Zoe Keller English 11:8
6 Feb. 2006 Guerrilla Teaching

The Ellesmere Manuscript – Teaching Experience

I decided to teach my entire family – my mother, father and 13 year-old sister – about the Ellesmere manuscript because I wanted to gain as much feedback as possible. My father has read several of *The Canterbury Tales*, my mother had some knowledge of Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales* and my sister had no knowledge of either subject (and was perfectly happy keeping it that way). I found their input extremely valuable.

Originally, I planned on handing out worksheets before I began my presentation. The worksheet contained the text of the presentation except for the narrations of the seven, short power-point presentations. Instead of the narrations, I had placed a small computer icon and the words "Media Connection" which were meant to signify that the reader should stop following along with me on the worksheet and watch the power-point presentation. My parents found this format extremely confusing and explained that they gave up following along on the worksheets shortly after the first power-point. They suggested that I hand the worksheets out after I had completed the entire report and I decided to follow their advice.

Although they had some complaints about the way in which the information was delivered, they had no problems with the information itself. They thought it was clear and my mother and father found the content interesting. My sister entertained herself by drawing pictures of Spongebob on her worksheet – I believe she was a little too young to appreciate the presentation. I hope that the class enjoys learning about the Ellesmere manuscript as much as my parents did.

The Ellesmere Manuscript

During the Middle Ages books were not printed, but instead were handwritten in often elaborately decorated documents called manuscripts. In the early Middle Ages manuscripts were produced in monasteries and were limited to copies of religious texts. Because they were expensive to create manuscripts were commissioned almost exclusively by religious institutions and by emperors. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, social changes transformed the manuscript market. (Weinstein 12)

Members of the nobility and the new middle class of wealthy merchants became avid supporters of manuscript production, commissioning manuscripts which they could display as signs of their good taste and wealth. (Weinstein 52) Scribes were no longer confined to monasteries, instead producing manuscripts in independent workshops and in the homes of their wealthy patrons. (Weinstein 33) The subjects of manuscripts expanded to include secular topics. (Weinstein 12) Many of the manuscripts produced during this period were romances and literature like that of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. (Weinstein 22)

The earliest manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales* are the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts. Both were written by the scribe Adam Pinkhurst, who worked for Chaucer during the 1380s and 1390s when Chaucer was writing the *Canterbury Tales*.

("University of Cambridge Scholar Identifies Mystery Scribe of The Canterbury Tales")

The manuscripts differ in language and in the order in which the tales are placed. It is impossible to know for sure which comes closer to Chaucer's original work because all copies of *The Canterbury Tales* written in Chaucer's hand have disappeared. Scholars

have spent centuries debating over which is more authoritative. (Woodward 2) Today, many regard the Hengwrt manuscript, which was written up to ten years prior to the Ellesmere manuscript and is neither as complete nor as lavishly decorated, as a hastily produced first draft. (Smith 79) The Ellesmere manuscript is accepted as the more reliable of the two works and has become the basis for almost all of the modern editions of *The Canterbury Tales*. (Woodward 2)

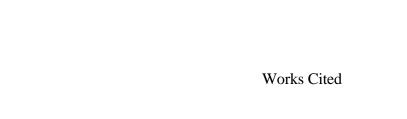
The Ellesmere manuscript was made in London shortly after Chaucer's death in 1400. It measures sixteen by eleven inches and contains two hundred forty parchment leaves, or four hundred eighty pages. Two hundred thirty-two of these leaves contain text, seventy-one include elaborate borders and twenty-three pages include portraits of the storytellers, including Chaucer himself. The final eight pages of the manuscript were left blank, possibly for a continuation of the cook's tale. (Woodward 3) The many owners of the manuscripts have written in these final eight pages, composing original poems, praising Chaucer and even practicing their calligraphy. (David 315)

Like many of its contemporaries, the Ellesmere manuscript is not written in Latin or French, but in one of the new forms of standardized English. (Smith 75) Long regarded as an inferior and informal language English was not used in manuscripts until several standardized forms of the language emerged in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries along with the new English-speaking middle class. (Smith 72) The Ellesmere manuscript is written in what is known as Type III English. This variety was used between 1380 and 1425 in London, and was greatly influenced by the increase in immigration from the Midlands that occurred during that period. (Smith 75)

The identity of the patron of the Ellesmere manuscript has been lost, but because the manuscript was so lavishly produced, it can be assumed that it was commissioned by, or intended as a gift for, a noble. (David 310) During the first two centuries of its existence, the Ellesmere manuscript passed through the hands of numerous owners and at least three noble families. Its earliest owners probably included John de Vere, the twelfth earl of Oxford, who was executed in 1462 for allegedly conspiring to overthrow King Edward IV. (David 311)

Early in the 17th century, the manuscript was placed in the private library of John Edgerton, the earl of Bridgewater. It remained there for two hundred years, during which time it was read only by the Bridgewater librarians and was almost forgotten. (David 320) In the late 1800s, the library was inherited by Francis Egerton, who immediately brought the Ellesmere manuscript into the public spotlight. There it gained fame as scholars around the world praised it as "...the finest and best of all manuscripts [of *The Canterbury Tales*] now extant..." (qtd. in David 321) In 1917 the entire Bridgewater library was purchased by H. E. Huntington for \$1,000,000. (David 321) Today, the Ellesmere manuscript resides in the Huntington Library in San Mario, California, where it is considered the jewel of the library's manuscript collection. (Moffett, Robertson)

The importance of the Ellesmere manuscript is unquestionable. Its careful construction and the language in which it is written make it an enduring example of the beauty of medieval manuscripts and of the sudden changes they underwent at the turn of the fourteenth century. More than anything, this manuscript proves the triumph of Chaucer's work over time.



- David, Alfred. "Ownership and Use of the Ellesmere Manuscript." <u>The Ellesmere</u>

 <u>Chaucer Essay in Interpretation</u>. Ed. Martin Stevens and Daniel Woodward. San

 Marino: Huntington Library, 1997. 307-326.
- Moffett, William A. and Mary L. Robertson. "Chaucer's 600th Anniversary Celebrated."

 <u>The Huntington Library.</u> 1 Sep. 2000. http://www.huntington.org
- Smith, Jeremy. "The Language of the Ellesmere Manuscript." <u>The Ellesmere Chaucer</u>

 <u>Essay in Interpretation</u>. Ed. Martin Stevens and Daniel Woodward. San Marino:

 Huntington Library, 1997. 69-86.
- "University of Cambridge Scholar Identifies Mystery Scribe of The Canterbury Tales."

 <u>University of Cambridge</u>. 19 July 2004. http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/
- Weinstein, Krystyna. <u>The Art of Medieval Manuscripts</u>. San Diego: Laurel Glen Publishing, 1997.
- Woodward, Daniel. "The New Ellesmere Chaucer Facsimile." <u>The Ellesmere Chaucer</u>

 <u>Essay in Interpretation</u>. Ed. Martin Stevens and Daniel Woodward. San Marino:

 Huntington Library, 1997. 1-14.



The Ellesmere Manuscript



Manuscripts

- o During the Middle Ages books were not printed. Instead, they were handwritten in documents called manuscripts.
 - Media Connection: How Manuscripts Were Made
- In the early Middle Ages manuscripts were produced in monasteries and were limited to copies of religious texts like the Bible. Because they were expensive to create most manuscripts were owned by religious institutions or emperors.
- o In the 14th and 15th centuries members of the nobility and the new middle class of wealthy merchants became avid supporters of manuscript production. They commissioned manuscripts which they could display as signs of their good taste and wealth.
- O During this period many scribes produced manuscripts in independent workshops and in the homes of their wealthy patrons.
- Around this time the subjects of manuscripts expanded beyond religion. Many
 of the manuscripts produced during this period were romances and literature
 like that of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.
 - Media Connection: Secular Manuscripts

The Ellesmere Manuscript vs. The Hengwrt Manuscript

- o The earliest manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales* are the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts.
- o Both were written by the scribe Adam Pinkhurst, who worked for Chaucer during the 1380s and 1390s when Chaucer was writing the *Canterbury Tales*.
 - *Media Connection*: The Mystery Scribe
- o The Hengwrt and Ellesmere differ slightly in language and the tales are placed in different orders.
- O Scholars have spent centuries debating over which is more authoritative. Today the Hengwrt manuscript is thought of as a first draft and the Ellesmere manuscript, which is more complete and more lavishly decorated, is accepted as the more reliable manuscript. It has become the basis for almost all of the modern-day editions of *The Canterbury Tales*.
 - Media Connection: Hengwrt Manuscript vs. Ellesmere Manuscript
- o However because all of the original copies of *The Canterbury Tales* have been lost it's impossible to know for sure which is closer to what Chaucer intended.

The Ellesmere Manuscript – What? Where? When?

- o The Ellesmere manuscript was made in London shortly after Chaucer's death in 1400.
- o It is sixteen by eleven inches and has 480 pages. 472 of these pages contain text, 72 include elaborate borders and 23 have portraits of the storytellers, including Chaucer himself.
 - *Media Connection*: Portraits in the Ellesmere Manuscript

O The final 8 pages of the manuscript were left blank, possibly for a continuation of the cook's tale. The many owners of the manuscripts have written on the blank pages, composing original poems, praising Chaucer and even practicing their calligraphy.

The Language of the Ellesmere Manuscript

- Like many other manuscripts produced near 1400, the Ellesmere manuscript is not written in Latin or French, but in one of the new forms of standardized English.
- O During the early Middle Ages English was thought of as an inferior and informal language. It wasn't used in manuscripts until several standardized forms of English emerged in the late 14th and early 15th centuries along with the new English-speaking middle class.
- O The Ellesmere manuscript is written in what is known as Type III English. This variety was used between 1380 and 1425 in London, and is greatly influenced by the increase in immigration from the Midlands that occurred during that period.
 - Media Connection: Common Words in Type III English

Owners of the Ellesmere Manuscript

- The identity of the patron of the Ellesmere manuscript has been lost, but because the manuscript was so lavishly produced, it can be assumed that it was commissioned by a noble.
- O During the first two centuries of its existence the Ellesmere manuscript passed through the hands of numerous owners and at least three noble families. One of its earliest owners was John de Vere an earl who was executed in 1462 for allegedly conspiring to overthrow King Edward IV.
- During the 1600 and 1700s the manuscript sat on the shelf of a private library in Bridgewater. There it was read only by the Bridgewater librarians and was almost forgotten.
- o In the late 1800s the library was inherited by Francis Egerton, who brought the Ellesmere manuscript into the public spotlight where it gained international fame.
- o In 1917 the entire Bridgewater library was purchased by H. E. Huntington for \$1,000,000. (David 321) Today, the Ellesmere manuscript resides in the Huntington Library in San Mario, California where it is considered the jewel of the library's manuscript collection.
 - *Media Connection*: Restoring the Ellesmere Manuscript



The Ellesmere Manuscript MY COPY



Manuscripts

- O During the Middle Ages books were not printed. Instead, they were handwritten in documents called manuscripts.
 - Media Connection: How Manuscripts Were Made

- Most medieval manuscripts were written on animal skin, or parchment, which was stretched, scraped clean and dried.
- The animal skin was then cut into sheets which were folded in half to create two leaves or "folios."
 - o Scribes then took the sheets and lined them to keep the writing straight.
- The scribe wrote out the text with a quill and ink. A penknife was used to scrape off any mistakes.
- The folios then went to an artist called an illuminator. The illuminator first sketched out their design using charcoal and ink.
- Gesso, a plaster compound, was applied to pages to provide support where gold leaf was to be added. Gold leaf was added using a burnishing tool, often to initial letters like this "T."
- Paint was applied next.
- Then folios were folded and stacked on top of each other to form sections called quires. The quires were placed in order and then...
- They were sewn together between wooden boards which were often covered with leather, velvet, gold and precious stones.
- And the manuscript was complete.
- In the early Middle Ages manuscripts were produced in monasteries and were limited to copies of religious texts like the Bible. Because they were expensive to create most manuscripts were owned by religious institutions or emperors.
- o In the 14th and 15th centuries members of the nobility and the new middle class of wealthy merchants became avid supporters of manuscript production. They commissioned manuscripts which they could display as signs of their good taste and wealth.
- O During this period many scribes produced manuscripts in independent workshops and in the homes of their wealthy patrons.
- Around this time the subjects of manuscripts expanded beyond religion. Many
 of the manuscripts produced during this period were romances and literature
 like that of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.
 - Media Connection: Secular Manuscripts
 - Secular manuscripts included...
 - Musical manuscripts
 - Bestiaries, or stories about animals
 - Manuscripts about herbs called "herbals"
 - Medieval textbooks
 - And romances and other forms of literature

The Ellesmere Manuscript vs. The Hengwrt Manuscript

o The earliest manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales* are the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts.

- o Both were written by the scribe Adam Pinkhurst, who worked for Chaucer during the 1380s and 1390s when Chaucer was writing the *Canterbury Tales*.
 - *Media Connection*: The Mystery Scribe
 - Although the identity of the scribe must have been known to the man who commissioned the manuscript, it was lost as the Ellesmere changed owners.
 - During the 1800 and 1900s most scholars agreed that the scribe who wrote the Ellesmere manuscript also wrote the Hengwrt manuscript, but they puzzled over who this scribe was, referring to him as "Scribe B."
 - In July of 2004, Professor Linne Mooney, who was working at Corpus Christi College at the time, matched the handwriting in these two manuscripts to the signature of Adam Pinkhurst in a book of regulations that belonged to the Scriveners' Company of London. Mooney then connected this name to a poem written by Chaucer to a scribe named "Adam," which jokingly chides the scribe for making many mistakes when copying Chaucer's work.
 - The identity of the scribe was thus revealed as Adam
 Pinkhurst, the son of a poor landowner who came to London to
 become a scribe. This is the Scriverners' Company of
 London's coat of arms.
- o The Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts differ slightly in language and the tales are placed in different orders.
- o Al of the original copies of *The Canterbury Tales* have been lost, so it's impossible to know for sure which is closer to what Chaucer intended.
- O Scholars have spent centuries debating over which is more authoritative. Today the Hengwrt manuscript is thought of as a first draft and the Ellesmere manuscript, which is more complete and more lavishly decorated, is accepted as the more reliable manuscript. It has become the basis for almost all of the modern-day editions of *The Canterbury Tales*.
 - Media Connection: Hengwrt Manuscript vs. Ellesmere Manuscript
 - These are the opening pages of the Ellesmere and Hengwrt manuscripts
 - The Ellesmere manuscript is in much better condition and contains more text on the first page and more embellished letters

The Ellesmere Manuscript – Who? Where? When?

- o The Ellesmere manuscript was made in London shortly after Chaucer's death in 1400.
- o It is sixteen by eleven inches and has 480 pages. 472 of these pages contain text, 72 include elaborate borders and 23 have portraits of the storytellers, including Chaucer himself.
 - *Media Connection*: Portraits in the Ellesmere Manuscript

- The portrait of each of the storytellers was placed on the first page of their tale, usually in the corner of the page.
- This is Chaucer.
- The physician
- The clerk of Oxford
- The reeve
- The friar
- The man of law
- The parson
- The yeoman
- The shipman
- The manciple
- The Franklin
- The summoner
- The cook
- The pardoner
- The knight
- The nuns priest
- The second nun
- The monk
- The squire
- The wife of bath
- The miller
- The merchant
- And the prioress
- O The final 8 pages of the manuscript were left blank, possibly for a continuation of the cook's tale. The many owners of the manuscripts have written on the blank pages, composing original poems, praising Chaucer and even practicing their calligraphy.

The Language of the Ellesmere Manuscript

- O Like many other manuscripts produced near 1400, the Ellesmere manuscript is not written in Latin or French, but in one of the new forms of standardized English.
- O During the early Middle Ages English was thought of as an inferior and informal language. It wasn't used in manuscripts until several standardized forms of English emerged in the late 14th and early 15th centuries along with the new English-speaking middle class.
- o The Ellesmere manuscript is written in what is known as Type III English. This variety was used between 1380 and 1425 in London, and is greatly influenced by the increase in immigration from the Midlands that occurred during that period.
 - Media Connection: Common Words in Type III English

• When they are examining manuscripts scholars look for these words to determine what form of English was used.

Owners of the Ellesmere Manuscript

- O The identity of the patron of the Ellesmere manuscript has been lost, but because the manuscript was so lavishly produced, it can be assumed that it was commissioned by a noble.
- O During the first two centuries of its existence the Ellesmere manuscript passed through the hands of numerous owners and at least three noble families. One of its earliest owners was John de Vere an earl who was executed in 1462 for allegedly conspiring to overthrow King Edward IV.
- During the 1600 and 1700s the manuscript sat on the shelf of a private library in Bridgewater. There it was read only by the Bridgewater librarians and was almost forgotten.
- o In the late 1800s the library was inherited by Francis Egerton, who brought the Ellesmere manuscript into the public spotlight where it gained international fame.
- o In 1917 the entire Bridgewater library was purchased by H. E. Huntington for \$1,000,000. (David 321) Today, the Ellesmere manuscript resides in the Huntington Library in San Mario, California where it is considered the jewel of the library's manuscript collection.
 - Media Connection: Restoring and Reproducing the Ellesmere Manuscript
 - In 1994 a team of experts restored the Ellesmere manuscript at the Huntington library
 - First the binding of the Ellesmere manuscript was removed.
 - Photographs were taken of each of the pages so they could be reproduced in the Ellesmere facsimiles, which are life-size color copies of the Ellesmere manuscript that can be purchased for \$16,000 a piece.
 - Individual folios were repaired by hand and then the quires were sewn back together.
 - The Ellesmere was rebound between oak panels. Later it was covered in calf-skin.