

Interactive Game Set in Medieval London

HIST 3930: *Parchment to Pixel: Digital History of Medieval London*

St Louis University, 2018

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Digital Project Overview

In *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1343 -1400) offers us a gently satirical portrait of late medieval society. Inspired by this work of fiction, students in HIST 3930 will work on a digital project that will take the form of an educational text-based interactive game, set in London during Chaucer's lifetime. The central character of each student's game will be a fictional character (a person who never lived), who will face a series of historically plausible life-defining choices. These choices might include whether to pursue higher education or an apprenticeship, whether to adopt a mercantile or religious vocation, and whether to remain or flee from the city in times of plague and urban unrest. The 'reader' or 'player' of the game should emerge from the experience of the game with a better sense not only of what the city itself was like, but also of the values, ideas and beliefs of the people who lived there. To design and build their games, students will employ user-friendly software (www.twinery.org). The game development process will have several stages. Students will first develop a proposal for a game (10% of the final grade), prepare a formal research essay that will articulate the empirical and intellectual foundation for their game (30%), build a prototype to present to their peers (25%), and finally prepare a reflective and evaluative statement that sets out the principles underlying its design and considers its audience impact (15%).

Grading Scheme

The digital project counts for 55 out of the 100 points to be earned in this class.

Project 40 points

1. Proposal Presentation (5), Oct 17th
2. Proposal Draft (10), Oct. 19th
3. Project Presentation (5), Dec 5, 7th
4. Project (20), Dec. 7th

Reflective essay, Dec. 10th 15 points

Wk1 -- Aug 27 **Introduction**

Monday: Play one of the following:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/ng-interactive/2014/jan/refugee-choices-interactive>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32057601>

Further reading: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/apr/06/syrian-journey-bbc-game-refugee-crisis>

Wednesday: Read: Uricchio, William. "Simulation, history, and computer games", *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*, ed. J. Raessens and J. Goldstein (Cambridge, 2005), 327-338.

Play one of the following and come prepared to discuss your experience:

www.mesopotamia.co.uk/trade/story/sto_set.html

www.philome.la/gamingthepast/path-of-honors-1-12-18

<https://www.choiceofgames.com/road-to-canterbury> www.theappendix.net/special/the-fever/

<https://ehistory.osu.edu/exhibitions/americanream/index>

www.tulane.edu/~sumter/

Friday: TWINE I: Introduction

Read: <http://www.playthepast.org/?p=5739>

Wk2 – Friday

TWINE Exercise I

Read: Tout, T.F. *A Mediaeval Burglary [of the treasury of the King's Wardrobe in Westminster Abbey, in 1303]* (Manchester, 1915).

Pretend you are a medieval detective and come prepared with a sketch of events.

Wk3-- Friday

TWINE Exercise II

Read: Geoffrey Chaucer, *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*.

Prepare a TWINE based on a biography of a Londoner based on the Oxford English Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB). How do the people mentioned in the prologue compare with those in the ODNB?

Wk4 – Friday

TWINE Exercise III

David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras, eds., 'The questioning of John Rykener, a male cross-dressing prostitute, 1395', at:

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/1395rykener.asp>

Wk5 – Friday

TWINE Exercise IV

Research someone who died or was affected by the plague and sketch out a TWINE.

Wk6 -- Friday

TWINE Exercise V

Prepare a twine with two branches: one which suggests that women were treated favourably in London and one which suggests that they faced challenges.

Wk7 –Friday

TWINE Exercise VI: Create a sample twine for an episode in the Peasant's Revolt that exposes two competing versions of events.

Wk8 – Monday -- Work on project proposals

Wednesday -- Present proposals

Friday -- Revise proposals and submit by noon

Wk9 -- *Friday*

TWINE II: Images and variables

Wk10 -- *Friday*

TWINE III: Random Numbers

Wk11 – TWINE IV: Logic

Wk12 – Thanksgiving

Wk13 –**Work on Project**

Wk14 – December 3 Presentations

Monday Testing

Wednesday Presentation

Friday Presentation, Submit project

Presentation/ Proposal (Due Oct 17th/ Oct 19th)

What group of Medieval Londoners or what section of the population do you propose to make the focus of your game? Make your case on Wednesday, October 17th in a short presentation (8-10 minutes). In the presentation, you have a chance to sketch out your provisional plan and ask for feedback and assistance from your peers. You will then submit a formal written proposal (1000-1200 words), where you will set out your arguments in detail, by noon, on Friday, October 19th. The written proposal will have the following sections:

- 1) **Introduction.** Identify the group of people you propose to make the focus of your game. Are they men or women? London born, immigrants or aliens? How did these people make their living? Were they merchants (eg. victuallers, peppers, mercers), artisans (eg. goldsmiths, butchers, brewers), regraters, labourers, the church (monks, chaplains)? In the final sentence of your introduction, offer a thesis statement that makes clear why you think these people should be represented in the game.
- 2) **Evidence.** Show that there is enough evidence for the lives of these people to create a wellfounded historical game. Identify one or more primary sources (Letterbooks, Coroners Rolls, Husting Wills, etc...) and explain what aspects of the lives of your chosen people they reveal. Next, identify two or more historical individuals who were members of the group and whose lives could serve as plausible models for your game. You may cite people from the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, secondary sources or from primary sources.
- 3) **Game structure.** What do you anticipate will be the major decisions that your game character, who will stand in for and represents the group who are the subject of your game, will face? Identify **two** opportunities and **two** challenges that stem from life in London that your character will confront.

4) **Secondary sources.** Demonstrate that you are aware of the existing scholarship of historians on your proposed group of people. Supply a bibliography, properly formatted in Chicago style, listing 10 secondary sources. Four of these sources may be works from the course reading list, but the remainder should be works you have discovered. For each work in your bibliography, provide two or three sentences commenting on how the work will be useful in shaping your thinking about your chosen group of Londoners.

5) **Conclusion.** Summarize your major points from sections 2,3 and 4 and give your final word on why you think including this group help the players of the game better understand life in fourteenth century London.