

Old English	Stressed Vowel Change	Middle English	Modern English
hæþen		heþen	heathen
cræft		craft	craft
fȳr		fir	fir
healf		half	half
dēop		dep	deep
stān		ston	stone
stēap		stepe	steep
cyssan		kisse	kisse
seofon		seven	seven
glēo		gle	glee
dæl		del	deal
hāl		hol	whole

The above sound changes are changes of vowel quality. There were also changes of vowel quantity (length) with far-reaching consequences.

1. **Lengthening in late OE before the consonant clusters *ld*, *mb*, *nd*.** OE *cild* /tʃild/ > ME *child* /tʃi:ld/. Lengthening did not occur before three consonants, e.g. *children* /tʃildrən/.
2. **Shortening in early ME.**
 - a. Before double consonants and consonant clusters, except those that caused lengthening; e.g. OE *cēpte* /ke:ptə/ 'he kept' > ME *kepte* /kɛptə/.
 - b. In the first syllable of trisyllabic words. Thus OE *hāliʒdæʒ* /ha:lijdæj/ 'holiday' > ME *halidai* /ha:lidi/.
3. **Lengthening of *a*, *e*, and *o* in open syllables in disyllabic words.** (Open syllables end in a vowel. In disyllabic words a single consonant between the vowels goes with the second syllable and leaves the first syllable open; two or more consonants make the syllable closed.) Thus OE *nama* /nama/ 'name' > ME *nāme* /na:mə/.

The effect of lengthening can be seen in MnE words such as *bate* with a ‘silent -e’, which in ME was pronounced /ə/, in contrast with words without the historically open syllable, such as *bat*.

Exercise

In each pair of words below, the stressed vowel in one word changed in quantity between OE and ME, the other did not. The phonetic transcription for the ME is provided. Give a phonetic transcription for the early OE and the MnE words and indicate the change, if any, in the quantity of the vowel in ME by writing the appropriate number from the description above in the blank. Since MnE vowel length is determined by the following consonant you do not need to mark vowel length in the MnE column.

	Early Old English	Middle English	Change in Quantity	Modern English
1. a.	þēoft /œə:ft/	þeft /œft/	2	theft /œft/
b.	þeof /œə:f/	þēf /œf/	-	thief /eif/
2. a.	nosu _____	nōse /nɔ:zə/	_____	nose _____
b.	nosþirl _____	nōþirl /nɔsərl/	_____	nostril _____
3. a.	cēpte _____	kepte /keptə/	_____	kept _____
b.	cēpan _____	kēpen /ke:pən/	_____	keep _____
4. a.	behindan _____	behīnde /bəhi:ndə/	_____	behind _____
b.	hindrian _____	hindre /hindər/	_____	hinder _____
5. a.	læfde _____	lafte /aftə/	_____	left _____
b.	læfan _____	lēven /le:ven/	_____	leave _____
6. a.	blēdde _____	bledde /bleddə/	_____	bled _____
b.	blēdan _____	blēde /ble:də/	_____	bleed _____
7. a.	late _____	lāte /la:tə/	_____	late _____
b.	lætera _____	latere /latərə/	_____	latter _____
8. a.	hund _____	hound /hu:nd/	_____	hound _____
b.	hundred _____	hundred /hundrəd/	_____	hundred _____

Consonants

The following changes occurred between OE and ME.

<u>Old English</u>	<u>Middle English</u>
hlud /hlu:d/ 'loud'	lud /lu:d/
hlǣne /hlæ:nə/ 'lean'	leane /hlæ:nə/
hnecca /hnekka/ 'neck'	necke /nekə/
hnutu /hnutu/ 'nut'	nute /nutə/
hring /hring/ 'ring'	ring /riŋg/
hrōf /hro:f/ 'roof'	rof /ro:f/
swētan /swe:tan/ 'sweet' (weak)	swete /swe:tə/
rihtlic /rixhtlit/ 'rightly'	rightly /rixhtli/
ānlic /a:nlit/ 'only'	onli /ɔ:nli/
swuster /swustər/ 'sister'	suster /sustər/
fæder /fædər/ 'father'	vader /vadər/ (South of the Thames)
self /self/ 'self'	zelf /zɛlf/ (South of the Thames)

Exercise

Give a phonetic transcription of the ME sounds in the examples below.

<u>Old English</u>	<u>Middle English</u>
/hl, hn, hr/	> _____
/n/ after unstressed vowel	> _____
/tj/ after unstressed vowel	> _____
/w/ after consonant and before back vowel	> _____
Initial /f, s/ (South of the Thames)	> _____