

THE GLENCOE LITERATURE LIBRARY

Study Guide

for

**The Canterbury
Tales**

Selected Works

by Geoffrey Chaucer



New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

To the Teacher

The *Glencoe Literature Library* presents full-length novels and plays bound together with shorter selections of various genres that relate by theme or topic to the main reading. Each work in the *Library* has a two-part Study Guide that contains a variety of resources for both you and your students. Use the guide to plan your instruction of the work and enrich your classroom presentations.

In **For the Teacher** you will find these time-saving instructional aids:

- *About the Work*: pertinent background information on the work, including a character list, a plot synopsis, key themes, and an annotated bibliography
- *Media Links*: annotated listings of audio, visual, electronic, and print resources related to the work
- *Teaching Options*: high-interest activities for introducing the work and individualizing instruction
- *Assessment Options*: alternative assessment activities for greater flexibility in evaluating students' understanding of the work
- *Options for Using Related Readings*: suggested approaches to the Related Readings included with the work
- *Answer Key and Assessment Rubrics*: detailed answers to all questions and reading activities and evaluations for alternative assessment activities

For the Student consists of these reproducible blackline masters:

- *Meet the Author*: a lively overview of the author's life
- *Introducing the Work*: background information that provides a meaningful context in which to read the work
- *Before You Read and Responding pages*: pre- and postreading questions and activities
- *Active Reading*: graphic organizers for students to complete as they read activities
- *Test*: a comprehensive two-part test of the work

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NOTE: The translations of *The Canterbury Tales* presented in this edition of the Glencoe Literature Library are Modern English versions of the work by Geoffrey Chaucer. The stories, presented here in their entirety, include language and situations that portray characters and situations of the fourteenth century. Certain words, phrases, or references may offend some modern readers.

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Send all inquiries to:

Glencoe/McGraw-Hill
8787 Orion Place
Columbus, OH 43240

ISBN 0-07-823548-0

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 045 05 04 03 02 01 00

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About the Work

THE CANTERBURY TALES BY GEOFFREY CHAUCER

Everyone loves a good story, and *The Canterbury Tales* contains some of the best ever written. Created over a period of years during the late 1300s, *The Canterbury Tales* is an unfinished frame tale: a series of stories within a story. This form was popular in Chaucer's time, but he improved upon it by giving each character a distinctive voice, spirit, and personality. The framework is a pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas à Becket, the martyred archbishop of Canterbury, undertaken by a varied group of men and women from all ages, ranks, and levels of society. They tell stories to amuse each other. Nine of their stories are thematically presented in this Glencoe Literature Library edition. Through the stories, descriptions, and comments, important elements of fourteenth-century life are revealed: the feudal system; the power (and sometimes the hypocrisy) of the church; family and business life.

The Glencoe Literature Library introduces students to two significantly different translations of stories from *The Canterbury Tales*. Tales translated by Nevill Coghill and David Wright provide students with the opportunity to analyze and evaluate the ways in which a translator's use of diction, rhythm, and emphasis contributes to the tone of the work.

Note that the stories in this edition have not been sanitized; some contain earthy language, crude jokes, references to bodily functions and parts, and humorous references to infidelity, dishonesty, and other character defects. Before assigning your class to read the book, you may wish to explain that Chaucer was trying to give a lifelike picture of the people and the times. Just as in real life, some characters were crude and others refined. The variety makes the stories true to life and entertaining.

CHARACTERS AND SYNOPSIS

Prologue In "The Prologue," a narrator introduces himself and the other travelers by occupation, and often by description. He sets the purpose of the trip, a pilgrimage to Canterbury, and tells how the Host suggested a storytelling contest to keep the trip interesting. The winner was to be feted with a supper at the Host's inn. The main characters, in order of appearance, include a *Knight*, a man of honor and courtesy; his son, a *Squire*; a *Yeoman*, dressed for the woods; a high-living *Nun*; a sporting *Monk*; a worldly *Friar*; a shrewd *Merchant*; an unworldly *Clerk*, or student from Oxford University; a wary and learned *Serjeant at the Law*, a lawyer and high justice; a wealthy *Franklin*, a free landowner who was not a noble; a skilled *Cook*; a hardy *Skipper*, probably involved in smuggling and piracy; a profit-minded *Doctor*; a lively woman from *Bath*, who had been married five times; a dedicated *Parson*; a good-hearted *Plowman*; a coarse *Miller*; a thrifty *Manciple*, or buyer; a sharp-eyed *Reeve*, or farm manager; a lecherous *Summoner*, responsible for bringing to church court people suspected of breaking church law; a cynical *Pardoner*, who dispensed papal pardons for sins to those who gave money to his charitable institution; and the *narrator* himself, who promises to give an account of everyone's "words and dealings."

Tales of Chivalry contains "The Knight's Tale," the truncated tale of "Sir Topaz," a brief summary of "The Tale of Melibeus," and "The Franklin's Tale." In **The Knight's Tale**, two Theban cousins, *Arcite* and *Palamon*, fall in love with the same woman, *Emily*, sister of the governor of Athens, whom they see from their prison cell, walking in a garden. In the tale of **Sir Topaz**, the narrator begins a sing-song poem about a knight by that name, but is silenced by the inn's Host, who calls it "doggerel." The summary of the **Tale of Melibeus** explains that *Melibeus's* wife, *Dame Prudence*, is involved in a moral debate about violence and revenge.

The Franklin's Tale relates how the happy marriage of the errant knight *Arveragus* and his wife, *Dorigen*, was almost ended by a jesting promise that *Dorigen* made to *Aurelius* during *Averagus's* absence.

Tales of Love and Marriage advances different views of love and matrimony. **The Wife of Bath's Tale** tells how a *knight* discovered the thing that women desire most; **The Clerk's Tale** reveals how a *marquis* cruelly tested the obedience of his low-born wife, *Griselda*.

Cautionary Tales comprises four stories. **The Nun's Priest's Tale** recounts how *Chanticleer*, the rooster, was tricked by *Daun Russel*, the fox; **The Pardoner's Tale** explains how *three greedy men* in search of *Death* ultimately found it; **The Summoner's Tale** is the ribald story of an unusual offering presented to a hypocritical *friar*; and **The Canon's Yeoman's Tale** explains how an unscrupulous *canon* tricked a gullible *priest* into believing that the *canon* was skilled in alchemy.

MAJOR THEMES OF THE TALES

Although many themes run through the tales, those that stand out are the value of chivalry; the guises of love, both courtly and otherwise; and the random distribution of vices and virtues among classes. In a sense, the latter are not so far removed from each other—as Barbara Tuchman points out in *A Distant Mirror* in the Related Readings, “Chivalry was a moral system, governing the whole of noble life.” However, not all people were noble by birth, and social roles were in a state of flux. The issue of what social, moral, and ethical guidelines people should follow—both in public and in private—was timely and interesting then, and continues to be.

APPROACHES TO TEACHING THE TALES

Students approaching *The Canterbury Tales* may be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of material. Selecting a focus will make the disparate tales more accessible.

- Suggest that students focus on the universality of human nature portrayed in the stories. Although religious and social mores change from age to age, people continue to be motivated by similar drives (e.g., love, greed, kindness, and hunger).
- Encourage students to notice the vast number of historical details about the era. For example, have them pay attention to clothing, methods of traveling, hunting implements, and scientific methods of the period. In Chaucer's time, clothing was such an important indicator of social standing that laws governed what people could wear.
- In “The Prologue,” Chaucer calls the best story that which “gives the fullest measure / Of good morality and general pleasure.” Emphasize the humor found in most stories.

FURTHER READING FOR THE TEACHER

- *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion* edited by Piero Boitani and Jill Mann offers numerous essays by international experts.
- *The Canterbury Tales: Nine Tales and the General Prologue: Authoritative Text Sources and Background Criticism (Norton Critical Edition)* W. W. Norton and Co., 1989.
- *Chaucer and His English Contemporaries* by W. A. Davenport, 1998, focuses on what was new and special about Chaucer.
- *Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales (Longman Critical Readers Series)* edited by Steve Ellis, 1998, contains a dozen papers on various tales.
- *Chaucer (New Casebooks)* edited by Valerie Allen and Ares Axiotis, 1997, contains recent critical essays.

Media Links



Videos

The following videos may be used to help students better understand the Middle Ages and some of the conflicts addressed in *The Canterbury Tales*.

- *Becket*, an award-winning, star-studded story about the tragedy of Thomas à Becket and Henry II (1964, 148 minutes)
- *The Lion in Winter*, a popular, award-winning period piece that captures the look and feel of medieval England (1968, 134 minutes)



Audiocassettes

Students may enjoy hearing the tales as well as reading them.

- *The Canterbury Tales*, an abridged edition from Naxon Audio Books
- *The Canterbury Tales* from Penguin Books



Music

Students who want to get into the mood of the Middle Ages might enjoy hearing music of or based on the times of *The Canterbury Tales*.

- *Dyson: The Canterbury Pilgrims* from Chandos. These CDs include choral and orchestral music based on *The Canterbury Tales*
- *Medieval English Music* from Musique D'Abord. This CD features music from the 14th and 15th centuries



Internet Connection

- Students can see images of and read brief descriptions of the Chaucerian landmarks referred to in *The Canterbury Tales* at “From the Gatehouse to Cathedral: A Photographic Pilgrimage to Chaucerian Landmarks,” <http://www.umkc.edu/lib/engellond/visual.htm>
- Descriptions and illustrations of important fourteenth-century events can be seen at <http://www.siue.edu/CHAUCER/14thcent.html>
- A comprehensive site covers Chaucer the man, his time, his literary style, and his language at <http://icg.harvard.edu/~chaucer>

At the time this study guide went to press, the Web sites were in operation. Before assigning students to visit the sites, check to ensure that the sites still exist.



Further Reading for the Student

- *Chaucer A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Works* by Rosalyn Rossignol, 1999, an encyclopedic guide covering all aspects of *The Canterbury Tales*, including literary references, history, characters, and setting
- *Readings on The Canterbury Tales*, edited by Don Nardo, 1997, a series of essays on Chaucer's characters, themes, life, and language

Be sure to preview all media links to determine whether or not the material is appropriate for your class.

Teaching Options

Options for Motivating Students

Road Trip

Help students relate *The Canterbury Tales* to their own experience.

- Have students name popular destinations that people might visit on a vacation. Have them select one place that they think appeals to the greatest variety of people. Then tell them to imagine that they are on a chartered bus to that place. As they look around them, what kinds of people do they see?
- Ask each student to describe at least five people that they would expect to see on such a trip. Encourage them to share their lists and to categorize the people by type, gender, age, or some other criteria. Discuss the common characteristics that they would expect the travelers to have, as well as the differences they would encounter.
- Point out that such a group would yield a relatively good cross-section of people at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the same way, Chaucer's tale provides a cross-section of people in the late Middle Ages.

The One-Minute Middle Ages

Provide a brief overview of the Middle Ages.

- Explain that *The Canterbury Tales* is set in the Middle Ages, during a century that historian Barbara Tuchman described as “calamitous.” (Students will read Tuchman's description of chivalry in the Related Readings.) Students will understand and enjoy the tales more if they have some background in this period.
- Write each topic below on a slip of paper and have each student take one:

chivalry	pilgrims and pilgrimages
courtly love	Roman Catholic Church
Middle English	in the Middle Ages
the <i>Decameron</i>	pardoners and
black death	indulgences
alchemy	
Hundred Years' War	

- Tell students to do just enough research on each topic so that they can present concise one-minute reports. This will allow them to cover the most important information about their topics.

Twice-Told Tales

Prepare students for the focus on familiar stories.

- Point out that many familiar stories are retold and adapted. For example, the story of “Beauty and the Beast” has been told many times, and has been adapted into film, television, and stage productions.
- Have students discuss reasons why people enjoy familiar tales so much that they want to retell them. Remind them that people in Chaucer's time were quite familiar with classical stories, fables, and other types of tales. Help students recognize that when readers and listeners are already familiar with stories, they can better enjoy the method of telling and embellishment when the same stories are retold.
- Invite volunteers to take turns retelling fables, folktales, or fairy tales that they believe will be familiar to the class.

Who's Who

Emphasize how language and subject matter help to communicate personality.

- Describe or play for students old radio dramas—stories people heard rather than read or saw. Point out that each character in a radio drama had a distinct voice and way of talking so that listeners could tell the characters apart.
- Have each student select a character type and write a brief monologue that shows some aspects of that person's character. For example, students might present a bullying boss, a timid sales clerk, or a boastful athlete. Have students brainstorm for numerous types of people. Then have them take turns role-playing typical speeches that these people might make.

Meeting Individual Needs

The writing style, subject matter, and literary elements in *The Canterbury Tales* make it appropriate for those students who enjoy more challenging reading material. The following activities are designed to help you present the tales in ways that meet the needs and interests of all students.

Less-Proficient Readers

Help students grasp the idea of stories within a story.

- Have students draw a picture frame around the edge of a blank sheet of paper. Next, have them divide the space enclosed by the frame into nine “windowpanes.” Inside the frame that surrounds the windowpanes, have students write the names of the characters on the pilgrimage. Then, inside each pane, have them write the title of a tale. Be sure to have them allow enough room to record names of characters in each tale, their descriptions, and the situation of each tale.
- Encourage students to relate the stories that the characters tell to stories that the students may know. Ask questions that will help them make the connections. For example, before reading “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” point out that the popular children’s story “Chanticleer and the Fox” is related to this tale. Bring in a copy of this tale and have students compare it with “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale.”

English Language Learners

Help students to understand dated vocabulary and poetic word order.

- Point out that *The Canterbury Tales* is told in verse, so students may encounter words arranged in an unfamiliar order. Also note that because it was written more than 600 years ago, it has words and references that are not familiar today. Before students begin to read each tale, provide a brief summary of it. Use illustrations, word webs, and other strategies to develop students’ understanding of interrelationships between characters, such as

those between knights and those between clergy members and parishioners.

- Encourage students to read along as they listen to an audiocassette of the tales so that they learn to follow the natural rhythm and flow of the sentences, pausing as required by commas and periods rather than at every line ending. If necessary, model the reading of a stanza for students.

Gifted and Talented

Encourage students to read “The Prologue” in its original form.

- Remind students that *The Canterbury Tales*, like many other poems, benefits from being read aloud. Encourage students to listen to it in the original Middle English. Both spoken and written versions can be found on the Internet and in many libraries. Suggest that students work in pairs or teams to find examples. Encourage them to work on the first eighteen lines, which they may enjoy reciting aloud.

Explore the many fictional genres that *The Canterbury Tales* includes: the religious parable, the romance, the exemplum, the fable, and the fabliau (a coarse comic tale written in verse).

- Using the definitions of the five genres, some of which are in *Glencoe Literature’s Literary Terms Handbook*, have students categorize the tales according to genre, explaining why the tales fit the assigned categories.

Have students look for similarities between *The Canterbury Tales* and tales in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*.

- Have students obtain a copy of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. Have students divide up the tales to read and to look for similarities.

Assessment Options

Writing

Two Knight-Time Tales

- Have students write an expository essay comparing and contrasting “The Knight’s Tale” with “Chaitivel.”

A Friendly Letter

- Have students write a letter to a friend from the point of view of one of the pilgrims. They can either choose to be one of the characters Chaucer depicted, or they can assume the identity of a new one who joined the procession without Chaucer’s knowledge.

Clerical Errors

- Chaucer describes several questionable practices among the clergy. Have students research medieval church practices and write an essay in which they draw conclusions about whether the problems that Chaucer describes were serious or trivial.

Listening and Speaking

In Character

- Invite students to present sections from “The Prologue” as Reader’s Theater, with each reading the lines about a particular character. If a character’s part seems long for the time allotted, have students select a section that appeals to them.
- Students should assume the posture and tone of the characters that they are presenting. They should practice until they are familiar enough with the material so that they can add gestures, expressions, and vocal emphasis.
- They should keep in mind that this is a dramatic presentation.

Viewing and Representing

A Gilded Page

- Have students create one page of an illuminated manuscript for a specific character or scene.
- Have them look at pages, either from early editions of *The Canterbury Tales* or from other elaborately illustrated books, such as the *Book of Hours*.
- Have them use a similar style to create either a border or an illustration for a paragraph or two of text from the tales. Text might be handwritten or computer generated.

Interdisciplinary Connection

Dark Days/Science

The Black Death changed the social and economic climate of the western world. To understand how it began, spread, and affected society, have students research and report on the numerous scientific causes of the plague.

- Students should identify the organisms responsible for the outbreak and learn how they are spread and what conditions fostered or inhibited the spread of disease.
- Have students learn about similar outbreaks in the twentieth century and contrast them with the outbreak that occurred during Chaucer’s time. How are modern-day epidemics different from those of the past? What has medical science learned since the outbreak of the plague? Students should describe past and current treatments and protocols.



Students should save their work for their portfolios.

Options for Using Related Readings

Related Readings	Making Connections to <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>
<p>In Chaucer Tale, a Clue to an Astronomic Reality by James Glanz (BLM page 32)</p>	<p>This article examines whether a magical detail in “The Franklin’s Tale” was based on a real event.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may wish to have students read this after they have read “The Franklin’s Tale.” • Before reading, lead a discussion on how authors might alter facts when writing stories. Ask why they might do this and how real details can enliven stories. • After students read the article, ask them what other types of real-world knowledge Chaucer might have incorporated into his tales. Have students defend their hypotheses with evidence based on what they have learned about Chaucer or his times, as Dr. Olson did.
<p>from the <i>Decameron</i> by Giovanni Boccaccio (BLM page 33)</p>	<p>This story is the one on which Chaucer based “The Clerk’s Tale.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because the plot of this tale is almost identical to that used by Chaucer, you may wish to have students read this before they read “The Clerk’s Tale.” • Before reading, ask students to contrast the institution of marriage in the Middle Ages with that of today. What has changed, and what has remained the same? Have students speculate about what people in earlier times may have felt were desirable qualities in prospective spouses. • After reading, ask students if they thought this story was meant to be realistic or instructional. Have them give reasons for their answers. • Ask how Boccaccio describes himself in the Foreword and why he might have identified with Gualtieri.
<p>Chaitivel (The Unfortunate One) by Marie de France (BLM page 34)</p>	<p>Courtly love is a major theme in this poem and in several tales. Here, however, it is considered from a woman’s point of view.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This poem could be used either as an introduction to the concept of courtly love or as a companion piece to “The Knight’s Tale,” the tale of “Sir Topaz,” or “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” as all deal with varieties of courtly love. • After reading, ask students what elements get the greatest emphasis in this poem: the knights, the lady, the tournament, or the love that they felt. Have them support their answers with examples from the poem. • Discuss the poem’s tone. What does the speaker’s attitude seem to be toward the knights? Ask how the poem’s tone might have been different if one of the knights had been the speaker. • Ask students to draw conclusions about courtly love based on this poem. How does it differ from a modern view? Have them write their responses in notes. After students have read <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>, have them discuss other elements that they could add to their conclusions.

Related Readings	Making Connections to <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>
<p>from <i>A Distant Mirror</i> by Barbara Tuchman (BLM page 35)</p>	<p>This reading discusses the reasons that chivalry and courtly love arose.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may wish to use this as a pre-reading activity for Tales of Chivalry. • Before students read, have them speculate about whether knights were really more noble than people are today. • As a class, have them speculate about why chivalry and all its trappings might have come into being. From where might the idea have sprung? • After they read, evaluate how accurate or inaccurate their responses were.
<p>from <i>The Fifth Pillar</i> by Saida Miller Khalifa (BLM page 36)</p>	<p>Like Chaucer’s characters, the narrator of this first-person account takes a pilgrimage with strangers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may wish to use this as a post-reading activity for The Prologue. • Before students read, discuss what they know about the pilgrimage to Mecca, the hajj, that observant Muslims make. Ask who takes it, where they come from, how they travel, and how they live when they arrive. • If students have little knowledge of the hajj, briefly explain what it is and invite them to read to find the answers to the questions above. • After they read, discuss what they learned and what questions they still have. Ask volunteers to note details that they found particularly interesting or informative.

Answer Key

ACTIVE READING

The Prologue pages 3–24

Students' answers should be similar to these:

Appearance curly locks, brown face; bald, shiny head; thread-bare overcoat; broad, with large hips and gap-teeth; thin, closely shaved beard and shorn hair; thin legs; red faced, black brows **Actions** had been in fifteen battles; always killed his man; carried a mighty bow; wiped her lip clean; sang well; knew the taverns; shared his household with the County; spared no expense; had an ulcer on his knee; ate only nutritious foods; had five husbands; paid his tithes; stole grain, told dirty stories **Speech** spoke in French; lisped; gave his opinions in solemn tones; formal speech; sang "Come hither, love, come home!" spoke boldly **Direct Characterization** a distinguished man, modest, perfect gentle-knight; all sentiment and tender-hearted; wary, wise, and discreet; hardy prudent; benign and diligent; frugal

Tales of Chivalry pages 25–113

Knight's Tale: a wise leader, knights, struggle, fate; **Sir Topaz:** a monster, knight; **Franklin's Prologue and Tale:** wise leader, contest; **Similarities:** people who behaved honorably; struggle or contest; ceremonial events; detailed descriptions.

Tales of Love and Marriage pages 115–161

Wife of Bath's Tale *Main characters* Knight, old woman *Character traits* violent, persevering, honorable; wise and kind. *Details that show this* attacks maiden, searches for answer, marries old woman; knows what women want, bestows upon Knight everything he wanted. *What makes happy marriage?* A strong wife who knows what she wants. **Clerk's Prologue and Tale and Chaucer's Envoy** *Main characters* Marquis, Griselda *Character traits* He is untrusting and cruel; she is obedient *Details that show this* He keeps testing her; she keeps bowing to his wishes. *What makes happy marriage?* An obedient wife.

Cautionary Tales pages 163–235

Nun's Priest's Tale *Character's defect or sin:* pride *What happens:* caught by fox *Lesson or lessons:* don't be deceived by flattery; **Pardoner's Tale** *Character's defect or sin:* greed *What happens:* all three men die *Lesson or lessons:* Greed leads to death. **Summoner's Tale** *Character's defect or sin:* flattery and lies *What happens:* Friar is given a fart as a treasure *Lesson or lessons:* Dishonesty gets what it deserves. **Canon's Yeoman's Tale** *Character's defect or sin:* gullibility, greed *What happens:* loses money, face is scarred *Lesson or lessons:* Be satisfied with what you have.

RESPONDING *The Prologue* pages 3–24

Recall and Interpret

1. It takes place in spring, a good time because the weather is good and because it is a time for new beginnings.
2. The Knight is described first, which suggests that the narrator ranked him highly. His descriptions of him as a distinguished man support this, as do the tales of his valor.
3. They led easy lives. They ate well and seemed to care little about religion. This suggests that they were not very pious, yet did belong to the upper social classes.
4. The Parson is a devout man who watches over his flock. He tries to save men's souls. This suggests that Chaucer saw the clergy as individuals—some good, some bad.
5. He is a genial man, who suggests the stories for fun. He asks them to tell old stories, which suggests that everyone knew old stories and was probably familiar with telling them.

Evaluate and Connect

6. Students might say that the Wife of Bath is most realistic, because of the details about her appearance and past life.

They might say that the Parson was most idealized, because of his modesty, honesty, and virtue.

7. Students should name a character and give reasons for their choice. If the character differs from the type of person they described in the **Focus Activity**, the reason might include the fact that Chaucer did not describe the same types of people that the students did.

RESPONDING *Tales of Chivalry* pages 25–113

Recall and Interpret

1. They are discovered alive in a pile of bodies and Theseus captures them; a friend arrives and persuades Theseus to let Arcite out; both events happen by chance.
2. They know almost nothing; Palamon says that Arcite has broken the vow to do nothing to hinder each other in love; it suggests that Arcite is dishonorable.
3. He suggests that a contest be held in a year; he wants no one killed.
4. Arcite wins the contest, but then falls off his horse and dies. Palamon finally marries Emily. Arcite gets a state funeral and orations; Palamon gets the bride. Both are honored.
5. He says it is worthless and irritating. This suggests that chivalric romances were supposed to be serious.

Evaluate and Connect

6. Ultimately, yes, because Palamon had broken no vows.
7. Responses will depend on student's expectations. Many will find such tales out of date, but some may suggest that presenting ideal behavior is always worthwhile and instructive.

RESPONDING *Tales of Love and Marriage* pages 115–161

Recall and Interpret

1. Women want mastery (sovereignty) over their husbands. He learns this from an ugly old woman he met at the edge of a woods.
2. He must marry the old woman, and this bothers him because she is so old and ugly. This suggests that he cares about her appearance more than her inner self.
3. He orders the children taken away, and he has Griselda sent home. She responds patiently and obediently. The advice is for husbands not to treat their wives the way the marquis treated his and for women not to give in. This suggests that the lesson is not to be taken literally.

Evaluate and Connect

4. Students may select *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, since she is an older woman and the main character in her tale is also an older woman who ends up with a handsome young knight.
5. Students may respond that the old woman in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* would say that a woman must have sovereignty; the marquis and Griselda would say that a wife should always be obedient.

RESPONDING *Cautionary Tales* pages 163–235

Recall and Interpret

1. A rooster, a hen, and a fox. Animals make a story funnier and more memorable. They are also more likely to be seen as more one-dimensional than humans are.
2. He fears they will come true. She tells him to ignore the dreams. Since bad things do befall him, it suggests that he ignored her advice.
3. He escapes because he does not allow himself to be tricked twice. The moral is that although pride can lead to trouble, people can learn from their mistakes.
4. He is greedy and corrupt and unrepentant. His characters are also immoral and greedy. They might stand for laziness, gluttony, and greed.

Answer Key

- The old man welcomes it, but the young men want to avoid it. This suggests that death can be a comfort as well as something to be feared.

Evaluate and Connect

- The human foibles that they describe are still found in people, so the lessons are worthwhile. However, the details and practices depicted are outdated.
- Students might warn against greed, lack of piety, violence, or some other social or personal evil.

RELATED READINGS

In Chaucer Tale, a Clue to an Astronomic Reality

Responding to the Reading

- A rare celestial alignment took place that may have caused unusually high tides. Glanz ties it to "The Franklin's Tale."
- Chaucer mentions actual details of that event, such as a reference to Christmas. Also, he was very interested in astronomy and would have likely known about the event.
- Students may either agree or disagree, but they should supply reasons that are similar to Glanz's.
- Students may say that Chaucer was so interested in science that today he might use a scientific explanation.

Making Connections

- The lines "He knew how far Alnath moved / From the head of the fixed Aries above" suggest this, as does the mention of the rising of the moon and the term of the zodiac.

from the Decameron

Responding to the Reading

- Many students will find the change unbelievable, since it happens so quickly and so totally.
- Since the marquis behaves cruelly, students may think that Griselda actually acts more nobly.
- Students may think that a wife's total obedience to her husband, and a husband's absolute power over his wife are ideas that have changed.

Making Connections

- Students may prefer Boccaccio's version, because it is in prose and faster to read, or they may like Chaucer's version, because of the Envoy's postscript.

Chaitivel (The Unfortunate One)

Responding to the Reading

- She wanted to find out who would love her best. Students may think this is either practical or calculating.
- Students may respond that the knights showed poor judgment and therefore deserved their fate.
- Each was thinking of her or his point of view. Since both thought *The Unfortunate One* was the better name, students may select that one.
- She says that she wants her grief remembered. She may also want to tell her point of view or to show how men fought over her.

Making Connections

- Many students may suggest that the Knight might have told such a tale, because it deals with chivalry and tournaments, subjects with which he was familiar.

from A Distant Mirror

Responding to the Reading

- It provided an ideal toward which people could strive.
- Students might say the Super Bowl or another sporting event. They are alike because they both draw huge crowds, are costly for the attendees, sell food, and profit winners.
- He is physically strong, brave, loyal, and ennobled by love.
- Some students may say that there would be less violence or rudeness. Others may say that the poor might fare worse because, in the scheme of things, they did not count.

Making Connections

- He describes both forms. In "The Knight's Tale" and "The Franklin's Tale," people behave honorably. However, in "The Wife of Bath's Tale," a knight assaults a girl.

from The Fifth Pillar

Responding to the Reading

- Modern pilgrims need clothing and must complete lots of paperwork; like pilgrims in the past, they would also pack food and a tent.
- The *mutawwif* acts almost like a travel agent, helping pilgrims complete official papers, secure lodging, and perform religious rites.
- First, she had to prove that she was a Muslim; then she had to share a room with many people; the woman in charge intimidated the narrator. Students may say that the crowded quarters would offer the greatest challenge.
- Students may be surprised at the variety of pilgrims, their ages, or how they lived communally. The author mentions having gone on another pilgrimage.

Making Connections

- In both accounts, groups of people of all ages band together for a common religious goal—to visit a shrine.

TEST

Recall and Interpret

A.

- b
- c
- d
- a
- b

B.

- They were both in love with the same woman, Emily.
- They valued the gold that was under the tree.
- He tells her to make the decision herself. She is pleased to have mastery and turns into a lovely young woman, and they live happily to the end.
- Her daughter had been taken away when she was little.
- He refused to take money for performing the magic feat.

Evaluate and Connect (any 2)

- Students might mention any of the greedy or impious clergy or the rude trick played in "The Summoner's Tale." One of these tales pokes fun at religion, while the other would have been viewed as coarse and unmannerly because of a reference to a bodily function.
- Many students will contrast the genuinely pious Parson to the worldlier Monk or Friar or Nun. The former actually follows the teachings of the church, while the latter look the part but their actions are contrary to the teachings.
- Both are frame tales and both deal with a variety of characters. Chaucer refers to earlier Italian writers, and he retells a story that appeared first in the *Decameron*.
- Chivalry is a code of conduct and manners. Students should give some example, as when Arcite and Palamon compete in a tournament to win the love of a lady.
- Students might point out that his knowledge of people is shown by the variety of the pilgrims; his exposure to a variety of literature is shown by the tales and details of other cultures. For example, he reveals a knowledge of ancient Greek religious customs in "The Knight's Tale" and a knowledge of other literary forms by the stories that he retells.

Assessment Rubrics

Use these criteria as guidelines for evaluating students' performance on Assessment Options activities presented in this study guide.

Writing

Two Knight-Time Tales *The comparison-contrast essay should*

- contain a thesis that states the main similarities and differences
- identify important points of comparison rather than superficial ones
- use examples and other evidence to support statements
- present ideas in a logical order, using transitions and other relational terms
- demonstrate competency in grammar, mechanics, and usage

A Friendly Letter *The friendly letter should*

- be told from the point of view of a pilgrim on Chaucer's pilgrimage
- contain details about people and actions that Chaucer mentions
- demonstrate a knowledge of the setting
- follow the format of a friendly letter

Clerical Errors *The essay should*

- state the main idea in a thesis statement
- include supporting evidence from *The Canterbury Tales* and from historical sources
- organize details effectively and logically
- employ the conventions of standard written English

Listening and Speaking

In Character *The dramatic reading should*

- indicate an understanding of the character's social standing and important personality traits
- include various tones of voice, expressions, and movements
- hold the interest of the audience

Viewing and Representing

A Gilded Page *The manuscript page should*

- demonstrate an understanding of the style used in illuminated manuscripts
- include typical decorative elements or illustrations
- contain text from *The Canterbury Tales*

Interdisciplinary Connections

Dark Days/Science *The report on the Black Death should*

- identify the bacillus that causes plague
- include details that describe how the disease spreads
- describe and contrast past and present treatments
- demonstrate audience awareness through choice of details and presentation

Meet Geoffrey Chaucer



Chaucer was one of the most original men who ever lived. There had never been anything like the lively realism of the ride to Canterbury done or dreamed of in our literature before. He is not only the father of all our poets, but the grandfather of all our hundred million novelists.

—G. K. Chesterton, from “The Greatness of Chaucer” in *Geoffrey Chaucer*, 1932

Geoffrey Chaucer’s exact year of birth is not certain, since no document recorded it. He was probably born around 1343 in London. His father was a middle-class wine merchant, and the young Chaucer became a page in the royal household while still a teenager. Despite the mundane duties that he carried out, the position exposed the youth to the speech, manners, and shortcomings of high-born people of the day.

His education was broad. He was a voracious reader who read in four different languages—English, Latin, French, and Italian. As one of his later works, a treatise on an astrolabe, showed, he was knowledgeable about science as well as literature.

When he was in his twenties, Chaucer was made a court official, an appointment that began many years of public service. During his career, he traveled abroad on diplomatic missions and gained

a knowledge of both French and Italian literature and culture.

Life As a Writer For the rest of his life, Chaucer held a variety of governmental posts. Despite his duties, he managed to produce a large body of work. Many scholars divide his work into three distinct periods. His early poetry, includes the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Romaunt of the Rose*. Later, he wrote the *Parliament of Fowls* and *Troilus and Criseyde*. His most mature works, written in his forties, include the *Legend of Good Women* and *The Canterbury Tales*.

The Canterbury Tales *The Canterbury Tales* is considered Chaucer’s masterpiece for several reasons. First, it marks the beginnings of a new tradition: Chaucer was the first writer to use English in a major literary work. Secondly, it gives a picture of a cross-section of society during the 1300s. Finally, it is a detailed, lifelike, and engaging picture. Chaucer lets his characters speak as they might actually talk. This was risky because they did not always talk in a polite way, which could offend some readers. Chaucer acknowledges this fact himself:

. . . I rehearse
*Their tales as told, for better or for worse,
For else I should be false to what occurred.
So if this tale had better not be heard,
Just turn the page and choose another sort;
You’ll find them here in plenty, long and short;
Many historical, that will profess
Morality, good breeding, saintliness.
Do not blame me if you should choose amiss.*

Some critics were shocked by the earthy language and humor in certain stories, but even more were captivated by the characters, stories, and the language itself. *The Canterbury Tales* shows Chaucer’s mastery of numerous poetic forms and his thorough grounding in history, mythology, psychology, science, theology, and business. He created approximately 17,000 lines of vivid poetry that has such universal appeal that it still attracts new readers today.

Introducing the Tales

The people we read about are as real as the people we brush clothes with in the street, — nay, much more real, for we not only see their faces, and the fashion and texture of their garments, we know also what they think, how they express themselves, and with what eyes they look out to the world.

—Alexander Smith, *Dreamthorp*

BACKGROUND

In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer uses a form that had been used before—the frame tale, a larger story, inside of which are many smaller stories. Since Chaucer had spent time in Italy, he was familiar with the *Decameron*, an earlier frame tale written by the Italian poet Boccaccio. In fact, he even incorporated stories from that work and from others into his own stories. Retelling older tales was a common practice in Chaucer's day. After all, before stories were printed, as they are today, people were used to hearing and rehearing the same tales. Their pleasure came not just from the plot, but from the storyteller's skill. Each teller added special qualities to a story.

Although Chaucer was not the first to use the frame tale, or even most of the plots themselves, he used the material in a special way. Each of the smaller stories was told by a character whose language and style was distinctive.

Today, this may not sound so unusual, but before Chaucer, most literature featured epic heroes—larger-than-life characters—or highly stylized figures who demonstrated only a few particular qualities. Chaucer's characters, although they are types, are well-rounded flesh-and-blood people. Through them, Chaucer provided a lively look at three distinct groups of people in fourteenth-century England:

Members of the feudal system: Knight, Squire, Yeoman, Franklin, Plowman, Miller, Reeve

People in religious life: Nun, Monk, Friar, Cleric, Parson, Summoner, Pardoner

The rising middle class: Merchant, Sergeant at the Law, Five Tradesmen, Cook, Skipper,

Doctor, Wife of Bath, Manciple, Host

Through these characters, readers are given an overview of many of the concerns and interests of fourteenth-century people. The concerns reflected major social changes that were occurring:

Social changes The old feudal system was beginning to come apart. Previously, the ruling classes had held all the power because they owned the land, which was a major source of wealth. Then the Black Death killed a huge percentage of the agrarian workers and tenant farmers. The ones who remained felt a new power, since landowners depended on these workers. Realizing this new status, the peasants began making demands. They were no longer content with life as it had been. Also, a new class of merchants, traders, and shopkeepers arose in response to widening trade opportunities, adding a new level to society.

Religious changes The church was losing some of its power and influence for several reasons. There was controversy after the French Pope Clement V moved the seat of the Church to France. This led to a series of arguments over who was really the head of the Church. Second, literacy was becoming more widespread. Once only the clergy could read and write, but now schools were springing up to teach the new merchants how to read, write, and do their accounting. As more people learned to read, literary tastes began to change. Instead of reading religious tracts or moralistic tales, people wanted more realistic works. *The Canterbury Tales* provided this.

Scholars think Chaucer originally planned an even more ambitious project than the one he created. A character in the Prologue, the Host, suggests that each of the thirty pilgrims tell four stories each, which suggests that Chaucer planned 120 different tales. However, he died after having written only twenty-two of them. Since he left behind a pile of incomplete tales and story parts, no one knows exactly when they were written or in what order Chaucer intended them.

THE TIME AND PLACE

The Canterbury Tales takes place during the fourteenth-century on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. People had been making that journey for 200 years to worship at a shrine of St. Thomas à Becket. He had been the archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of Henry II and was murdered by that king's knights over religious differences.

Becket's murder, inside the Cathedral, made him a martyr, and in 1220 an elaborate gold shrine was built to hold his remains. Every half a century, celebrations were held there on the anniversary of his death, and these celebrations attracted numerous pilgrims. The 200th anniversary of Becket's death fell within Chaucer's lifetime, and this event brought larger crowds than usual.

Did You Know?

The Canterbury Tales were written in English, but not in the English of today. Chaucer spoke a language that we now call Middle English. Middle English was the language of England after the Norman conquest of 1066 and before the modern English that we speak today. Besides the older Anglo-Saxon words, it also included many words from French and from Latin. Furthermore, it no longer contained all the complicated word endings used in Old English. Although many Middle English words look familiar today, their pronunciation was

quite different in Chaucer's time. For example, what we now call the silent *e* at the ends of certain words was once a separate syllable.

The fact that Chaucer chose Middle English at all was unusual at the time. Most writers of his day wrote in French or in Latin, and Chaucer knew both of those languages. He could have chosen one of them. Middle English was considered ordinary, not literary, language, and the fact that Chaucer selected it suggests that these tales were written for the general population instead of the ruling classes.

CRITIC'S CORNER

Like vacation acquaintances in all time periods, the Canterbury pilgrims experience each other in a lighthearted way. The pilgrimage offers them time and space away from their everyday cares; they are on holiday, thus open to each other in a way they would not be in any other context. A spirit of play animates their interactions, a spirit of acceptance informs their attitudes. People who would otherwise be separated by social class or occupation or gender are brought together by chance. . . .

—Margaret Hallissy, *A Companion to Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*

Before You Read

The Canterbury Tales The Prologue

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What kinds of people interest you the most? What kinds would you enjoy sharing company with on a long trip?

Web It

If you wanted to capture an individual's personality, what sorts of details would you note? Choose someone you know well. With that person's name in a center circle, make a web, jotting down in the surrounding circles the kinds of details that best reflect his or her qualities.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out about the colorful characters who embark on the journey to Canterbury.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

During Chaucer's lifetime, people went on pilgrimages for many reasons. Some went to show their devotion; others went to pray for miracles; still others went for more mundane reasons. They wanted adventure, perhaps, or a change of scenery. Pilgrims usually banded together for safety and convenience. The roads they traveled on often were unpaved, muddy, and difficult to ride on. Also, a lone traveler was more likely to be robbed than a member of a group would be. Today, the distance that Chaucer's band traveled seems short—perhaps a two-hour drive. In Chaucer's day, though, such a journey usually took several days. People stayed at inns along the way, often sharing rooms and sometimes beds with complete strangers.

Satire and Irony

Modern readers sometimes approach *The Canterbury Tales* solemnly, since they know it is a "classic." They are often happily surprised to discover how much humor is tucked inside. Two of the most common forms include satire and irony. **Satire** is a type of writing that pokes fun at people, their weaknesses, institutions, and social conventions. Satire takes different forms: it can be moralistic and indignant, or it can be gentle and elicit laughter to make a point. **Irony** means using words to express the opposite of what is literally said. A writer who uses verbal irony might state things that readers know to be false, such as calling a stingy person "generous." Writers also use situational irony, in which readers expect one thing but get surprised by its opposite. For instance, a writer might create a character who is a firefighter, yet who, for the thrill of extinguishing them, sets fires deliberately.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

buffoon [bə foon'] *n.* a gross and stupid person (p. 16)

conveyance [kən vā'əns] *n.* instrument by which title to property is delivered (p. 11)

prevarication [pri var'ə kā' shən] *n.* deviation from the truth; lie (p. 20)

screeds [skrēdz] *n.* long pieces of writing (p. 11)

sundry [sun' drē] *adj.* miscellaneous, various (p. 3)

superfluties [sōō' pər floō'ə tēz] *n.* unnecessary items (p. 13)

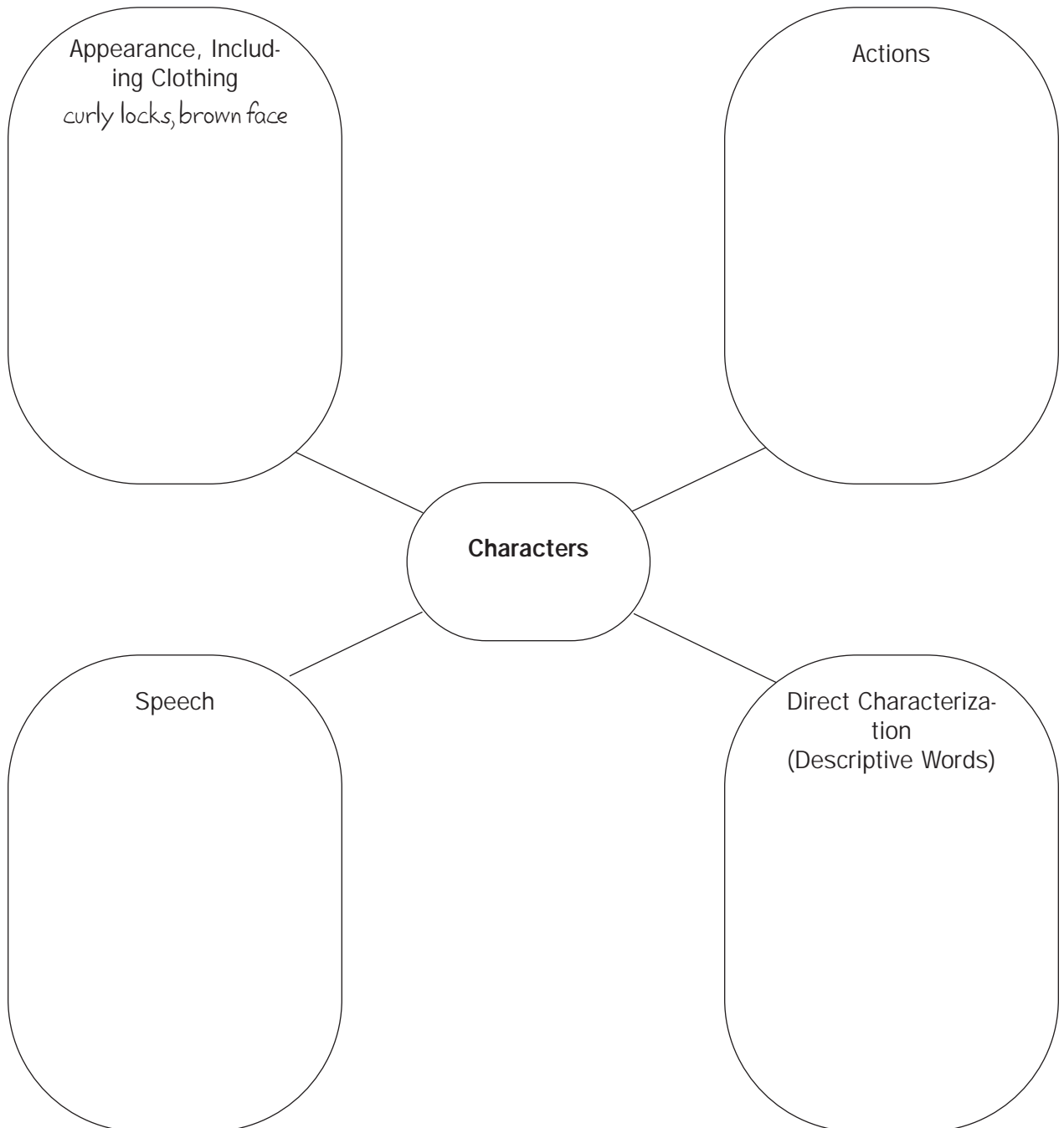
tithes [tītʰz] *n.* a tenth of one's income given to the church (p. 16)

wimpled [wim' pəld] *adj.* wearing a wimple, a type of cloth covering worn over the head and neck (p. 14)

Active Reading

The Canterbury Tales The Prologue

For centuries, readers have delighted in the colorful characters Chaucer introduced in “The Prologue.” Pay attention to how Chaucer made these characters so memorable. As you read “The Prologue,” list some of the lively and descriptive details that he used to make his characters vivid. Try to write at least one detail for each main character.



Responding

The Canterbury Tales The Prologue

Personal Response

Which character or characters made the greatest impression on you, and why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. At what time of year does this pilgrimage take place? Why is this a good time of year for such a trip?

2. Which pilgrim is described first? What might this suggest about the narrator's attitude toward the character? What words or phrases support your answer?

3. What sort of life did the Prioress and the Monk lead? What does this suggest about their values and position in life?

4. What details do you learn about the Parson? In what way is he different from the Monk, and what does this suggest about the narrator's attitude toward the clergy?

5. What sort of man is the Host, and what reason does he give for suggesting the stories? What sorts of stories does he ask the pilgrims to tell? What does this suggest about people's knowledge?

Responding

The Canterbury Tales The Prologue

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Which character or characters are most lifelike, do you think, and which are most idealized? Support your answers with details and examples from “The Prologue.”

7. Now that you have met the pilgrims, which one would you most enjoy traveling with? Is this the type of person you described in the **Focus Activity** question on page 16? If not, in what ways does the person differ?

Literature and Writing

Who Says?

Although the narrator of “The Prologue” uses the word *I*, do you think the narrator is Chaucer, or do you think it is another character that Chaucer created? Support your answer with reasons and evidence from the text.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Which characters does Chaucer seem to admire, and which does he poke fun at? Answer the question for yourself first and then compare your answers with other members of your group. Discuss the reasons for the answers, and try to see if you can reach agreement as a group.

Learning for Life

The Host acts a little like a tour guide, happily planning activities for his visitors. However, he is first of all a businessman, and happy guests mean recommendations and repeat visitors. As the Host, write a business plan for your inn. Explain what you offer, how you promote your business now, and how you plan to expand your business in the future. Provide facts and figures that document that your business is worthy of a loan.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Canterbury Tales Tales of Chivalry

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What images come to mind when you think of medieval knights and ladies? What qualities do you associate with them?

Freewrite

Spend three or four minutes freewriting on the topic of medieval knights and ladies. Begin by answering the questions above. Then keep writing until the full time has elapsed.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover the varieties of chivalric behavior portrayed in *Tales of Chivalry*.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

“The Knight’s Tale,” the longest piece in this section, demonstrates Chaucer’s familiarity with Boccaccio’s story “Teseida,” on which it is based, and also Chaucer’s facility with writing a romance. A **romance** is a long narrative about chivalric heroes.

Elements of Chivalry

Chivalry was the code of conduct and manners associated with knights in the Middle Ages. Although the system developed over time, certain elements and themes are typical of chivalric romances:

- a wise and just leader
- trustworthy knights who were loyal, courteous warriors
- people who behaved with honor and kept promises
- a struggle or contest, often to win the hand of a lady
- detailed descriptions of clothing, discussions, or other elements
- an unattainable woman who was often loved from afar
- an idealized rather than realistic or physical love
- the involvement of destiny, fate, chance, or the gods
- ceremonial events, such battles, tournaments, weddings
- a dragon, a monster, or some other supernatural element

Not every feature is found in every story. However, as you read these tales, you may be surprised by how many elements do appear, even though they might be cast in an unexpected setting, such as ancient Greece.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

amity [am’ə tē] *n.* friendship (p. 62)

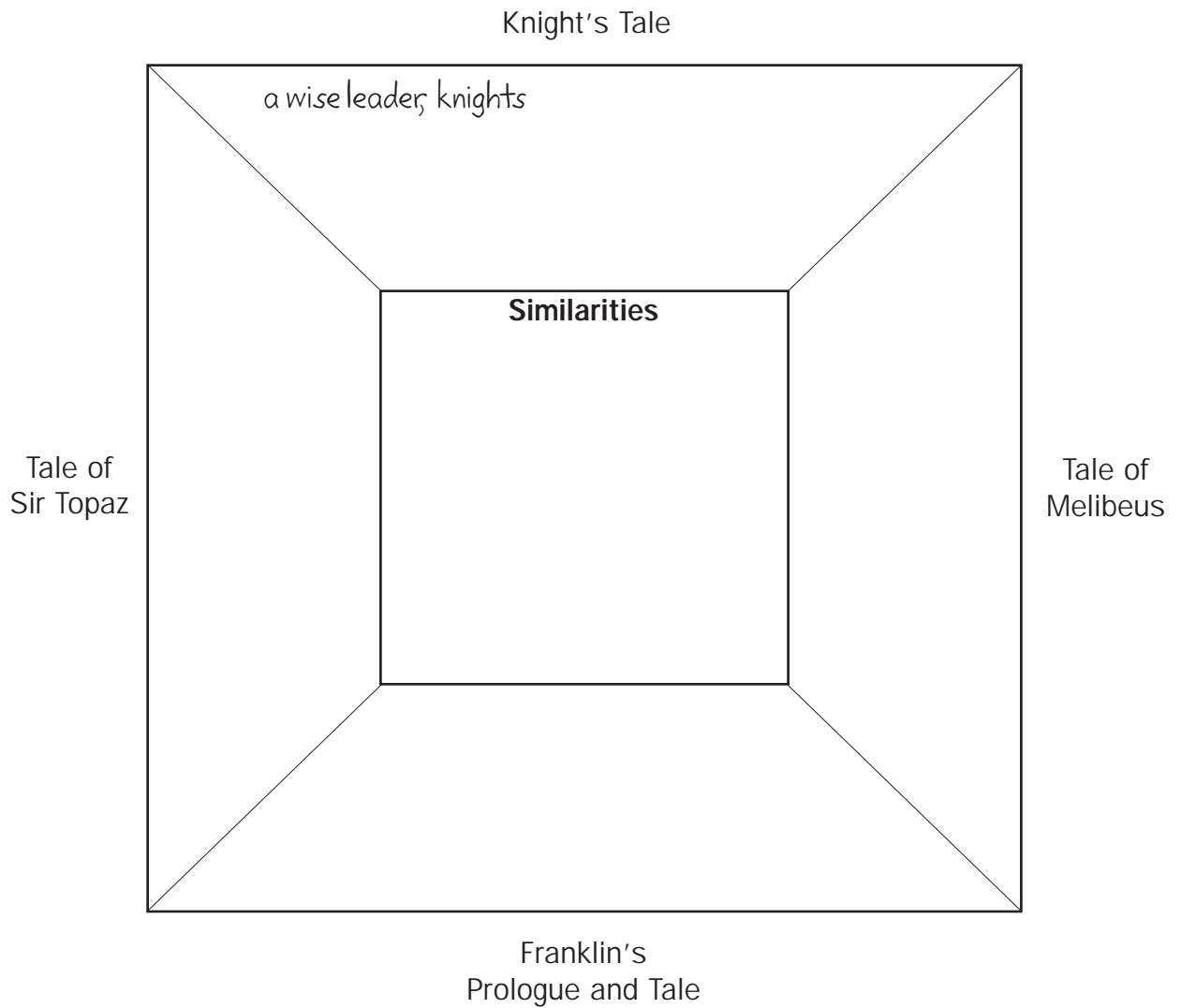
boon [bōōn] *n.* favor, especially one given in answer to a request (p. 60)

lamentation [lam’ən tā’shən] *n.* wailing to show grief (p. 29)

Active Reading

The Canterbury Tales Tales of Chivalry

These tales have many similar elements, as well as some striking differences. To focus on their common view of chivalry, fill in the diagram below. Note some of the distinguishing features that each story contains, as well as the similarities.



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Responding

The Canterbury Tales Tales of Chivalry

Personal Response

Were you surprised by anything in these tales? Describe why or why not.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How do Arcite and Palamon wind up in prison, and how does Arcite get out? What part does chance play in these events?

2. What do the men know of Emily? When Arcite voices his love for her, why does Palamon become so angry? How does this cast doubt on Arcite's honor as a knight?

3. Theseus forgives Arcite and Palamon and then proposes a way to let Destiny determine who will win Emily's hand. What does he suggest? What rules must be followed?

4. What finally happens to Arcite and Palamon? What ceremonies are associated with each event? What rewards does each man gain?

5. Why does the Host stop the tale of "Sir Topaz"? In what ways is its tone different from "The Tale of Melibeus"? What does this difference suggest about what was acceptable in a chivalric romance?

Responding

The Canterbury Tales Tales of Chivalry

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. In “The Knight’s Tale,” did the best man win? Give reasons for your answer.

7. Review the freewriting that you did in response to the **Focus Activity** on page 20. In what ways did these tales match your expectation and in what ways were they different? Are any of these elements meaningful today? Explain your answer.

Literature and Writing

Analyzing Details

Certain situations in these stories are described in detail, while others are taken care of in a few lines. Select one scene that is vividly described and analyze the types of details that it contains. Draw conclusions about the author’s purpose for including so much detail in that scene. Be sure to support your conclusions with specific examples and reasons.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Although women are considered to be the audience for modern romance novels, they may not have been the audience for medieval romances. With your group, discuss whether these tales are more likely to appeal to men or to women and why. Compare your answer with that of other groups to see if there is any consensus.

Internet Connection

Modern tournaments and ceremonies similar to those of Chaucer’s time still take place today. They are produced by groups who enjoy creating medieval reenactments. One of the best-known groups is the Society for Creative Anachronism, but it is not the only group. Using a search engine, find Web sites about medieval reenactments to discover some fascinating glimpses into modern chivalric ceremonies and to see why people enjoy them.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Canterbury Tales Tales of Love and Marriage

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Do you think that men and women would agree on what makes a good marriage? What ingredients would you choose?

List It

Work with classmates to make a list of elements that are likely to produce happy marriages.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover the roles that husbands and wives often fulfilled in medieval marriages.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Men and women were treated quite differently in the Middle Ages, and these differences were probably most apparent among the upper classes. Some, for example, considered men to be rational human beings, motivated by logic, honor, and virtue, while women were often seen as passionate creatures who were not as spiritual as men. At the same time, they were often idealized as delicate beings who needed protection. Laws and customs of the time showed the same dual vision. Men were allowed to abuse women physically and control their actions. Still, married women could own property, and they often ran households and businesses while their husbands were away.

Marriage in the Middle Ages

Marriages were often arranged between families, although the men and women involved did seem able to reject unappealing suitors. Wives were usually quite young, often not even in their teens, probably because women often died young in those days. Men were somewhat older—but might be as young as age seventeen. Marriage was more of a business transaction than a love match; each partner looked for a suitable mate who would fulfill her or his role. Women's families promised dowries—donations of cash or goods—to future husbands, and the size of the dowry often determined whether a marriage took place.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

betray [bi trā'] *v.* to reveal unintentionally or intentionally (p. 120)

clemency [klem'ən sē] *n.* an act or instance of leniency (p. 131)

prescience [prē'shē əns] *n.* foreknowledge of events (p. 146)

sovereign [sov'rən] *adj.* superlative in quality; supreme (p. 121)

temporal [tem'pər əl] *adj.* of or relating to time as opposed to eternity (p. 123)

Active Reading

The Canterbury Tales Tales of Love and Marriage

These stories present different ideas about what makes happy marriages. To understand each story's message, look at several elements. First, note the characteristics of the men and of the women. Who has the power in each story, and what does he or she do? Then consider who ends up happy—the man, the woman, or both? As you read, make notes in the chart below.

Wife of Bath's Tale

Main Characters	Character Traits	Details That Show This
Knights, old woman		

What makes a happy marriage? _____

Clerk's Prologue and Tale and Chaucer's Envoy

Main Characters	Character Traits	Details That Show This

What makes a happy marriage? _____

Responding

The Canterbury Tales Tales of Love and Marriage

Personal Response

What did you notice especially about the characters or situations in these stories or in one of the stories? Why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What is the Knight's answer to the question the Queen posed? How does the Knight discover that answer?

2. What price must the Knight pay for his new knowledge, and why does this bother him? What does this suggest about his character?

3. What cruel actions does the marquis order? How does Griselda respond to each? What advice is given in Chaucer's Envoy, and what does this suggest about the lesson that the tale tells?

Responding

The Canterbury Tales Tales of Love and Marriage

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Which story best fits the character of the pilgrim who told it? Give reasons for your answer.

5. Review your response to the **Focus Activity** on page 24. How do you think characters in each tale would answer the question? How do you think they would respond to your list? Why?

Literature and Writing

Drawing Conclusions About Chaucer

From what you have read here, would you guess that Chaucer himself had a happy or unhappy marriage? Take a stand. Write a paragraph or two stating your position and using story details to support it.

Extending Your Response

Performing

Bring these tales into the modern day by creating a skit about an on-air radio personality who takes questions about love and marriage from callers. First, assign roles, asking each character to consider what he or she might say. Then discuss the dialogue as a group, working to make it lively, humorous, and in keeping with the spirit of the story from which the character is taken. Finally, practice your skit and then audiotape or videotape it for other classes to enjoy.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Canterbury Tales Cautionary Tales

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What is the best or most important lesson you ever learned, and how did you learn it?

Journal

Two of the most common ways to learn lessons are by experience and through advice that proves true. In your journal, describe an important lesson that you learned and tell how you learned it.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Chaucer's tales taught those who read them enduring lessons about life.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Churches in Chaucer's time had many officials who engaged in questionable practices, a situation that ultimately led to the Reformation in the sixteenth century. One practice that became corrupt was the granting of indulgences—written forgiveness for past sins. Theoretically, a person had to show true repentance to be granted an indulgence by a pardoner, a clergyman authorized by the pope to pardon sinners. However, unethical pardoners quickly learned that they could sell pardons, as well as holy relics. As you read these tales, you will also find other examples of unethical church practices. However, Chaucer includes other descriptions of truly devout members of the clergy, so his view was not entirely negative.

Types of Cautionary Tales

From ancient times until today, people have used stories to teach lessons and to transmit social values. Stories designed to warn against certain behaviors or situations are called cautionary tales. These include **fables**, brief stories with morals at the end; **parables**, stories that parallel a more general lesson about morality; and **exemplums**, stories that provide specific examples that prove some moral rule.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

conundrum [kə nun' drəm] *n.* an intricate and difficult problem (p. 209)

iniquity [in ik' wə tē] *n.* wickedness (p. 174)

miscreant [mis' krē ənt] *n.* one who behaves criminally or viciously (p. 193)

prattle [prat' əl] *n.* unimportant or empty talk (p. 173)

recrimination [ri krim' ə nā' shən] *n.* accusation in revenge for another accusation (p. 221)

sycophant [sik' ə fənt] *n.* servile, self-seeking flatterer (p. 177)

transmutation [trans' mū tā' zshən] *n.* conversion of base metals into gold or silver (p. 216)

Active Reading

The Canterbury Tales Cautionary Tales

The Cautionary Tales warn listeners of certain types of behavior. As you read each story, note the character defect or sin that each main character shows. Then consider what happens to the character. From this, you can draw some conclusions about the lesson that the tale is trying to teach. Use the spaces below to record your ideas.

<p style="text-align: center;">Nun's Priest's Tale</p> <p>Character's defect or sin: <i>pride</i></p> <p>What happens:</p> <p>Lesson or lessons:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Pardoner's Tale</p> <p>Character's defect or sin:</p> <p>What happens:</p> <p>Lesson or lessons:</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Summoner's Tale</p> <p>Character's defect or sin:</p> <p>What happens:</p> <p>Lesson or lessons:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Canon's Yeoman's Tale</p> <p>Character's defect or sin:</p> <p>What happens:</p> <p>Lesson or lessons:</p>

Responding

The Canterbury Tales Cautionary Tales

Personal Response

What scenes or images from these tales most stick in your mind, and why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What animals are the main characters, and why might fables use animal characters so often instead of human ones?

2. Why is Chanticleer concerned about dreams? What advice does Pertelote give him when he voices his concerns? What lesson can be inferred from her reaction and what follows?

3. What happens to Chanticleer at the end? In what ways was he responsible for what happened? What moral is suggested by this ending?

4. What do you learn about the Pardoner in his Prologue? What kind of man is he? In what ways are his characters like him? What sin might each character stand for?

5. How does the old man view Death? How do the young men view Death? What does their meeting suggest about the relationship between humans and death?

Responding

The Canterbury Tales Cautionary Tales

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. In what ways are the lessons taught in “The Summoner’s Tale” and “The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale” useful today? In what ways are they outdated?

7. If Chaucer were writing cautionary tales today, what subject might he write about and what lesson might he try to teach? Before you respond, review your response to the **Focus Activity** on page 28 to see if you wish to include it here.

Literature and Writing

Analyzing Effectiveness

Do you think that telling a cautionary tale is more or less effective at teaching a lesson than just offering advice and logical reasons is? Support your answer with quotations and other evidence from the stories in this part.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Compare and contrast the four stories. Which are more effective and entertaining? Are the ones that are more entertaining the most effective ones at teaching lessons? Discuss these questions with your group. Later, compare your answers with those of another group.

Music Connection

Select or create a piece of music that you think would provide a good background to one of the tales or to one of the scenes within a tale. Share the music with the class, telling what work or scene it reminds you of and why.

James Glanz

In Chaucer Tale, a Clue to an Astronomic Reality

Before You Read

Focus Question

Do you think that factual knowledge or imagination is more important in writing a story? Why?

Background

This newspaper article explores the possibility that Chaucer incorporated a rare actual astronomical occurrence into the “The Franklin’s Tale.”

Responding to the Reading

1. What unusual astronomical event happened in the fourteenth century? To what fictional event does James Glanz connect it?

2. What evidence or reasons make James Glanz and others believe that Chaucer knew about this event?

3. Do you think Glanz is right? Why or why not?

4. If Chaucer were writing today, do you think he would still use magic to explain the tide or would he be more likely to use a scientific explanation? Give reasons for your answer.

5. **Making Connections** What details in “The Franklin’s Tale” could suggest that the “magical” occurrence was really an astronomical event?

Learning for Life

Write a brief scientific report explaining what causes regular tides and what causes the sorts of high tides that Glanz describes. Use details from his article as well as diagrams or illustrations that you find or create.

Giovanni
Boccaccio

from the *Decameron*

The Marriage of the Marquis of Saluzzo and Griselda

Before You Read

Focus Question

What is the most important quality that a spouse can have? Why?

Background

Like *The Canterbury Tales*, the *Decameron* is a frame tale. This story was the basis for the “Clerk’s Tale.”

Responding to the Reading

1. How realistic are Griselda’s changes after the wedding and people’s feelings toward her?

2. Who behaves more nobly, do you think, the humble Griselda or her husband? Give your reasons.

3. The characters and situations in the story suggest certain attitudes toward women and marriage. How have such attitudes changed?

4. **Making Connections** Whose version of this story did you like more, Chaucer’s or Boccaccio’s? Why?

Creative Writing

Assume the personality and viewpoint of one of the minor characters in this story, such as Griselda’s father, the retainer who took the children, or even one of the children. From that character’s perspective, write a first-person account of what happened to Griselda in her marriage.

Marie
de France

Chaitivel

(The Unfortunate One)

Before You Read

Focus Question

How would you go about winning the love of another person? What methods would you avoid?

Background

Although little is known about the twelfth-century writer Marie de France, she did leave behind a remarkable body of work, including the *Lais*, short verses dealing with romantic and chivalric subjects. Besides being exceptional literary works, they also provide a glimpse of knighthood from a female perspective.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to Marie de France, why does the lady not choose one of the men before the tournament? What are your thoughts on this?

2. The speaker describes what happened because the knights did not separate at the tournament. "They paid for it," she says. In your opinion, did they get what they deserved or not? Explain.

3. For what reason, do you think, do the lady and knight come up with different titles? Which title do you think is better and why?

4. What is the purpose of this *lai*, according to the lady? What other purpose might she have had?

5. **Making Connections** Suppose a character in *The Canterbury Tales* had told this story. Which character, do you think, would have told it? Give reasons for your answer.

Literature Groups

Discuss this question with your group: How does the writer's gender affect the tone, content, or style of the story? Use quotations and examples from the poems to support your responses.

**Barbara
Tuchman**

from A Distant Mirror

Before You Read

Focus Question

What do you know about chivalry, and why do you think it began and continued?

Background

This article explores chivalry and courtly love and their relationship to each other. The author explains what each aspired to be and how they were actually practiced in the time of Chaucer.

Responding to the Reading

1. Tuchman writes that chivalry was “about four parts in five illusion.” Despite this, in what ways was it still valuable?

2. What modern event do you think compares most favorably to a tournament? Tell the ways in which they are alike.

3. Describe the ideal knight. What physical and moral qualities does he have?

4. How would your life be different if people still subscribed to the ideals of chivalry and courtly love? Would your life be better or worse? Why?

5. **Making Connections** What evidence can you find in *The Canterbury Tales* that Chaucer was well acquainted with chivalry, both in its ideal form and as it was practiced? Give several examples.

Learning for Life

Suppose knights had to be interviewed in order to join the brotherhood. What questions might an interviewer ask to discover if an applicant were truly worthy? Write five questions that are designed to determine an applicant’s suitability. Afterwards, compare your list with another student’s.

Saida Miller
Khalifa

from The Fifth Pillar

Before You Read

Focus Question

If you were undertaking a modern-day pilgrimage, what do you think the hardest part of it would be?

Background

The hajj is a pilgrimage to Mecca that Muslims take at least once in a lifetime if they are able. Pilgrims converge from all over the world. This narrative is a clear first-person account of a modern Muslim woman's experience.

Responding to the Reading

1. What types of preparations must be made before a modern hajj? How are they different from what pilgrims did long ago?

2. What is the function of the *mutawwif*? Why is this job important?

3. What were some of the problems that the narrator faced? Which of these would you find most difficult, and why?

4. What details surprised you the most in this account? What evidence suggests that this was not the last pilgrimage undertaken by Khalifa?

5. **Making Connections** Compare this modern pilgrimage and the account of it with the one you read about in *The Canterbury Tales*. How are they alike?

Art Connection

Find, draw, or paint an illustration for this account. Try to capture the atmosphere and setting or the characters in a particular scene.

TEST: *The Canterbury Tales*

Recall and Interpret (40 points total; 4 points each)

A. Write the letter of the best answer.

- _____ 1. Every tale in the book is told by
a. the narrator. c. the Host.
b. a different pilgrim. d. a knight.
- _____ 2. Chaucer presents members of the clergy
a. as scoundrels. c. in different ways.
b. only in minor roles. d. in a very flattering light.
- _____ 3. One type of tale that teaches a lesson is called
a. a romance. c. a prologue.
b. a *lai*. d. an exemplum.
- _____ 4. Chivalric tales often deal with
a. honor. c. science.
b. peasants. d. humor.
- _____ 5. In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer
a. is an innkeeper. c. is not in evidence.
b. appears as a pilgrim. d. tells the best story.

B. Write a short answer for each question below.

6. What was the main conflict between Arcite and Palamon in “The Knight’s Tale”?

7. In “The Pardoner’s Tale,” what did the three men value above all else?

8. In “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” the old woman asks her husband, the Knight, to make a choice. What is his reply? What is the result of his reply?

9. In “The Clerk’s Tale,” why doesn’t Griselda recognize her daughter before the wedding?

TEST: *The Canterbury Tales* (continued)

10. How did the magician reward Aurelius at the end of “The Franklin’s Tale”?

Evaluate and Connect (60 points total; 30 points each)

Answer two of the following essay questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. The narrator makes this plea in “The Prologue” to *The Canterbury Tales*:

*But first I beg of you, in courtesy,
Not to condemn me as unmannerly
If I speak plainly and with no concealing
And give account of all their words and dealings,
Using their very phrases as they fell.*

Why was such a warning needed? Give an example of a story or detail that might have been viewed as “unmannerly,” and explain why readers of the time might have been offended.

2. Contrast two characters who are members of the clergy. Show how they are different, and explain what this difference reveals about the gap between the ideal and the actual church.
3. Compare *The Canterbury Tales* with the *Decameron*. Identify two similarities that suggest that Chaucer was acquainted with the *Decameron*.
4. Define “chivalry” and identify a scene or story that illustrates some aspect of it.
5. In *A Companion to Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales*, Margaret Hallissy writes:

Chaucer’s job required him to move easily between four languages; this linguistic fluency increased his exposure of a variety of literatures while enriching his knowledge of people and ideas.

Give examples from *The Canterbury Tales* that support this statement, and explain how they support it.