

Lesson Plan: Diagramming the Stars and Stories: A Medieval Grammar Quest

Materials Needed:

- Digital or physical copies of:
 - A selection from the *Mabinogion* (e.g., the First or Fourth Branch)
 - A selection of the *Lais* of Marie de France (e.g., "Lanval" or "Bisclavret")
 - Geoffrey Chaucer's *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* (specifically the Prologue and Part 1)
 - Large paper (or a whiteboard) for diagramming
 - Pens/markers in different colors
 - A grammar handbook or website for referencing sentence diagramming rules (e.g., websites like Grammar Revolution or a standard grammar textbook)
 - Notebook or word processor for writing exercises
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Subject(s): English Language Arts, Medieval Literature, Advanced Grammar

Grade Level: 11th-12th Grade (Age 17)

Time Allotment: Approximately 3-4 sessions of 60-90 minutes each, designed as a week-long unit.

1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- **Analyze** the grammatical structure of complex sentences from three distinct medieval texts.
- **Apply** advanced sentence diagramming techniques to identify main clauses, subordinate clauses, verbal phrases (gerunds, participles, infinitives), and other complex grammatical elements.
- **Compare and contrast** how sentence structure contributes to authorial style and purpose, distinguishing between narrative prose (*Mabinogion*, Marie de France) and instructional prose (Chaucer).
- **Create** an original short piece of writing that imitates a medieval style, intentionally using and correctly diagramming specific complex grammatical constructions.

2. Alignment with Standards and Curriculum

This lesson aligns with high school ELA standards focusing on grammar, reading complex texts, and writing.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.1:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. (This lesson focuses on analyzing and applying these conventions.)
 - **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5:** Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
 - **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.D:** Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters. (The final creative project encourages this.)
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3. Instructional Strategies and Activities

Session 1: The Magic of Narrative Structure (60 minutes)

Introduction (10 mins): "The Grammar Puzzle"

1. Begin by diagramming a simple, modern sentence together, such as: "The hero rode his horse across the field."
2. Now, present a much more complex sentence from the Mabinogion, such as this one from *Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed*: "And as he was listening to the barking of the pack, he could hear another pack, a different one, coming to meet his own."
3. Frame the task as a puzzle: Medieval authors built magnificent "cathedrals" of thought with their sentences. Sentence diagramming is like looking at the blueprints to see how they did it.

Activity (40 mins): "Diagramming the Lais"

1. Read a short section from a lai by Marie de France (e.g., the opening of "Lanval").
2. Together, select two or three sentences that are particularly descriptive or complex. Look for sentences with multiple clauses or interesting phrases.
3. On the large paper or whiteboard, work together to diagram the first sentence. Use different colored markers to identify different parts of speech or types of clauses. Talk through the logic of each connection. For example, "Where does this prepositional phrase connect? What is it modifying?"
4. The student will then diagram the second sentence independently, explaining their choices as they go.

Discussion (10 mins):

- What does the sentence structure tell us about Marie de France's style? Is it flowing? Ornate? Direct?
- How does she use grammar to build suspense or create a vivid image?

Session 2: The Logic of the Astrolabe (60 minutes)

Introduction (5 mins): "Shifting Gears"

- Briefly discuss the different purposes of writing: telling a story versus giving instructions. How might that change the way an author writes their sentences?

Activity (45 mins): "Chaucer's Technical Prose"

1. Turn to Chaucer's *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*. Read the first few sentences of his prologue, written for "little Lewis my son."
2. Select a sentence that is clearly instructional, such as: "Thy Astrolabe hath a ring to put on the thumb of thy right hand in taking the height of things."
3. Diagram this sentence. Note how different it is from the narrative sentences. It is likely to be more direct, perhaps an imperative, and filled with prepositional phrases that clarify location and purpose ("to put on the thumb," "of thy right hand," "in taking the height").
4. Have the student find and diagram another instructional sentence from the text on their own. Encourage them to look for infinitive phrases that explain the *purpose* of an object or action.

Comparison (10 mins):

- Place the Chaucer diagram next to the Marie de France diagram from the previous session.
- Discuss the differences. How does function (instruction vs. narration) dictate form (sentence structure)? Which style do they find more complex, and why?

Session 3: The Apprentice's Treatise (90 minutes)

Introduction (10 mins): "Your Turn to Build"

- Explain the final project: The student will become a medieval author for a day. Their task is to write a short, original piece (1-2 paragraphs) in one of two styles, and then diagram three of their own complex sentences from that piece.

Creative Writing (40 mins): Choose a Path

- **Path A: The Storyteller.** Write a short, dramatic scene in the style of the Mabinogion or Marie de France. Describe a magical event, a noble knight, or a mysterious forest. The goal is to use long, flowing sentences with subordinate clauses to build atmosphere.
- **Path B: The Scholar.** Write a "treatise" in the style of Chaucer, explaining how to do something modern. For example: "A Treatise on the Method of Winning a Video Game" or "A Treatise on the Artful Construction of a Sandwich." The goal is to use clear, purposeful sentences with infinitive and prepositional phrases to give instructions.
- **The Requirement:** The piece must intentionally include at least one of each of the following: a subordinate (adverbial or adjectival) clause, a participial phrase, and a gerund phrase.

Diagramming as Self-Evaluation (40 mins):

1. Once the piece is written, the student will select three sentences (ideally the ones containing the required elements) to diagram.
2. This part of the exercise is not just about getting the diagram right; it's about using the diagram to analyze one's own writing. Does the sentence make sense? Is it structured effectively? Does the diagram reveal any misplaced modifiers or awkward phrasing?
3. The student should use their grammar resources to ensure their diagrams are accurate.

4. Differentiation and Inclusivity

- **Support:** Provide a "menu" of pre-selected sentences from the texts if finding good examples is challenging. Offer a quick-reference sheet for diagramming complex structures like noun clauses or participles.
- **Extension/Challenge:** Ask the student to find an example of a periodic sentence or anastrophe (inverted word order) in the texts and diagram it, explaining its rhetorical effect. For the final project, challenge them to include and diagram an absolute phrase.
- **Student Choice:** The choice between the "Storyteller" and "Scholar" paths allows the student to align the final project with their personal creative interests, increasing motivation and engagement.

5. Assessment Methods

- **Formative Assessment:** Ongoing observation and discussion during the joint diagramming activities. The student's ability to explain their reasoning while diagramming serves as a check for understanding.
- **Summative Assessment:** The final "Apprentice's Treatise" project will be evaluated based on a simple rubric:

1. **Grammatical Application (40%):** Did the student correctly use and accurately diagram the three required complex structures in their own writing?
2. **Stylistic Imitation (30%):** Does the creative piece successfully capture the tone and style of the chosen medieval model (narrative or instructional)?
3. **Clarity and Creativity (30%):** Is the writing clear, creative, and engaging? Does the project demonstrate a thoughtful connection between grammar and style?