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***The Canterbury Tales***  
BY GEOFFREY CHAUCER



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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Pre-Reading

### Historical Context

**Objectives:** Understanding and identifying historical events surrounding a text  
Creating a presentation

#### Activity

Authors do not write in a vacuum; they are affected by events that they experience personally and that they see happening around the world. Chaucer lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and as you read his stories, it may help to understand some major historical events that were happening during his lifetime.

In small groups, research one of the following topics using books from your library, Internet sources, and other sources to which your teacher and librarian can direct you. Create a five-minute presentation in which you and your group will tell your classmates about your chosen topic.

Make your presentation fun—don't just read out of a book, but assign each group member to tell your classmates interesting facts and trivia about your topic. Everyone should speak during your presentation, if only for a few moments. Feel free to use visual aids (pictures, movies, handouts) in your presentation to keep your audience's interest.

Be sure to answer the following questions about your topic:

- What happened during this historical moment?
- When did the event take place?
- What countries or regions were impacted?
- Who were key “players” in the event?
- Was Chaucer directly involved in the event?
- What were the historical repercussions from this particular incident?

Topics for Research:

- The Black Death
- The Hundred Years' War
- The Peasants' Revolt
- The Papal Election Controversy

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The General Prologue

### The Host's Words: From Verse to Prose

**Objectives:** Changing the style of a work  
Interpreting details from the text  
Analyzing differences between types of work

#### Activity

Poems are written in verse while regular fiction is written in prose. Some people have a preference, while others like both. All of Chaucer's tales are written in verse, although he is telling a story similar to what might be found in a work of fiction. For this task, 'translate' the section of "The General Prologue" which is titled "The Host," into prose, and write the story in 1-2 paragraphs.

1. First, 'translate' the poem into regular prose. For example, the lines:

Great cheer our host gave to us, every one,  
And to the supper set us all anon;  
And served us then with victuals of the best.  
Strong was the wine and pleasant to each guest

Might be changed to: "Our friendly host served us a delicious supper, along with fine wine."

2. Next, write a brief paragraph which reflects on the differences between the story in verse and the story in prose which answers the following questions:
  - Which version do you like better?
  - How does the tone change?
  - What details get left out, and what details do you think needed to be left in?
  - Do you think the message or theme of the verse changes when you translate it to prose?
  - How did your understanding of the text change as you 'translated' it?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Knight's Tale

### Comic Strip

**Objective:** Creating Graphic Images

#### Activity

A comic strip tells a story, just as a narrative does, but in visual form, rather than literary form. For this activity, you will be re-creating the plot of "The Knight's Tale," in the form of a comic strip, with illustrations and speech balloons showing each character's words.

First, make a list of the important events that occur in the story, and put them in order.

Then decide on the best way to illustrate them in comic-strip form. To do this, create a storyboard in lead pencil on scrap paper, sketching out each panel in the strip, and what the characters in each panel are saying. Place each character's words in a speech balloon above each one's head, pointing to the character to indicate that he or she is saying those words.

Once you decide on the storyboard, create the finished comic strip, using colored pencils (markers, computer generated images, or regular pencils are also an option) and following the storyboard.

Your comic strip should be at least four panels, but may include as many more as you think are needed to convey the events in the story.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Miller's Prologue

### Journal Entries

**Objectives:** Interpreting details from the text  
Reflecting on characters' personalities and motivation  
Rewriting verse into prose

#### Activity

The narrator writes that many pilgrims enjoyed the Knight's Tale, but the Miller rudely interrupts to tell his own story.

Your task here is to write a journal entry as a pilgrim in *The Canterbury Tales*. Rewrite what happens in "The Miller's Prologue" from your own point of view, commenting on your own opinion of the Miller and also the other characters' reactions. You may choose to express positive or negative feelings towards the Miller, but you cannot add major events which are not already in the text.

Your entry should include references to:

- Your own occupation
- Your personal opinion about the Knight's Tale
- Your opinion about the Miller's response
- Your observations on how others are responding to the Miller, and whether or not you agree with them

We have provided a sample beginning for your journal entry; feel free to use it or start your own.

Spring, 1380.

The Knight had just finished telling his sad but wonderful story, when all of a sudden this rude man interrupted! I was shocked—I would never think of doing that, as I have been brought up to be very courtly and polite.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Wife of Bath's Prologue

### Emailing

Objectives: Composing an email  
Reflecting on a story

#### Activity

You are close friends with the Wife of Bath, who has just sent you an excerpt from her Prologue to explain some of her life events. You want to email her back with your reaction. You should be reacting to it as if this were a true story your friend has told you, not reacting to formal literary techniques or themes.

Compose an email to the Wife of Bath, telling her what you think of her history. Include your opinion of her husband's book and how you felt about these stories. Express how you might feel if someone close to you told you this same story, and offer words of encouragement if needed. The purpose of the email should be to reflect upon the story, rather than just summarize what you read.

Remember, this is in email form, so it does not have to be extremely formal.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Pardoner's Tale

### Create a Newspaper

**Objectives:** Distinguishing fact from opinion  
Writing in various newspaper styles

#### Activity

In this activity, you will create an edition of a newspaper based on the events in the Pardoner's story.

News stories answer the following questions: *Who, What, When, Where, Why* and *How*. This information is usually contained in the very first paragraph, with the rest of the story filling in the secondary details. Excellent journalists can even put all the facts in the first sentence without it appearing forced. The main purpose of news stories is to inform and educate readers, simply by stating factual information.

While most "hard" news stories try to answer these questions in the first or second paragraph, "feature" or "human interest" stories may answer them throughout the piece.

Human interest stories concentrate less on the facts and do not always place the 4Ws, 1H in the beginning; this type of journalism focuses more on how the story will resonate with the paper's readers. Human interest stories deal with subject the editors of the paper feel their audience want to explore. These types of stories are frequently about animals, achievements, curiosities, or unusual happenings, but they can deal with almost any aspect of "human interest." Their purpose is to entertain.

Editorials, on the other hand, take facts and develop an opinion based on the facts. The 4W's, 1H may or may not even be in the editorial. They present information, but in a biased way. Editorials are meant to persuade readers, to have them take action on a subject, or to enlighten readers about an issue on which there are differing views.

1. First, the class as a whole will decide on a name for the newspaper and a slogan and then choose from among the suggestions based on a vote.
2. Then, as an individual, pick one of the following types of articles to write. Make sure to give what you write a catchy headline!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Nun's Priest's Prologue

### Advertising Copy

**Objective:** Writing a Help Wanted ad

#### Activity

In this story, the characters are complaining about the monk's tale and asking for a different kind of story. Imagine that they have asked you, the host, to find them additional storytellers to join their group, after being disappointed in the monk. Write a long and detailed Help Wanted describing what kind of storyteller you are looking for. Use clues for the text in this story, but you may also add your own priorities and desires as well—what kind of story do *you* want to see next? Try to keep the other members of the party happy, while also considering what you think will keep your interest as a reader.

Your ad should not be like most employment ads in the paper today, which are filled with abbreviations and other shorthand to make the ad fit into a small space in the paper. Instead, you should make your ad a comprehensive overview of what the job entails, so prospective employees would know exactly what the employer is looking for and what they could expect on the job. We have provided a brief sample one for you, based on a prospective employee who might be similar to the author of "The Knight's Tale."

#### Example:

STORYTELLER WANTED – must be highly experienced in the language of courtly love, well travelled, and detail-oriented. Must be able to identify with characters in own story. War experience is preferred and qualities of humility and honor are required.

This is an exceptional opportunity for someone who wishes to tell stories with a moral or didactic ending. Great support system and feedback will be provided for the employee.

We offer a competitive salary and benefits package, with promotion opportunities. You'll make a good living, while making journeys enjoyable for others.

Contact Chaucer Tales Inc.