

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Canterbury Tales

by Geoffrey Chaucer

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The Canterbury Tales

Note to Teacher

This Response Journal corresponds with the *Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics* version of *The Canterbury Tales*. The selected tales in this book have been translated into Modern English and reproduced in their entirety. As such, some of the content, dealing with themes of a sexual nature, may not be appropriate for some classes. Teacher discretion is advised.

The Canterbury Tales

Pre-Reading

1. Pictures are a type of visual imagery that captures specific moments in time. The cover of a book is often a picture that captures a scene from the story. Other times, the cover can be abstract (featuring a series of designs or collection of pictures) or very minimal (featuring only the title and author). There is a proverb that states “A picture is worth a thousand words.” It means that an image can visually represent a written idea or story; how true is this statement?

Based on the cover image, list what types of characters you expect to find while reading. Beside each type of character, indicate which image led you to that prediction.

2. Books often include a synopsis, located on the back cover that helps potential readers get a general idea about its contents. The best synopsis is one that offers enough information to spark a reader’s interest without divulging too much information about the plot.

Think about the types of information you have seen on the back covers of books and the types of information you find most or least helpful. Then, write a letter to the editor of *The Canterbury Tales* that gives your opinion of the synopsis located on the back of your book. Be sure to include your opinion regarding whether too much or not enough information regarding the plot is revealed.

3. Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* in the late 14th century, a little more than six hundred years ago. While works of literature contain universal themes, which extend to people in different nations and time periods, sometimes historical events and institutions referenced in the work are irrelevant and unimportant to the reader. For instance, while modern-day readers might understand the idea of corruption in the Church, they would not particularly care about the work of Pardoners, who no longer exist.

If you were Geoffrey Chaucer and you were writing a collection of tales, what are some prominent, 21st century events, achievements, and problems that you would mention in your work? Make a list of at least ten.

The Canterbury Tales

“The General Prologue”

4. There are many different ways to commence writing a text. Some writers choose to begin with dialogue or by introducing characters; other writers may choose to begin by offering background information or details about the setting.

“The General Prologue” begins with an introduction of the story’s setting that uses several different indicators of time, such as calendar months, astrology, and agriculture. Write a paragraph explaining whether you think this is an effective introductory tactic. Then, make a list of other possible ways Chaucer could have started the story.

5. After establishing the time and place of the tale, the narrator explains how he is introduced to the pilgrims whose tales he will reveal. He and the other pilgrims are residing at the same place, The Tabard Inn, and are familiarizing themselves with one another before they depart for Canterbury in the morning.

Getting to know your travel companions can be an easy way to get mentally prepared for a trip. It’s natural to want to know more information about people with whom you will be spending time. However, being mentally prepared is just part of getting ready for a trip.

Write a minimum of two paragraphs describing how you prepared for one particular trip or journey. Do not make your primary focus the things you packed. Did you have to do anything at home or school before you went away? Did you have to learn a new skill or language? Did you have to make an itinerary of the things you were going to do? Include specific details about your preparation, in addition to what you thought and how you felt.

6. In conversing with the other pilgrims, the narrator obtains a good deal of information about them, such as everyone’s class, and even takes note of their appearance. The fact that the narrator gathers all of this information upon first meeting the other pilgrims indicates that he has a very charismatic personality that makes people open up to him. However, not everyone is as comfortable in situations where they must meet new people. Getting to know new people and talking to strangers can be intimidating.

The Canterbury Tales

Imagine you are an advice columnist who receives a letter asking for your advice on how to become better at talking comfortably with people in social settings. Write a letter in response that offers clear advice on how to become more confident and how to engage people in conversation.

7. The Knight is the first pilgrim the narrator introduces. Knights have often been portrayed in books, plays, and movies, but what do you really know about them?

Consider the information you know about knights and knighthood, and do a freewrite about them. If your teacher prefers a timed freewrite, write nonstop for approximately three minutes. Otherwise, give your response in a minimum of two paragraphs. Try to do this freewrite without referring back to the text so you can compare your insight about knights with the description of the knight that the narrator offers.

8. The Prioress has excellent table manners. The narrator praises her ability to eat daintily and carefully, while still managing to be pleasurable company for those she is around.

Write a list of guidelines that could be used in a handbook for those looking for a quick and easy reference on table manners and dining etiquette. Be sure that the guidelines you offer can be successfully followed by an individual who is at least your own age. It may help if you consider different occasions that may require specific rules of etiquette.

9. Despite knowing that “hunters are not holy men,” the Monk is an outdoorsman who enjoys hunting on a regular basis. He is well aware that he is breaking the rules of his religion and has no desire to change his behavior.

Reflect back to a time when you chose to break the rules. What kind of situation was it, and what was the outcome? Describe the situation in a journal entry, making sure to reveal your feelings. Remember that a journal entry is a powerful piece of writing because it allows you to capture your innermost thoughts and feelings as you relay your firsthand experiences.

The Canterbury Tales

10. The Friar is similar to the Monk in that he defies his vocation to pursue personal pleasure. Instead of remaining in his cloister, the Monk prefers spending time in taverns and flirting with pretty young women. Furthermore, rather than use the money the parishioners give him for the Church, he uses it to buy expensive clothing and food. Because of his greed, the Friar only acquaints himself with the rich, the people who can give him the most money.

Imagine that you are one of the poor people who reside within the Friar's district. Write a letter to the Friar describing your feelings about the selectivity of the company he keeps and his inappropriate behavior. Use examples from "The General Prologue," to support your argument.

11. Although the narrator learns a great deal about the Merchant's business, he readily admits that he cannot remember his name. What is it about the impression the Merchant makes on the narrator that makes him unmemorable?

First impressions are very important because they help determine whether one person decides to become more familiar with another. Sadly, first impressions are not always positive and they cannot be done over. For this reason, it is very important to make the best first impression that you can so that people have a good, memorable recollection of you for the future.

Having read the first impression that the Merchant makes on the narrator, explain to a fellow classmate possible reasons why the narrator fails to remember the Merchant's name.

12. Despite not having much money, the Clerk spends much of his money on books. He obviously has a passion for reading and learning, so he does not mind spending his limited income on books instead of food or clothing.

While the Clerk's spending habits may seem unusual and extreme, his actions are essentially sound. People are more likely to spend money on and willing to make sacrifices for things they are passionate about.