Teaching with Fashion Rules!

A closer look at clothing in the Middle Ages

by Gail Skroback Hennessey

BEFORE READING: Explain that the story, *Fashion Rules*, takes place in Medieval Times (also known as the Middle Ages).

Medieval times occurred between 500-1500 AD. There is an overlap (depending on the country) with the period of time called the Renaissance which began in Italy in the 13th century. Ask readers to share any prior knowledge they have about this time period known as the Middle Ages. (a time of castles, knights, feudalism). Review the cover of the book. Encourage readers to share

any thoughts they may have based on the illustrations. What are several things they see? Turn to page 11 (two men with shoe tips



attached to chains). Ask students how they would feel wearing such shoes? What type of shop were they near? Turn to page 17 (peasants with pig). How does the illustrator show the people here are poor? Turn to page 31 or 33 (jester by the fire). Give three descriptions of the jester's clothing. Why do you think jesters wore such clothing?

DURING READING: Stop from time to time to make text-to-self connections. Discuss problem solving. What was Bickford's problem when he came to the town? How did he go about solving his problem? What was the problem a young woman had? How did she solve her problem? What was the problem that the tailor had in the story? How do you know he was unable to solve his problem? Stop and have the students close the book. Ask readers the riddle of the jester and see if any of the readers can solve the riddle. What is a problem you may have? For example, you aren't very good at playing the guitar. How might you go about solving your problem?

AFTER READING: Have each reader explain their favorite part in the story. Would they have wanted to live in this time period, why or why not? What are 3 modern conveniences that readers would find difficult to live without if they lived during the Middle Ages?

Discussion Questions (key at end):

- 1. Why do you think people didn't travel much during the Middle Ages? What did a traveling jester, such as Bickford, bring to people in addition to "entertainment"?
- 2. How could you tell someone's position in life? Give 3 ways.
- 3. How did Bickford hope that one day people would be judged?
- 4. In the story, what rule was a woman accused of breaking? How did she get out of trouble?
- 5. How was a tailor punished for wearing clothing above his class?
- 6. What was the clothing associated with a jester?
- 7. Do you think Trowbridge was proud of his town? Why or why not?



Vocabulary: Students may need to review the following words/terms:

jester: person who made a living as a fool and juggler to entertain others.

henin: tall pointed hat worn by wealthy women

poulaines (crakows): shoes with very long pointed toe tips

chopines: very tall wooden platform shoes

peasants: poor class in medieval times

medieval: Another name for the Middle Ages, a time period in history

Renaissance: time of "rebirth and renewed interest" in learning

Place the words into creative sentences. Discuss syllables and have the students determine how many syllables are in the different vocabulary words. A tip is to have students place their hand under their chin. Each time their chin drops, is one syllable. For example: **ILLUSTRATED** (chin drops 4 times, so the word has 4 syllables)

Activities

- 1. Draw /color a picture of a person in the town showing their rank in the society. Write three facts learned about the period of time on your drawing.
- 2. Write a diary entry pretending to be one of the people in the story such as Trowbridge, Bickford, the tailor, woman with the buttons, a wealthy woman wearing a tall henin or walking with chopines. Tell a day in your life and include 3 facts learned from the story.
- 3. Sequencing: Write 5 events from the story on five different pieces of paper. Exchange with someone else and place in proper sequence for the story.
- 4. Have students write 3 problems of people in the story and 3 examples of how their problems were solved. For example: Most people could not read during Medieval Times. How did shopkeepers let people know what business was offered in their shop?

Problem: How Problem was Addressed:

1.

2.

3.

Possible examples:

- long shoes flopped around making it difficult to walk/ attached chains from tips to fingers
- Women wearing tall platform heels/had to have help walking
- Peasants weren't allowed to wear belts/used cords of rope
- Wealthy women wanted to show they were important/wore high pointed hats called henins.

FUN FACTS about the Middle Ages:

- 1. The expression "It's raining cats and dogs" dates back to the Middle Ages. Small animals such as cats, dogs, piglets, baby goats were placed on thatched roofs to stay warm. When it rained heavily, animals often would slip off the roof.
- 2. The expression "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water" dates back to this time period. The man of the house took a bath first, then other sons, then women and lastly babies (all with the same tub of water). Water was very dirty by this time!
- 3. The expression "Upper crust" refers to very important and wealthy people and dates back to this time. The poor had the burned bottom part of a loaf of bread, the family the middle part and the top crust went to guests.
- 4. In the early Middle Ages, punctuation and spaces disappeared in writing. (Ittooktoomuchspaceonvaluableparchment).

KEY

- 1. Many people didn't have the means to travel. Explain that people didn't feel safe during this period of time and stayed put often under the protection of a wealthy landlord. In exchange for protection, the people had to work. This system was called "feudalism". Bickford, willing to travel brought information of the outside areas to the people he visited.
- 2. Size of your hat, the number of buttons, the length of your shoe tips, color of clothing, etc.
- 3. To be judged not by "who" someone was but by what value that person had to offer.
- 4. Wearing enamel buttons which weren't allowed for her class. Since she didn't have any buttonholes, she wasn't actually wearing "buttons".
- 5. His clothing was torn and he was forced to walk around the street to embarrass himself in front of others as an example.
- 6. Two different color pant legs (red and green), a fool's hat of three points with bells attached; a red top with diamond patterns and a black cape.

Educators: find more resources at the author's website: http://www.gailhennessey.com

