100 most frequent Middle English words

al, al be that: although
als, also: as, also
anon: at once
artow: art thou, thou art
as: as, as if, like
atte: at, at the
aventure: chance
axe: ask
ay: always
been: are
bet: better
beth: are; (imperative) be
brenne: burn
but, but if: unless
can, kan: know, be able
canstow: can you, you can
cas: happening, chance
certes: surely, certainly
clepe (n): call
clerk: scholar
coy: quiet
ech: each
echo (o) n: each one
eek, eke: also
er, or: before; formerly
everich: every; every one
fay, fey: faith
forthy: therefore
fro: from
gan, gonne: began
han: have
hastow: have you, you have
hem: them
here: her
hight: named, called
him lest (list): he wants
hir (e): her, their
ich: I
ilke: same
kan: know, know how to; can
konne: learn; know how to; can
koude: knew; knew how to; could
kynde: nature
lasse: less
le (e) ve: dear
lite: little
maistow, maystow: may you, you may
make: mate, husband, make
mo: more
moot (e) (n): may, must, ought to; so (also, ever) moot I: as I hope to
morewe: morrow, morning
mowe: may
muche (1): much, many (a)
nam: am not
namo, namoore, no more
nas: was not
nat: not
natheles: nevertheless
ne: not, nor
nere: were not
nolde: would not
nones, nonys: occasion
noon: none, no
noot: know not
nyce: foolish
nys: is not
o, oo, on, oon, that oon: one
of: of; off
pardee: (lit. “by God”), a common oath; certainly
prime, pryme: 9 A.M.
quod: said
rathe: early, soon
rede: advise; interpret; read
seistow: you say
sely: innocent, simple
seyde: said
seye: say
shaltow: you shall
sikerly: certainly, surely, truly
sith: since; then
somdel: somewhat
sooth, soothfastnesse, sothe: truth
swich: such
syn: since
than (ne): then, than
thilke: this, that, at that
tho: those; then
tweye: two
unnethe (s): scarcely
verray: true, veritable
wene, -eth: think, thinks
whylom: once, once upon a time, formerly
wight: person, thing
yaf: gave
ycleped: named
ye (n): eye (s)
yeve, -en, -est, -eth: give, given
ynogh: enough
ywis: surely, certainly
Knight’s Tale, I and II

asterte: escape
brydel, bridil: bridle, reins
chere, cheer(e), chiere: face, facial expression
despit(e), dispit: disdain, scorn
gentil(e): noble, well-born
hente(n): seize, grasp
lystes: jousting or tilting fields; enclosed grounds for formal combat
maugre(e), malgre: despite, in spite of
mottelee: multi-colored; patchwork
parfit: perfect; complete
pyne: pain, harm, misery, suffering
socour(e), sokour: succor, help
sote, soot(e): sweet-smelling
sterve(n): die
steven(e): voice, sound
trew(e): true, faithful
weylaway, wailaway, etc.: alas!
waymentyng(e): lamentation
wepne, wepen(e): weapon(s)
wood(e), wod(e): mad, crazy

The Miller’s Tale

Know the c and e words, above, in addition to the vocabulary below

cherl: common man, peasant, ruffian
cokewold: cuckold
daungerous: standoffish, aloof, fastidious
deerne: secret
joly, jolyf: merry, cheerful, lusty, amourous
kultour: plough blade
leman, lemmen: loved one, paramour, slut
lever(e): preferable, dearer (from “leef” or “life,” dear, beloved)
pryvete(e): privacy, secrecy; secret; private affairs; private (sexual) parts
quite(n): repay; pay back (with a vengeance)
rewen(n): have mercy on; feel pity for
sely: happy, innocent, wretched, insignificant, ignorant
sola(a)s: comfort, pleasure, solace
swynke(n): work
unnethe, unneth, unethe: hardly, scarcely, with difficulty
whether, wether: A male sheep, a ram, a castrated ram

The Reeve’s Tale

Know the f and g words, above, in addition to the vocabulary below

grucche: complain (cf. “grouch”)
smoterlich: besmirched, sullied (in reputation)
camus nose, kamus nose: pug nose
capul: horse
cake: loaf of bread
ilhayl: bad luck
warderere: look out behind!
herberwe: lodging
ese: refreshment, food
yexeth: belches
fnorteth: snorts
rowtyng: snoring
pyled: bald
poke: bag
throte-bolle: Adam’s apple

The Wife of Bath’s Prologue

In addition to the vocabulary words below, know the high frequency h and i words

abroche: open
the Apostle: St. Paul
auctoritee, autorite: written authority; an authoritative passage
bishrew: curse
chaffre, chaffare: merchandise, wares, trade
chepe: buy
costage: expense
engendrure: the act of procreation
geste, geeste: story, history
glose(n): interpret, explain (a text); flatter, deceive
gossib, gossyb, godsib: close friend
hende: courteous, handy, close at hand
kyndely: naturally
maydenhede: virginity
mete(n): dream (mette=a dream)
pleyne, playne: lament, complain
purveyance, purveaunce, purveiaunce: foresight
shende: destroy
soveraynetee, sovereignte: mastery, sovereignty
wexe(n), waxe(n): grow, increase

The Nun’s Priest’s Prologue and Tale

In addition to the vocabulary words below, know the high frequency p, q, and r words

avantour: boaster
biknew(e): makes, knows, confesses
catel: property, possessions
chuk: cluck
gargat: throat
keen, kyne: cows
losengeour: flatterer
pyned: tortured
recche: interpret, care, be concerned for ("reckon")
steven(e): voice
sweven(e): dream
woned: dwelled

**The Second Nun’s Prologue and Tale**

*Please also know the high frequency words up to and including the t’s*

passioun: suffering
herye(n): praise
honestee: chastity
thewes: morals
unwemmed: undefiled
clennesse: purity (clene = pure)
corones: crowns
reneye: renounce
quyken: give life to
lotynge: in hiding

**The Canon Yeoman’s Prologue and Tale**

slit: “slideth”; slides, slips away
quelle: kill
sublymed: purified
elvysshe: mysterious
multiplicaccioun: transmutation
mollificacioun: softening
induracioun: hardening
Elixer: substance believed to transmute base metals to gold; the “Philosopher’s Stone”
bitymes: soon, quickly
hals: neck
mortifye: harden, make nonvolatile
byjaped: tricked

**The Manciple’s Prologue and Tale**

*At this point in the semester, you should know and have internalized the 100 most common words in Middle English. Know the following, as well.*

fleen: fleas
queen: whore
hevynesse: drowsiness
ganeth: yawns
fneseth: sneezes
pose: head cold
volage: flighty, foolish
Cokkow: cuckoo (a reference to the cuckold)
montance: value
rakel: rash
unavysed: recklessly
wantrust: distrust