

## The Age of Chaucer

### The Prologue from The Canterbury Tales

Poem by Geoffrey Chaucer Translated by Nevill Coghill



**READING 3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods.

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML12-142A

#### Meet the Author

### Geoffrey Chaucer 1340?–1400

Geoffrey Chaucer made an enormous mark on the language and literature of England. Writing in an age when French was widely spoken in educated circles, Chaucer was among the first writers to show that English could be a respectable literary language. Today, his work is considered a cornerstone of English literature.

**Befriended by Royalty** Chaucer was born sometime between 1340 and 1343, probably in London, in an era when expanding commerce was helping to bring about growth in villages and cities. His family, though not noble, was well off, and his parents were able to place him in the household of the wife of Prince Lionel, a son of King Edward III, where he served as an attendant. Such a position was a vital means of advancement; the young Chaucer learned the customs of upper-class life and came into contact with influential people. It may have been during this period that Chaucer met Lionel's younger brother, John of Gaunt, who would become Chaucer's lifelong patron and a leading political figure of the day.

**A Knight and a Writer** Although Chaucer wrote his first

important work around 1370, writing was always a sideline; his primary career was in diplomacy. During Richard II's troubled reign (1377 to 1399), Chaucer was appointed a member of Parliament and knight of the shire. When Richard II was overthrown in 1399 by Henry Bolingbroke (who became King Henry IV), Chaucer managed to retain his political position, as Henry was the son of John of Gaunt.

Despite the turmoil of the 1380s and 1390s, the last two decades of Chaucer's life saw his finest literary achievements—the brilliant verse romance *Troilus and Criseyde* and his masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of verse and prose tales of many different kinds. At the time of his death, Chaucer had penned nearly 20,000 lines of *The Canterbury Tales*, but many more tales were planned.

**Uncommon Honor** When he died in 1400, Chaucer was accorded a rare honor for a commoner—burial in London's Westminster Abbey. In 1556, an admirer erected an elaborate marble monument to his memory. This was the beginning of the Abbey's famous Poets' Corner, where many of England's most distinguished writers have since been buried.

Author Online

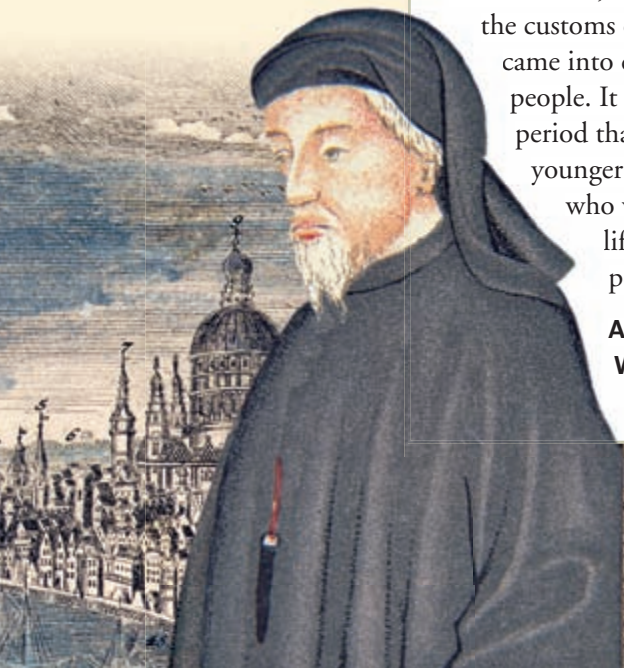


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#### DID YOU KNOW?

Geoffrey Chaucer . . .

- was captured and held for ransom while fighting for England in the Hundred Years' War.
- held various jobs, including royal messenger, justice of the peace, and forester.
- portrayed himself as a foolish character in a number of works.



## LITERARY ANALYSIS: CHARACTERIZATION

**Characterization** refers to the techniques a writer uses to develop characters. In “The Prologue,” the introduction to *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer offers a vivid portrait of English society during the Middle Ages. Among his 30 characters are clergy, aristocrats, and commoners. Chaucer employs a dramatic structure similar to Boccaccio’s *The Decameron*—each pilgrim tells a tale. Some of the ways Chaucer characterizes the pilgrims include

- description of a character’s appearance
- examples of a character’s speech, thoughts, and actions
- the responses of others to a character
- the narrator’s direct comments about a character

As you read, look for details that reveal the **character traits**, or consistent qualities, of each pilgrim.

## READING STRATEGY: PARAPHRASE

Reading medieval texts, such as *The Canterbury Tales*, can be challenging because they often contain unfamiliar words and complex sentences. One way that you can make sense of Chaucer’s work is to **paraphrase**, or restate information in your own words. A paraphrase is usually the same length as the original text but contains simpler language. As you read, paraphrase difficult passages. Here is an example.

Chaucer’s Words	Paraphrase
“When in April the sweet showers fall/ And pierce the drought of March to the root, . . .” (lines 1–2)	When the April rains come and end the dryness of March, . . .

## VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The following boldfaced words are critical to understanding Chaucer’s literary masterpiece. Try to figure out the meaning of each word from its context.

1. The refined gentleman always behaved with **courtliness**.
2. She remained calm and **sedately** finished her meal.
3. The popular politician was charming and **personable**.
4. When you save money in a bank, interest will **accrue**.
5. Does she suffer from heart disease or another **malady**?
6. She made an **entreaty** to the king, asking for a pardon.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

# What makes a great CHARACTER?

Creating a great character requires a sharp eye for detail, a keen understanding of people, and a brilliant imagination—all of which Chaucer possessed. Chaucer populated *The Canterbury Tales* with a colorful cast of characters whose virtues and flaws ring true even today, hundreds of years later.

**QUICKWRITE** Work with a partner to invent a character. Start with an intriguing name. Then come up with questions that will reveal basic information about the character, such as his or her age, physical appearance, family and friends, job, home, and personal tastes. Brainstorm possible answers for the questions. Then circle the responses that have the best potential for making a lively character.

Name: Bartholomew  
Throckmorton

1. What is his occupation?

duke  
squire to a knight  
sea captain  
town doctor  
grave digger

2. Where does he live?

3.

4.

5.

# The CANTERBURY TALES

Geoffrey Chaucer



## The PROLOGUE

**BACKGROUND** In “The Prologue” of *The Canterbury Tales*, a group gathers at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, a town just south of London, to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. At the suggestion of the innkeeper, the group decides to hold a storytelling competition to pass the time as they travel. “The Prologue” introduces the “sundry folk” who will tell the stories and is followed by the tales themselves—24 in all.

When in April the sweet showers fall  
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all  
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power  
As brings about the engendering of the flower,  
5 When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath  
Exhales an air in every grove and heath  
Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun  
His half-course in the sign of the *Ram* has run,  
And the small fowl are making melody  
10 That sleep away the night with open eye  
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)  
Then people long to go on pilgrimages  
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands  
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,  
15 And specially, from every shire’s end  
Of England, down to Canterbury they wend  
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick  
To give his help to them when they were sick. **A**

It happened in that season that one day  
20 In Southwark, at *The Tabard*, as I lay

**5 Zephyrus** (zěf’ər-əs): the Greek god of the west wind.

**8 the Ram:** Aries—the first sign of the zodiac. The time is mid-April.

**13 palmers:** people journeying to religious shrines; pilgrims; **strands:** shores.

**14 sundry** (sŭn’drē): various.

**15 shire’s:** county’s.

**17 martyr:** St. Thomas à Becket.

### **A** PARAPHRASE

Restate lines 1–18. Why does the group make its pilgrimage in April?



Ready to go on pilgrimage and start  
For Canterbury, most devout at heart,  
At night there came into that hostelry  
Some nine and twenty in a company  
25 Of sundry folk happening then to fall  
In fellowship, and they were pilgrims all  
That towards Canterbury meant to ride.  
The rooms and stables of the inn were wide;  
They made us easy, all was of the best.  
30 And, briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,  
I'd spoken to them all upon the trip  
And was soon one with them in fellowship,  
Pledged to rise early and to take the way  
To Canterbury, as you heard me say.

35 But none the less, while I have time and space,  
Before my story takes a further pace,  
It seems a reasonable thing to say  
What their condition was, the full array  
Of each of them, as it appeared to me,  
40 According to profession and degree,  
And what apparel they were riding in;  
And at a Knight I therefore will begin. **B**  
There was a *Knight*, a most distinguished man,  
Who from the day on which he first began  
45 To ride abroad had followed chivalry,  
Truth, honor, generousness and courtesy.  
He had done nobly in his sovereign's war  
And ridden into battle, no man more,  
As well in Christian as in heathen places,  
50 And ever honored for his noble graces.

When we took Alexandria, he was there.  
He often sat at table in the chair  
Of honor, above all nations, when in Prussia.  
In Lithuania he had ridden, and Russia,  
55 No Christian man so often, of his rank.  
When, in Granada, Algeciras sank  
Under assault, he had been there, and in  
North Africa, raiding Benamarin;  
In Anatolia he had been as well  
60 And fought when Ayas and Attalia fell,  
For all along the Mediterranean coast  
He had embarked with many a noble host.  
In fifteen mortal battles he had been  
And jousted for our faith at Tramissene

23 **hostelry** (hōs'tel-rē): inn.

### Language Coach

**Roots and Affixes** The suffix *-ship* can mean “someone entitled to a specific rank of” (*lordship*), “art or skill of” (*craftsmanship*), or “state of” (*friendship*). Which meaning applies to *fellowship*? Give another example of each use of *-ship*.

### **B** PARAPHRASE

Paraphrase lines 35–42. What does the narrator set out to accomplish in “The Prologue”?

45 **chivalry** (shīv'el-rē): the code of behavior of medieval knights, which stressed the values listed in line 46.

51 **Alexandria**: a city in Egypt, captured by European Christians in 1365. All the places named in lines 51–64 were scenes of conflicts in which medieval Christians battled Muslims and other non-Christian peoples.

64 **jousted**: fought with a lance in an arranged battle against another knight.

65 Thrice in the lists, and always killed his man.  
This same distinguished knight had led the van  
Once with the Bey of Balat, doing work  
For him against another heathen Turk;  
He was of sovereign value in all eyes.

70 And though so much distinguished, he was wise  
And in his bearing modest as a maid.  
He never yet a boorish thing had said  
In all his life to any, come what might;  
He was a true, a perfect gentle-knight. **C**

75 Speaking of his equipment, he possessed  
Fine horses, but he was not gaily dressed.  
He wore a fustian tunic stained and dark  
With smudges where his armor had left mark;  
Just home from service, he had joined our ranks  
80 To do his pilgrimage and render thanks.

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.

85 In stature he was of a moderate length,  
With wonderful agility and strength.  
He'd seen some service with the cavalry  
In Flanders and Artois and Picardy  
And had done valiantly in little space  
90 Of time, in hope to win his lady's grace.  
He was embroidered like a meadow bright  
And full of freshest flowers, red and white.  
Singing he was, or fluting all the day;  
He was as fresh as is the month of May.  
95 Short was his gown, the sleeves were long and wide;  
He knew the way to sit a horse and ride.  
He could make songs and poems and recite,  
Knew how to joust and dance, to draw and write.  
He loved so hotly that till dawn grew pale  
100 He slept as little as a nightingale.  
Courteous he was, lowly and serviceable,  
And carved to serve his father at the table.

There was a *Yeoman* with him at his side,  
No other servant; so he chose to ride.  
105 This Yeoman wore a coat and hood of green,  
And peacock-feathered arrows, bright and keen  
And neatly sheathed, hung at his belt the while

**65 thrice:** three times; **lists:** fenced areas for jousting.

**66 van:** vanguard—the troops foremost in an attack.

**67 Bey of Balat:** a Turkish ruler.

### **C CHARACTERIZATION**

Reread lines 43–74. What do the Knight's actions on and off the battlefield reveal about his character? Cite details to support your answer.

**77 fustian** (fūs'chən): a strong cloth made of linen and cotton.

**81 Squire:** a young man attending on and receiving training from a knight.

**82 cadet:** soldier in training.

**88 Flanders and Artois** (är-twä') and **Picardy** (pĭk'ər-dē): areas in what is now Belgium and northern France.

**93 fluting:** whistling.

**103 Yeoman** (yō'mən): an attendant in a noble household; **him:** the Knight.

—For he could dress his gear in yeoman style,  
 His arrows never drooped their feathers low—  
 110 And in his hand he bore a mighty bow.  
 His head was like a nut, his face was brown.  
 He knew the whole of woodcraft up and down.  
 A saucy brace was on his arm to ward  
 It from the bow-string, and a shield and sword  
 115 Hung at one side, and at the other slipped  
 A jaunty dirk, spear-sharp and well-equipped.  
 A medal of St. Christopher he wore  
 Of shining silver on his breast, and bore  
 A hunting-horn, well slung and burnished clean,  
 120 That dangled from a baldrick of bright green.  
 He was a proper forester, I guess.

There also was a *Nun*, a Prioress,  
 Her way of smiling very simple and coy.  
 Her greatest oath was only “By St. Loy!”  
 125 And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.  
 And well she sang a service, with a fine  
 Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly,  
 And she spoke daintily in French, extremely,  
 After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe;  
 130 French in the Paris style she did not know.  
 At meat her manners were well taught withal;  
 No morsel from her lips did she let fall,  
 Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;  
 But she could carry a morsel up and keep  
 135 The smallest drop from falling on her breast.  
 For **courtliness** she had a special zest,  
 And she would wipe her upper lip so clean  
 That not a trace of grease was to be seen  
 Upon the cup when she had drunk; to eat,  
 140 She reached a hand **sedately** for the meat.  
 She certainly was very entertaining,  
 Pleasant and friendly in her ways, and straining  
 To counterfeit a courtly kind of grace,  
 A stately bearing fitting to her place,  
 145 And to seem dignified in all her dealings. **D**  
 As for her sympathies and tender feelings,  
 She was so charitably solicitous  
 She used to weep if she but saw a mouse  
 Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding.  
 150 And she had little dogs she would be feeding  
 With roasted flesh, or milk, or fine white bread.  
 And bitterly she wept if one were dead

**113 saucy:** jaunty; stylish; **brace:** a leather arm-guard worn by archers.

**116 dirk:** small dagger.

**117 St. Christopher:** patron saint of travelers.

**120 baldrick:** shoulder strap.

**122 Prioress:** a nun ranking just below the abbess (head) of a convent.

**124 St. Loy:** St. Eligius (known as St. Éloi in France).

**129 Stratford-atte-Bowe:** a town (now part of London) near the Prioress’s convent.

**131 at meat:** when dining; **withal:** moreover.

**courtliness** (kôrt’lê-nÿs) *n.*  
 polite, elegant manners; refined behavior

**sedately** (sÿ-dât’lê) *adv.* in a composed, dignified manner; calmly

**143 counterfeit:** imitate.

**D CHARACTERIZATION**  
 Reread lines 122–145. Which details suggest that the Prioress may be trying to appear more sophisticated than she really is?

Or someone took a stick and made it smart;  
 She was all sentiment and tender heart.  
 155 Her veil was gathered in a seemly way,  
 Her nose was elegant, her eyes glass-grey;  
 Her mouth was very small, but soft and red,  
 Her forehead, certainly, was fair of spread,  
 Almost a span across the brows, I own;  
 160 She was indeed by no means undergrown.  
 Her cloak, I noticed, had a graceful charm.  
 She wore a coral trinket on her arm,  
 A set of beads, the gaudies tricked in green,  
 Whence hung a golden brooch of brightest sheen  
 165 On which there first was graven a crowned A,  
 And lower, *Amor vincit omnia*.

Another *Nun*, the secretary at her cell,  
 Was riding with her, and *three Priests* as well.

A *Monk* there was, one of the finest sort  
 170 Who rode the country; hunting was his sport.  
 A manly man, to be an Abbot able;  
 Many a dainty horse he had in stable.  
 His bridle, when he rode, a man might hear  
 Jingling in a whistling wind as clear,  
 175 Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell  
 Where my lord Monk was Prior of the cell.  
 The Rule of good St. Benet or St. Maur  
 As old and strict he tended to ignore;  
 He let go by the things of yesterday  
 180 And took the modern world's more spacious way.  
 He did not rate that text at a plucked hen  
 Which says that hunters are not holy men  
 And that a monk uncloistered is a mere  
 Fish out of water, flapping on the pier,  
 185 That is to say a monk out of his cloister.  
 That was a text he held not worth an oyster;  
 And I agreed and said his views were sound;  
 Was he to study till his head went round  
 Poring over books in cloisters? Must he toil  
 190 As Austin bade and till the very soil?  
 Was he to leave the world upon the shelf?  
 Let Austin have his labor to himself.

This Monk was therefore a good man to horse;  
 Greyhounds he had, as swift as birds, to course.  
 195 Hunting a hare or riding at a fence

**159 span:** a unit of length equal to nine inches. A broad forehead was considered a sign of beauty in Chaucer's day.

**163 gaudies:** the larger beads in a set of prayer beads.

**166 *Amor vincit omnia*** (ä'môr wĭn'kĭt òm'nĕ-ə): Latin for "Love conquers all things."

**171 Abbot:** the head of a monastery.

**172 dainty:** excellent.

**176 Prior of the cell:** head of a subsidiary group of monks.

**177 St. Benet . . . St. Maur:** St. Benedict, who established a strict set of rules for monks' behavior, and his follower, St. Maurus, who introduced those rules into France.

**190 Austin:** St. Augustine of Hippo, who recommended that monks engage in hard agricultural labor.

**194 to course:** for hunting.





Was all his fun, he spared for no expense.  
 I saw his sleeves were garnished at the hand  
 With fine grey fur, the finest in the land,  
 And on his hood, to fasten it at his chin  
 200 He had a wrought-gold cunningly fashioned pin;  
 Into a lover's knot it seemed to pass.  
 His head was bald and shone like looking-glass;  
 So did his face, as if it had been greased.  
 He was a fat and **personable** priest;  
 205 His prominent eyeballs never seemed to settle. **E**  
 They glittered like the flames beneath a kettle;  
 Supple his boots, his horse in fine condition.  
 He was a prelate fit for exhibition,  
 He was not pale like a tormented soul.  
 210 He liked a fat swan best, and roasted whole.  
 His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.

There was a *Friar*, a wanton one and merry,  
 A Limiter, a very festive fellow.  
 In all Four Orders there was none so mellow,  
 215 So glib with gallant phrase and well-turned speech.  
 He'd fixed up many a marriage, giving each  
 Of his young women what he could afford her.  
 He was a noble pillar to his Order.  
 Highly beloved and intimate was he  
 220 With County folk within his boundary,  
 And city dames of honor and possessions;  
 For he was qualified to hear confessions,

**personable** (pûr'sə-nə-bəl)  
*adj.* pleasing in behavior and appearance

**E CHARACTERIZATION**

List three **character traits** of the Monk. In what ways does the narrator appear to poke fun at him?

**211 palfrey** (pôl'frē): saddle horse.

**212 Friar:** a member of a religious group sworn to poverty and living on charitable donations; **wanton** (wŏn'tən): playful; jolly.

**213 Limiter:** a friar licensed to beg for donations in a limited area.

**214 Four Orders:** the four groups of friars—Dominican, Franciscan, Carmelite, and Augustinian.

**222 confessions:** church rites in which people confess their sins to clergy members. Only certain friars were licensed to hear confessions.

Or so he said, with more than priestly scope;  
 He had a special license from the Pope.  
 225 Sweetly he heard his penitents at shrift  
 With pleasant absolution, for a gift.  
 He was an easy man in penance-giving  
 Where he could hope to make a decent living;  
 It's a sure sign whenever gifts are given  
 230 To a poor Order that a man's well shriven,  
 And should he give enough he knew in verity  
 The penitent repented in sincerity.  
 For many a fellow is so hard of heart  
 He cannot weep, for all his inward smart.  
 235 Therefore instead of weeping and of prayer  
 One should give silver for a poor Friar's care.  
 He kept his tippet stuffed with pins for curls,  
 And pocket-knives, to give to pretty girls.  
 And certainly his voice was gay and sturdy,  
 240 For he sang well and played the hurdy-gurdy.  
 At sing-songs he was champion of the hour.  
 His neck was whiter than a lily-flower  
 But strong enough to butt a bruiser down.  
 He knew the taverns well in every town  
 245 And every innkeeper and barmaid too  
 Better than lepers, beggars and that crew, **F**  
 For in so *eminent* a man as he  
 It was not fitting with the dignity  
 Of his position, dealing with a scum  
 250 Of wretched lepers; nothing good can come  
 Of commerce with such slum-and-gutter dwellers,  
 But only with the rich and victual-sellers.  
 But anywhere a profit might **accrue**  
 Courteous he was and lowly of service too.  
 255 Natural gifts like his were hard to match.  
 He was the finest beggar of his batch,  
 And, for his begging-district, paid a rent;  
 His brethren did no poaching where he went.  
 For though a widow mightn't have a shoe,  
 260 So pleasant was his holy how-d'ye-do  
 He got his farthing from her just the same  
 Before he left, and so his income came  
 To more than he laid out. And how he romped,  
 Just like a puppy! He was ever prompt  
 265 To arbitrate disputes on settling days  
 (For a small fee) in many helpful ways,  
 Not then appearing as your cloistered scholar  
 With threadbare habit hardly worth a dollar,

225 **shrift**: confession.

230 **well shriven**: completely forgiven through the rite of confession.

231 **verity**: truth.

237 **tippet**: an extension of a hood or sleeve, used as a pocket.

240 **hurdy-gurdy**: a stringed musical instrument, similar to a lute, played by turning a crank while pressing down keys.

#### **F** PARAPHRASE

Restate lines 237–246. How does the Friar spend the money he earns through hearing confessions?

252 **victual** (vɪ'tl): food.

**accrue** (ə-krōō') v. to be added or gained; to accumulate

261 **farthing**: a coin of small value used in England until recent times.

265 **settling days**: days on which disputes were settled out of court. Friars often acted as arbiters in the disputes and charged for their services, though forbidden by the church to do so.

But much more like a Doctor or a Pope.  
 270 Of double-worsted was the semi-cope  
 Upon his shoulders, and the swelling fold  
 About him, like a bell about its mold  
 When it is casting, rounded out his dress.  
 He lisped a little out of wantonness  
 275 To make his English sweet upon his tongue.  
 When he had played his harp, or having sung,  
 His eyes would twinkle in his head as bright  
 As any star upon a frosty night.  
 This worthy's name was Hubert, it appeared.

280 There was a *Merchant* with a forking beard  
 And motley dress; high on his horse he sat,  
 Upon his head a Flemish beaver hat  
 And on his feet daintily buckled boots.  
 He told of his opinions and pursuits  
 285 In solemn tones, he harped on his increase  
 Of capital; there should be sea-police  
 (He thought) upon the Harwich-Holland ranges;  
 He was expert at dabbling in exchanges.  
 This estimable Merchant so had set  
 290 His wits to work, none knew he was in debt,  
 He was so stately in administration,  
 In loans and bargains and negotiation.  
 He was an excellent fellow all the same;  
 To tell the truth I do not know his name. **G**

295 An *Oxford Cleric*, still a student though,  
 One who had taken logic long ago,  
 Was there; his horse was thinner than a rake,  
 And he was not too fat, I undertake,  
 But had a hollow look, a sober stare;  
 300 The thread upon his overcoat was bare.  
 He had found no preferment in the church  
 And he was too unworldly to make search  
 For secular employment. By his bed  
 He preferred having twenty books in red  
 305 And black, of Aristotle's philosophy,  
 Than costly clothes, fiddle or psaltery.  
 Though a philosopher, as I have told,  
 He had not found the stone for making gold.  
 Whatever money from his friends he took  
 310 He spent on learning or another book  
 And prayed for them most earnestly, returning  
 Thanks to them thus for paying for his learning.

**270 double-worsted** (wōōs'tīd): a strong, fairly costly fabric made from tightly twisted woolen yarn; **semi-cope**: a short cloak.

**281 motley**: multicolored.

**282 Flemish**: from Flanders, an area in what is now Belgium and northern France.

**287 Harwich-Holland ranges**: shipping routes between Harwich (hār'tj), a port on England's east coast, and the country of Holland.

**288 exchanges**: selling foreign currency at a profit.

#### **G PARAPHRASE**

Paraphrase lines 284–294.

Is the Merchant a successful businessman? Why or why not?

**295 Cleric**: a student preparing for the priesthood.

**301 preferment**: advancement.

**305 Aristotle's philosophy**: the writings of Aristotle, a famous Greek philosopher of the fourth century B.C.

**306 psaltery** (sôl'tè-rê): a stringed instrument.

**307–308 Though a philosopher . . . gold**: The “philosopher’s stone” supposedly turned metals into gold.

His only care was study, and indeed  
He never spoke a word more than was need,  
315 Formal at that, respectful in the extreme,  
Short, to the point, and lofty in his theme.  
A tone of moral virtue filled his speech  
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach. **H**

*A Sergeant at the Law* who paid his calls,  
320 Wary and wise, for clients at St. Paul's  
There also was, of noted excellence.  
Discreet he was, a man to reverence,  
Or so he seemed, his sayings were so wise.  
He often had been Justice of Assize  
325 By letters patent, and in full commission.  
His fame and learning and his high position  
Had won him many a robe and many a fee.  
There was no such conveyancer as he;  
All was fee-simple to his strong digestion,  
330 Not one conveyance could be called in question.  
Though there was nowhere one so busy as he,  
He was less busy than he seemed to be.  
He knew of every judgment, case and crime  
Ever recorded since King William's time.  
335 He could dictate defenses or draft deeds;  
No one could pinch a comma from his screeds  
And he knew every statute off by rote.  
He wore a homely parti-colored coat,  
Girt with a silken belt of pin-stripe stuff;  
340 Of his appearance I have said enough.

There was a *Franklin* with him, it appeared;  
White as a daisy-petal was his beard.  
A sanguine man, high-colored and benign,  
He loved a morning sop of cake in wine.  
345 He lived for pleasure and had always done,  
For he was Epicurus' very son,  
In whose opinion sensual delight  
Was the one true felicity in sight.  
As noted as St. Julian was for bounty  
350 He made his household free to all the County.  
His bread, his ale were finest of the fine  
And no one had a better stock of wine.  
His house was never short of bake-meat pies,  
Of fish and flesh, and these in such supplies  
355 It positively snowed with meat and drink  
And all the dainties that a man could think. **I**

#### **H** CHARACTERIZATION

Reread lines 295–318. In what ways does the Oxford Cleric differ from the Monk and the Friar? Cite details.

**319 Sergeant at the Law:** a lawyer appointed by the monarch to serve as a judge.

**320 St. Paul's:** the cathedral of London, outside which lawyers met clients when the courts were closed.

**324 Justice of Assize:** a judge who traveled about the country to hear cases.

**325 letters patent:** royal documents commissioning a judge.

**328 conveyancer:** a lawyer specializing in conveyances (deeds) and property disputes.

**329 fee-simple:** property owned without restrictions.

**334 King William's time:** the reign of William the Conqueror.

**336 screeds:** documents.

**341 Franklin:** a wealthy landowner.

**343 sanguine** (sǎng'gwĭn): cheerful and good-natured.

**346 Epicurus' very son:** someone who pursues pleasure as the chief goal in life, as the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus was supposed to have recommended.

**349 St. Julian:** the patron saint of hospitality; **bounty:** generosity.

#### **I** CHARACTERIZATION

What does the narrator state directly about the Franklin in lines 341–356?

According to the seasons of the year  
 Changes of dish were ordered to appear.  
 He kept fat partridges in coops, beyond,  
 360 Many a bream and pike were in his pond.  
 Woe to the cook unless the sauce was hot  
 And sharp, or if he wasn't on the spot!  
 And in his hall a table stood arrayed  
 And ready all day long, with places laid.  
 365 As Justice at the Sessions none stood higher;  
 He often had been Member for the Shire.  
 A dagger and a little purse of silk  
 Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.  
 As Sheriff he checked audit, every entry.  
 370 He was a model among landed gentry.

*A Haberdasher, a Dyer, a Carpenter,  
 A Weaver and a Carpet-maker* were  
 Among our ranks, all in the livery  
 Of one impressive guild-fraternity.  
 375 They were so trim and fresh their gear would pass  
 For new. Their knives were not tricked out with brass  
 But wrought with purest silver, which avouches  
 A like display on girdles and on pouches.  
 Each seemed a worthy burgess, fit to grace  
 380 A guild-hall with a seat upon the dais.  
 Their wisdom would have justified a plan  
 To make each one of them an alderman;  
 They had the capital and revenue,  
 Besides their wives declared it was their due.  
 385 And if they did not think so, then they ought;  
 To be called "*Madam*" is a glorious thought,  
 And so is going to church and being seen  
 Having your mantle carried, like a queen.

They had a *Cook* with them who stood alone  
 390 For boiling chicken with a marrow-bone,  
 Sharp flavoring-powder and a spice for savor.  
 He could distinguish London ale by flavor,  
 And he could roast and seethe and broil and fry,  
 Make good thick soup and bake a tasty pie.  
 395 But what a pity—so it seemed to me,  
 That he should have an ulcer on his knee.  
 As for *blancmange*, he made it with the best.

There was a *Skipper* hailing from far west;  
 He came from Dartmouth, so I understood.

**365 Sessions:** local court proceedings.

**366 Member for the Shire:** his county's representative in Parliament.

**368 girdle:** belt.

**369 Sheriff:** a royal tax collector.

**370 landed gentry** (jĕn'trē): well-born, wealthy landowners.

**371 Haberdasher:** a seller of hats and other clothing accessories.

**373–374 livery . . . guild-fraternity:** uniform of a social or religious organization.

**379 burgess** (bŭr'jĭs): citizen of a town.

**382 alderman:** town councilor.

**388 mantle:** cloak.

**397 blancmange** (blə-mānj'): a thick chicken stew with almonds.

**399 Dartmouth** (dārt'meth): a port in southwestern England.

400 He rode a farmer's horse as best he could,  
 In a woolen gown that reached his knee.  
 A dagger on a lanyard falling free  
 Hung from his neck under his arm and down.  
 The summer heat had tanned his color brown,  
 405 And certainly he was an excellent fellow.  
 Many a draft of vintage, red and yellow,  
 He'd drawn at Bordeaux, while the trader snored.  
 The nicer rules of conscience he ignored.  
 If, when he fought, the enemy vessel sank,  
 410 He sent his prisoners home; they walked the plank.  
 As for his skill in reckoning his tides,  
 Currents and many another risk besides,  
 Moons, harbors, pilots, he had such dispatch  
 That none from Hull to Carthage was his match.  
 415 Hardy he was, prudent in undertaking;  
 His beard in many a tempest had its shaking,  
 And he knew all the havens as they were  
 From Gottland to the Cape of Finisterre,  
 And every creek in Brittany and Spain;  
 420 The barge he owned was called *The Maudelayne*.

A *Doctor* too emerged as we proceeded;  
 No one alive could talk as well as he did  
 On points of medicine and of surgery,  
 For, being grounded in astronomy,  
 425 He watched his patient closely for the hours  
 When, by his horoscope, he knew the powers  
 Of favorable planets, then ascendant,  
 Worked on the images for his dependent.  
 The cause of every **malady** you'd got  
 430 He knew, and whether dry, cold, moist or hot;  
 He knew their seat, their humor and condition.  
 He was a perfect practicing physician.  
 These causes being known for what they were,  
 He gave the man his medicine then and there.  
 435 All his apothecaries in a tribe  
 Were ready with the drugs he would prescribe  
 And each made money from the other's guile;  
 They had been friendly for a goodish while.  
 He was well-versed in Aesculapius too  
 440 And what Hippocrates and Rufus knew  
 And Dioscorides, now dead and gone,  
 Galen and Rhazes, Hali, Serapion,  
 Averroes, Avicenna, Constantine,  
 Scotch Bernard, John of Gaddesden, Gilbertine.

**402 lanyard** (lăn'yərd): a cord worn as a necklace.

**406 vintage:** wine.

**407 Bordeaux** (bôr-dô'): a region of France famous for its wine.

**414 Hull . . . Carthage:** ports in England and in Spain. The places named in lines 414–419 show that the Skipper is familiar with all the western coast of Europe.

**416 tempest:** violent storm.

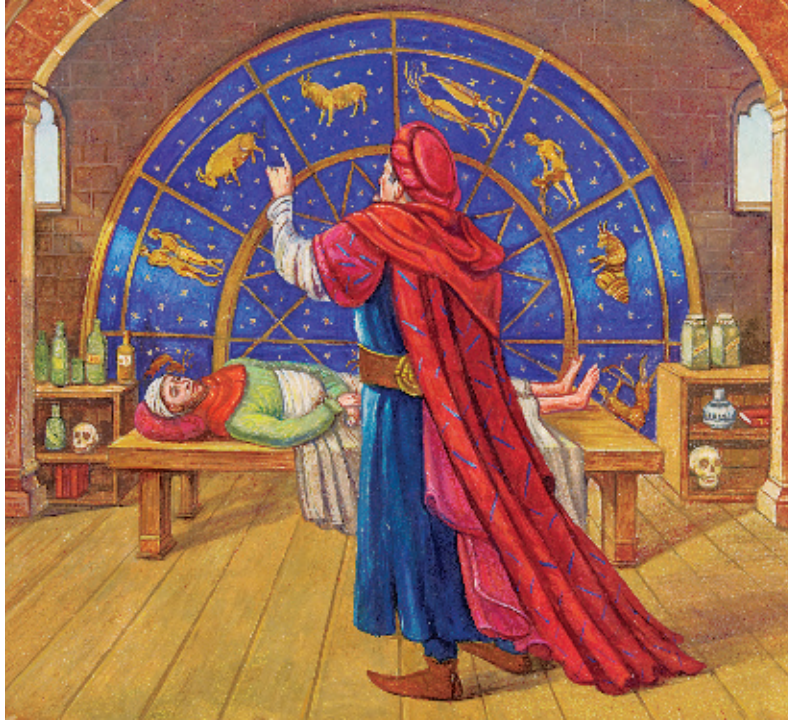
**424 astronomy:** astrology.

**malady** (măl'ə-dē) *n.* a disease or disorder; an ailment

**430 dry, cold, moist . . . hot:** in medieval science, the four basic qualities that were thought to combine to form both the four elements of the world (fire, air, water, and earth) and the four humors of the human body.

**435 apothecaries** (ə-pŏth'ĭ-kēr'ēz): druggists.

**439–444 Aesculapius** (ēs'kyə-lă'pē-əs) . . . **Gilbertine:** famous ancient and medieval medical experts.



### ◀ Analyze Visuals

What does this image reveal about the ways in which a medieval doctor's practice differed from that of a modern doctor?

445 In his own diet he observed some measure;  
 There were no superfluities for pleasure,  
 Only digestives, nutritives and such.  
 He did not read the Bible very much.  
 In blood-red garments, slashed with bluish grey  
 450 And lined with taffeta, he rode his way;  
 Yet he was rather close as to expenses  
 And kept the gold he won in pestilences.  
 Gold stimulates the heart, or so we're told.  
 He therefore had a special love of gold.

446 **superfluities** (sōō'pər-flōō'ī-tēz): excesses.

450 **taffeta** (tăf'ī-tə): a stiff, smooth fabric.

452 **pestilences**: plagues.

455 A worthy *woman* from beside *Bath* city  
 Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity.  
 In making cloth she showed so great a bent  
 She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent.  
 In all the parish not a dame dared stir  
 460 Towards the altar steps in front of her,  
 And if indeed they did, so wrath was she  
 As to be quite put out of charity.  
 Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground;  
 I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,  
 465 The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.  
 Her hose were of the finest scarlet red  
 And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.  
 Bold was her face, handsome, and red in hue.  
 A worthy woman all her life, what's more  
 470 She'd had five husbands, all at the church door,  
 Apart from other company in youth;  
 No need just now to speak of that, forsooth.

455 **Bath**: a city in southwestern England.

458 **Ypres** (ē'prə) . . . **Ghent** (gĕnt): Flemish cities famous in the Middle Ages for manufacturing fine wool fabrics.

461 **wrath** (răth): angry.

463 **ground**: a textured fabric.

466 **hose**: stockings.

470 **all at the church door**: In medieval times, a marriage was performed outside or just within the doors of a church; afterwards, the marriage party went inside for mass.

472 **forsooth**: in truth; indeed.

And she had thrice been to Jerusalem,  
Seen many strange rivers and passed over them;  
475 She'd been to Rome and also to Boulogne,  
St. James of Compostella and Cologne,  
And she was skilled in wandering by the way.  
She had gap-teeth, set widely, truth to say.  
Easily on an ambling horse she sat  
480 Well wimpled up, and on her head a hat  
As broad as is a buckler or a shield;  
She had a flowing mantle that concealed  
Large hips, her heels spurred sharply under that.  
In company she liked to laugh and chat  
485 And knew the remedies for love's mischances,  
An art in which she knew the oldest dances. ❶

A holy-minded man of good renown  
There was, and poor, the *Parson* to a town,  
Yet he was rich in holy thought and work.  
490 He also was a learned man, a clerk,  
Who truly knew Christ's gospel and would preach it  
Devoutly to parishioners, and teach it.  
Benign and wonderfully diligent,  
And patient when adversity was sent  
495 (For so he proved in much adversity)  
He hated cursing to extort a fee,  
Nay rather he preferred beyond a doubt  
Giving to poor parishioners round about  
Both from church offerings and his property;  
500 He could in little find sufficiency.  
Wide was his parish, with houses far asunder,  
Yet he neglected not in rain or thunder,  
In sickness or in grief, to pay a call  
On the remotest, whether great or small,  
505 Upon his feet, and in his hand a stave.  
This noble example to his sheep he gave  
That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught;  
And it was from the Gospel he had caught  
Those words, and he would add this figure too,  
510 That if gold rust, what then will iron do?  
For if a priest be foul in whom we trust  
No wonder that a common man should rust;  
And shame it is to see—let priests take stock—  
A shitten shepherd and a snowy flock.  
515 The true example that a priest should give  
Is one of cleanness, how the sheep should live.

473–476 Jerusalem . . . Rome . . .  
Boulogne (bōō-lōn'), St. James of  
Compostella and Cologne (kə-lōn'):  
popular destinations of religious  
pilgrimages in the Middle Ages.

480 **wimpled**: with her hair and  
neck covered by a cloth headdress.

481 **buckler**: small round shield.

❶ **CHARACTERIZATION**

Reread lines 455–486. Which  
details help define the Wife of  
Bath as a worldly woman?

490 **clerk**: scholar.

500 **sufficiency**: enough to get by on.

501 **asunder**: apart.

505 **stave**: staff.

507 **wrought** (rôt): worked.

509 **figure**: figure of speech.



He did not set his benefice to hire  
 And leave his sheep encumbered in the mire  
 Or run to London to earn easy bread  
 520 By singing masses for the wealthy dead,  
 Or find some Brotherhood and get enrolled.  
 He stayed at home and watched over his fold  
 So that no wolf should make the sheep miscarry.  
 He was a shepherd and no mercenary. **K**  
 525 Holy and virtuous he was, but then  
 Never contemptuous of sinful men,  
 Never disdainful, never too proud or fine,  
 But was discreet in teaching and benign.  
 His business was to show a fair behavior  
 530 And draw men thus to Heaven and their Savior,  
 Unless indeed a man were obstinate;  
 And such, whether of high or low estate,  
 He put to sharp rebuke, to say the least.  
 I think there never was a better priest.  
 535 He sought no pomp or glory in his dealings,  
 No scrupulosity had spiced his feelings.  
 Christ and His Twelve Apostles and their lore  
 He taught, but followed it himself before.

There was a *Plowman* with him there, his brother;  
 540 Many a load of dung one time or other  
 He must have carted through the morning dew.  
 He was an honest worker, good and true,  
 Living in peace and perfect charity,  
 And, as the gospel bade him, so did he,  
 545 Loving God best with all his heart and mind  
 And then his neighbor as himself, repined  
 At no misfortune, slacked for no content,  
 For steadily about his work he went  
 To thrash his corn, to dig or to manure  
 550 Or make a ditch; and he would help the poor **L**  
 For love of Christ and never take a penny  
 If he could help it, and, as prompt as any,  
 He paid his tithes in full when they were due  
 On what he owned, and on his earnings too.  
 555 He wore a tabard smock and rode a mare.

There was a *Reeve*, also a *Miller*, there,  
 A College *Manciple* from the Inns of Court,  
 A papal *Pardoner* and, in close consort,

**517 set his benefice** (bĕn'ə-fĭs) **to hire:** pay someone to perform his parish duties for him.

**K PARAPHRASE**

Restate lines 515–524. In what ways does the Parson serve the members of his parish?

**536 scrupulosity** (skrōō'pyə-lōs'ī-tē): excessive concern with fine points of behavior.

**L CHARACTERIZATION**


Compare the Plowman with his brother, the Parson. What character traits do they seem to share?

**555 tabard smock:** a short loose jacket made of a heavy material.

**556 Reeve:** an estate manager;

**557 Manciple:** a servant in charge of purchasing food; **Inns of Court:** London institutions for training law students; **558 Pardoner:** a church official authorized to sell people pardons for their sins.

A Church-Court *Summoner*, riding at a trot,  
560 And finally myself—that was the lot.

The *Miller* was a chap of sixteen stone,  
A great stout fellow big in brawn and bone.  
He did well out of them, for he could go  
And win the ram at any wrestling show.  
565 Broad, knotty and short-shouldered, he would boast  
He could heave any door off hinge and post,  
Or take a run and break it with his head.  
His beard, like any sow or fox, was red  
And broad as well, as though it were a spade;  
570 And, at its very tip, his nose displayed  
A wart on which there stood a tuft of hair  
Red as the bristles in an old sow's ear.  
His nostrils were as black as they were wide.  
He had a sword and buckler at his side,  
575 His mighty mouth was like a furnace door.   
A wrangler and buffoon, he had a store  
Of tavern stories, filthy in the main.  
His was a master-hand at stealing grain.  
He felt it with his thumb and thus he knew  
580 Its quality and took three times his due—  
A thumb of gold, by God, to gauge an oat!  
He wore a hood of blue and a white coat.  
He liked to play his bagpipes up and down  
And that was how he brought us out of town.

585 The *Manciple* came from the Inner Temple;  
All caterers might follow his example  
In buying victuals; he was never rash  
Whether he bought on credit or paid cash.  
He used to watch the market most precisely  
590 And got in first, and so he did quite nicely.  
Now isn't it a marvel of God's grace  
That an illiterate fellow can outpace  
The wisdom of a heap of learned men?  
His masters—he had more than thirty then—  
595 All versed in the abstrusest legal knowledge,  
Could have produced a dozen from their College  
Fit to be stewards in land and rents and game  
To any Peer in England you could name,  
And show him how to live on what he had  
600 Debt-free (unless of course the Peer were mad)  
Or be as frugal as he might desire,  
And make them fit to help about the Shire

**559 Summoner:** a layman with the job of summoning sinners to church courts.

**561 stone:** a unit of weight equal to 14 pounds.

 **GRAMMAR AND STYLE**

Review lines 570–575. Notice how Chaucer uses **similes**, or comparisons, to create a remarkably vivid—and unflattering—portrait of the Miller.

**576 wrangler** (rǎng'glər): a loud, argumentative person; **buffoon** (bə-fōōn'): a fool.

**577 in the main:** for the most part.

**581 thumb of gold:** a reference to a proverb, "An honest miller has a golden thumb"—perhaps meaning that there is no such thing as an honest miller.

**585 Inner Temple:** one of the Inns of Court.

**594 his masters:** the lawyers that the Manciple feeds.

**595 abstrusest:** most scholarly and difficult to understand.

**597–598 stewards . . . Peer:** estate managers for any nobleman.

In any legal case there was to try;  
And yet this Manciple could wipe their eye.

- 605 The *Reeve* was old and choleric and thin;  
His beard was shaven closely to the skin,  
His shorn hair came abruptly to a stop  
Above his ears, and he was docked on top  
Just like a priest in front; his legs were lean,  
610 Like sticks they were, no calf was to be seen.  
He kept his bins and garners very trim;  
No auditor could gain a point on him.  
And he could judge by watching drought and rain  
The yield he might expect from seed and grain.  
615 His master's sheep, his animals and hens,  
Pigs, horses, dairies, stores and cattle-pens  
Were wholly trusted to his government.  
He had been under contract to present  
The accounts, right from his master's earliest years.  
620 No one had ever caught him in arrears.  
No bailiff, serf or herdsman dared to kick,  
He knew their dodges, knew their every trick;  
Feared like the plague he was, by those beneath.  
He had a lovely dwelling on a heath,  
625 Shadowed in green by trees above the sward.  
A better hand at bargains than his lord,

604 **wipe their eye:** outdo them.

605 **choleric** (kŏl'ə-rĭk): having a temperament in which yellow bile predominates, and therefore prone to outbursts of anger.

608 **docked:** clipped short.

611 **garners:** buildings for storing grain.

617 **government:** authority.

620 **in arrears:** with unpaid debts.

621 **bailiff:** farm manager; **serf:** farm laborer.

625 **sward:** grassy plot.



He had grown rich and had a store of treasure  
 Well tucked away, yet out it came to pleasure  
 His lord with subtle loans or gifts of goods,  
 630 To earn his thanks and even coats and hoods.  
 When young he'd learnt a useful trade and still  
 He was a carpenter of first-rate skill.  
 The stallion-cob he rode at a slow trot  
 Was dapple-grey and bore the name of Scot.  
 635 He wore an overcoat of bluish shade  
 And rather long; he had a rusty blade  
 Slung at his side. He came, as I heard tell,  
 From Norfolk, near a place called Baldeswell.  
 His coat was tucked under his belt and splayed.  
 640 He rode the hindmost of our cavalcade.

**633 stallion-cob:** a thickset, short-legged male horse.

**638 Norfolk** (nôr'fək): a county in eastern England.

There was a *Summoner* with us at that Inn,  
 His face on fire, like a cherubin,  
 For he had carbuncles. His eyes were narrow,  
 He was as hot and lecherous as a sparrow.  
 645 Black scabby brows he had, and a thin beard.  
 Children were afraid when he appeared.  
 No quicksilver, lead ointment, tartar creams,  
 No brimstone, no boracic, so it seems,  
 Could make a salve that had the power to bite,  
 650 Clean up or cure his whelks of knobby white  
 Or purge the pimples sitting on his cheeks.  
 Garlic he loved, and onions too, and leeks,  
 And drinking strong red wine till all was hazy.  
 Then he would shout and jabber as if crazy,  
 655 And wouldn't speak a word except in Latin  
 When he was drunk, such tags as he was pat in;  
 He only had a few, say two or three,  
 That he had mugged up out of some decree;  
 No wonder, for he heard them every day.  
 660 And, as you know, a man can teach a jay  
 To call out "Walter" better than the Pope.  
 But had you tried to test his wits and grope  
 For more, you'd have found nothing in the bag.  
 Then "*Questio quid juris*" was his tag.  
 665 He was a noble varlet and a kind one,  
 You'd meet none better if you went to find one.  
 Why, he'd allow—just for a quart of wine—  
 Any good lad to keep a concubine  
 A twelvemonth and dispense him altogether!  
 670 And he had finches of his own to feather:  
 And if he found some rascal with a maid

**642 cherubin** (chĕr'ə-bĭn'): a type of angel—in the Middle Ages often depicted with a fiery red face.

**643 carbuncles** (kär'bŭng'kəlz): big pimples, considered a sign of lechery and drunkenness in the Middle Ages.

**647–648 quicksilver . . . boracic** (bə-rās'ĭk): substances used as skin medicines in medieval times.

**650 whelks** (hwĕlks): swellings.

**656 tags:** brief quotations.

**658 mugged up:** memorized.

**660 jay:** a bird that can be taught to mimic human speech without understanding it.

**664 *Questio quid juris*** (kwĕs'tĕ-ō kwĭd yŏŕ'ĭs): Latin for "The question is, What part of the law (is applicable)?"—a statement often heard in medieval courts.

He would instruct him not to be afraid  
 In such a case of the Archdeacon's curse  
 (Unless the rascal's soul were in his purse)  
 675 For in his purse the punishment should be.  
 "Purse is the good Archdeacon's Hell," said he.  
 But well I know he lied in what he said;  
 A curse should put a guilty man in dread,  
 For curses kill, as shriving brings, salvation.  
 680 We should beware of excommunication.  
 Thus, as he pleased, the man could bring duress  
 On any young fellow in the diocese.  
 He knew their secrets, they did what he said.  
 He wore a garland set upon his head  
 685 Large as the holly-bush upon a stake  
 Outside an ale-house, and he had a cake,  
 A round one, which it was his joke to wield  
 As if it were intended for a shield.  
  
 He and a gentle *Pardoner* rode together,  
 690 A bird from Charing Cross of the same feather,  
 Just back from visiting the Court of Rome.  
 He loudly sang, "*Come hither, love, come home!*"  
 The Summoner sang deep seconds to this song,  
 No trumpet ever sounded half so strong.  
 695 This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,  
 Hanging down smoothly like a hank of flax.  
 In driblets fell his locks behind his head  
 Down to his shoulders which they overspread;  
 Thinly they fell, like rat-tails, one by one.  
 700 He wore no hood upon his head, for fun;  
 The hood inside his wallet had been stowed,  
 He aimed at riding in the latest mode;  
 But for a little cap his head was bare  
 And he had bulging eye-balls, like a hare.  
 705 He'd sewed a holy relic on his cap;  
 His wallet lay before him on his lap,  
 Brimful of pardons come from Rome, all hot.  
 He had the same small voice a goat has got.  
 His chin no beard had harbored, nor would harbor,  
 710 Smoother than ever chin was left by barber.  
 I judge he was a gelding, or a mare.  
 As to his trade, from Berwick down to Ware  
 There was no pardoner of equal grace,  
 For in his trunk he had a pillow-case  
 715 Which he asserted was Our Lady's veil.

**673 Archdeacon's curse:** excommunication—an official exclusion of a person from participating in the rites of the church. (An archdeacon is a high church official.)

**681 duress** (doo-rēs'): compulsion by means of threats.

**682 diocese** (dī'ə-sīs): the district under a bishop's supervision.

**685–686 the holly-bush . . . ale-house:** Since few people could read in the Middle Ages, many businesses identified themselves with symbols. Outside many taverns could be found wreaths of holly on stakes.

**690 Charing Cross:** a section of London.

**696 flax:** a pale grayish yellow fiber used for making linen cloth.

**701 wallet:** knapsack.

**705 holy relic:** an object revered because of its association with a holy person.

**711 gelding** (gēl'dīng): a castrated horse—here, a eunuch.

**712 Berwick** (bēr'īk) . . . **Ware:** towns in the north and the south of England.

**715 Our Lady's veil:** the kerchief of the Virgin Mary.

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  
 720 And, in a glass, a rubble of pigs' bones.  
 And with these relics, any time he found  
 Some poor up-country parson to astound,  
 In one short day, in money down, he drew  
 More than the parson in a month or two,  
 725 And by his flatteries and prevarication  
 Made monkeys of the priest and congregation. **N**  
 But still to do him justice first and last  
 In church he was a noble ecclesiast.  
 How well he read a lesson or told a story!  
 730 But best of all he sang an Offertory,  
 For well he knew that when that song was sung  
 He'd have to preach and tune his honey-tongue  
 And (well he could) win silver from the crowd.  
 That's why he sang so merrily and loud.

735 Now I have told you shortly, in a clause,  
 The rank, the array, the number and the cause  
 Of our assembly in this company  
 In Southwark, at that high-class hostelry  
 Known as *The Tabard*, close beside *The Bell*.  
 740 And now the time has come for me to tell  
 How we behaved that evening; I'll begin  
 After we had alighted at the Inn,  
 Then I'll report our journey, stage by stage,  
 All the remainder of our pilgrimage.  
 745 But first I beg of you, in courtesy,  
 Not to condemn me as unmannerly  
 If I speak plainly and with no concealings  
 And give account of all their words and dealings,  
 Using their very phrases as they fell.  
 750 For certainly, as you all know so well,  
 He who repeats a tale after a man  
 Is bound to say, as nearly as he can,  
 Each single word, if he remembers it,  
 However rudely spoken or unfit,  
 755 Or else the tale he tells will be untrue,  
 The things pretended and the phrases new.  
 He may not flinch although it were his brother,  
 He may as well say one word as another.  
 And Christ Himself spoke broad in Holy Writ,  
 760 Yet there is no scurrility in it,

**716 gobbet:** piece.

**717–718 when he . . . took hold:** a reference to an incident in which Jesus extended a helping hand to Peter as he tried to walk on water (Matthew 14:29–31).

**N PARAPHRASE**

Paraphrase the description of the Pardoner in lines 712–726. How exactly does he earn a living?

**739 The Bell:** another inn.

**745–756** The narrator apologizes in advance for using the exact words of his companions.

**759 broad:** bluntly; plainly.

**760 scurrility** (skə-rī'lī-tē): vulgarity; coarseness.



And Plato says, for those with power to read,  
 “The word should be as cousin to the deed.”  
 Further I beg you to forgive it me  
 If I neglect the order and degree  
 765 And what is due to rank in what I’ve planned.  
 I’m short of wit as you will understand.

**761 Plato** (plā'tō): a famous philosopher of ancient Greece.

Our *Host* gave us great welcome; everyone  
 Was given a place and supper was begun.  
 He served the finest victuals you could think,  
 770 The wine was strong and we were glad to drink.  
 A very striking man our Host withal,  
 And fit to be a marshal in a hall.  
 His eyes were bright, his girth a little wide;  
 There is no finer burgess in Cheapside.  
 775 Bold in his speech, yet wise and full of tact,  
 There was no manly attribute he lacked,  
 What’s more he was a merry-hearted man.  
 After our meal he jokingly began  
 To talk of sport, and, among other things  
 780 After we’d settled up our reckonings,  
 He said as follows: “Truly, gentlemen,  
 You’re very welcome and I can’t think when  
 —Upon my word I’m telling you no lie—  
 I’ve seen a gathering here that looked so spry,  
 785 No, not this year, as in this tavern now.  
 I’d think you up some fun if I knew how.  
 And, as it happens, a thought has just occurred

**767 Host**: the innkeeper of the Tabard.

**772 marshal in a hall**: an official in charge of arranging a nobleman’s banquet.

**774 Cheapside**: the main business district of London in Chaucer’s day.

**780 settled up our reckonings**: paid our bills.

To please you, costing nothing, on my word.  
You're off to Canterbury—well, God speed!  
790 Blessed St. Thomas answer to your need!  
And I don't doubt, before the journey's done  
You mean to while the time in tales and fun.  
Indeed, there's little pleasure for your bones  
Riding along and all as dumb as stones.  
795 So let me then propose for your enjoyment,  
Just as I said, a suitable employment.  
And if my notion suits and you agree  
And promise to submit yourselves to me  
Playing your parts exactly as I say  
800 Tomorrow as you ride along the way,  
Then by my father's soul (and he is dead)  
If you don't like it you can have my head!  
Hold up your hands, and not another word."

Well, our opinion was not long deferred,  
805 It seemed not worth a serious debate;  
We all agreed to it at any rate  
And bade him issue what commands he would.  
"My lords," he said, "now listen for your good,  
And please don't treat my notion with disdain.  
810 This is the point. I'll make it short and plain.  
Each one of you shall help to make things slip  
By telling two stories on the outward trip  
To Canterbury, that's what I intend,  
And, on the homeward way to journey's end  
815 Another two, tales from the days of old;  
And then the man whose story is best told,  
That is to say who gives the fullest measure  
Of good morality and general pleasure,  
He shall be given a supper, paid by all,  
820 Here in this tavern, in this very hall,  
When we come back again from Canterbury. ○  
And in the hope to keep you bright and merry  
I'll go along with you myself and ride  
All at my own expense and serve as guide.  
825 I'll be the judge, and those who won't obey  
Shall pay for what we spend upon the way.  
Now if you all agree to what you've heard  
Tell me at once without another word,  
And I will make arrangements early for it."

**790 St. Thomas:** St. Thomas à Becket, to whose shrine the pilgrims are traveling.

**794 dumb:** silent.

### Language Coach

**Multiple Meanings** *Submit* has several meanings: (1) to yield to someone else's power, (2) to present for review, (3) to present as an opinion. Which meaning applies in line 798? Which meaning applies in this sentence? *I will submit my article to the school newspaper.*

**807 bade him:** asked him to.



TEKS 3

### ○ TONE

In literature, **tone** refers to the attitude a writer takes toward a subject or character. A writer can communicate tone through diction, choice of details, and direct statements of his or her opinion. Tone can be serious, playful, admiring, mocking, or objective. How would you describe Chaucer's tone toward his characters throughout "The Prologue"? Why do you think he portrays his characters this way?



830 Of course we all agreed, in fact we swore it  
Delightedly, and made **entreaty** too  
That he should act as he proposed to do,  
Become our Governor in short, and be  
Judge of our tales and general referee,  
835 And set the supper at a certain price.  
We promised to be ruled by his advice  
Come high, come low; unanimously thus  
We set him up in judgment over us.  
More wine was fetched, the business being done;  
840 We drank it off and up went everyone  
To bed without a moment of delay. **P**

Early next morning at the spring of day  
Up rose our Host and roused us like a cock,  
Gathering us together in a flock,  
845 And off we rode at slightly faster pace  
Than walking to St. Thomas' watering-place;  
And there our Host drew up, began to ease  
His horse, and said, "Now, listen if you please,  
My lords! Remember what you promised me.  
850 If evensong and matins will agree  
Let's see who shall be first to tell a tale.  
And as I hope to drink good wine and ale  
I'll be your judge. The rebel who disobeys,  
However much the journey costs, he pays.  
855 Now draw for cut and then we can depart;  
The man who draws the shortest cut shall start."

**entreaty** (ĕn-trĕ'tĕ) *n.* a serious request or plea

**P CHARACTERIZATION**

Examine the way the pilgrims respond to the Host in lines 830–841. What type of person do you think would appeal to so many?

**843 cock:** rooster (whose cry rouses people from sleep).

**846 St. Thomas' watering-place:** a brook about two miles from London.

**850 If evensong and matins** (măt'nz) **will agree:** if what you said last night is what you will do this morning. (Evensong and matins are evening and morning prayer services.)

**855 draw for cut:** draw lots.

## Comprehension

1. **Recall** When and where does “The Prologue” take place?
2. **Recall** What event or circumstance causes the characters to gather?
3. **Summarize** What plan does the Host propose to the characters?



**WRITING 3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods.

## Literary Analysis

4. **Analyze Characterization** Throughout the selection, Chaucer uses physical details—eyes, hair, clothing—to help develop his **characters**. Choose three pilgrims and describe how their outward appearances reflect their personalities.
5. **Identify Irony** Much of the humor of “The Prologue” is based on irony, the discrepancy between what appears to be true and what actually is true. Explain the irony in each of the following character portraits:
  - the Nun Prioress
  - the Merchant
  - the Skipper
  - the Doctor
6. **Draw Conclusions** Review what you **paraphrased** as you read the selection. Describe the narrator’s personality and values.
7. **Examine Satire** A writer who pokes fun at behaviors and customs with the intent of improving society is creating **satire**. Review the descriptions of the Monk and the Friar in lines 169–279. What aspects of the medieval church does Chaucer satirize through these characters?
8. **Interpret Tone** In literature, **tone** refers to the attitude a writer takes toward a subject or character. Tone can be serious, playful, admiring, mocking, or objective. Review lines 455–486. What is Chaucer’s tone toward the Wife of Bath? Cite specific words and phrases to support your answer.

## Literary Criticism

9. **Critical Interpretations** In 1809, the English poet and artist William Blake made the following observation: “Chaucer’s pilgrims are the characters which compose all ages and nations. . . . Some of the names or titles are altered by time, but the characters themselves forever remain unaltered.” Do you agree or disagree that Chaucer’s characters seem timeless and universal? Support your opinion with details from the text and your own experiences.

### *What makes a great* **CHARACTER?**

Which of Chaucer’s characters do you like best? Which character traits make this character appealing to you?

# Vocabulary in Context

## ▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Use the details from “The Prologue” and your understanding of the boldfaced words to help you choose the answer to each question.

1. Which of these characters shows the most **courtliness**?
2. Which of these characters seems the most **personable**?
3. What does the Doctor believe can cause a **malady**?
4. Which of these characters tries the most to behave **sedately**?
5. Which character has seen money **accrue** in his savings?
6. To whom do the pilgrims make an **entreaty** about judging the story contest?

### WORD LIST

accrue  
courtliness  
entreaty  
malady  
personable  
sedately

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• concept • culture • parallel • section • structure

Chaucer characters embody abstract **concepts** like greed and vanity, yet remain fully-realized, three-dimensional characters. Using at least two additional Academic Vocabulary words, write about how the **structure** of “The Prologue” allows Chaucer to give such a complete picture of the pilgrims.

## VOCABULARY STRATEGY: WORDS FROM FRENCH

French has contributed words to English since the French-speaking Normans invaded England in 1066. A huge number of our “Latin” words actually come from Latin by way of Old French. Knowing the French origins of a word can help you understand its meanings. For example, knowing that *parley* comes from the French *parler*, which means “to speak,” will tell you that a *parley* is a conference.

**PRACTICE** Based on the word list to the right and the following word bank, respond each item below:

• malady • personable • entreaty • court • accrue

1. The words *accretion* and \_\_\_\_\_ both contain the core meaning of the Old French word *acrev*. What is that core meaning? \_\_\_\_\_
2. The core meaning of the English word \_\_\_\_\_ can be found in the Old French word for “sick.” What is that word? \_\_\_\_\_
3. If the Normans had not invaded England in 1066, we might not say a friendly individual is \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Although it did not survive into Modern French, the Old French word *entraiter* survives in English in the form of \_\_\_\_\_.



**READING 1A** Determine the meaning of technical academic English words in multiple content areas derived from Latin or other linguistic roots. **1D** Analyze and explain how the English language has developed and been influenced by other languages.

Old French Root	Original Meaning
<i>acrev</i>	<i>increased</i>
<i>entraiter</i>	<i>to deal with, beseech</i>
<i>malade</i>	<i>sick</i>
<i>persone</i>	<i>person</i>

Interactive Vocabulary **THINK central**

Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com).  
KEYWORD: HML12-168