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Teaching Unit™

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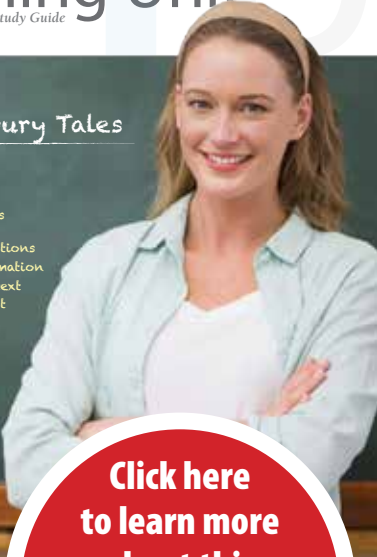
Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Canterbury Tales

by Geoffrey Chaucer

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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The Canterbury Tales

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the individual personalities of the pilgrims and comment on those personality features that could be called “universal character traits.”
2. identify those characteristics of the pilgrims that represent some of the virtues and vices found in Chaucer’s society.
3. explain the role that social class plays in *The Canterbury Tales*.
4. point out examples of Chaucer’s humor and, from these examples, draw a generalization as to how Chaucer created his humor.
5. define satire and discuss the kind of satire seen in *The Canterbury Tales*.
6. define the term allusion and provide examples from the text.
7. cite comments and/or incidents from *The Knight’s Tale* which depict the theme of free will versus Divine Providence.
8. distinguish between various genres, including romance, fabliau, fable, and sermon.
9. discuss life in the medieval period as portrayed in *The Canterbury Tales*.
10. cite examples of Chaucer’s criticism of the Catholic Church.
11. consider the position of women in medieval European society.

The Canterbury Tales

Questions for Essay and Discussion

THE GENERAL PROLOGUE

1. Show that the presentation of figures in *The General Prologue* ranges from gentle criticism of human failings to a stronger criticism that exposes, and perhaps condemns, serious misbehavior.
2. List the pilgrims according to their social rank; specify their secular or religious classification.
3. Discuss the framework of *The Canterbury Tales* and compare it to a modern story or movie with a similar framework.

THE KNIGHT'S TALE

1. Explain the aspects associated with the medieval code of chivalry.
2. Discuss the theme of friendship in its various forms as depicted in this tale.
3. Why do you suppose that Chaucer uses ancient Greece as the setting for *The Knight's Tale*? Support your generalizations with examples from the text.
4. Explain what "the code of courtly love" involves and illustrate your explanation with examples from the text.

THE MILLER'S TALE

1. Compare and contrast *The Knight's Tale* and *The Miller's Tale*.
2. Identify and comment on the role of biblical allusions in *The Miller's Tale*.
3. In what way does the tale match the miller's persona?
4. Based on the tale, do you suppose that May/December marriages were popular during the medieval era?

2. What is the setting as the story begins?

3. The story begins:

“WHEN APRIL with his showers sweet with fruit
The drought of March has pierced unto the root
And bathed each vein with liquor that has power
To generate therein and sire the flower [...]” (lines 1 – 4)

What imagery do these lines contain, and how does it pertain to the story?

4. The narrator tells us that he is going to describe the pilgrims, “who they were, and what was their degree” (line 40). Why is the knight the first character described?

5. What do we learn of the knight’s character, appearance, and history?

6. What do we learn about the squire? How is he similar to and different from his father?

7. Describe the yeoman.

The Knight's Tale

Vocabulary

aghast – pail; surprised
caveat – a warning
ere – before
fain – glad, eager
hart – a deer
hie – to hurry
kite – a type of scavenging bird
thrall – a slave
twain – two
vestments – clothes
weal – goodness
wight – man

1. Who is the narrator in *The Knight's Tale*, and how does this story suit him?

2. Theseus weds Queen Hippolyta and brings his wife and her sister, Emily, to Athens after a campaign against the Amazons. As their group nears Athens, who stops them, and what is their complaint?

3. A lamenting woman tells Theseus, “Thanks be to Fortune and her treacherous wheel, / There's none can rest assured of constant weal” (line 49 – 50) Explain the pun that Chaucer uses with these lines. In addition, what does this passage imply about fate?

4. How does Theseus' attack on Thebes correspond with the honor code which was followed by knights of medieval times?

The Miller's Tale

Vocabulary

jape – a joke

1. Who lives with John the carpenter and his wife, Alison? How is he described?

2. Why is John jealous when it comes to his wife?

3. What simile is used to describe Alison that hints at her dishonesty?

4. How does Nicholas act towards Alison, and what is her response?

5. Who is Absalom and what is ironic about the description of him? What is Chaucer inferring about the church with his description of Absalom?
