

## 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  
nathelees: 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, amorous  
kultour: plough blade  
leman, lemman: 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)  
rewe(n): have mercy on; feel pity for  
sely: happy, innocent, wretched, insignificant, ignorant  
sola(a)s: comfort, pleasure, solace  
swynke(n): work  
unnethe, unneþ, 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  
throthe-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  
bishrewe: 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  
elvysse: 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