



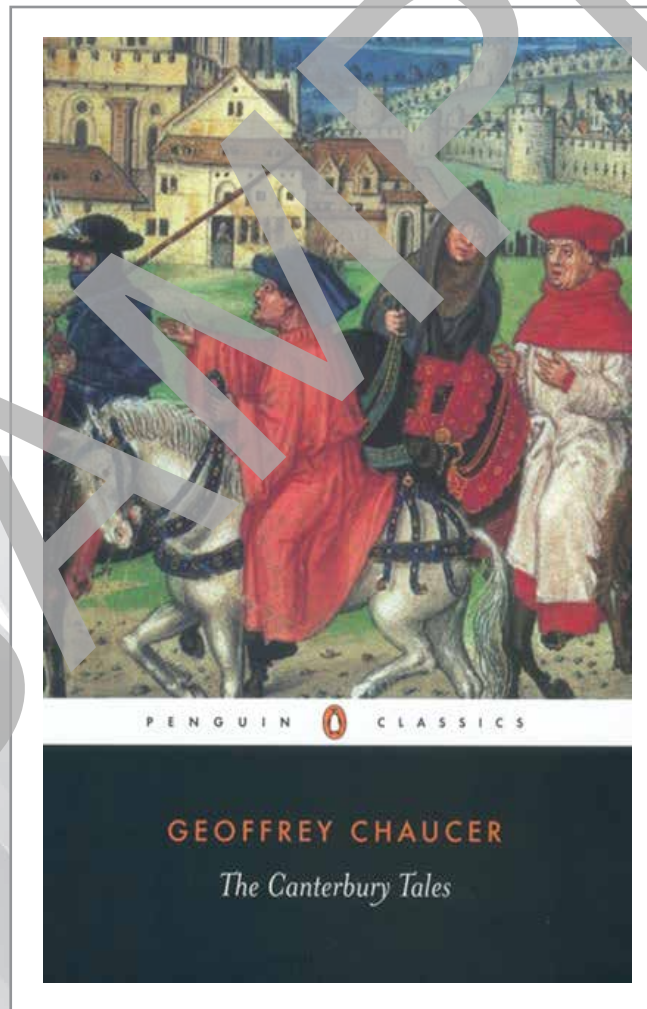
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Canterbury Tales

Geoffrey Chaucer



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Canterbury Tales

Geoffrey Chaucer

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming

Comprehension

Summarizing, literature log

Writing

Freewriting, literature journals, description, letter, epilogue, alternative endings, script, epitaphs, beast fable, poetry, conversation

Listening/Speaking

Debate, recordings, role playing, choral reading, news show

Vocabulary

etymology, word maps, word chains

Literary Elements

Prologue, medieval romance, fabliaux, lay, medieval exemplum, saint's legend, beast fable, similes

Other

Geography, dance improvisation, diorama, mural, mobile, props/costumes, cartoon strip, illustrations, music, science, social studies, history, culinary

Summary of *The Canterbury Tales*

Twenty-nine pilgrims from various walks of life are lodged at the Tabard Inn outside of London, about to embark on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas à Becket in Canterbury. To entertain themselves along the way, they agree to tell four stories each—two on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. Unfortunately, Chaucer died before the tales were complete, but he finished twenty-two and left two more partially composed. His General Prologue gives a portrait of each pilgrim, and the tales themselves reveal a lot more about each storyteller (e.g., the Wife of Bath's Tale shows her to be an earthy extrovert; the Knight's Tale reveals his love of the chivalric virtues; the Pardoner's Tale reinforces our image of a self-serving cheat). The tales represent a range of 14th-century genres: the romance, the folk tale, the fabliau, the lay, the beast-fable, the saint's legend, the allegory, the sermon. Several of the tales are adaptations of old stories, with humor and insight added by Chaucer.

About the Author

Geoffrey Chaucer was probably born around 1344 in London. Descended from a line of wine merchants, Chaucer went on to become the main English poet of the medieval period and one of the greatest writers of English literature. He was also a man of public affairs who had the advantage of royal patronage. His family was well-to-do, but not rich; nevertheless, Geoffrey's father saw to it that he was placed in a royal household. His formal education (in liberal arts as well as the art of war) continued as he served as Prince Lionel's page. While serving the English in France during the Hundred Years' War, he was taken prisoner and released only after payment of a large ransom was made. He married a woman named Philippa and received several diplomatic appointments—one of which took him to Italy, an area that was to influence his writing style. His posts were often well-paid and he enjoyed royal favor (Richard II was a patron of the arts), but Chaucer had some financial difficulties after his wife's death. His final appointment was as Deputy Forester of the Royal Forest of North Petherton. He died in 1400.

Although language experts tend to agree that Chaucer had little impact on English speech (grammar and pronunciation), there is little doubt that Chaucer's works raised the prestige of English within the literary world. Before Chaucer appeared on the scene, the "best" authors didn't consider the English language an entirely worthy one. His works, which displayed mastery of rhythm and rhyme, convinced the world that English could be a beautiful, flexible language. In addition to *The Canterbury Tales*, he wrote twenty-one short poems, several love-vision poems, and several prose works, the most famous of which is the great romance, *Troilus and Criseyde*, about the ethics of courtly love—a tale whose plot was borrowed by Shakespeare.

Introductory Activities

1. **Introducing students to Chaucer:** Present the information in "About the Author" and have students read and discuss the Introduction, pages ix-xvi. Point out that—
 - as a court poet of the Middle Ages he was: held to be learned; expected to take a "Christian view of things;" dependent on patrons

The Prologue, pages 3-41

Summary

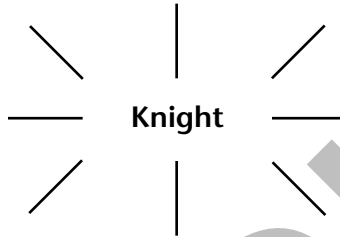
In April, people “long to go on pilgrimages”—especially to Canterbury, shrine of St. Thomas à Becket who healed so many of the sick. So it was that Chaucer himself stopped at the Tabard Inn one day as he was about to set out on a pilgrimage. There he met 29 others also on their way to Canterbury, including: a “true, perfect, gentle knight;” his son, a young squire who was quite the ladies’ man; a yeoman, who was skilled with the bow and arrow; the prioress, a cheerful nun who prided herself on her ladylike manners; a monk, who loved to hunt and eat; a friar who would rather spend time with barmaids than beggarwomen; a merchant who bragged about his profits while falling into debt; a poor, scholarly clerk (“and gladly would he learn, and gladly teach”); a sergeant of the law who was a respected attorney; a franklin—a wealthy landowner who enjoyed his food and drink; a haberdasher, carpenter, weaver, dyer, and tapestry maker—all from one “great and dignified guild;” a talented cook with an unfortunate boil on his leg; a shipman who was one of the best at compass work; a doctor of medicine who was “grounded in astronomy” and in cahoots with the apothecaries; the Wife of Bath, a rather bawdy woman who had had five husbands and knew the remedies of love; a poor parson—a good man who never neglected his parishioners; a plowman who was a good and faithful laborer; a brawny miller who loved telling tavern tales; a gentle manciple who was adept at buying provisions; a slender reeve who was a “better buyer than his lord” and rode last among the pilgrims; a summoner who liked his women and his wine and could be bribed by those he was supposed to summon to trial; his friend the pardoner, who sold pardons and relics; and the host—the innkeeper who “served us with the best of food.” After supper the host came up with an idea for entertaining the pilgrims on their trip. They should hold a storytelling contest—each telling two stories on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. The host would come along as their guide—for free—and would judge which of the tales was best. The winner would get a free supper—paid for by the others—upon their return to the inn. (Anyone who disputed the host’s judgment would pay all that the others spent along the way.) The next morning the pilgrims agreed with their host’s plan and drew lots to see who would tell the first story. The knight drew the shortest lot and cheerfully began his tale.

Vocabulary

martyr (3)	chivalry (5)	fustian (5)	squire (5)
yeoman (7)	baldric (7)	seemly (7)	wimple (9)
venery (9)	supple (11)	prelate (11)	palfrey (11)
friar (11)	wanton (11)	dalliance (11)	curate (13)
absolution (13)	penance (13)	pittance (13)	fleur-de-lis (13)
lepers (13)	paupers (13)	cloistered (15)	secular (15)
assizes (17)	sanguine (17)	carp (19)	burgess (19)
dais (19)	apothecaries (21)	taffeta (23)	pestilence (23)
footmantle (23)	parson (25)	excommunicate (25)	tithes (25)
chantry (25)	mercenary (25)	discreet (25)	tunic (27)
ribaldry (27)	manciple (29)	reeve (29)	choleric (29)
granary (29)	arrears (29)	bailiff (29)	summoner (31)
lecherous (31)	borax (31)	concubine (31)	veronica (33)
gelding (33)	ecclesiastic (35)	offertory (35)	burgher (37)
gainsay (39)	prudent (41)		

Discussion Questions

1. Who has gathered where? Why? (*A group of pilgrims on their way to Canterbury to visit the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket has gathered at the Tabard Inn.*)
2. What plan does the host come up with? (*The pilgrims will tell stories and the best storyteller will earn a free dinner.*) Can you think of a similar situation today where a group of people might decide to tell stories?
3. Who is speaking *The Prologue*? (*Chaucer*) What can you tell about him?
4. What words and phrases would you use to describe each of the pilgrims? (*Sample graphic for chalkboard or overhead projector:*)



How do you imagine each to look?

5. If you were “sorting” the pilgrims, which would you put together? How are the ones you paired alike—or opposite?

Literary Analysis: Prologue

Explain that a **prologue** is an introductory part of a discourse, poem, or novel. **Ask:** What function does Chaucer’s Prologue serve? (We are introduced to the purpose of the journey, the individual pilgrims, and the framework for the rest of the story—a storytelling contest.) Where else have students come across prologues?

Writing Ideas

1. Write a brief summary of *The Prologue*—in modern-day, colloquial English.
2. Suppose you are one of the pilgrims. Write the brief description of yourself that Chaucer might have included.

The Knight’s Tale, pages 43-145

Summary

The knight tells the tale of an Athenian duke named Theseus who conquered the Amazons and took Queen Hippolyta as his bride. Along the highway he came upon a group of ladies dressed in black, shrieking and wailing. One told Theseus they were all former queens and duchesses who had lost their husbands at Thebes. The city’s lord, Creon, would not allow them to bury their husbands. Theseus sent Hippolyta and her sister, Emily, to stay in Athens while he rode off to Thebes. There, he assaulted the city, slew Creon, and saw that the husbands’ bones were returned to their wives. Two knights injured in the attack, Palamon and his friend Arcite—Theban royalty who fought under Creon—were sent to Athens to be imprisoned with no chance for ransom or freedom. One spring morning years later Palamon happened to see lovely Emily from the prison tower—and instantly fell in love with her. At Palamon’s cry, Arcite looked out—and fell in love with her, too. Naturally this created friction between the two. One day, at the request of a friend of Theseus, Arcite was released and told to leave the land