

# *The Canterbury Tales*

*Curriculum Unit*





# **The Canterbury Tales**

Geoffrey Chaucer

Curriculum Unit

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The Center for Learning

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# Introduction

No study of English literature would be complete without Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The medieval masterpiece does so much so well. Chaucer creates a host of memorable characters, presents the interactions among them, and ingeniously matches tales to narrators. The work is of equal interest to historians, for it presents a hands-on view of life in England in the Middle English Period.

Chaucer has been called the “Father of English poetry.” He was the first writer of significance to move beyond the scholarly Latin or courtly French of his day to use the vernacular (London dialect of Middle English), thus raising the language to an acceptable standard for literature. *Canterbury Tales* synthesizes types of literature from separate realms: scholarly and ecclesiastical Latin, continental Italian, courtly French, popular English legends and tales. In style, it is incomparable poetry; in structure, it is a novel, a frame story; in content, it is an anthology.

All of this does not necessarily make it easy to teach high school students. To them, the Prologue often seems like an interminable list of boring characters. They need help to see the wit in Chaucer's clever descriptions. The tales, too, may seem merely old, although the alert reader can soon see their timeless elements. The materials in this unit aim to bridge the gap between today's young readers and Chaucer so that they can find *The Canterbury Tales* to be not dull, but delightful.



# Teacher Notes

Those who have studied *The Canterbury Tales* know that it is a challenging work requiring time and energy. The lessons in this resource unit present information, activities, and concepts in a series of increments designed to integrate into an overall understanding.

Geoffrey Chaucer's work is available in several formats. First, and most difficult, is the Middle English original. Second, the form usually preferred for high school students, is verse translation into contemporary English, emulating Chaucer's cadence and rhyme. Finally, there are prose translations, making the work appear to be a novel or collection of short stories.

High school British/English literature texts tend to include all or most of the Prologue and at most two stories, usually The Pardoner's Tale and/or The Nun's Priest's Tale. For the typical class, that is certainly enough. Honors and advanced placement classes, however, may go beyond the basics to examine other tales and passages between tales.

For this reason, these lessons are organized in the following way.

- Lessons 1–7 are intended for all high school audiences.

Lesson 1 is introductory in nature. It includes a pre-reading activity and research into Chaucer's life and times. Lessons 2–5 deal with the Prologue and emphasize characterization, style, and structure. Lesson 6 focuses on The Pardoner's Tale. Lesson 7 considers The Nun's Priest's Tale.

- Lessons 8–10 are intended for more advanced groups.

These lessons address issues related to translation, extended reading of the *Tales*, and analysis of medieval genres.

The Internet provides thousands of sites related to *The Canterbury Tales* and Chaucer. These range from simple study tools to complex materials from universities. Your favorite search engine will help you to pinpoint sites useful to your students.

Although it is not included specifically in any of the lessons, you may want to use the movie *A Knight's Tale* (2001) as part of your study. Students find it delightful, and it helps to interest them in medieval life.

Answers to handouts will vary unless otherwise indicated. Students may need additional paper to complete some handouts.



# Lesson 1

## Pre-Reading

### Objectives

- To participate in an activity simulating the context of *The Canterbury Tales*
- To research information on Geoffrey Chaucer and England in the late medieval period

### Notes to the Teacher

Students can readily appreciate the general context of *The Canterbury Tales*: a fairly lengthy journey with a variety of people and the desire for entertainment along the way. With none of our technology, Chaucer's characters tell stories. The entire work presents a panorama of medieval people and culture.

Preliminary research can help orient the class to their trip back in time with Chaucer. It helps establish a context for understanding a literary work that mirrors a society that may seem alien to today's students. The research also acquaints students with the values and cultural nuances of the society about which they are reading. The general principle is relevance of research as contextual background for reading literature.

This lesson begins with a simulation activity and then engages students in research about Chaucer's England. For the simulation activity in procedures 3–5, you may want to provide candy bars or other rewards for winning storytellers. For the research activity, students need access to the Internet and/or library.

### Procedure

1. Ask students to identify journeys they have undertaken with other people, and record examples on the board. (*Examples might include a team on a bus headed to a competition, a cross-country or trans-Atlantic flight, or participating in a rally or demonstration.*)
2. Ask students to describe ways people often pass the time when they are traveling. (*Possibilities include singing, telling jokes, playing cards, listening to music, and sleeping.*)

3. Distribute **Handout 1**, and direct students to work on it in small groups.
4. When groups have completed the activity, assemble winning storytellers in the front of the classroom or in the center in goldfish-bowl style. Ask them to identify themselves to the group as a whole and to tell their stories once again. Then have the class cast ballots for the best story. Ask a volunteer to tally results, and reward the winner(s).
5. Point out ways that the stories connect with the narrators' characters and personalities.
6. Explain that the next literary work students will read, *The Canterbury Tales*, takes place in a context similar to the one students have just experienced. The main difference is that the journey occurs many centuries ago in a culture somewhat different from ours.
7. Distribute **Handout 2**, and divide the research topics among the students. (You may want to have them work in pairs.) Direct students to find and summarize information about their topics, as well as to prepare to present their findings to the whole class.
8. Have students complete oral presentations, and direct the class to take notes. In the course of the presentations, highlight key information such as the following.

Thomas à Becket—*a saint who was revered during medieval times; he was killed by agents of the king*

Giovanni Boccaccio—*Italian writer who created a collection of short stories, The Decameron*

Geoffrey Chaucer—*the greatest writer of medieval England; author of The Canterbury Tales; also a diplomat and seasoned traveler*

Canterbury Cathedral—*location of Becket's tomb and a destination of pilgrimages*

The Crusades—*wars conducted by Christian Europe against Islam*

*Aesop's Fables—short animal stories with moral themes*

*Summoner—person who served notice that people had to present themselves to church courts for investigation*

*Prioress—head nun in a convent*

*Medieval Guilds—precursors to modern-day labor unions; organizations based on labor skills*

*The Black Plague—disease that ravaged Europe during the medieval period*

## Let Me Tell You a Story

**Directions:** Read the following scenario, and complete the exercise.

You and the rest of your group are in a bus on a five-hour trip. You do not have any music or books with you, your cell phone is not working, and you do not feel a bit sleepy. To pass the time, you decide to tell stories, and the best one will win the storyteller a free fast-food dinner when you finally arrive at your destination.

1. Who are the people in your group? You may be your real selves, or you may create fictional personas.

Names	General Descriptions	Primary Interests

2. Quietly plan your individual story. Then take turns sharing stories with group members. Briefly record the contents of the tales.

3. Decide who is the winning storyteller, and explain why.

## Research Topics

**Directions:** Use print and online sources to locate information on the following topics related to medieval England.

### People

Thomas à Becket  
Richard the Lionhearted  
King Henry IV of England  
King Edward III of England  
William Caxton  
William the Conqueror  
Fredrick Barbarossa  
Sir Thomas Malory  
John of Salisbury  
Eleanor of Aquitaine  
John of Gaunt  
Dante Alighieri  
Giovanni Boccaccio  
Geoffrey Chaucer  
Philippa Roet Chaucer  
William Langland  
The Pearl Poet  
Petrarch  
Blanche of Lancaster

### Places

The Poet's Corner  
Canterbury Cathedral  
Oxford University  
Bath  
Brittany  
Medieval London  
Medieval Inns and Taverns

### Events

The Crusades  
The Children's Crusade  
Battle of Hastings  
Feudalism  
The Hundred Years' War  
The Great Schism  
The Peasants' Revolt

### Literary Works

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*  
*Le Morte D'Arthur*  
Aesop's Fables  
*The Decameron*  
Medieval Ballads  
Morality Plays  
Miracle Plays

### Occupations

Haberdasher  
Squire  
Yeoman  
Franklin  
Parson  
Canon  
Manciple  
Forester  
Knight  
Abbot  
Summoner  
Reeve  
Page  
Prioress/Abbess  
Friar  
Monk  
Cleric

### Other

Magna Carta  
Chivalry  
Manor Houses  
Medieval Guilds  
Parliament  
Medieval Social Classes  
Medieval Clothing  
Medieval Marriage Customs  
Medieval Warfare  
Astrology  
Medieval Humors Tradition  
Alchemy  
The Black Plague  
Pilgrimages

# Lesson 2

## Introducing the Prologue

### Objectives

- To recognize the changing nature of the English language
- To understand the setting and context of *The Canterbury Tales*
- To meet selected Canterbury pilgrims

### Notes to the Teacher

If your students have read *Beowulf*, they probably know that it was composed in Old English, which is a foreign language to us. While Middle English is significantly less alien, it is still quite a challenge to try to read it. For this reason, high school texts usually deal with *The Canterbury Tales* in contemporary translation; they usually also include a brief excerpt in its original form.

This lesson begins with a brief consideration of Middle English. Students then read the introductory section of the Prologue and meet five sample characters: the Knight, the Squire, the Yeoman, the Cook, and the Shipman.

For the first procedures, you will need audio recordings of readings in Old English and Middle English. These are readily supplied by most textbook companies as complimentary teachers' materials.

### Procedure

1. Tell students that you are going to play brief selections of literature for them and you want them to take brief notes about what they hear. Then play a reading of a section of *Beowulf* in Old English. Invite student observations. (*The passage is not understandable; it sounds rather Germanic.*) Identify the language as Old English or Anglo-Saxon, a very early ancestor of the English we speak today.
2. Play a reading of the opening lines of the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* in Middle English. Invite student observations. (*A few words sound familiar; the language is more melodic than Old English.*) Identify the language as Middle English. Explain that over the centuries the ancient Anglo-Saxon evolved with cultural changes. The language

was modified by Norman French, thus by the linguistic root of Latin. The result was Middle English, the language of Geoffrey Chaucer and his contemporaries.

3. Refer students to the excerpt in the text (or one on the Internet) presenting the opening of the Prologue in Middle English. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Point out the enormous challenge involved in trying to read many pages in this language, and explain that, to facilitate their study, the class will be encountering *The Canterbury Tales* in translation.
4. Distribute **Handout 3**. Divide the class into small groups, and direct them to read the Prologue up to the introduction of the Knight and to answer the questions on the handout.

### Suggested Responses

1. *It is spring, April; birds sing, and the wind is gentle and warm.*
  2. *Like people today, people then experienced spring fever; the desire to travel away from one's ordinary life and responsibilities.*
  3. *Traditionally, a pilgrimage is a journey to a holy place.*
  4. *The narrator seems to be Chaucer himself or a persona created by him. It is evident that he is sociable—he manages to get acquainted with all these people quickly—as well as intelligent.*
  5. *The Tabard is the inn where the narrator meets up with a number of other pilgrims.*
  6. *He mentions the number twenty-nine.*
  7. *He plans to describe all of these people.*
5. Link the Prologue with the research conducted in Lesson 1 by explaining that Chaucer and the other pilgrims are making a pilgrimage to Canterbury to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas à Becket.

6. State that Chaucer plans to introduce all of the pilgrims, but he does not describe them all in the same detail. Point out variations in length by calling attention to the lengthy description of the Friar, the terse mention of the priests at the end of the description of the Prioress, and the short depiction of the Cook. Ask students why some characters would get lengthy descriptions while others would not. (*The pilgrims vary in human-interest details as well as in the extent to which the narrator gets to know them.*)
  7. Point out that Chaucer says he intends to describe the Knight first, and ask why he would start with this character. (*The Knight is of the highest social class on the journey; the choice is a gesture of respect.*)
  8. Distribute **Handout 4**, and ask a volunteer to read aloud the description of the Knight. Then work through item 1 with the class.
9. Have students work in small groups to complete the handout.

**Suggested Responses:**

1. *The Knight's actual name is not given. He is middle-aged and dressed very simply, not in armor. He has been involved extensively in the Crusades. Chaucer makes his respect and esteem for the Knight very evident; this knight is a worthy example of the medieval code of chivalry at its best.*
2. *The Squire, the Knight's son, is about the age of the students in the class. He is cheerful, very interested in girls, stylishly dressed, and has curly hair; he seems to be in training to be a knight. Chaucer finds him amusing but does not mock him.*
3. *The Yeoman is a servant and perhaps a bodyguard to the Knight and Squire; he is well armed and dressed in the style of Robin Hood; his face is weathered. Chaucer does not seem to know him very well.*
4. *The Cook has special skills involving ale and chicken; he has a nasty sore on his knee. Chaucer's attitude is ambiguous.*
5. *The Shipman carries a dagger and rides his horse poorly; he is actually a pirate of sorts who steals wine and has no mercy on captives. Chaucer seems to find him interesting; humor and irony are evident in the tone.*

## **The Context of *The Canterbury Tales***

**Directions:** Read the Prologue up to the beginning of the description of the Knight, and answer the following questions.

1. What season of the year does Geoffrey Chaucer describe? What descriptive details about the weather does he stress?
2. What do people often feel like doing during this season?
3. What is a pilgrimage?
4. Who seems to be the narrator in the story? What do we learn about him?
5. What is the Tabard?
6. How many other pilgrims does the narrator meet?
7. The narrator says that he is going to interrupt his story about the pilgrimage. What does he plan to tell us?

### A Sampling of Characters

**Directions:** Read Geoffrey Chaucer’s opening descriptions of the Knight, the Squire, and the Yeoman. Then go on to his descriptions of the Shipman and the Cook. Fill in the columns below.

<b>Character</b>	<b>Descriptive Details</b>	<b>Chaucer’s Attitude</b>
1. Knight		
2. Squire		
3. Yeoman		
4. Shipman		
5. Cook		

# Lesson 3

## A Host of Medieval Characters

### Objectives

- To describe additional Canterbury pilgrims
- To identify Geoffrey Chaucer's characteristic tones
- To imitate Chaucer's descriptive style

### Notes to the Teacher

Students are generally adept at realizing that the Prologue introduces the characters intended to narrate the stories to follow. Chaucer takes a back seat, focusing on his observations of the other pilgrims. Some he describes in great detail, while others seem less interesting to him. He admires a few, finds many amusing, and scorns a few. Characteristically, the narrator finds humanity to be a very entertaining lot.

As students begin to distinguish characters, they will find some dull, others amusing, and a few unattractive. The goal is to help the class become comfortable with the pilgrims and to make connections with them.

This lesson begins with a brief review. Students then analyze the remaining Canterbury pilgrims. Finally, they conclude with creative writing.

### Procedure

1. Conduct a brief review using the following questions.
  - a. What are the time and place settings of *The Canterbury Tales*? (*Spring in England during the medieval period; Southwark, an area of London, and the road to Canterbury*)
  - b. Why are the characters going to Canterbury? (*They are on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas à Becket.*)
  - c. What does Chaucer say that he wants to do before going ahead with his story? (*describe the characters*)
  - d. What five characters have we met so far? What do we know about them? (*The Knight is a paragon of chivalry; his son, the Squire, is lively and romantic; the Yeoman traveling with them is well*

*armed and capable; the Cook is skillful but has something wrong with his leg; the Shipman is an adept seaman and sort of pirate.)*

2. Ask students to consider which of the five characters they would prefer to accompany on the journey and to give reasons for their choices.
3. Divide the class into groups, and assign each group one or more of the following characters described in the Prologue:
  - Prioress
  - Monk
  - Friar
  - Merchant
  - Oxford Cleric
  - Man of Law
  - Franklin
  - Guildsmen
  - Physician
  - Wife of Bath
  - Parson
  - Plowman
  - Miller
  - Manciple
  - Reeve
  - Summoner
  - Pardoner

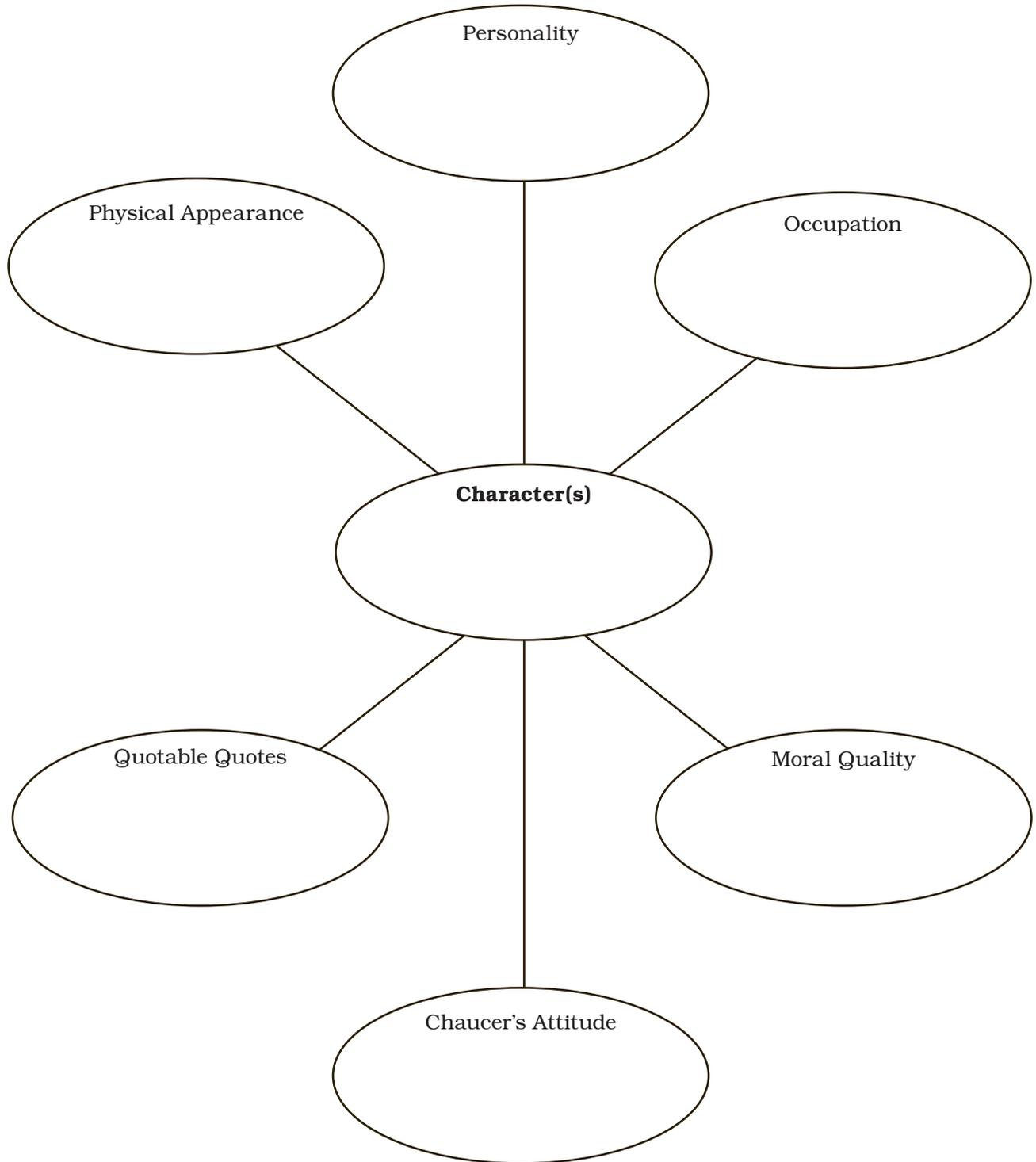
Distribute **Handout 5**, and ask students to follow the directions.

4. Have small groups share information with the class as a whole. Distribute **Handout 6**, and direct students to take notes on information. As students do presentations, stress key points such as the following information.
  - Chaucer's admiration of the moral character of a few pilgrims such as the Parson and the Plowman
  - His gentle and not-so-gentle mockery of characters such as the Prioress, the Wife of Bath, and the Guildsmen

- His recognition of hypocrisy in characters such as the Monk, Friar, Physician, and Man of Law
  - Sarcasm in some portraits (e.g., the Summoner and the Pardoner)
  - The fact that only a few characters are assigned proper names (e.g., Madame Eglantyne, the Prioress)
  - Vivid physical details such as the Monk's bald head and the Miller's wart
5. Point out that some characters can be named in more than one way. For example, the Wife of Bath is sometimes referred to as the Woman from Bath. The scholar from Oxford may be identified as the Cleric or as the Clerk.
  6. Have students individually review the characters and select the individual or group they would choose to accompany on the trip to Canterbury. Ask them to write one or two paragraphs identifying their choices and explaining their reasons. Pool choices on the chalkboard. Answers will vary widely but often include the Squire (close to students' age), the Miller (vulgar but entertaining), the Knight (interesting stories), and the Parson (a really good man).
  7. Explain that the term *tone* refers to an author or narrator's attitude. Ask students to brainstorm words to identify tones they perceive in the descriptions of the characters.
- Suggested Responses:**
- *irony*
  - *sarcasm*
  - *objectivity*
  - *admiration*
  - *amusement*
8. Point out Chaucer's role as observer; he seems to find the people around him to be a vast source of entertainment. Also point out his style, regular rhythm with couplets.
  9. Direct students to imitate Chaucer's style and write a ten- or twelve-line poem describing a specific person, perhaps a classmate, teacher, or family member. Set necessary rules regarding content. When students have finished, have them share results, perhaps in the context of a game trying to identify the persons described.

## A Canterbury Character Analysis

**Directions:** Use the following web to analyze Geoffrey Chaucer's portrait of one or more Canterbury pilgrims.



## The Canterbury Pilgrims

**Directions:** Fill in the following columns with information about Chaucer's other characters.

Character	Key Details	Chaucer's Attitude
Knight	Many crusades, simply dressed, example of chivalry in action	Admiration
Squire	Knight's son, romantic, medieval "cool"	Gentle amusement
Yeoman	Dressed like Robin Hood, well armed	Objective approval
Cook	Good with chicken and ale, sore on knee	Amusement?
Shipman	Pirate whose prisoners walk the plank	Amusement, irony
Prioress		
Monk		
Friar		
Merchant		

<b>Character</b>	<b>Key Details</b>	<b>Chaucer's Attitude</b>
Oxford Cleric		
Man of Law		
Franklin		
Guildsmen		
Physician		
Wife of Bath		

<b>Character</b>	<b>Key Details</b>	<b>Chaucer's Attitude</b>
Parson		
Plowman		
Miller		
Manciple		
Reeve		
Summoner		
Pardoner		

# Lesson 4

## A Cross Section of Medieval Society

### Objectives

- To recognize the social cross section presented in the Prologue
- To identify interior groupings of characters

### Notes to the Teacher

Geoffrey Chaucer seems to have had two purposes in writing *The Canterbury Tales*: to present an anthology of stories of various types and to depict a cross section of his own society. Since that society reflects the social classes of the medieval period, students need help to understand the subtle shadings of the social class structure of Chaucer's day. Distinctions among clergy, aristocrats, middle, trade, and peasant classes were familiar to Chaucer's contemporaries.

Chaucer on occasion intentionally misleads readers by implying that some characters will be accepted in given social standings because of the company they keep. In taking Chaucer's word that he will describe his characters according to social class (degree), modern readers begin with the Knight and may see the Yeoman as the third highest in social rank. Chaucer's audience would have recognized that the Yeoman is placed with the Knight and the Squire because he is traveling with them and perhaps to emphasize the presence of a bodyguard. A yeoman was, in reality, a member of the peasant class whose actual social position was, in Chaucer's day, at the bottom of the social ladder.

The same situation occurs in other social groupings. For example, the Second Nun and the Nun's Priest are associated with the Prioress. The Cook is grouped with the Guildsmen. The Reeve rides with members of the trade classes, including the Miller. Later, the Miller-Reeve association becomes interesting when the Miller usurps the Knight's rightful place and leads the pilgrims out of Southwark towards Canterbury. The Reeve expresses his disgust by choosing to ride last in order to be as far as possible from the Miller. Social friction is designed to generate much of the humor in the prologues and in the tales themselves.

In this lesson, students match pilgrims with their positions in medieval society. Students then analyze interior groupings within the Prologue. Finally, they consider twenty-first century counterparts to Chaucer's social divisions.

### Procedure

1. Point out that Chaucer presents a group of pilgrims who represent a cross section of medieval society, but he does not describe them in hierarchical order. Use the board to explain medieval social class divisions.

*Aristocrats—upper class society*

*Clergy—people with positions in the church (During medieval times, the church was an enormously powerful social institution, giving clergy high social standing.)*

*Middle class—a new development during the medieval period, as feudalism waned*

*Trade class—skilled workers like carpenters, sometimes organized into guilds*

*Peasants—the lowest social tier, often associated with agricultural work*

2. Distribute **Handout 7**, and direct students to complete it. Assist with characters students have difficulty classifying.

### Suggested Responses:

1. *Knight and Squire; respectful presentation*
2. *Prioress, Monk, Friar, Nun's Priest, Second Nun, Parson, Summoner, Pardoner; recognition of hypocrisy when it is present*
3. *Merchant, Clerk, Man of Law, Franklin, Reeve, Physician, Wife of Bath; seems to see this level as his peer group*
4. *Guildsmen, Shipman, Manciple, Cook, Host (described later); objective, ironic*
5. *Miller, Plowman, Yeoman; objective, somewhat distant*

3. Acknowledge the borderline status of some characters. For example, the Oxford scholar aspired to a church position, so he could have become clergy, but he never got beyond academics. The Miller's position borders on trade class.
4. Point out that Chaucer does not present his characters totally according to social class. He uses more subtle connections in his arrangement. Distribute **Handout 8**, and direct small groups to complete it.

**Suggested Responses:**

1. *a past, professional soldier; a present soldier-in-training, or court soldier; a future foot soldier of much lower social status; grouped together as father, son, and servant*
2. *the head of the convent, accompanied by two figures of much lower status but associated with the same convent*
3. *the head of a monastery and a member of the begging friars; neither faithful to the ideals of their vocations*
4. *both in debt, one a man of the material world, the other a man of the intellectual world*
5. *focus on ownership of land, one emphasizing legal aspects, the other generosity*
6. *tradesmen aspiring to the middle class; social climbers accompanied by their hired cook*
7. *profit-oriented; one a pirate, the other a mercenary physician*
8. *alone and unchaperoned but very sociable*
9. *brothers, both devout, a country priest and a Christian farmer*
10. *a motley crew; one boorish and greedy but entertaining; one a shrewd, common-sense tradesman; one now middle class with lower-class origins*

*11. friends of dubious character, both members of the clergy; one responsible to summon people to religious courts; the other a con man who sells fake religious relics*

*12. outsider, in a way; an observer, narrator, and pilgrim, obviously educated and probably a member of the rising middle class*

5. Mention that the Host of the Tabard Inn is introduced later, and another pilgrim, the Canon's Yeoman, joins the pilgrimage after it is in progress.
6. Reestablish that Chaucer recreates a cross section of his own society, and explain that a writer today might try to do the same thing regarding our own culture. Ask students to brainstorm a list of occupations reflecting various levels of prestige. Record responses on the board. Then ask students to arrange the occupations in hierarchical order, and conduct a discussion based on responses. Include questions such as the following:
  - Is a doctor higher than a lawyer?
  - Is a teacher lower than a nurse?
  - Where would a politician rank?
  - Where would a plumber or electrician rank?
  - Where would a drug dealer fit?
  - Are all occupations equally respectable?
7. Ask students to conjecture that they are creating a contemporary counterpart to Chaucer's work using the characters listed on the board. What interesting traveling companions would they create? (*Sample responses include a plumber and a cardiac surgeon; a politician and a thief; a nun and a prostitute; a soldier and a boy scout.*)

### Chaucer's Social Classes

**Directions:** Review your notes on the Canterbury pilgrims, and assign each to the relevant social class. Then identify characteristics of Geoffrey Chaucer's treatment of each level.

Class	Pilgrims	Chaucer's Treatment
1. Aristocracy		
2. Clergy		
3. Middle Class		
4. Trade Class		
5. Peasant Class		

### Prologue: Groupings by Chaucer

**Directions:** Geoffrey Chaucer does not present his Canterbury pilgrim characters in order of social prestige. Consider his actual order. Then complete the chart by speculating on characters' connections.

Group	People in Group	Connections/Motivations
1. Military Group	Knight Squire Yeoman	
2. Religious 1: Group	Prioress (Nun) Second Nun Nun's Priest	
3. Religious 2: Pair	Monk Friar	
4. Pair 1	Merchant Clerk	
5. Pair 2	Man of Law Franklin	
6. Group: Guildsmen	Haberdasher Carpenter Weaver Dyer Tapestry-Maker Cook	

<b>Group</b>	<b>People in Group</b>	<b>Connections/Motivations</b>
7. Pair 3	Shipman Physician	
8. Single	Wife of Bath	
9. Pair 4: The Brothers	Parson Plowman	
10. Group	Miller Manciple Reeve	
11. Religious 3: Pair	Summoner Pardoner	
12. Not Placed Socially	Chaucer	



# Lesson 5

## A Frame Story

### Objectives

- To increase familiarity with the Canterbury pilgrims
- To characterize the innkeeper
- To describe the contest that establishes *The Canterbury Tales* as a frame story

### Notes to the Teacher

Having completed his descriptions of the pilgrims gathered at the Tabard, Geoffrey Chaucer goes on to introduce the innkeeper and to describe his role in organizing the storytelling contest that comprises *The Canterbury Tales*. It is evident that the host is a robust man with leadership ability and a keen business eye—and perhaps spring fever, too, as he joins the trip to Canterbury.

In this lesson, students read the remainder of the Prologue and analyze the characterization of the innkeeper. They go on to create dramatizations of Canterbury pilgrims in dialogue with one another. You may want to provide an assortment of props for the dramatizations.

### Procedure

1. Have volunteers read the remainder of the Prologue aloud, from the end of the description of the Pardoner to the introduction of The Knight's Tale.
2. Distribute **Handout 9**, and have small groups complete it.

### Suggested Responses:

1. *the proprietor of the Tabard*
2. *He is a big, robust man with an agreeable, outgoing personality.*
3. *Chaucer clearly likes and enjoys him.*
4. *He gets the pilgrims to agree with his plan before they even hear what it is; he organizes a storytelling contest.*
5. *Each pilgrim will tell two stories on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. The host will be the judge who decides which is the best story,*

*and the prize will be a free dinner for the winner at the Tabard when they get back from Canterbury. The pilgrims will draw straws to see who will tell the first story.*

6. *It guarantees customers at the Tabard when the pilgrims return.*
7. *Chaucer planned to write well over a hundred stories—a goal he did not fulfill.*
8. *The Canterbury Tales consists of a story of a group of pilgrims who meet at an inn in London and embark on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. That story frames the stories told by the individual pilgrims.*
3. Distribute **Handout 10**, and read the directions with the class. Point out that students might choose to dramatize natural groupings, for example the Knight, Squire, and Yeoman, who are traveling together. On the other hand, students can work with chance encounters of characters such as the Miller, the Friar, and the Clerk.
4. When students have had ample time to create, write, and practice their dialogues, have them present performances to the rest of the class.
5. Explain that Chaucer never completed *The Canterbury Tales*, but he did finish an assortment of stories, each with its own prologue. Just as he begins his character descriptions with the Knight, he has the Knight tell the first story, a lengthy one involving the code of chivalry. The individual stories show Chaucer's genius at matching story to character.

## The Innkeeper's Game Plan

**Directions:** Read the last part of the Prologue, after the descriptions of the pilgrims assembled at the Tabard, and answer the following questions.

1. Who is the host?
2. How does Geoffrey Chaucer describe his appearance and personality?
3. Describe Chaucer's attitude toward the man.
4. What indicates that the host has substantial leadership ability?
5. Identify the terms of the contest the innkeeper suggests.
6. In what way is the contest a good business move for him?
7. How many stories did Chaucer intend to include in *The Canterbury Tales*?
8. How does *The Canterbury Tales* fit the definition of a frame story?

## Dramatizations

**Directions:** Work with a small group to create a dramatic dialogue involving a group of Canterbury pilgrims. Then prepare to perform your one-act play for the class. In the spaces below, identify your characters, write the dialogue, and include necessary stage directions.

**Example:**

If the Wife of Bath and the Prioress were to encounter one another in the hall that evening, they might have a conversation beginning something like the following.

WIFE OF BATH: Madame Eglantyne! It's so exciting! I think I'll tell a story about my first husband. When he died, he left me a lot of money.

PRIORRESS: How sad that he died so young. I've always believed that love conquers all.

WIFE OF BATH: I don't mean to be nosy, but what ever made you become a nun?

PRIORRESS: *(with tears glistening in her eyes)* That is a really long story, but not one I would tell to all of the men on this trip.

**Cast of Characters**

**Time**

evening, shortly after agreeing to the innkeeper's story telling contest

**Place**

the Tabard Inn, \_\_\_\_\_

**Dialogue/Stage Directions**



# Lesson 6

## The Pardoner's Tale

### Objectives

- To recognize popular genres of the medieval period
- To analyze The Pardoner's Tale
- To describe the relationship between the tale and its teller

### Notes to the Teacher

Geoffrey Chaucer's individual tales are examples of various types of stories popular in his own time. They also reflect values central to the medieval period: chivalry, belief in life after death, material prosperity. The Pardoner's Tale is an apt example, and one often included in high school textbooks. Because it is relatively short and eminently readable, it is a good place for students to start.

The Pardoner, as described in the Prologue, is a con artist who fools people into buying fake religious artifacts. Chaucer makes fun of his voice and his hair and questions his masculinity. It is evident that the Pardoner's main goal is money; for his own benefit, he capitalizes on people's religious faith and gullibility. Ironically, his tale is a serious story that presents greed as the root of all evil. Doubtless the Pardoner hopes a few pilgrims will purchase some of his pigs' bones.

In this lesson, students learn about genres popular in Chaucer's day. They go on to read and analyze The Pardoner's Tale. Finally, they become acquainted with the seven deadly sins and create original stories about the root of all evil.

### Procedure

1. Point out that, when people tell stories, they work with genres or literary forms that are familiar. Popular examples today include the detective story, romance, and science fiction. There are thousands of examples of the fisherman's story of "the big one that got away." Similarly, Chaucer's pilgrims tell stories that represent genres that were popular in his time.

2. Distribute **Handout 11**, and review it with students. Point out that sometimes a story can combine two or more genres. Then ask the following questions.
  - a. What character(s) would be likely to tell a chivalric romance? (*Knight, Squire*)
  - b. Who might tell a story about a saint? (*one of the nuns or priests*)
  - c. Who might tell a joke? (*Miller, Friar, Summoner*)
3. Have students reread the description of the Pardoner in the Prologue. Direct them to complete **Handout 12**.

### Suggested Responses:

Physical Description—*Chaucer makes a point of ridiculing the Pardoner's stringy hair and protuberant eyes, as well as a voice that seems never to have been altered by puberty.*

Talents—*Chaucer also indicates that the Pardoner is an effective preacher and liturgist, as well as a good salesman.*

Vices—*He is traveling with the Summoner, suggesting a host of vices. The Pardoner is certainly greedy and dishonest.*

Main Motivation—*financial gain*

Profession—*member of the clergy*

Probable Story Types—*He would be unlikely to tell any story that would ruin his con game. He might tell any of the religious or moral tales.*

4. Have students read The Pardoner's Tale and complete **Handout 13**.

### Suggested Responses:

1. *three rowdy young men, apparently from the lower social classes; drinkers*
2. *first a tavern in town; then out in the country*
3. *literally, the Black Plague, a scourge of the medieval period; an allegorical figure similar to those used in morality plays*

4. *The encounter with the old man reveals the three men's cruelty. His directions to look for Death under the tree lead to the story's conclusion.*
5. *One morning three rowdy men are in a tavern drinking when they hear that a friend has died of the plague. They make a pact to avenge themselves upon Death. An old man they meet on the way tells them that Death waits for them down the road under a tree. They find a lot of gold under the tree. By drawing straws, one, the youngest, is chosen to go into town for supplies. While he is gone, the other two plan to kill him and divide the money two ways instead of three; the youngest, meanwhile, decides to poison the other two and keep the gold for himself. When he returns, the other two kill him before drinking poisoned wine. The three men have, indeed, found Death under the tree.*
6. *Greed is the root of all evil.*
7. *The Pardoner himself is a greedy man; the story is probably also a vehicle of greed.*
8. *an exemplum*
9. *The theme is timeless, as are the characters: young toughs out on a hopeless mission.*
5. Distribute **Handout 14**, and have students complete the writing. When they have finished, ask volunteers to share stories with the class.

## Chaucer's Genres

**Directions:** Read the following descriptions of types of stories that were popular in Geoffrey Chaucer's time. These are the genres he used in *The Canterbury Tales*.

*Chivalric romance*—a nonscholarly narrative in metrical verse; tale of love, adventure, knightly conflict, and pageantry

*Myth*—retelling of a classical myth

*Breton Lais*—set in the Brittany region of France; tales, Celtic in origin, of magic, fairies, folklore, and courtly love

*Beast Fable*—animal characters with human qualities; clever tale that preaches a moral lesson

*Prose Allegory*—nonpoetic tale in which people and things represent abstract qualities

*Mock-Heroic*—ridicule, by imitation, of chivalric literature and heroic characters

*Mock-Romance*—ridicule of chivalric romance by parody

*Jokes*—humorous incidents that ridicule people

*Fabliau*—story based on clever tricks involving infidelity

*Sermon*—an oratory preaching a Christian message

*Exemplum*—a sermon that illustrates a known moral lesson

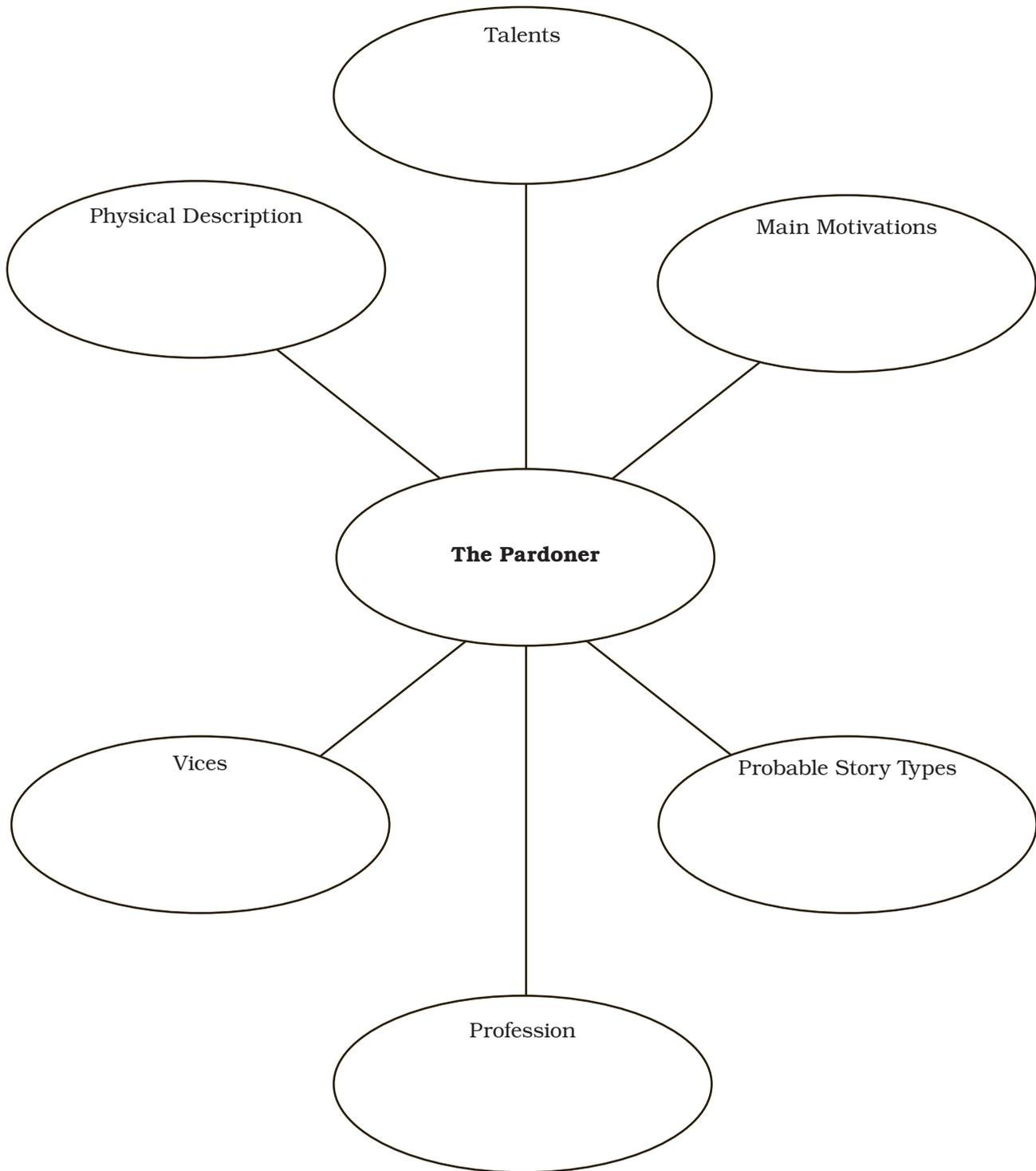
*Saint's Legend*—tale of inspirational acts or martyrdom

*Miracle of the Virgin*—tale in which the Virgin Mary miraculously aids a follower in time of need

*Moral Tale*—tale to inspire moral conduct in the listener

### The Pardoner: A Closer Look

**Directions:** Reread Geoffrey Chaucer's description of the Pardoner in the Prologue. Then fill in the web with specific details.



## The Pardoner's Tale

**Directions:** Read The Pardoner's Tale, and answer the following questions.

1. Who are the main characters?
2. What is the setting?
3. Who is Death?
4. What role does the old man play?
5. Identify the main events.
6. What is the story's main theme?
7. What is ironic about the Pardoner's theme?
8. What type of story is The Pardoner's Tale?
9. Is this story relevant today?

## The Root of All Evil

**Directions:** Read the following description of the medieval concept of the seven deadly sins. Then choose one of the seven deadly sins, and write a short story in which you show that it can be the root of all evil.

Medieval people had a concept of seven deadly sins, any one of which would have lethal consequences if left unchecked. One is greed, the central theme of The Pardoner's Tale. Greed is not just wanting things; it is wanting everything for oneself. Another is anger, or wrath, whose logical outcome is murder. Pride is not just good self-esteem; it is extreme arrogance, an exaggerated sense of one's own power. Envy, a fourth, involves wanting something that belongs to someone else. The other three deadly sins might, at first glance, not seem so deadly. They are sloth, gluttony, and lust. Sloth is permanent laziness; gluttony involves chronic overeating and overdrinking; lust means that one is driven by sexual desire.

# Lesson 7

## The Nun's Priest's Tale

### Objectives

- To define the term *beast fable*
- To analyze The Nun's Priest's Tale

### Notes to the Teacher

Beast fables are among the oldest of literary forms. They are not just stories about animals; they are stories in which the animal characters represent human beings or human traits. Aesop's stories are among the earliest examples; George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a famous twentieth-century example, and one sees elements of the beast fable in many cartoons and children's books.

In the Prologue, Geoffrey Chaucer says almost nothing about the priest traveling with the Prioress. His association with her suggests that he has some social standing and significant education. The famous story of Chanticleer, Pertelote, and the fox has roots in both classical and popular literature. The moral is clear: if we are not cautious, flattery can lead us to dangerous, even fatal actions.

This lesson begins with samples of children's literature. Students then read and analyze The Nun's Priest's Tale. Finally, they create original animal fables. For the first procedure, you will need a collection of children's books dealing with animals that represent human beings.

### Procedure

1. Divide the class into small groups, give each group an animal story written for very small children, and have one member of each group read the story aloud to the others.
2. Have groups share and discuss the stories with the entire class.
3. Refer to **Handout 11** (Lesson 6) and the definition of *beast fable*. Clarify the definition (see Notes to the Teacher), and relate it to the children's books the class has just discussed. Ask students to surface other examples of beast fables with which they are familiar (for example, the story of the grasshopper and the ant, or the one about the race between the hare and the tortoise).
4. Ask students what Chaucer says in the Prologue about the priest traveling with the Prioress. (*He says almost nothing, suggesting that the man was not particularly interesting.*)
5. Direct students to read The Nun's Priest's Tale.
6. Distribute **Handout 15**, and have small groups complete it.

### Suggested Responses:

1. *beast fable, mock-heroic*
2. *He was probably familiar with Aesop's fables and with popular fables about Reynard the Fox as the central character.*
3. *The setting is a farmyard of a small farm in a small village and, later, the surrounding countryside. The chicken yard also seems to be analogous to a castle or manor house.*
4. *a poor woman who owns a few farm animals; the rooster Chanticleer, who is the hero; Pertelote, his favorite hen; a hungry fox*
5. *One night Chanticleer has a bad dream that upsets him. Pertelote henpecks him, saying that he has been overeating. Later, Chanticleer meets a hungry fox who flatters him into singing with his eyes closed. The fox grabs him and runs, with the woman, other animals, and several villagers in hot pursuit. Chanticleer convinces the fox to say something defiant to his pursuers. When the fox opens his mouth to speak, the rooster escapes.*
6. *Be wary of flattery. Flattery gets Chanticleer into trouble in the first place; then it leads the fox to lose its meal.*
7. *Animal stories are still simple and entertaining ways to convey themes. Flattery is just as devious a trap today as it was in Chaucer's time.*

7. Have the class brainstorm possible characters and settings for original animal fables. Examples might include a tank of tropical fish or a robin's nest with hatchlings. Direct students to write original animal fables with clear morals that they articulate at the very end.

## Chanticleer and Pertelote

**Directions:** Read The Nun's Priest's Tale, and answer the following questions.

1. What genres could be associated with this tale?
2. Where do you think the priest got his ideas for this story?
3. What is the story's setting?
4. Who are the characters?
5. Summarize the story's main events.
6. What is its central theme?
7. Is the story relevant today?



# Lesson 8

## Texts and Translations

### Objectives

- To consider criteria involved in selecting a text
- To compare and contrast versions of *The Canterbury Tales*

### Notes to the Teacher

This lesson returns to the subject of language, introduced in Lesson 2. For the fullest understanding of Geoffrey Chaucer and the truest flavor of the medieval mindset, one should read *The Canterbury Tales* in a text written in Middle English and providing extensive footnotes and background information. This challenge is beyond the stamina of most high school students.

High school classes most commonly use a modern English translation in poem form; this approach attempts to keep the flavor of the original by imitating Chaucer's rhyme, rhythm, and tone. An understanding of subtle changes in words and their meanings is one of the limits of this type of study; however, this approach does make Chaucer accessible and attractive.

Modern prose translations are even easier to read, and they offer an understanding of how a work of literature can change through adaptation and still present the essence of the work. Because these are designed for high entertainment value, they may closely approximate Chaucer's original intent of writing for a general audience.

This lesson emphasizes comparative readings. By pairing segments of Middle English with contemporary translations, students are able to gain an understanding of the changes of individual words and of the language as a whole over a period of time. This develops a sense of linguistics and an awareness of word etymology. Interlinear and side-by-side formats eliminate the need for footnotes and are suitable for advanced high school students.

To complete this lesson, students need access to the Internet and/or multiple editions of all or part of *The Canterbury Tales*.

### Procedure

1. Initiate a class discussion on the contrast of books and their film adaptations. Help students to establish not only the differences but also what each version has to offer. Have them discuss the relative merits of reading the book first or seeing the movie first.
2. Remind students that *The Canterbury Tales* was originally written in Middle English, and point out that the translation they have been reading is similar in some ways to a film adaptation.
3. Identify and explain the various ways modern readers meet Chaucer: Middle English, modern poem translation, modern prose translation, and interlinear or side-by-side texts. (See information in Notes to the Teacher.)
4. Distribute **Handout 16**, and have students work with partners to complete the exercise. Discuss their responses and point out the following:
  - The prose and poem translations are both very readable and stress the Squire's youthful energy and cheerfulness.
  - The Middle English version presents Chaucer's original words, but it can be tiresome to keep consulting footnotes that interrupt the reading.
  - Interlinear and side-by-side versions present a convenient way to understand the original and consider alternative word choices.
5. Have students work individually on **Handout 17**.

### Suggested Responses, Part B:

1. *It can be helpful to read the prose translation first to get a general meaning; on the other hand, readers who first consult the Middle English version are likely to be more appreciative of one of the others.*
2. *Many Middle English words are unfamiliar and difficult to decipher.*

3. Earl might be translated as fellow, chap, guy, or other words of that type. Werte is Chaucer's version of wart, as blake is of black. Swerd clearly means sword. More difficult for the modern reader is forneys, meaning furnace. Harlotryes is an early form of harlotry, immorality of a sexual nature.
6. Direct students to complete **Handout 18** individually.
7. Determine a class consensus as to which type of selection the students enjoy the most and which type gives the greatest insight. Some of the students may share the discovery that they have changed their minds since earlier in the lesson.

### **Optional Activities**

1. Select a description of one of the Canterbury pilgrims in the Prologue, and write a contemporary translation for teenage readers.
2. Select a popular song and translate it into prose or annotate it with footnotes for audiences of the future. Another option is to write an interlinear translation of the lyrics, explaining slang phrases, and stereotypes and giving commentary.

## A New Look at the Squire

**Directions:** Read the following versions of Geoffrey Chaucer's description of the Squire, and answer the questions that follow.

### Prose Translation

With him there was his son, a young SQUIRE, a lover and a lusty bachelor, with hair as curly as if it had been set. He was about twenty years old, I would say, and he was of average height, remarkably agile, and very strong.<sup>1</sup>

### Poem Translation

He had his son with him, a fine young *Squire*,  
A lover and cadet, a lad of fire  
With locks as curly as if they had been pressed.  
He was some twenty years of age, I guessed.  
In stature he was of a moderate length,  
With wonderful agility and strength.<sup>2</sup>

### Middle English

With hym ther was his sone, a yong *Squier*,  
A lovyere and a lusty bacheler,  
With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse.  
Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.  
Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,  
And wonderly delyvere, and of greet strengthe.

80

**79. Squier**, an attendant on a knight. **80. lovyere**, lover. **lusty**, vigorous, lively. **bachelor**, aspirant to knighthood. **81. crulle**, curly. **as they were**, as if they had been. **82. Of twenty yeer**, The noun is an older form of the plural; the partitive use of *of* is due to French influence. Cf. *de quinze mètres de longueur*. **I gesse**, This use of *guess*, now obsolete in England, is preserved in American English. **83. evene lengthe**, average or proper height. **84. delyvere**, active, agile.<sup>3</sup>

### Interlinear Version/Side by Side Reading

With him ther was his sone, a yong SQUYER,  
*With him there was his son, a young SQUIRE,*  
A lovyere, and a lusty bacheler,  
*A lover, and a lusty aspirant for knighthood,*  
With lokkes crulle, as they were leyd in presse.  
*With locks curled, as if from a curling-iron.*  
Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.  
*About twenty years of age he was, I guess.*  
Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,  
*In stature he was of average height,*  
And wonderly deliver, and greet of strengthe.  
*And wonderfully agile, and great of strength.*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Geoffrey Chaucer, "Prologue," in *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. R. M. Lumiansky (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1948), 4.

<sup>2</sup>Geoffrey Chaucer, "Prologue," in *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. Nevill Coghill (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1951), 5.

<sup>3</sup>*The Canterbury Tales*, in *Chaucer's Major Poetry*, ed. Albert C. Baugh (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), 239.

<sup>4</sup>"The Prologue," in *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (Selected): An Interlinear Translation*, 2nd ed., trans. Vincent F. Hopper (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1970), 6.

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each way of reading Chaucer?
2. Which of the four selections do you find most enjoyable? Why?
3. Which selection do you believe provides the most insight into the Squire? Why?
4. Identify what you have learned about a word that you now see in a new or different way.
5. Which version would you prefer for more extensive reading of *The Canterbury Tales*? Why?

## A New Look at the Miller

### Part A.

**Directions:** Find Geoffrey Chaucer's description of the Miller in a Middle English version of the Prologue (line 547), and locate three different translations of the same passage. (You may use print or online editions.) Then complete the chart: copy the first four lines in Middle English and the corresponding section in each translation.

<b>Middle English</b>	<b>Translation 1</b> by _____	<b>Translation 2</b> by _____	<b>Translation 3</b> by _____



## Chaucer: A Linguistic Examination

**Directions:** Select four to six lines of any part of *The Canterbury Tales*. You may want to work with the Prologue, with one of the tales, or with the prologue to one of the tales. Then complete the following exercise.

1. Copy on separate paper Geoffrey Chaucer's original Middle English version, and circle words that you find difficult.
2. Find and copy a prose translation, and circle any words that you would translate differently if you were the translator.
3. Copy a poem translation, and circle words that are identical with those in Chaucer's original.
4. Create an interlinear or side-by-side reading, and use arrows to link unfamiliar Middle English terms with their definitions.
5. Determine what you have learned from working with various versions of *The Canterbury Tales*.



# Lesson 9

## An Anthology of Medieval Genres

### Objectives

- To recognize diverse literary genres among the stories in *The Canterbury Tales*
- To associate specific genres with various social classes
- To recognize Geoffrey Chaucer's complex pattern of organization

### Notes to the Teacher

*The Canterbury Tales* functions as a collection of tales, an anthology of popular genres of the Middle Ages, reflecting literary tastes of people from various social classes. The people viewed the purpose of literature to be both entertainment and moral instruction. This view derives from Aristotle, who suggested that literature both delight and instruct the audience. During Chaucer's time, the more that literature stressed moral and instructive aspects, the more it was respected as high literature; the more it stressed entertainment, particularly if secular and/or slanderous, the less it was respected.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, examples of high literature include chivalric romances, myths, moral tales, stories about miracles of the Virgin Mary and the saints, sermons, exemplums, and some beast fables. Low literature is represented by the fabliau, jokes, mock-heroics, and possibly some of the Breton lais. Although the upper classes and the clergy would attest to the entertaining nature of these tales of low taste, they could object to their lack of moral instruction. Still, the argument can be made that, upon closer examination, these low tales do present morals. By pointing out what a person should avoid, they suggest the proper way to live. They can be viewed as a matter of perspective. Someone like the Prioress could find *The Miller's Tale*, a fabliau, offensive, while members of the trade class could view the tale as one of humorous happenstance. Within the anthology, as in the Prologue, Chaucer provides a pattern of interior organization.

This lesson emphasizes analysis based on genre, a topic introduced in Lesson 6. Students examine stories throughout *The Canterbury*

*Tales*, looking for patterns and drawing conclusions. For example, students studying the tales of the aristocratic Knight and Squire will notice that they tell chivalric romances, as befits their social class, while no one from a lower class should presume to do so. This becomes comic when Chaucer, a pilgrim who seems to be associated with the middle class, begins the *Sir Thopas Tale*, an imitation chivalric romance. The host, seeming to speak for the whole group, tells Chaucer to stop the doggerel.

When students are able to recognize use of interior patterns within *The Canterbury Tales*, they can gain insights into Chaucer's control and skill as a writer. Later, this focus on interior structure can also be applied to other literary works.

For this lesson, students need access to *The Canterbury Tales* in its entirety, either on the Internet or in print versions.

### Procedure

1. Review Chaucer's use of groups and pairs of characters within the framework of the Prologue. Suggest that there is also merit to focusing on groupings among the tales themselves.
2. Have students retrieve **Handout 11** (Lesson 6), and use it to review the genres.
3. Divide the class into small groups, and assign each group one of the following topics:
  - Tales by aristocrats
  - Tales by religious
  - Stories from the middle class
  - Stories from the trade class
  - Stories from the peasant class
  - Stories told by women
  - Stories dealing with marriage
  - Examples of fabliaux
4. Distribute **Handout 19**, and direct students to use it to record information about their topic as they peruse *The Canterbury Tales*.

5. When students have had sufficient time to gather information, reassemble the class, and have groups present their findings. Distribute **Handout 20** for use as a note-taking guide.

### **Suggested Responses:**

#### 1. Aristocrats

- a. Members—*Knight, Squire*
- b. Types of Tales—*Chivalric romances*
- c. Pairs or Subgroups—*The Knight and the Squire form a pair by telling the same type of tale: romance. This indicates that they not only know this type of tale but also are the logical ones to tell it.*
- d. Conclusions—*The chivalric romance is the tale of the nobility of the Middle Ages and a tale designed to both delight and instruct.*

#### 2. Religious

- a. Members—*Prioress, Monk, Friar, Second Nun, Nun's Priest, Parson, Summoner, and Pardoner*
- b. Types of Tales—*Miracle of the Virgin, saint's legend, exemplum, beast fable, sermon, and joke*
- c. Pairs or Subgroups—*The Prioress and the Second Nun tell typically religious tales, a miracle of the Virgin and a saint's legend, respectively. The Monk and the Pardoner tell exemplums. The Friar and the Summoner tell jokes. The Parson and the Nun's Priest tell tales that are explicitly moral in nature, a sermon and a beast fable, respectively.*
- d. Conclusions—*As would be expected, members of the religious group tell morally uplifting tales. Exceptions and/or surprises include the Pardoner, a disreputable character, who presents an excellent example of an exemplum, and the Friar and the Summoner, who involve themselves in the telling of slanderous jokes.*

#### 3. Middle Class

- a. Members—*Franklin, Wife of Bath, Reeve, Merchant, Physician, Cleric, Man of Law, and Chaucer*

- b. Types of Tales—*Breton lais, fabliaux, moral tales, mock-romance, prose allegory, and one unidentifiable fragment*

- c. Pairs or Groups—*The Franklin and the Wife of Bath tell Breton lais. The Clerk and the Physician tell moral tales. The Reeve and the Merchant tell fabliaux. Chaucer begins telling a mock-romance, then a prose allegory. The Man of Law begins, but never finishes, a tale of an unidentified genre, so in a sense, Chaucer and the Man of Law group relate only fragments of tales.*

- d. Conclusions—*The middle-class group provides a diversity of genre. The Clerk and the Physician tell tales that are high literature, moral tales that are instructive in nature, emulating the aristocracy and religious groups. The Franklin and Wife of Bath tell Breton lais, which are both entertaining and instructive, as well as representative of the earlier Celtic literature of the British Isles. The Reeve and the Merchant tell tales that are for entertainment only: the low literature fabliau. These two hold positions in society that involve commerce with great numbers of people, so it can be assumed that they either hear such tales in their everyday jobs or relate them to people with whom they commonly deal. Chaucer's pilgrim tale is interesting in that he tries to emulate the aristocracy with the mock-romance, is stopped by the Host, then tells a prose allegory after apologizing for being a poor poet. This is Chaucer joking with the reader at his own expense, while at the same time showing how the middle class envies the tales of the aristocrats (romances) and the religious (moral works like a prose allegory).*

#### 4. Trade Class

- a. Members—*Shipman, Manciple, Host, Cook, and Guildsmen*
- b. Types of Tales—*Myth, fabliau (one complete and one fragment)*

- c. Pairs or Subgroups—*The Shipman and the Cook* tell *fabliaux*. *The Manciple* tells a myth. *The Host and the Guildsmen* tell no tales; the Host, as impartial judge, has no intention of doing so, and Chaucer never wrote a tale for the Guildsmen.
  - d. Conclusions—Because this group is small and incomplete, it is difficult to draw many conclusions. It is certain that two of the members, the Shipman and the Cook, tell low literature *fabliaux*, perhaps as expected from members of one of the lower classes. Even the myth told by the Manciple is a myth dealing with infidelity of the gods, a kind of a mythical *fabliau*. Had Chaucer written tales for the Guildsmen, more conclusions could be drawn about the group as a whole. Students might speculate that since the Guildsmen appear in the Prologue as such social climbers, some of them might have been expected to tell tales associated with the upper classes, although some may have told tales closer to their own background, jokes and fables.
5. Peasant Class
- a. Members—*Plowman*, *Yeoman*, *Miller*, and *Canon's Yeoman*
  - b. Types of Tales—*Fabliau*
  - c. Pairs or Subgroups—*The Miller and the Canon's Yeoman* tell *fabliaux*. Neither the *Plowman* nor the *Yeoman* have tales.
  - d. Conclusions—Here again is a small and incomplete group. *The Miller and the Canon's Yeoman* tell the low literature *fabliau*, intending, one would suppose, to be indicative of the peasant class. Since, however, the *Plowman* and the *Yeoman* have no tales, it is difficult to determine what Chaucer may have wanted his readers to conclude about this group. Students may speculate, though, that the *Yeoman*, who travels with the aristocrats, may have told a tale of a higher form of literature, and the *Plowman*, who travels with the virtuous Parson, may also have told a high literature tale. The students' conclusion would be based upon whether they believe that a contrast of tales was intended, or is fitting, or whether the author intended the whole peasant class to tell tales of low literature. If the latter, students should be encouraged to refer to the Prologue where the character descriptions would suggest tales of some high merit.
6. Women
- a. Members—*Prioress*, *Second Nun*, and *Wife of Bath*
  - b. Types of Tales—*Miracle of the Virgin*, *saint's legend*, and *Breton lais*
  - c. Pairs or Subgroups—Both members of the religious group tell characteristic moral/religious tales. *The Wife of Bath* tells a *Breton lais*.
  - d. Conclusions—As expected, the *Prioress* and the *Second Nun* tell religious tales. *The Wife of Bath's Breton lais* is a tale of secular love and Celtic magic designed to entertain and inspire. All of the women tell tales that represent high literature, and the *Wife of Bath*, despite her worldliness, avoids the low *fabliau*, which some less astute readers might have anticipated.
7. Marriage Group
- a. Members—*Wife of Bath*, *Cleric*, *Franklin*, *Manciple*, *Merchant*, and the *Squire*
  - b. Types of Tales—*Breton lais*, moral tale, myth, *fabliau*, chivalric romance
  - c. Pairs or Subgroups—*The Franklin and the Wife of Bath* tell *Breton lais*. *The Manciple* tells a *fabliau* and the *Merchant* tells a myth, but since it is a myth of infidelity of pagan gods, it seems to form a pair on the theme of infidelity. *The Squire and the Clerk*, both men in training, tell tales of high literature, a romance and a moral tale, respectively.
  - d. Conclusions—One conclusion can be drawn concerning the social classes

of the members of this group. Four are members of the middle class (Franklin, Wife of Bath, Clerk, and Merchant) while one represents the aristocracy (the Squire) and one represents the trade class (the Manciple). Another conclusion concerns the fact that the members, although predominantly middle class, tell tales of rich diversity, from high literature to low literature, with two Breton lais showing the only pairing of tales. Just as the members and tales are diverse, so, too, are the viewpoints on marriage. Perhaps the answer to the question the old hag asks in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, who rules in a marriage, is the emergent theme of this group's tales. Also, considering the dominance of the middle-class members, it may be concluded that marriage is a dominant topic as well as a characteristic rite of the middle class.

6. Distribute **Handout 21**, and assign students to select individual tales for close reading and analysis.

8. Fabliau Group

- a. Members—Miller, Reeve, Cook, Shipman, and Merchant
- b. Social Classes Represented—Middle class, trade class, and peasant class
- c. Pairs or Subgroups—The Cook and the Shipman represent the trade class, and perhaps the Reeve does as well, since he began as a member of the trade class. The Merchant and the Reeve are members of the middle class. The Miller is the only representative of the peasant class.
- d. Conclusions—It appears as though the fabliau is the tale of the lower classes, especially in the trade and peasant classes, and even though a man like the Reeve is able to move up in society to the middle class, he still tells the tale that represents his trade class background. Since the middle-class merchant deals daily with members of the lower classes, he would be familiar with this type of story.



## Chaucer's Tales: An Overview

**Directions:** Take notes on Geoffrey Chaucer's use of various genres throughout *The Canterbury Tales*.

1. Aristocrats
  - a. Members
  
  - b. Types of Tales
  
  - c. Pairs or Subgroups
  
  - d. Conclusions
  
2. Religious
  - a. Members
  
  - b. Types of Tales
  
  - c. Pairs or Subgroups
  
  - d. Conclusions
  
3. Middle Class
  - a. Members
  
  - b. Types of Tales
  
  - c. Pairs or Subgroups
  
  - d. Conclusions
  
4. Trade Class
  - a. Members
  
  - b. Types of Tales
  
  - c. Pairs or Subgroups
  
  - d. Conclusions

5. Peasant Class
  - a. Members
  
  - b. Types of Tales
  
  - c. Pairs or Subgroups
  
  - d. Conclusions
  
6. Women
  - a. Members
  
  - b. Types of Tales
  
  - c. Pairs or Subgroups
  
  - d. Conclusions
  
7. Marriage Group
  - a. Members
  
  - b. Types of Tales
  
  - c. Pairs or Subgroups
  
  - d. Conclusions
  
8. Fabliau Group
  - a. Members
  
  - b. Types of Tales
  
  - c. Pairs or Subgroups
  
  - d. Conclusions

## **An Analysis of a Canterbury Tale**

**Directions:** Select one tale that you have not already studied, and read it carefully. Then use the following questions to present your insights.

1. Which tale have you selected?
2. Who are the main characters, and what are their relationships?
3. Summarize the plot.
4. What are the time and place settings?
5. What is the central theme?
6. What genre(s) does the tale represent? Give evidence to support your answer.
7. What are the sources of the tale?
8. What do you know from the General Prologue, as well as from the prologue to the tale, about the pilgrim who tells the story?
9. How is the tale related to the teller?

# Lesson 10

## Satire and Comedy

### Objectives

- To become acquainted with rhetorical devices of satire
- To identify Geoffrey Chaucer's use of satiric techniques

### Notes to the Teacher

Chaucer's importance in literature derives from several major facts. He was the first to write a great work of literature in the English language at a time when the established languages of the clergy and aristocracy were Latin and French. Further, he was perhaps the only writer of his time to blend into a single work elements of the literature of the common English folk, the religious community, the French, Celtic, and Italian (Boccaccio) traditions, and Greek and Latin mythology. Additionally, he was perhaps the first great satirist in English literature. This lesson focuses on Chaucer as literary satirist.

Chaucer's comic genius is usually more obvious to students than the more subtle satire which he employs equally well. Students reading any of the fabliaux, comic interludes, or interior prologues find humor in the absurd plots, the twists and reversals in the plots, the humorous treatment of the gullible commoners and, occasionally, of the upper or religious classes.

Comedy (from the Greek word *komos*, "a revel") originated as a literary form with the plays of classical Greece, as evidenced in the plays of Aristophanes (438–380 B.C.), and continued in the literature of Rome, especially in the plays of Plautus (254–184 B.C.). Great comedy allows us as audience or reader to laugh both with and at the comic characters.

Satire (from the Greek word *satira*, "a mixed dish") has us laugh at characters ridiculed for their vices and follies. Classical satire is best evidenced in the Roman writers, such as Horace, Juvenal, and Persius. Satire is best when it employs several of the ingredients of the mixed dish of satiric devices: mockery, parody, mock-heroic, sarcasm, verbal irony, understatement, overstatement, and bathos.

In this lesson, students review terms associated with satire. Then they identify the satiric devices used by Chaucer in the Prologue. Finally, the class examines contemporary counterparts to Chaucer's pilgrims.

### Procedure

1. Ask students to distinguish between the acts of laughing with someone and laughing at someone. By using the information in Notes to the Teacher, help students to distinguish between comedy and satire (i.e., laughing with someone and at someone).
2. Distribute **Handout 22**. Review the types of devices used in the mixed dish of satire to make sure that students understand the terminology.
3. Distribute **Handout 23** to be completed individually or in small groups. Allow time for reading and identifying the devices used. Ask students to share their responses to ensure correct identification.

### Suggested Responses:

1. *irony*
  2. *bathos*
  3. *understatement*
  4. *irony*
  5. *mockery, sarcasm*
  6. *mockery, parody*
  7. *bathos, irony*
4. Direct students to cite other examples of Chaucer's use of the devices of satire.
  5. Distribute **Handout 24**, and have students use it to compare Chaucer's work to some American writings.

### Suggested Responses:

Part A.

- *Both Longfellow's Landlord and Chaucer's Knight are presented as fair and honorable men.*

- *The Landlord is linked to the Knight by his inclusion in the aristocracy and his context as a fighting man.*
- *Both establish a standard by which others may be judged.*

Part B.

- *Chaucer's Cleric would "gladly teach" and Whittier's Schoolmaster "could doff at ease his scholar's gown."*
- *The Cleric fills his speech with "the thought of moral virtue" while the Schoolmaster stands in favor of emancipation and equality.*
- *Both read the classics: the Cleric reads Aristotle; the Schoolmaster tells of "classic legends rare and old."*

Part C.

- *Both give an indication as to their character through the clothing that they wear; the Knight dresses simply, Grangerford in a white linen suit.*
- *Grangerford is a "gentleman all over"; the Knight is a "true, a perfect gentle-knight."*
- *The Knight is "in his bearing as modest as a maid," while Grangerford "warn't ever loud."*

## The Devices of Satire

**Directions:** Read the following definitions of terms associated with satire.

*Satire*—the act of ridiculing human vices and follies; the word comes from the Greek word *satura*, meaning “medley” or a mixture of things

*Mockery*—laughter, scorn, and ridicule

*Parody*—mocking imitation of a known person, literary work, movie, or event

*Mock-Heroic*—imitation of the literary epic and its style by exaggeration and distortion and by elevating the trivial to a level higher than it deserves

*Sarcasm*—using praise to mock someone personally; the word comes from the Greek word *sarkazein*, meaning “to tear flesh”

*Verbal Irony*—a double meaning; saying one thing and meaning another

*Understatement*—implying the opposite by saying less than one means to say

*Overstatement*—exaggeration by saying more than one means to say

*Bathos*—going quickly from the sublime or serious to the ridiculous; oversentimentality

## Identifying Satiric Devices in Context

**Directions:** Read each of the following quotations from the Prologue. Identify the satiric devices.

Quotations	Satiric Devices
1. Physician “Gold stimulates the heart, or so we’re told. He therefore had a special love of gold.”	
2. Pardoner “He said he had a gobbet of the sail Saint Peter had the time when he made bold To walk the waves, till Jesu Christ took hold. He had a cross of metal set with stones And, in a glass, a rubble of pigs’ bones.”	
3. Clerk “. . . his horse was thinner than a rake, And he was not too fat, I undertake. . . .”	
4. Friar “He was a noble pillar to his Order.”	
5. Miller “A wrangler and buffoon, he had a store Of tavern stories, filthy in the main. His was a master-hand at stealing grain.”	
6. Summoner “Garlic he loved, and onions too, and leeks, And drinking strong wine till all was hazy. Then he would shout and jabber as if crazy, And wouldn’t speak a word except in Latin When he was drunk . . . .”	
7. Friar “He knew the taverns well in every town And every innkeeper and barmaid too Better than lepers, beggars and that crew. . . .”	

Source: *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. Nevill Coghill (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1951).

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## American Counterparts

### Part A.

**Directions:** Read the description of the Landlord from *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, published in 1861 by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882). Compare it with the description of the Knight in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. Identify several similarities that suggest Chaucer’s influence on Longfellow.

#### The Landlord

But first the Landlord will I trace;  
Grave in his aspect and attire;  
A man of ancient pedigree,  
A Justice of the Peace was he,  
Known in all Sudbury as “The Squire.”  
Proud was he of his name and race,  
Of old Sir William and Sir Hugh,  
And in the parlour, full in view,  
His coat-of-arms, well framed and glazed,  
Upon the wall in colors blazed;  
He beareth gules upon his shield,  
A chevron argent in the field,  
With three wolf’s heads, and for the crest  
A Wyvern part-per-pale addressed  
Upon a helmet barred; below  
The scroll reads, “By the name of Howe.”  
And over this, no longer bright,  
Though glimmering with a latent light,  
Was hung the sword his grandsire bore,  
In the rebellious days of yore,  
Down there at Concord in the fight.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

**Part B.**

**Directions:** Read the description of the Schoolmaster from *Snow-Bound*, published in 1866 by John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892). Compare it with the description of the Cleric in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. Identify several similarities that suggest Chaucer’s influence on Whittier.

**The Schoolmaster**

Brisk wielder of the birch and rule,  
The master of the district school  
Held at the fire his favored place, 440  
Its warm glow lit a laughing face  
Fresh-hued and fair, where scarce appeared  
The uncertain prophecy of beard.  
He teased the mitten-blinded cat,  
Played cross-pins on my uncle’s hat,  
Sang songs, and told us what befalls  
In classic Dartmouth’s college halls.  
Born the wild Northern hills among,  
From whence his yeoman father wrung  
By patient toil subsistence scant, 450  
Not competence and yet not want,  
He early gained the power to pay  
His cheerful, self-reliant way;  
Could doff at ease his scholar’s gown  
To peddle wares from town to town;  
Or through the long vacation’s reach  
In lonely lowland districts teach,  
Where all the droll experience found  
At stranger hearths in boarding round,  
The moonlit skater’s keen delight, 460  
The sleigh-drive through the frosty night,  
The rustic party, with its rough  
Accompaniment of blind-man’s-buff,  
And whirling plate, and forfeits paid,  
His winter task a pastime made.  
Happy the snow-locked homes wherein  
He turned his merry violin,  
Or played the athlete in the barn,  
Or held the good dame’s winding yarn,  
Or mirth-provoking versions told 470  
Of classic legends rare and old,  
Wherein the scenes of Greece and Rome  
Had all the commonplace of home,  
And little seemed at best the odds  
’Twixt Yankee pedlers and old gods;  
Where Pindus-born Arachthus took  
The guise of any grist-mill brook,  
And dread Olympus at his will  
Became a huckleberry hill.

A careless boy that night he seemed; 480  
But at his desk he had the look  
And air of one who wisely schemed,  
And hostage from the future took  
In trained thought and lore of book.  
Large-brained, clear-eyed,—of such as he  
Shall Freedom's young apostles be,  
Who, following in War's bloody trail,  
Shall every lingering wrong assail;  
All chains from limb and spirit strike,  
Uplift the black and white alike; 490  
Scatter before their swift advance  
The darkness and the ignorance,  
The pride, the lust, the squalid sloth,  
Which nurtured Treason's monstrous growth,  
Made murder pastime, and the hell  
Of prison-torture possible;  
The cruel lie of caste refute,  
Old forms remould, and substitute  
For Slavery's lash the freeman's will,  
For blind routine, wise-handed skill; 500  
A school-house plant on every hill,  
Stretching in radiate nerve-lines thence  
The quick wires of intelligence;  
Till North and South together brought  
Shall own the same electric thought,  
In peace a common flag salute,  
And, side by side in labor's free  
And unresentful rivalry,  
Harvest the fields wherein they fought.

—John Greenleaf Whittier

**Part C.**

**Directions:** Read the description of Col. Grangerford from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in 1884 by Mark Twain (1835–1910). Compare it with the description of the Knight in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. Identify several similarities that suggest Chaucer’s influence on Twain.

**Col. Grangerford**

Col. Grangerford was a gentleman, you see. He was a gentleman all over; and so was his family. He was well born, as the saying is, and that’s worth as much in a man as it is in a horse, so the Widow Douglas said, and nobody ever denied that she was of the first aristocracy in our town; and pap he always said it, too, though he warn’t no more quality than a mudcat himself. Col. Grangerford was very tall and very slim, and had a darkish-paly complexion, not a sign of red in it anywheres; he was clean shaved every morning all over his thin face, and he had the thinnest kind of lips, and the thinnest kind of nostrils, and a high nose, and heavy eyebrows, and the blackest kind of eyes, sunk so deep back that they seemed like they was looking out of caverns at you, as you may say. His forehead was high, and his hair was black and straight and hung to his shoulders. His hands was long and thin, and every day of his life he put on a clean shirt and a full suit from head to foot made out of linen so white it hurt your eyes to look at it; and on Sundays he wore a blue tail-coat with brass buttons on it. He carried a mahogany cane with a silver head to it. There warn’t no frivolishness about him, not a bit, and he warn’t ever loud. He was as kind as he could be—you could feel that, you know, and so you had confidence. Sometimes he smiled, and it was good to see; but when he straightened himself up like a liberty-pole, and the lightning begun to flicker out from under his eyebrows, you wanted to climb a tree first, and find out what the matter was afterwards. He didn’t ever have to tell anybody to mind their manners—everybody was always good-mannered where he was. Everybody loved to have him around, too; he was sunshine most always—I mean he made it seem like good weather. When he turned into a cloud-bank it was awful dark for half a minute, and that was enough; there wouldn’t nothing go wrong again for a week.

—Mark Twain

## Quiz: The Canterbury Pilgrims

**Directions:** Match the description to the character.

- |           |  |                 |
|-----------|--|-----------------|
| _____ 1.  | sociable and independent person who has been married five times    | a. Monk         |
| _____ 2.  | person who loves learning and teaching above all                   | b. Prioress     |
| _____ 3.  | person who knows a lot of dirty stories and has a wart on his nose | c. Yeoman       |
| _____ 4.  | person so sentimental that the death of a mouse brings tears       | d. Cook         |
| _____ 5.  | con man who claims to sell religious relics                        | e. Plowman      |
| _____ 6.  | person with a face so ugly that it scares little children          | f. Wife of Bath |
| _____ 7.  | romantic and hot-blooded person who is in training as a soldier    | g. Physician    |
| _____ 8.  | pirate who steals wine and shows no mercy to captives              | h. Squire       |
| _____ 9.  | person who has a nasty sore on his knee                            | i. Shipman      |
| _____ 10. | holy priest who attends to the needs of his congregation           | j. Parson       |
| _____ 11. | well-armed person who is dressed like Robin Hood                   | k. Summoner     |
| _____ 12. | person described as having a strong love for gold                  | l. Pardoner     |
| _____ 13. | hard-working farmer with sincere religious faith                   | m. Clerk        |
| _____ 14. | businessman who is in debt   | n. Merchant     |
| _____ 15. | monastery head with a worldly attitude                             | o. Miller       |

## **Answer Key for Quiz**

1. f
2. m
3. o
4. b
5. l
6. k
7. h
8. i
9. d
10. j
11. c
12. g
13. e
14. n
15. a

## Test

### Part A.

**Directions:** Match these characters from the Prologue with the proper descriptions.

- |                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. Knight           | a. a “proper forester”; he has a longbow and a “head like a nut”     |
| _____ 2. Geoffrey Chaucer | b. a model of the landed gentry; he is kind, old, and generous       |
| _____ 3. Guildsmen        | c. a “wrangler and buffoon”; he plays the bagpipes                   |
| _____ 4. Monk             | d. a “model ecclesiast”; he is a “shepherd and no mercenary”         |
| _____ 5. Clerk            | e. named Harry Bailly; he is a “merry-hearted man”                   |
| _____ 6. Host             | f. a model of chivalry and courtesy; he is humble and a good soldier |
| _____ 7. Yeoman           | g. both author and pilgrim   |
| _____ 8. Parson           | h. loves hunting with his horses and greyhounds                      |
| _____ 9. Miller           | i. social climbers who travel as a group                             |
| _____ 10. Franklin        | j. stereotype of a philosophical student                             |

### Part B.

**Directions:** Match the genre terms with the definitions.

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| _____ 1. Narrative about knightly quests and adventures                           | a. Breton Lais       |
| _____ 2. Tale, often set in Brittany region, of courtly love, magic, and folklore | b. Beast Fable       |
| _____ 3. Animals with human characteristics involved in clever moral tales        | c. Fabliau           |
| _____ 4. Nonpoetic tale in which people and things represent abstract ideas       | d. Prose Allegory    |
| _____ 5. Narrative of the lower classes based on clever tricks                    | e. Chivalric Romance |

**Part C.**

**Directions:** Provide answers to the following questions.

1. Who is buried at Canterbury?
2. Where do the pilgrims meet?
3. When do they meet there?
4. How many pilgrims are there?
5. Identify a literary influence on Chaucer's writing of *The Canterbury Tales*.
6. Which character leads the pilgrimage socially?
7. Which character actually leads the pilgrimage?
8. Which characters are of the lowest social rank?
9. Which character follows at the end of the pilgrimage?
10. Identify Chaucer's two major purposes in writing *The Canterbury Tales*.

## Answer Key for Test

### Part A.

1. f
2. g
3. i
4. h
5. j
6. e
7. a
8. d
9. c
10. b

### Part B.

1. e
2. a
3. b
4. d
5. c

### Part C.

1. St. Thomas à Becket
2. the Tabard Inn in London
3. in April
4. Chaucer says he meets twenty-nine at the inn; he himself is one, the Host joins them, and the Canon's Yeoman joins them later.
5. Boccaccio wrote *The Decameron*.
6. Knight
7. Miller
8. Plowman, Miller
9. Reeve
10. to create a gallery of medieval social classes; to write an anthology of medieval genres

## Journal Topics

**Directions:** Write about the following topics.

1. If you could take a vacation or go on a journey when you get spring fever, where would you want to go? Why would you want to go there?
2. What is your favorite story (from a book, movie, or television program)? What did you learn from the story?
3. Who is the most interesting person that you have ever met?
4. Which job, career, or occupation do you feel is the most interesting? How do you think people in our society view that occupation or job?
5. Which kind of entertainment do you prefer in a book or movie—adventure, romance, comedy, drama? Why? How does it make you feel?
6. It is sometimes said that “clothes make the man (or woman).” Write about a time when your choice of clothing reflected the kind of person that you are—or want to be.
7. If you could visit another time period, which one would it be? What would you hope to learn about the people who lived in that time period?
8. Do you agree or disagree that society changes with the times, yet people remain pretty much the same?
9. Do you think we form opinions of people based upon the way that they speak? If so, do you speak differently among your friends, in school, and at home? Why?
10. Suppose that you were selected to place five things in a time capsule to be buried on school property. What five items would you place in it? What would each thing tell a person living several hundred years in the future about our society and our culture?

### The Canterbury Connection

**Directions:** In the first column list ten types of persons found in modern society. In the second column identify personality traits of one individual representing each type. In the third column list specific details which demonstrate those traits. A sample is provided.

Modern Pilgrim	Identifying Characteristics	Specific Behavior/Mannerisms
1. Talk show host	Humorous; relaxed; arrogant; insulting	Attracts large audience; belittles guests with opposing viewpoints
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

**Part B.**

**Directions:** Decide to send the characters from part A on a trip (e.g., vacation, convention, campaign trail). Write a prologue in prose or verse depicting the individuals traveling in this assemblage; choose details to reveal a variety of actions—amusing, benevolent, corrupt, etc.

## Writing Topics

**Directions:** Select one of the following topics, and write a thoughtful, well-constructed response.

1. Why do you think Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* has remained a classic? Defend your opinion.
2. Show how one pilgrim's description in the Prologue can be related to the story told later. How are the character's personality, lifestyle, interests, intelligence, vocation, and attitudes toward life and people reflected in the tale?
3. Identify the tale that you found to be the best, funniest, or most moralistic. Cite evidence to support your opinion.
4. How does a reader's forming impressions of a character in the Prologue affect an understanding of the character's individual tale?
5. Trace how a reader's understanding of the characters in the Prologue is shaped by Chaucer's presenting them in a particular sequence.
6. Compare and contrast the uses of different types of texts for reading *The Canterbury Tales*.
7. View the movie *The Knight's Tale*, and relate it to *The Canterbury Tales*.
8. Research the popularity of *The Canterbury Tales* from medieval times to the present, and summarize your findings.
9. Read Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* or the Tilbury poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson, and compare that literature to Chaucer's work.

## Supplemental Reading List

### Fiction

*Watership Down*, Richard Adams  
*The Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio  
*The Name of the Rose*, Umberto Eco  
*Le Morte D'Arthur*, Sir Thomas Malory  
*Animal Farm*, George Orwell  
*The Noble Acts of King Arthur*, John Steinbeck  
*The Hobbit*, J. R. R. Tolkien  
*Fellowship of the Rings*, J. R. R. Tolkien  
*A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Mark Twain  
*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain  
*The Once and Future King*, T. H. White

### Drama

*A Man for All Seasons*, Robert Bolt  
*Everyman*  
*The Second Shepherd's Play*  
*Spoon River Anthology*, Edgar Lee Masters

### Poetry

*Early Irish Poetry*, Myles Dillon  
*Song of Roland*, Robert Harrison, trans.  
*Tales of a Wayside Inn*, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow  
*Lady of the Lake*, Sir Walter Scott  
*Idylls of the King*, Alfred, Lord Tennyson  
*Snowbound*, John Greenleaf Whittier  
*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, J. R. R. Tolkien or Brian Stone translation

### Nonfiction

*Chaucer of England*, Marchette Chute  
*The Last Plantagenets*, Thomas B. Costain  
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*Chaucer and His Times*, Derek Brewer

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*Chaucer: Poet of Mirth and Morality*, Helen Storm Corsa

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## The Canterbury Tales

ISBN 978-1-56077-842-4

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### Entire Unit

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| RL.11-12.1 | Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.  |
| RL.11-12.5 | Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.                 |
| RI.11-12.4 | Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10). |
| W.11-12.2b | Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.  |
| W.11-12.2d | Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.   |
| W.11-12.3b | Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.  |
| W.11-12.3d | Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.  |
| W.11-12.3e | Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.   |
| W.11-12.4  | Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)  |
| W.11-12.6  | Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.  |
| W.11-12.8  | Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience;  |

integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

- SL.11-12.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
- SL.11-12.1c Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.
- SL.11-12.1d Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.
- SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.
- SL.11-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
- L.11-12.2b Spell correctly.
- L.11-12.4a Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

#### Source

*Common Core State Standards* (Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010)



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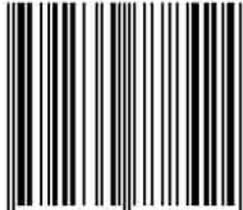


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