveler*.
- For *Beowulf*, the translation by Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney makes for a riveting read (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001). For more contemporary takes on the *Beowulf* characters, John Gardner's classic *Grendel* (NY: Vintage, 1971/1989) examines the material from the point of view of the "monster," while Susan Signe Morrison's *Grendel's Mother: The Saga of the Wyrld Wife* (Top Hat Books 2015) gives it a feminist twist.
- Patricia Bracewell's trilogy set in eleventh-century England depicting Emma of Normandy's tumultuous life begins with *Shadow on the Crown* (Viking 2013) and Emma's marriage to King Aethelred II.
- For letters to and from Leoba, look here: <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/woman/55.html>.
- Nicola Griffith's novel *Hild* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2013) traces Hild's life from her girlhood and explores her impact on the Anglo-Saxon world.
- Enjoy wonderful Arthurian romances by Chrétien de Troyes that may have been read at Eleanor's court. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/831/831-h/831-h.htm#link2H_4_0005. Start with *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion* where the hero, torn between his duty to his beloved and his knightly prowess, goes mad.
- Novelist Karen Cushman brings medical issues to life: *Matilda Bone* (NY: Yearling, 2002) and *The Midwife's Apprentice* (NY: HarperCollins, 1996).
- Read some of Marie's *Lais*: <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/jshoaf/Marie/>.
- This novel fictionalizes a female troubadour: Mary Hoffmann's *Troubadour* (NY: Bloomsbury, 2009).
- For a masterwork of world literature, be sure to read the Arabic prose masterpiece *One Thousand and One Nights*, in which the lovely Scheherazade saves her own and other women's lives through relating a cornucopia of tales about Sinbad, Ali Baba, and Aladdin.

- Birgitta was described in the *Acts of the Saints* as a virgin, wife, and widow. To read a fictional life of a comparable Scandinavian woman, delve into a trilogy by the Norwegian Noble Prize-winning woman, Sigrid Undset. Her famous series follows the life of *Kristin Lavransdatter*. King Magnus, who was a key champion of Birgitta, appears in this imaginative book series.
- Rebecca Barnhouse's *The Book of the Maidservant* (New York: Random House Books for Young Readers, 2009) imagines Margery Kempe's life from the perspective of her servant Johanna.
- Candace Robb (penname Emma Champion) has written numerous dazzling novels set in fourteenth-century England. Focusing on the women—fictional and historical—who influenced events and experienced love and betrayal, these books bring to life the lives of medieval women, such as the "Fair Maid of Kent" in *A Triple Knot* (Broadway Books 2014) and Alice Perrers, who really was *The King's Mistress* (Broadway Books 2011).
- Jess Wells reimagines Christine de Pizan's life in her novel *A Slender Tether* (Firebrand Press 2013).
- Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century romance, *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*, depicts poverty-stricken and poorly clad female slaves incarcerated inside of sharp stakes where they sew using golden and silken thread for their evil masters in a textile sweatshop.
- In Tamora Pierce's series *The Protector of the Small Quartet* and *The Song of the Lioness*, a cross-dressed girl becomes a knight.
- Sarah Roche-Mahdi's translation of *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2007) delightfully draws the reader along with the trials and tribulations of Silence, raised as a boy so as not to lose her inheritance.
- Famed English novelist, Virginia Woolf, vividly imagines the Pastons' world in *The Common Reader* (1925): <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91c/chapter2.html>.
- Countless novels depict the savage era of the War of the Roses, from Philippa Gregory's *The Cousins' War* series (Simon & Schuster 2009) about Elizabeth Woodville, Margaret Beaufort and Anne Neville (now in a Starz mini-series) to Josephine Tey's class mystery *The Daughter of Time* (Scribner 1951). More recently, George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* draws on the War of the Roses mayhem to violent effect in his wildly popular *A Song of Ice and Fire* fantasy series, now filmed for HBO.

Social Studies/History

- A letter to St. Margaret from Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, can be found here: <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/woman/9.html>.
- For numerous letters to and from Matilda of Scotland, look here: <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/woman/64.html>.
- For actual letters written to and from Eleanor, check this resource: <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/woman/24.html#letterslist>.
- Read Margaret of Beverley's story: <http://www.umilta.net/jerusalem.html>.
- You can read about the peace treaty between Richard I and Saladin here: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1192peace.asp>.
- Read some of Hildegard's letters: <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/woman/115.html>.
- You can read letters and to and from Heloise: <http://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/woman/28.html>.
- Na Prous Boneta's actual testimony: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/naprous.asp>. The testimony of her sister, Alisseta Boneta: http://www.history.vt.edu/Burr/heresy/beguins/Alisseta_Boneta.html.
- Margery Kempe's book is digitized: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Add_MS_61823.

- Many documents related to Joan, including her trial testimony, can be found here: <http://faculty.smu.edu/bwheeler/ijas/guide.html>
- Though fading as a custom in present day Albania, women still take on the roles of men: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/25/world/europe/25virgins.html?pagewanted=all>.
- Teresa's attackers accused her of plagiarism. How could a deaf woman write so intelligently? Another famous deaf woman, Helen Keller (1880-1968), likewise was accused of plagiarism—at the age of eleven. People couldn't believe that someone deaf could read and write. You can read Helen's defense in her book, *The Story of My Life* (1903): <http://www.afb.org/MyLife/book.asp?ch=P1Ch14>.
- The Paston Letters amid beautiful color illustrations: Roger Virgoe's *Private Life in the Fifteenth Century: Illustrated Letters of the Paston Family* (New York, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989).
- BBC History has more information and images: http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/middle_ages/pastonletters_01.shtml.

Science

- Explore the state of medieval medicine. Read charms and medical recipes. How do they differ from ours? What mythological elements appear in these charms? Do any have Christian elements as well?
- Read and analyze this article: Ebenesersdóttir, Sigríður Sunna, Ásgeir Sigurðsson, Federico Sánchez-Quinto, Carles Lalueza-Fox, Kári Stefánsson, and Agnar Helgason. "A New Subclade of mtDNA Haplogroup C1 Found in Icelanders: Evidence of Pre-Columbian Contact?" *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 144 (2011): 92-99.
- Find more articles about insights into the medieval period through DNA research.
- See here for a discussion of the humoral theory from Hildegard von Bingen's perspective: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/med/hildegarde.asp#melancholy>.
- Browse the Index of Medieval Medical Images at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA): <http://digital.library.ucla.edu/immi/>.
- Images at the Wellcome Library focus on medicine: <http://wellcomeimages.org/>.
- To find out more about Avicenna's medicine, look here: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1020Avicenna-Medicine.asp>.

Economics

- Discuss the slave trade. How does it manifest itself in terms of gender? How does that contribute to societal friction and/or success?
- Research *wergild* and how it works in this Germanic culture.
- How would pilgrims exchange money as they travelled through different lands?

Art

- To examine the Benedictional of St Æthelwold, look here. Be sure to "turn" the pages and see many lovely images. http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_49598_fs001r.
- You can digitally flip through an actual religious book owned by Christina of Markyate: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/index.shtml>. Be sure to check out page 285, under Psalm 105, where you can discover an image of Christina herself. <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/stalbanspsalter/english/commentary/page285.shtml>
- To see images of people of color in European art history, including in the Middle Ages, check out this website: <http://www.imageoftheblack.com/>. The second volume, parts 1 and 2, of this book series edited by David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., focuses on medieval arts.

- You can see some Christ dolls at the Bishopric Augsburg, Germany: http://www.bistum-augsburg.de/index.php/bistum/Nachrichten/Ein-Buendel-voller-Hoffnung_id_100366.
- Flemish Béguinages have been declared members of the UNESCO World Heritage Site: http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31&id_site=855
- Explore Christine's fabulous manuscript with sumptuous images created under her supervision, presented to Queen Isabeau of France in 1414. <http://www.pizan.lib.ed.ac.uk/>.
- Bayeux Tapestry: The history of this needlework is very mysterious. See some speculative theories at the website for the Bayeux Tapestry Museum. <http://www.tapestry-bayeux.com/index.php?id=395>.
- In her art piece dedicated to women of the past, Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art displays place settings dedicated to many of the women in this book, including Hildegard and Christine de Pizan. See the exhibit here: http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/home.php.
- Be sure to browse the place settings for medieval women: http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/browse.php
- Design your own place setting in honor of your favorite medieval woman.

Music

- Listen to a section of the Old English *Beowulf* where the hero fights the monster Grendel as performed by the world's leading *Beowulf* performer, accompanying himself on an Anglo-Saxon harp. <http://www.bagbybeowulf.com/video/index.html>.
- Write your own music for a Trobairitz song/poem and perform it. Write your own song inspired by this medieval material.
- You can hear many beautiful versions of Hildegard's music on YouTube.
- This discography lists many recordings of her music: <http://www.medieval.org/emfaq/composers/hildegard.html>.
- Discography and information about women composers and their music: <http://earlywomenmasters.net/cds/>.

Geography

- Look at historical maps to discover all the peoples mentioned in this book. What modern political entities exist there now?

Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics

- Research pagan mythologies. How does the tension between pagan and Christian come up in the women's lives in this book.
- The stipulations established by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 can be read here: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.asp>.

Civics

- How does court life function? Research the role of the lord, thegn (thane), and counsel (Anglo-Saxon society) or the King, baron, knight (feudal). Does such a system have flaws?
- You can contemplate the advice given to such women in the thirteenth-century *Rule for Anchoresses*, including prohibitions on keeping any beast but a cat. See [<http://www.bsswebsite.me.uk/History/AncreneRiwle/AncreneRiwle2.htm>] to imagine what would be expected of you.

Technology and Gaming

- Explore the technology of making swords. Take a blacksmithing class.

- Explore how a hall would have been built. Make your own blueprints for an Anglo-Saxon hall. Build it!
- Jewelry was crafted in ingenious ways. Look up images of medieval artifacts such as swords and jewelry and armor. Research the processes used to create jewelry and armor.
- Anna Komnene appears as the character Anna Comnenus, a Byzantine princess and diplomat, in the video game (rated T for Teen) *Medieval II: Total Warfare*. Play the game.

Film and Theatre

- Watch the various versions of *Beowulf* films. Which is the best? Why or why not? Are any of them good?
- Perform one of Hrotsvit's plays.
- The film *Anchoress* (1993), based on the life of Christina Carpenter, imagines in stunning black and white photography the visions and everyday realities of this holy woman.
- Excellent films help recreate the time period of Eleanor of Aquitaine. The Oscar-winning *The Lion in Winter* (1968) dramatically imagines the marriage of Eleanor and Henry II when they were older. *Becket* (1964) focuses on the fraught and ultimately tragic friendship between Henry II and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket [<http://youtu.be/XM6nWIcevOE>]. A classic novel about the young Eleanor is Kristiana Gregory's *Eleanor: Crown Jewel of Aquitaine, France, 1136* (2002), in the Royal Diaries series. Many novels about her life continue to be written, including *Captive Queen* by Alison Weir (Ballantine 2010) and *The Summer Queen* by Elizabeth Chadwick (Sourcebooks 2014).
- Write your own screenplay to one of these women's lives..
- A fabulous Egyptian film tells about the Crusades from the Islamic point of view: *El Naser Salah el Dine* (1963), in Arabic with English subtitles, about Saladin, Richard III, and Louise, a woman warrior.
- The luminous film *Vision* (2009) directed by Margarethe von Trotta stars Barbara Sukowa as the visionary leader.
- The 1988 film, *Stealing Heaven*, based on the novel by Marion Meade, interprets the passionate tragedy of these two lovers.
- Director Franco Zeffirelli's stunning film *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* (1972) recreates the friendship of St. Clare and St. Francis, infusing it with the "flower power" sensibilities of the 1960s and 1970s counter culture.
- Carl Dreyer's silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), riveting and spectacular, caused a furor at its release in the wake of Joan's successful canonization proceedings. The highly evocative music of composer Richard Einhorn accompanies certain releases.
- You can read the film script of *The Passion of Joan of Art* (1928):
<http://www.aellea.com/script/passionarc.txt>

Creative Writing

- Write your own response to one of the women's lives in this book. Decide what genre you will use: film, screenplay, play, novel, poem, etc. Whose point of view will your work take? How long will you make it? Start to craft it!

A Q & A with Susan Signe Morrison

How did *A Medieval Woman's Companion* come about?

I've been teaching the lives of medieval women since 1992. I came to write my first book about medieval women pilgrims out of my teaching experience. I regularly teach a fictional woman pilgrim--Chaucer's Wife of Bath from *The Canterbury Tales*--and a historical woman pilgrim--Margery Kempe who is featured in one of the chapters of *A Medieval Woman's Companion*. I went to the library to find a book on medieval women pilgrims to see how these two deviated or adapted to general ideas about such women. Lo and behold--there was no such book! The standard book at the time only had 3 pages on women. I thought there must have been more to medieval women than that. So I began my detective hunt into them. As for other women, I love medieval women writers--they are deeply profound and compassionate, bold and sassy, philosophical and joyful--just like women today.

I understand you've written a novel about a medieval woman?

Yes, my first published fiction. I'm very excited about. The title is *Grendel's Mother: The Saga of the Wyrd-Wife* (Winchester, UK: Top Hat Books, 2015). I've taught the famous Old English epic *Beowulf* for years. I've always been fascinated by the "monster," Grendel's Mother. In the early 1970s, John Gardner wrote a novel telling the story of *Beowulf* from the point of view of the monster, Grendel. So I decided it was time to write a feminist novel from the point of view of Grendel's Mother. In my novel, she is no monster, but a human. The novel has been shortlisted for the **2014-2015 Sarton Literary Award for Historical Fiction**.

What other books have you written?

Living in Austin, Texas, I write on topics lurking in the margins of history, ranging from recently uncovered diaries of a teenaged girl in World War II to medieval women pilgrims, excrement in the Middle Ages, and waste. Professor of English at Texas State University, I am committed to bringing the lives of women hidden in the shades of history to a wider audience. You can see all my books at these two sites:

- susansignemorrison.com
- http://www.amazon.com/Susan-Signe-Morrison/e/B001HPWK78/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_1?qid=1454192265&sr=8-1.

Where are you in terms of social media?

I can be found at homefrontgirl diary.com, grendelsmotherthenovel.com, and amedievalwomanscompanion.com. I tweet @medievalwomen.

What else do you like to do besides write?

Many things! I love to swim in the ocean. I like to practice yoga too and have begun to sail. I love to walk. Many year ago, my husband and I walked 137 miles in the south of England along the Pilgrims' Way from Winchester to Canterbury as part of my research for the medieval women pilgrims book. We had backpacks on and that was all we had for two weeks. I don't know if I could go so far, so fast today! I like to see old movies on television—especially black and white films. My favorites are from the 1930s and 1940s, though I like silent films a lot too. And I love to travel. I taught English in Japan for a year; I also studied German in college and graduate school and lived in Munich, Berlin, and the former East Germany where I taught in the 1980s. I even have my East German secret police file — but that's another story! My family and I have lived in England several times,. My kids even went to English schools for a couple of years. Most of all, I love to spend time with family and friends, just talking and laughing.