Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Canterbury Tales

by Geoffrey Chaucer

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The Canterbury Tales

Disclaimer

This Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit corresponds to the *Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics* version of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. The selected tales in this book have been translated into Modern English and reproduced in their entirety. Some tales contain sexual material that may not be appropriate for some classes.

The Canterbury Tales

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, students will be able to

1. evaluate *The Canterbury Tales* in terms of its historical context, as well its importance and appeal to modern-day readers.

2. analyze the use of humor, wit, and sarcasm in the tales.

3. identify the characteristics of an English romance, *fabliau*, *exemplum*, and beast fable and analyze how various tales function as examples of these genres.

4. examine the use of verbal, dramatic, and situational irony in the tales.

5. analyze feminist and anti-feminist messages within the text.

6. evaluate the ways Chaucer uses metaphor, simile, personification, allusion, and imagery in the text.

7. analyze the ways Chaucer uses characterization and establishes diverse and unique narrative voices.

8. discuss the different rhetorical levels in the text.

9. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

10. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

11. offer a close reading of *The Canterbury Tales* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the collection.

The Canterbury Tales

Lecture Notes

CHAUCER'S LIFE

Many English scholars and literature aficionados consider Chaucer one of the greatest English writers of the Medieval Period. Aside from authoring *The Canterbury Tales, Troilus and Criseyde, The Book of the Duchess,* and several other notable poems, Chaucer was an active civil servant, and because of his mark on the public record, modern scholars know a good deal about his life, even though he lived more than six hundred years ago.

He is also dearly remembered as among the first writers to write "serious literature" in English vernacular rather than in the customary Latin or French.

Chaucer was born sometime around 1343 to John Chaucer and Agnes Copton, vintners who owned property outside of London. We know little about Chaucer's education, but it is clear from the allusions he makes in his writing that he studied Greek and Latin poetry, particularly that of Homer, Ovid, and Virgil.

As a young man, Chaucer was a servant in the household of Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster and wife of Prince Lionel, the Duke of Clarence. In the early years of the Hundred Years' War, in which King Edward III attempted to take the French throne, Chaucer accompanied Prince Lionel and his men to the continent. In 1360, one year after joining the military, Chaucer was captured and ransomed for £16, which Edward III paid.

When Chaucer returned to England, he served as a valet in the king's household. There, he met Philippa de Roet, one of the queen's attendants, and they married in 1366. They had four children together: Thomas, Lewis, Agnes, and Elizabeth. While raising his family, Chaucer continued his dutiful service to the king. In 1374, Edward promised him a gallon pitcher of wine a day for life, a generous gift, which the king maintained until his death in 1377. Edward's successor, Richard II, resumed the act, but he allowed Chaucer to exchange the wine for twenty marks instead.

Chaucer also took on additional positions, including the Comptroller of the Port of London, a job given to him in 1374, which involved collecting customs on wool, leather, and sheepskin. He also frequently traveled to Europe, visiting Picardy, Florence, and Genoa in his lifetime. In 1377, he journeyed to France under the king's orders, where he supposedly assisted in the attempt to arrange a marriage between Richard II and a French princess. Because of his travels, Chaucer was able to study French and Italian poetry, both of which influenced his work.

On October 25, 1400, Chaucer died from unknown causes. Some scholars believe that he was murdered by enemies of King Richard II, but there is not substantial evidence to support this claim. Chaucer was buried in the Westminster Abbey, and in 1556, his remains were moved to what has now been named the Poet's Corner, the South Transept of the abbey where other famous writers, including Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Edmund Spenser, and Ben Jonson, are interred.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

Geoffrey Chaucer began writing *The Canterbury Tales* sometime around 1380, but due to lack of evidence, scholars cannot provide an exact year when he began writing them.

In *The Canterbury Tales,* thirty pilgrims of various social classes are traveling to Canterbury to visit the shrine of Sir Thomas Becket. Harry Bailey, the innkeeper of the Tabard Inn, where the pilgrims coincidentally meet, suggests a storytelling competition. According to the rules of the competition, each pilgrim is to tell four tales—two on the journey to Canterbury and two on the journey back to the Tabard. If Chaucer were to complete the task of writing all of the tales told by every pilgrim mentioned in "The General Prologue," the complete version of the book would include one hundred sixteen tales. Chaucer died, however, before completing his *magnum opus*, leaving behind only the General Prologue and twenty-four tales, approximately one-fifth of the intended number.

Today, eighty-three medieval manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* have been discovered, but none of them is a complete collection of all the written tales. Because of this, Chaucer experts do not know in what order he intended the tales to be placed. Therefore, the tales have been organized into fragments based on the exchanges between the pilgrims in the tales' introductions and prologues. There is no interconnectivity between the various fragments.

The *Canterbury Tales* is generally divided in the following way (The Tales in the *Literary Touchstone Classic* are in bold):

Fragment I:	**The General Prologue**, **The Knight**, **The Miller**, The Reeve, The Cook
Fragment II:	The Man of Law (The Lawyer)
Fragment III:	**The Wife of Bath**, The Friar, The Summoner
Fragment IV:	The Clerk, The Merchant
Fragment V:	The Squire, The Franklin
Fragment VI:	The Physician, **The Pardoner**
Fragment VII:	The Shipman (The Sailor), The Prioress, The Tale of Sir Thopas, The Tale of Melibee, The Monk, **The Nun's Priest**
Fragment VIII:	The Second Nun, The Canon's Yeoman
Fragment IX:	The Manciple
Fragment X:	The Parson

The tales were originally written in Middle English, an amalgamation of West Germanic Old English and French (which had been brought to England during the Norman Invasion in 1066 CE). Since there was no standardized spelling at the time the *Canterbury Tales* was written, the original text appears more daunting and antiquated than it actually is. Chaucer wrote the tales as they would have been spoken aloud, and the unique spelling and pronunciation of words reflect his regional accent. (Chaucer's dialect, the language of mercantile London, is the dialect that evolved into Modern English, while the various provincial dialects essentially disappeared, leaving vestiges in the various accents and brogues still found in the British Isles.)

The following is the beginning of "The General Prologue" in the *Canterbury Tales*. The left column contains the text in Middle English. The right column has the same text translated into Modern English. Although the reader may need a glossary to define some of the archaic words, the original Chaucerian text can be understood easily if put into standard spelling.

Middle English	Modern English
Whan that aprill with his shoures soote *The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,* *And bathed every veyne in swich licour* *Of which vertu engendred is the flour;* *Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth* *Inspired hath in every holt and heeth* *Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne* *Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,* *And smale foweles maken melodye,* *That slepen al the nyght with open ye* *(so priketh hem nature in hir corages);* *Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,* *And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,* *To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;* *And specially from every shires ende* *Of engelond to caunterbury they wende,* *The hooly blisful martir for to seke,* *That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.*	When April with his showers sweet The drought of March has pierced to the root, And bathed every vine in such liquor Of which virtue engendered is the flower. When Zephyr also with his sweat breath Breathes life into every grove and heath Tender crops, and the young sun Has in the ram his half course run And small fowls make melody That sleep all night with open eye (so livens Nature with their spirits); Then, people long to go on pilgrimages, And palmers long to seek foreign shores, To distant shrines, known in several lands And especially from every shire's end Of England, they to Canterbury went, The holy, blissful martyr they went to see, Who helped them when they were sick.

THE RHYTHM OF CHAUCER'S POETRY

Meter is the measurement of rhythm in poetry (as long as the poetry is not in free verse). Every line in a poem of regular rhythm can be divided into a certain number of sections called *feet*. Look at the following line:

The drought / of March / has pierced / unto / the root

This is the second line from the (updated) *Canterbury Tales* that you are reading. You can see that it is divisible into five feet.

If you read the line aloud, you will notice that the emphasis, or *stress*, of each foot is on the second syllable. A two-syllable foot with the stress on the second syllable is called an *iamb*.

The **drought** / of **March** / has **pierced** / un**to** / the **root**

iamb iamb iamb iamb iamb

The meter of the line above is therefore called *iambic pentameter* (*pentameter* means "five feet.")

Most poetry composed in the "English language" prior to Chaucer followed a rhythmic pattern reminiscent of Norse epics and sagas, like *Beowulf*, in which line of verse are highly alliterative, and the alliterating syllables received more stress than non-alliterating syllables.

Just as Chaucer was the first English poet to compose serious literature in the English vernacular, Chaucer's poetry was the first in English to be written in *iambic pentameter*.

Chaucer's language was Middle English, a hybrid of Old English (the Anglo-Saxon language of Britain prior to the Norman invasion of 1066, surviving in poems like *Beowulf)* and the language that William and his Norman compatriots brought with them in the 1066 invasion. Modern readers can usually read and understand much of Chaucer's original work without translation.

Here is the first sentence of the General Prologue in Middle English, with the first two lines divided into feet (notice that the first line is not iambic!)

Whan that/ **A**prille/ **with** his/ **shour**es/ **soot**e
The **droghte**/ of **Marche**/ hath **perc**/ed **to**/ the **roo**te,
And **bath**/-ed **ev**'/-ry **veyne**/ in **swich**/ li-**cour**,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
When Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heath
The tender croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours yronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen all the night with open ye,
(So priketh him nature in hir corages:
Than longeth folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmers for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, couthe in sondry londes,
And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The holy blissful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seke.

THE NUMBER OF PILGRIMS

One question that readers frequently ask when studying the *Canterbury Tales* is how many pilgrims there are on the pilgrimage. In line 24 of "The General Prologue," Chaucer remarks that there are twenty-nine people on the pilgrimage. However, in this count, the narrator omits himself and several other characters.

Below is the complete list of the pilgrims on the journey to Canterbury. The characters in bold tell a tale.

1. **The Knight**
2. **The Squire**
3. The Yeoman
4. **The Prioress**
5. **The Second Nun**
6. **The Nun's Priest**
7. a second priest
8. a third priest
9. **The Monk**
10. **The Friar**
11. **The Merchant**
12. **The Clerk**
13. **The Man of Law**
14. **The Franklin**
15. a haberdasher
16. a carpenter
17. a weaver
18. a dyer
19. an arras-maker
20. **The Cook**
21. **The Shipman**
22. **The Physician**
23. **The Wife of Bath**
24. **The Parson**
25. The Plowman
26. **The Miller**
27. **The Manciple**
28. **The Reeve**
29. **The Summoner**
30. **The Pardoner**
31. The Host
32. **Chaucer's persona (tells two tales)**
33. The Canon (who runs away)
34. **The Canon's Yeoman***

* The Canon's Yeoman is not the same as the Knight's Yeoman. He is not mentioned in "The General Prologue."

Chaucer's Sources for the Selected Tales

THE GENERAL PROLOGUE

The General Prologue and the character portraits have no precedent, but the frame narrative and the storytelling game may have been inspired by Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In the *Decameron*, seven women and three men, all young and of noble birth, travel from village to village, attempting to escape the Black Death. In order to amuse themselves on their travels, they agree to tell stories. Each of the ten travelers is assigned a day in which he or she chooses a theme; then, each of the ten pilgrims tells a story using that theme. At the end of the *Decameron* and the passing of ten days, one hundred stories have been told.

The *Canterbury Tales* differs from the *Decameron* in that the number of pilgrims is significantly larger, the storytelling is a contest, and the pilgrims are from different estates (see "The Three Estates" below), not just the nobility.

The General Prologue might also have been inspired by the *estates satire*, a literary genre in which characters are stereotyped and given vices common to those people who share their profession. For instance, the dishonest miller and the hypocritical friar are examples of stereotypes.

THE KNIGHT'S TALE

"The Knight's Tale" is adapted from another of Boccaccio's works, *Il Teseida*, or, "The Story of Theseus." This epic poem tells almost an identical story about Arcita and Palamon and their battle over Emily. Chaucer condenses Boccaccio's version and inserts passages and ideas that are not included in the original. An example is Theseus' speech about the First Mover in lines 2130 – 2217.

THE TALE OF THE WIFE OF BATH

"The Tale of the Wife of Bath" is derived from short stories with the "loathly lady" theme, in which an ugly woman tricks or convinces a man to kiss her, then transforms into a beautiful maiden. One famous story of this type is John Gower's "Tale of Florent," a tale in his *Confessio Amantis*.

In Gower's story, Florent—a young, honorable knight—is tricked by the mother of a captain he killed in battle into answering a presumably unanswerable question: What is it that women most desire? He is given a year to find the answer; if he is unsuccessful or does not return for his sentencing, he will be executed.

For an entire year, Florent searches in vain for the answer. As he returns to the castle, coming to terms with his inevitable execution, an old woman offers him the answer in exchange for a vow of marriage. Florent accepts her proposal, and he returns to the captain's mother with an answer: What women want most is to be dominant over their husbands. The answer is correct, and Florent is granted his life.

Staying true to his word, Florent marries the old woman who gave him the answer. On their wedding night, when the two are about to consummate their marriage, Florent discovers that his wife is no longer a hag, but a beautiful woman. As he moves to embrace her, the woman tells him that he must restrain himself to a choice: would he have her beautiful by day or by night? Florent cannot decide, so he leaves the choice up to her.

At that moment, the spell is entirely broken. The old woman, now forever a beautiful maiden, reveals that she is actually the young princess of Sicily, and her evil stepmother placed a curse upon her to make her ugly. By granting her sovereignty, Florent breaks the curse, and the two live happily ever after.

THE NUN'S PRIEST'S TALE

"The Nun's Priest's Tale" or "Of the Cock and Hen: Chanticleer and Pertelote" is most likely derived from another collection of beast fables, *Le Roman de Renart*. The *Roman de Renart*, written in French, details the adventures of Reynard the Fox, an animal with anthropomorphic characteristics and deceptive behavior. Like "The Nun's Priest's Tale," the tales of Reynard the Fox were satires, using allegory to insult the clergy and the nobility. It is very likely that Russel, the fox in Chaucer's tale, is based on Reynard.

SAINT THOMAS BECKET, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

Thomas Becket was an important religious and political figure. It is to his shrine in Canterbury that the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* are traveling.

Becket was born in 1118, and as a boy, studied church and secular law at the English Merton Priory, as well as other schools in France and Italy. At age ten, he became a favorite of Theobald of Bec, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Through the Archbishop's connections and friendship with King Henry II, Becket was named Lord Chancellor. After Theobald's death, Becket became the next Archbishop of Canterbury, a position he held from 1162 until his death.

Henry II and Thomas Becket had been very close friends, and Henry's second son lived in Becket's household for a time. However, Henry and Becket disagreed on the balance of power between the church and the state. Henry believed that, as supreme ruler of England, he should have more authority in clerical affairs. While Becket did not agree with Henry's position, he did obey the king's orders to collect tax on both secular and clerical lands, much to the church's displeasure.

Beckett defied his friend and king, however, by refusing to sign the Constitution of Clarendon, a document limiting the powers of the church and subjecting clergy to the same punishments as secular citizens. As it stood, priests were under the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical, rather than civil, courts. In the ecclesiastical courts, church members were often sympathetic toward other clergymen; often, the only punishment monks, friars, and priests would receive for murder was acquittal or laicization (removal of their clerical rights and authority), while ordinary citizens could be subject to death. Becket disagreed with the change proposed by the Constitution of Clarendon for two reasons: first, it would increase the king's power in the church; second, it would result in double jeopardy (a person being charged twice for the same crime).

When Henry learned that Becket did not approve of his proposal, he confiscated all of Becket's property and accused him of stealing money while serving as Lord Chancellor. Becket fled to France and took refuge with King Louis VII; he also tried to convince Pope Alexander II to excommunicate Henry. When the Pope threatened Henry, the king made an agreement with Becket and asked him to return to England.

Once back in England, Becket was slighted when Henry II's son—the boy who resided at Becket's home as a child—was anointed as "junior king" at York, and the ceremony was presided over by the Archbishop of York, the Bishop of Salisbury, and the Bishop of London. Traditionally, the Archbishop of Canterbury would lead the ceremony. Becket asserted that the other bishops overstepped their bounds, and he excommunicated them.

Henry, upon hearing how Beckett punished the bishops, remarked, "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?" While it is unclear what Henry meant by the comment and how responsible he was for the events that followed, some of Henry's knights interpreted the king's exclamation as an order to have Becket murdered. On December 29, 1170, hoping to win the king's favor, four knights entered the Canterbury Cathedral during mass and murdered Thomas Becket. Two years later, he was canonized as a saint for defending the Church against over-powerful, secular authority.

Thomas Becket's tomb in the Canterbury Cathedral became a shrine to which many devout churchgoers made pilgrimages. His shrine remained intact until 1538, when King Henry VIII ordered that it and similar shrines be destroyed.

THE THREE ESTATES

In medieval England, society was divided into three classes: the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners.

The clergy consisted of "those who pray," all of the individuals who worked for the Church. This group was subdivided into two additional groups, the regular clergy and the secular. Members of the **regular clergy** lived according to the rules of a particular order, such as the Benedictine Monks, who lived by the rules established by St. Benedict. Individuals belonging to the **secular clergy** lived in the community and interacted with the commoners on a daily basis. Examples of people in the secular clergy included parsons and priests.

There were also other members of the clergy who did not fit into the aforementioned groups—people such as summoners and pardoners. People of those occupations did not take vows, and the nature of their offices made them especially susceptible to corruption. Summoners, as their name would imply, summoned individuals to the Church court, but could easily be bribed. Pardoners dispensed indulgences, essentially selling absolution from sin for a price.

People belonging to **the nobility** were "those who fight." The nobles were secular individuals, not part of the Church, who were from the upper class or aristocracy. They were members of the wealthy, landed elite, and consisted of dukes, earls, barons, knights, squires, and members of the royal family.

Members of the nobility ruled over **the commoners**, "those who work." The commoners consisted of freemen and serfs, who, because of their social position, worked for a living. **Freemen** owned their own land, while **serfs** rented land and were in the service of a lord. The commoners consisted of about 99% of the secular population, but they had the least amount of influence and were often oppressed.

FEUDALISM

Feudalism was a socio-economic system of reciprocity between lords and vassals. **Vassals** declared **fealty**, or allegiance, to a **lord**. In exchange for either military or material support, the lord gave vassals land, a **fief**. The entire English social hierarchy consisted of these agreements, beginning with the king and his lords. The king granted his lords land in exchange for soldiers, and if ever the country went to war, the king's lords would provide him men. The lords, who were unable to manage the large tracts of land on their own, gave fiefs to knights and squires. Agreements between lords and vassals extended to those at the lowest level of the hierarchy, the poor serfs, who worked the fields and tended the livestock, providing sustenance for the upper classes, ostensibly in exchange for protection from invasion and insurrection.

THE PEASANTS' REVOLT

The Peasants' Revolt, also known as Tyler's Rebellion, took place in 1381. The bubonic plague (see "Astrology and Medieval Medicine" below) had killed approximately 20% of England's population, and most of those killed were serfs and peasants, members of the lower class who lived in squalor and were, thus, especially susceptible to disease. Since the plague diminished the labor force and put workers in greater demand, the lower class banded together in unions and demanded to be paid higher wages.

King Edward III had died in 1377 and been succeeded by his grandson, Richard II. Richard was only ten years old at the time, and his uncle, John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, was appointed protector. John of Gaunt was unpopular with the people, mostly because they feared he would steal the throne from Richard.

Richard resumed the Hundred Years War with France, but the war was becoming increasingly more difficult to finance. In order to raise money, Richard levied a series of poll taxes, in which everyone over a certain age was required to pay the state a particular amount of money. In 1381, the third poll tax required everyone over the age of fifteen to pay three groats, a large sum for most members of the lower class.

On May 30, 1381, when tax collector Thomas Bampton arrived in Fobbing, Essex, to collect the poll tax, the villagers refused to pay. The chief justice, Robert Belknap, heard what had happened and returned the following day to punish the rebels. He was attacked.

On June 8, 1381, in the nearby county of Kent, Wat Tyler gathered a group of protestors, intending to march on London and express their refusal to pay the poll tax. While passing through Canterbury, the rebels entered the cathedral during high mass and demanded that Simon Sudbury, the current archbishop of Canterbury and advisor to Richard II, be replaced. From there, the mob continued marching toward London. When passing through Blackheath, southeast of London, John Ball, a rebel and Lollard priest, gave a speech and asked the famous question, "When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?" The rebels were joined by Jack Straw, another rebel leader, at Great Baddow.

When the rebels finally reached London, they attacked all of the property connected with John of Gaunt and the Hospitaller Order. Richard II finally met with the rebels at Mile End on June 14, and he conceded to some of their demands. He agreed to abolish serfdom and dismiss some of his ministers, the peasants believed were corrupt. Simultaneously, the rebels stormed the Tower of London, executing Simon Sudbury, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Robert Hales, the Lord High Treasurer.

The revolt reached its climax on June 15th at Smithfield. Tyler went to speak to the king and his men and supposedly, after making an impetuous remark, was stabbed to death by Sir Ralph de Standish and William Walworth. The rebels witnessing the event, however, saw Tyler with the king, but did not know that he was dead. The king declared that Tyler had been knighted, and he told the people, "You shall have no captain but me." Richard advised the rebels to continue marching onward to St. John's Fields as Tyler had ordered. In the meantime, the nobles gathered 7000 men, formed a militia and attacked the dissenting commoners. John Ball and Jack Straw were killed, and all of the king's concessions were revoked.

Literary Genres

Four literary genres that are found in *The Canterbury Tales* are *fabliau*, English romance, beast fable, and *exemplum*.

FABLIAU

Based on a traditional French form, *Fabliaux* are stories, usually bawdy, in verse. They take place at the time they are written and involve characters and settings that would be familiar to the reader. The plot of the *fabliau* usually centers on a trick or a ruse—a gullible individual becomes the victim of a trickster figure. The stories have an element of justice to them, and characters who are greedy, proud, or foolish are punished for their actions.

"The Miller's Tale" is an example of a *fabliau*.

ENGLISH ROMANCE

English romances involve characters who are knights or members of the aristocracy, and the stories focus on chivalry and courtly love. The main character worships and honors his lady, in much the same way he worships and honors his lord, and he goes on quests to win her love.

"The Knight's Tale" is an example of an English romance.

BEAST FABLE

Beast fables use allegory to teach a moral lesson. In these tales, animals talk, act, and behave like humans. The animals embody human virtues and vices, and the good are rewarded while the bad are punished.

"The Nun's Priest's Tale" is a beast fable.

EXEMPLUM

Exempla are tales that teach a moral lesson, as the name would suggest, through example. A speech akin to a sermon introduces the story, and the teller explains exactly what moral point will be illustrated.

"The Pardoner's Tale" and "The Tale of the Wife of Bath" are *exempla*.

ASTROLOGY AND MEDIEVAL MEDICINE

When Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales*, astrology did not have the stigma of a pseudo-science that it has today, but it was, in fact, a scholarly subject. Different celestial forces were thought to influence the earth: everything from planetary alignment to the phases of the moon were believed to affect the weather, political events, various illnesses, and the personalities of people born on a particular day. Astrologers studied the relative movement and positions of these heavenly bodies.

Physicians studied astronomy and believed that the heavens could affect people's emotional and physical well-being. In addition, medieval doctors believed that the human body contained four fluids, called the **humors**; in order for a person to be emotionally stable and in good physical health, all of the humors had to be in balance. Each humor pertained to the particular area of the body in which the fluid was believed to be produced, and people who had an excess of one humor exhibited certain personality traits. Furthermore, like almost everything in astronomy and metaphysics, each humor was associated with a particular season and element.

Name of the Humor	Organ from Which It Is Secreted *	Temperament	Characteristics	Season	Element
blood	liver	sanguine	passionate, courageous, energetic	spring	air
yellow bile	gall bladder	choleric	ill-tempered, impatient, irascible	summer	fire
black bile	spleen	melancholic	depressed, hopeless, irritable	autumn	earth
phlegm	brain & lungs	phlegmatic	tranquil, self-possessed, unemotional	winter	water

* According to Galen and ancient physicians.

Almost all physicians had **leech books**, reference guides that listed the symptoms of various ailments and their cures. Doctors healed their patients through a prescribed diet, herbal medication, and often **phlebotomy**, or blood-letting. They believed that letting blood from a particular vein would affect particular organs; the leech books instructed doctors exactly where to remove the blood. Sometimes, a remedy called for **derivation**, in which blood was let from around the infected area, and other times for **revulsion**, in which the blood was removed from the area of the body farthest from the infected area. Needless to say, patients in the middle ages died almost as often from the primitive treatment methods as from the ailments themselves.

Two of the most prevalent epidemics during Chaucer's time were leprosy and the Black Death (bubonic plague). Both diseases were caused by bacteria and had similar physical effects; therefore, both were commonly confused.

The bubonic plague is a bacterial disease that enters through the skin, usually by way of a flea bite. The disease causes the lymph nodes to swell, creating swellings called *buboes*. In more advanced stages, the skin begins to decompose while the victim is still alive. Other symptoms of the plague are a high fever and hemorrhaging. While the bubonic plague was fatal during the Middle Ages, in the 21st century, it can be cured by modern antibiotics.

Leprosy resembles the plague in that it causes sores on the skin and disfiguring nodules. It can cause skin tissue to decay, sometimes resulting in the loss of limbs and the collapse of the nose. Leprosy can also result in nerve damage, leading to numbness, muscle weakness, and if the nerves are damaged around the eyes, the loss of the ability to blink.

Unlike the plague, leprosy has a long incubation period, and when a patient finally develops symptoms of the disease, it is difficult to determine when the disease was contracted and from whom. Fortunately, leprosy is not very contagious, and 95% of the population is immune to the disease.

DEITIES AND DAYS OF THE WEEK

In the Medieval Period, days of the week were attributed to Norse and Roman deities or heavenly bodies.

English	Norse Gods	Latin	Roman Gods	Spanish
Sunday	Day of the Sun	dies solis	Day of the sun/Day of Dominus (the Lord)	Domingo
Monday	Day of the Moon	dies lunae	Day of Luna (the moon)	Lunes
Tuesday	Day of Tiu/Tyr	dies marti	Day of Mars	Martes
Wednesday	Day of Wodan/ Odin	dies mercuri	Day of Mercury	Miercoles
Thursday	Day of Thor	dies ioves	Day of Jove/Jupiter	Jueves
Friday	Day of Fria/Freya	dies veneris	Day of Venus	Viernes
Saturday	Day of Saturn	dies saturni	Day of Saturn/Day of the Sabbath	Sabado

The days of the week and their corresponding deities are relevant in the context of "The Knight's Tale." Two key events in the story take place on a specific day of the week because of the deity to which the day is attributed. About the first, Chaucer writes,

> *Even as on a Friday, truth to tell,*
> *The sun shines now, and now the rain comes fast,*
> *Even so can fickle Venus overcast*
> *The spirits of her people; as her day*
> *Is changeful, so she changes her array.*
> *Seldom is Friday quite like all the week* (lines 679 – 683)

It is no coincidence that Arcita goes into the fields and sings aloud a song of love on Friday, the day attributed to Freya and Venus, who are both goddesses of love.

The second event is the great battle between Arcita and Palamon, which takes place on a Tuesday, the day attributed to Mars and Tyr, gods of war:

> *Great was the fete in Athens on that day,*
> *And too, the merry season of the May*
> *Gave everyone such joy and such pleasance*
> *That all that Monday they'd but joust and dance,*
> *Or spend the time in Venus' high service.*
> *But for the reason that they must arise*
> *Betimes, to see the heralded great fight,*
> *All they retired to early rest that night.*
> *And on the morrow, when that day did spring,*
> *Of horse and harness, noise and clattering,*
> *There was enough in hostelries about…* (lines 1632 – 1642)

There is an additional reference to a day of the week and its deity in "The Miller's Tale." The great trick happens on Monday, by the light of the moon, which has two symbolic meanings, both of which are relevant. The moon represents Diana, who is both the virgin goddess of the hunt and a fertility goddess. It is not coincidental that the night Nicholas and Alisoun finally spend together happens on a day attributed to this goddess. Furthermore, the moon is a symbol of deception, relating to the trick that Nicholas plays on John.

The last reference to a day and its deity appears in "The Nun's Priest's Tale," when the narrator says,

> *And on a Friday fell all this mischance.*
> *O Venus, who art goddess of pleasance,*
> *Since he did serve thee well, this Chanticleer,*
> *And to the utmost of his power here,*
> *More for delight than cocks to multiply,*
> *Why would'st thou suffer him that day to die?*
> *O Gaufred, my dear master sovereign,*
> *Who, when King Richard Lionheart was slain*
> *By arrow, sang his death with sorrow sore,*
> *Why have I not your faculty and lore*
> *To chide Friday, as you did worthily?*
> *(For truly, on a Friday slain was he)…* (lines 521 – 532)

Although the trick Russel plays on Chanticleer does not directly relate to love or fertility, the day is linked to Venus. The narrator asks the goddess how she could allow Chanticleer to be harmed, especially after he served her by engendering many offspring. The Nun's Priest wishes he had Gaufred's writing talents and could deride Venus for Chanticleer's misfortune as well as Gaufred chided her for allowing King Richard to die.

Corruption in the Medieval Church

THE AVIGNON PAPACY AND THE GREAT SCHISM

In the fourteenth century, political struggles both within the Church and between the Church and secular rulers led to the anointing of multiple Popes.

In 1309, Pope Clement V, who was French, moved the papal seat from Rome to France. This led the other European nations to believe that France was using its power to influence the Pope. Clement and six subsequent Popes ruled from Avignon, a town in Southern France, until Pope Gregory XI moved the papal seat back to Rome in 1378. Unfortunately, Gregory's untimely death prevented the transfer of power from officially occurring.

After Gregory's death, also in 1378, the people of Rome demanded a Roman be elected Pope, but the college of cardinals, could find no "suitable" Roman candidate, and elected instead a man from Naples—Pope Urban VI.

Almost immediately, cardinals in France regretted the election: Pope Urban VI forbade clergy members to accept gifts and bribes from secular rulers, and he condemned the French clergy's lavish, extravagant lifestyle. In 1379, the French cardinals elected an "alternate" Pope, a Frenchman, Pope Clement VII. He maintained his seat of authority in Avignon.

The period from 1378 to 1414 saw two, and later, three, rival Popes residing in Avignon, Rome, and Pisa. This division of Church loyalty into three rival factions is called "the Second Great Schism" or "the great controversy of the anti-Popes."

The Great Schism came to an end in 1414 at the Council of Constance. As a result of this council, the claims of all three papal claimants were repudiated: Pope Gregory XII (Rome) had already abdicated; John XXIII (Pisa) resigned, and Benedict XIII (Avignon) was excommunicated. A new conclave elected Martin V, and the Church was officially united once again under a single Pope. Discontent among the people who had been loyal to the previous three Popes did linger.

CORRUPTION IN THE CHURCH

By the time of Popes Clement V (r. 1302 – 1314) and John XXII (r. 1316 – 1334), corruption had become widespread in the Church. Church offices and land grants were called **benefices**. **Simony** was the sale of these benefices; instead of being seen as sacred responsibilities, the Church offices were thought of as investments. It was common for one individual to hold multiple benefices (**pluralism**), some of which they abandoned for long periods of time or never visited at all (**absenteeism**). Instead of giving the money they earned to the poor or investing it back into the Church, the Popes used what was earned by selling of offices to buy expensive clothing, gold, and silver.

INDULGENCES

Aside from selling benefices, another way the Church made money was through the sale of **indulgences**. Popes, cardinals, bishops, and other members of the clergy hired pardoners to sell God's grace and absolution from sin. It was believed that instead of confessing and doing penance, a person could purchase an indulgence and be instantly forgiven, buying his or her way out of purgatory. It was also common for pardoners to sell false relics and trinkets claimed to cause miracles.

SATIRE IN *THE CANTERBURY TALES*

Satire is a literary form in which human or social vices, frailties, and foibles are held up to ridicule, ostensibly with the object of correcting them. Thus, the satirist is often considered either the most bitter or the most optimistic of all writers.

This ridicule of human failings can take many forms and tones, and satire is often difficult to recognize. In most cases, the reader who does not recognize the satire makes himself or herself one of the group being satirized.

Horatian Satire, named for the Roman satirist Horace, is lighthearted and playful. Wordplay, verbal and situational irony, spoof, parody, and burlesque are all elements or forms of Horatian Satire.

Juvenalian Satire, named for the Roman satirist Juvenal, is darker and more caustic. At times, the humor becomes hurtful or offensive to the subject of the satire; sometimes the essential humor is all but lost, and the satire deteriorates into pure invective.

In "The General Prologue," Chaucer's narrator describes the other pilgrims in a flattering manner, naively praising their vices, apparently ignorant of what one expects of people in their respective positions. In this manner, Chaucer satirizes corrupt practices in medieval society, and the educated reader, who is familiar with the historical context, can easily discern the writer's sarcasm. For instance, the narrator praises the Prioress for her elegant dress, her proper manners, and her love of animals (who eat better than most peasants), but he is satirizing individuals in her position for valuing material things, a good reputation, and pets over God. The narrator also "compliments" a finely-dressed Monk, who loves to hunt, and a lecherous and rotund Friar, who associates only with the wealthy. The reader is aware that individuals in these vocations should exercise self-sacrifice, devote their lives to studying scripture, and help the poor. Through irony, Chaucer discretely points out the faults of church officials by "commending" their faults.

The group of people who are arguably the most satirized in *The Canterbury Tales* are the pardoners, men who embody almost all of the Church's vices. The Pardoner in the *Tales* deceives his congregation by selling false relics, which he readily admits to the other pilgrims are animal bones and rags. Even though it is believed that God alone can give grace and salvation, the Pardoner sells indulgences, convincing Christians that they can buy their way out of purgatory in the afterlife. He is also uneducated for a member of the Church, and he speaks only enough Latin to convince the laypeople that he understands God's word and will. He gives his sermons and *exempla* to make the people feel guilty of avarice and to convince them that the only way to save their souls is to give money to the Church—Of course, the majority of the money goes to the Pardoner himself, who proclaims himself greedy and hypocritical.

Several other people on the pilgrimage to Canterbury are satirized in the tales. As the class reads and analyzes the text, it may help students to consider the following questions for each pilgrim:

- Is the pilgrim an example of a type, or is he or she portrayed as a complex and unique character?

- Are the pilgrim's shortcomings and positive qualities attributed to him or her alone, or can they be applied to several people in that particular profession?

- Does the profile of the pilgrim reveal any overt complaints about the Church, the nobility, or commoners in the Medieval Period?

- Does Chaucer offer any suggestions for how those particular complaints can be remedied?

The Canterbury Tales

Practice Free-Response Questions

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION #1

Read the following passages from Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" concerning warfare. In a well-organized essay, compare the words and images used to describe war in the two passages. Then analyze how Chaucer uses the two passages to characterize the Knight.

PASSAGE ONE

In length and breadth the whole wall was painted
Like the interior of that grisly place,
The mighty temple of great Mars in Thrace,
In that same cold and frosty region where
Mars to his supreme mansion may repair.
First, on the wall was limned a vast forest
Wherein there dwelt no man nor any beast,
With knotted, gnarled, and leafless trees, so old
The sharpened stumps were dreadful to behold;
Through which there ran a rumbling, even now,
As if a storm were breaking every bough;
And down a hill, beneath a sharp descent,
The temple stood of Mars armipotent,
Wrought all of burnished steel, whereof the gate
Was grim like death to see, and long, and strait.
And therefrom raged a wind that seemed to shake
The very ground, and made the great doors quake.
The northern light in at those same doors shone,
For window in that massive wall was none
Through which a man might any light discern.
The doors were all of adamant eterne,
Rivetted on both sides, and all along,
With toughest iron; and to make it strong,
Each pillar that sustained this temple grim
Was thick as tun, of iron bright and trim.
There saw I first the dark imagining
Of felony, and all the compassing;
And cruel anger, red as burning coal;
Pickpurses, and the dread that eats the soul;
The smiling villain, hiding knife in cloak;
The farm barns burning, and the thick black smoke;
The treachery of murder done in bed;
The open battle, with the wounds that bled;
Contest, with bloody knife and sharp menace;
And loud with creaking was that dismal place.
The slayer of himself, too, saw I there,
His very heart's blood matted in his hair;
The nail that's driven in the skull by night;
The cold plague-corpse, with gaping mouth upright.

In middle of the temple sat Mischance,
With gloomy, grimly woeful countenance.
And saw I Madness laughing in his rage;
Armed risings, and outcries, and fierce outrage;
The carrion in the bush, with throat wide carved;
A thousand slain, nor one by plague, nor starved.
The tyrant, with the spoils of violent theft;
The town destroyed, in ruins, nothing left.
And saw I burnt the ships that dance by phares,
The hunter strangled by the fierce wild bears;
The sow chewing the child right in the cradle;
The cook well scalded, spite of his long ladle.
Nothing was lacking of Mars' evil part:
The carter over-driven by his cart,
Under a wheel he lay low in the dust.
There were likewise in Mars' house, as needs must,
The surgeon, and the butcher, and the smith
Who forges sharp swords and great ills therewith.
And over all, depicted in a tower,
Sat Conquest, high in honour and in power,
Yet with a sharp sword hanging o'er his head
But by the tenuous twisting of a thread.
Depicted was the death of Julius,
Of Nero great, and of Antonius;
And though at that same time they were unborn,
There were their deaths depicted to adorn
The menacing of Mars, in likeness sure;
Things were so shown, in all that portraiture,
As are fore-shown among the stars above,
Who shall be slain in war or dead for love.
Suffice one instance from old plenitude,
I could not tell them all, even if I would.
Mars' image stood upon a chariot,
Armed, and so grim that mad he seemed, God wot;
And o'er his head two constellations shone
Of stars that have been named in writings known.
One being Puella, and one Rubeus.
This god of armies was companioned thus:
A wolf there was before him, at his feet,
Red-eyed, and of a dead man he did eat.
A cunning pencil there had limned this story
In reverence of Mars and of his glory.

PASSAGE TWO

And certainly, 'twas thought by many a man
That never, since the day this world began,
Speaking of good knights hardy of their hands,
Wherever God created seas and lands,
Was, of so few, so noble company.
For every man that loved all chivalry,
And eager was to win surpassing fame,
Had prayed to play a part in that great game;
And all was well with him who chosen was.
For if there came tomorrow such a case,
You know right well that every lusty knight
Who loves the ladies fair and keeps his might,
Be it in England, aye or otherwhere,
Would wish of all things to be present there
To fight for some fair lady. Ben'cite!
'Twould be a pleasant goodly sight to see!
And so it was with those with Palamon.
With him there rode of good knights many a one;
Some would be armoured in a habergeon
And in a breastplate, under light jupon;
And some wore breast- and back-plates thick and large;
And some would have a Prussian shield, or targe;
Some on their very legs were armoured well,
And carried axe, and some a mace of steel.
There is no new thing, now, that is not old.
And so they all were armed, as I have told,
To his own liking and design, each one.
There might you see, riding with Palamon,
Lycurgus' self, the mighty king of Thrace;
Black was his beard and manly was his face.
The eyeballs in the sockets of his head,
They glowed between a yellow and a red.
And like a griffon glared he round about
From under bushy eyebrows thick and stout.
His limbs were large, his muscles hard and strong.
His shoulders broad, his arms both big and long,
And, as the fashion was in his country,
High in a chariot of gold stood he,
With four white bulls in traces, to progress.
Instead of coat-of-arms above harness,
With yellow claws preserved and bright as gold,
He wore a bear-skin, black and very old.
His long combed hair was hanging down his back,
As any raven's feather it was black:
A wreath of gold, arm-thick, of heavy weight,
Was on his head, and set with jewels great,
Of rubies fine and perfect diamonds.
About his car there circled huge white hounds,
Twenty or more, as large as any steer,
To hunt the lion or the antlered deer;
And so they followed him, with muzzles bound,
Wearing gold collars with smooth rings and round.

A hundred lords came riding in his rout,
All armed at point, with hearts both stern and stout
With Arcita, in tales men call to mind,
The great Emetreus, a king of Ind,
Upon a bay steed harnessed all in steel,
Covered with cloth of gold, all diapered well,
Came riding like the god of arms, great Mars.
His coat-of-arms was cloth of the Tartars,
Begemmed with pearls, all white and round and great.
Of beaten gold his saddle, burnished late;
A mantle from his shoulders hung, the thing
Close-set with rubies red, like fire blazing.
His crisp hair all in bright ringlets was run,
Yellow as gold and gleaming as the sun.
His nose was high, his eyes a bright citrine,
His lips were full, his colouring sanguine.
And a few freckles on his face were seen,
None either black or yellow, but the mean;
And like a lion he his glances cast.
Not more than five-and-twenty years he'd past.
His beard was well beginning, now, to spring;
His voice was as a trumpet thundering.
Upon his brows he wore, of laurel green,
A garland, fresh and pleasing to be seen.
Upon his wrist he bore, for his delight,
An eagle tame, as any lily white.
A hundred lords came riding with him there,
All armed, except their heads, in all their gear,
And wealthily appointed in all things.
For, trust me well, that dukes and earls and kings
Were gathered in this noble company
For love and for increase of chivalry.
About this king there ran, on every side,
Many tame lions and leopards in their pride.
And in such wise these mighty lords, in sum,
Were, of a Sunday, to the city come
About the prime, and in the town did light.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION #2

Read the following passage from Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale." Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze the way the Knight uses language to create pathos in the passage, and explain how Chaucer characterizes the Knight through this language.

The noblest Greeks did gladly volunteer
To bear upon their shoulders that great bier,
With measured pace and eyes gone red and wet,
Through all the city, by the wide main street,
Which was all spread with black, and, wondrous high,
Covered with this same cloth were houses nigh.
Upon the right hand went old Aegeus,
And on the other side Duke Theseus,
With vessels in their hands, of gold right fine,
All filled with honey, milk, and blood, and wine;
And Palamon with a great company;
And after that came woeful Emily,
With fire in hands, as use was, to ignite
The sacrifice and set the pyre alight.
Great labour and full great apparelling
Went to the service and the fire-making,
For to the skies that green pyre reached its top,
And twenty fathoms did the arms out-crop,
That is to say, the branches went so wide.
Full many a load of straw they did provide.
But how the fire was made to climb so high;
Or what names all the different trees went by.
As oak, fir, birch, asp, alder, poplar, holm,
Willow, plane, ash, box, chestnut, linden, elm,
Laurel, thorn, maple, beech, yew, dogwood tree,
Or how they were felled, sha'n't be told by me.
Nor how the wood-gods scampered up and down,
Driven from homes that they had called their own,
Wherein they'd lived so long at ease, in peace,
The nymphs, the fauns, the hamadryades;
Nor how the beasts, for fear, and the birds, all
Fled, when that ancient wood began to fall;
Nor how aghast the ground was in the light,
Not being used to seeing the sun so bright;
Nor how the fire was started first with straw,
And then with dry wood, riven thrice by saw,
And then with green wood and with spicery,
And then with cloth of gold and jewellery,
And garlands hanging with full many a flower,
And myrrh, and incense, sweet as rose in bower;
Nor how Arcita lies among all this,
Nor what vast wealth about his body is;
Nor how this Emily, as was their way,
Lighted the sacred funeral fire, that day,
Nor how she swooned when men built up the fire,
Nor what she said, nor what was her desire;
No, nor what gems men on the fire then cast,

When the white flame went high and burned so fast;
Nor how one cast his shield, and one his spear,
And some their vestments, on that burning bier,
With cups of wine, and cups of milk, and blood,
Into that flame, which burned as wild-fire would;
Nor how the Greeks, in one huge wailing rout,
Rode slowly three times all the fire about,
Upon the left hand, with a loud shouting,
And three times more, with weapons clattering,
While thrice the women there raised up a cry;
Nor how was homeward led sad Emily;
Nor how Arcita burned to ashes cold;
Nor aught of how the lichwake they did hold
All that same night, nor how the Greeks did play
Who, naked, wrestled best, with oil anointed,
Nor who best bore himself in deeds appointed.
I will not even tell how they were gone
Home, into Athens, when the play was done.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION #3

Read the following passage from Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale." In a well-organized essay, analyze the persuasive techniques that Nicholas uses to convince John that there will be a second flood.

And on the chamber door, then, he did press.
His servant was a stout lad, if a dunce,
And by the hasp he heaved it up at once;
Upon the floor that portal fell anon.
This Nicholas sat there as still as stone,
Gazing, with gaping mouth, straight up in air.
This carpenter thought he was in despair,
And took him by the shoulders, mightily,
And shook him hard, and cried out, vehemently:
"What! Nicholay! Why how now! Come, look down!
Awake, and think on Jesus' death and crown!
I cross you from all elves and magic wights!"
And then the night-spell said he out, by rights,
At the four corners of the house about,
And at the threshold of the door, without:—
"O Jesus Christ and good Saint Benedict,
Protect this house from all that may afflict,
For the night hag the white Paternoster! —
Where hast thou gone, Saint Peter's sister?"
And at the last this clever Nicholas
Began to sigh full sore, and said: "Alas!
Shall all the world be lost so soon again?"
This carpenter replied: "What say you, then?
What! Think on God, as we do, men that swink."
This Nicholas replied: "Go fetch me drink;
And afterward I'll tell you privately
A certain thing concerning you and me;
I'll tell it to no other man or men."
This carpenter went down and came again,
And brought of potent ale a brimming quart;
And when each one of them had drunk his part,
Nicholas shut the door fast, and with that
He drew a seat and near the carpenter sat.
He said: "Now, John, my good host, lief and dear,
You must upon your true faith swear, right here,
That to no man will you this word betray;
For it is Christ's own word that I will say,
And if you tell a man, you're ruined quite;
This punishment shall come to you, of right,
That if you're traitor you'll go mad—and should!"
"Nay, Christ forbid it, for His holy blood!"
Said then this simple man: "I am no blab,
Nor, though I say it, am I fond of gab.
Say what you will, I never will it tell
To child or wife, by Him that harried Hell!"
"Now, John," said Nicholas, "I will not lie;
But I've found out, from my astrology,

As I have looked upon the moon so bright,
That now, come Monday next, at nine of night,
Shall fall a rain so wildly mad as would
Have been, by half, greater than Noah's flood.
This world," he said, "in less time than an hour,
Shall all be drowned, so terrible is this shower;
Thus shall all mankind drown and lose all life."
This carpenter replied: "Alas, my wife!
And shall she drown? Alas, my Alison!"
For grief of this he almost fell. Anon
He said: "Is there no remedy in this case?"
"Why yes, good luck," said clever Nicholas,
"If you will work by counsel of the wise;
You must not act on what your wits advise.
For so says Solomon, and it's all true,
'Work by advice and thou shalt never rue.'
And if you'll act as counselled and not fail,
I undertake, without a mast or sail,
To save us all, aye you and her and me.
Haven't you heard of Noah, how saved was he,
Because Our Lord had warned him how to keep
Out of the flood that covered earth so deep?"
"Yes," said this carpenter, "long years ago."
"Have you not heard," asked Nicholas, "also
The sorrows of Noah and his fellowship
In getting his wife to go aboard the ship?
He would have rather, I dare undertake,
At that time, and for all the weather black,
That she had one ship for herself alone.
Therefore, do you know what would best be done?
This thing needs haste, and of a hasty thing
Men must not preach nor do long tarrying.
"Presently go, and fetch here to this inn
A kneading-tub, or brewing vat, and win
One each for us, but see that they are large,
Wherein we may swim out as in a barge,
And have therein sufficient food and drink
For one day only; that's enough, I think.
The water will dry up and flow away
About the prime of the succeeding day.
But Robin must not know of this, your knave,
And even Jill, your maid, I may not save;
Ask me not why, for though you do ask me,
I will not tell you of God's privity.
Suffice you, then, unless your wits are mad,
To have as great a grace as Noah had.
Your wife I shall not lose, there is no doubt,
Go, now, your way, and speedily about,
But when you have, for you and her and me,
Procured these kneading-tubs, or beer-vats, three,
Then you shall hang them near the roof-tree high,
That no man our purveyance may espy.
And when you thus have done, as I have said,
And have put in our drink and meat and bread,

Also an axe to cut the ropes in two
When the flood comes, that we may float and go,
And cut a hole, high up, upon the gable,
Upon the garden side, over the stable,
That we may freely pass forth on our way
When the great rain and flood are gone that day-
Then shall you float as merrily, I'll stake,
As does the white duck after the white drake.
Then I will call, 'Ho, Alison! Ho, John!
Be cheery, for the flood will pass anon.'
And you will say, 'Hail. Master Nicholay!
Good morrow, I see you well, for it is day!'
And then shall we be barons all our life
Of all the world, like Noah and his wife.
"But of one thing I warn you now, outright.
Be well advised, that on that very night
When we have reached our ships and got aboard,
Not one of us must speak or whisper word,
Nor call, nor cry, but sit in silent prayer;
For this is God's own bidding, hence- don't dare!
"Your wife and you must hang apart, that in
The night shall come no chance for you to sin
Either in looking or in carnal deed.
These orders I have told you, go, God speed!
Tomorrow night, when all men are asleep,
Into our kneading-tubs will we three creep
And sit there, still, awaiting God's high grace.
Go, now, your way, I have no longer space
Of time to make a longer sermoning.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION #4

Read the following passage from Chaucer's "The Tale of the Wife of Bath." In a well-organized essay, analyze the Wife of Bath as a narrator and explain how Chaucer makes use of narrative voice in the tale.

He sought out every house and every place
Wherein he hoped to find that he had grace
To learn what women love the most of all;
But nowhere ever did it him befall
To find, upon the question stated here,
Two persons who agreed with statement clear.
Some said that women all loved best riches,
Some said, fair fame, and some said, prettiness;
Some, rich array, some said 'twas lust abed
And often to be widowed and re-wed.
Some said that our poor hearts are aye most eased
When we have been most flattered and thus pleased
And he went near the truth, I will not lie;
A man may win us best with flattery;
And with attentions and with busyness
We're often limed, the greater and the less.
And some say, too, that we do love the best
To be quite free to do our own behest,
And that no man reprove us for our vice,
But saying we are wise, take our advice.
For truly there is no one of us all,
If anyone shall rub us on a gall,
That will not kick because he tells the truth.
Try, and he'll find, who does so, I say sooth.
No matter how much vice we have within,
We would be held for wise and clean of sin.
And some folk say that great delight have we
To be held constant, also trustworthy,
And on one purpose steadfastly to dwell,
And not betray a thing that men may tell.
But that tale is not worth a rake's handle;
By God, we women can no thing conceal,
As witness Midas. Would you hear the tale?
Ovid, among some other matters small,
Said Midas had beneath his long curled hair,
Two ass's ears that grew in secret there,
The which defect he hid, as best he might,
Full cunningly from every person's sight,
And, save his wife, no one knew of it, no.
He loved her most, and trusted her also;
And he prayed of her that to no creature
She'd tell of his disfigurement impure.
She swore him: Nay, for all this world to win
She would do no such villainy or sin
And cause her husband have so foul a name;
Nor would she tell it for her own deep shame.
Nevertheless, she thought she would have died

Because so long the secret must she hide;
It seemed to swell so big about her heart
That some word from her mouth must surely start;
And since she dared to tell it to no man,
Down to a marsh, that lay hard by, she ran;
Till she came there her heart was all afire,
And as a bittern booms in the quagmire,
She laid her mouth low to the water down:
"Betray me not, you sounding water blown,"
Said she, "I tell it to none else but you:
Long ears like asses' has my husband two!
Now is my heart at ease, since that is out;
I could no longer keep it, there's no doubt."
Here may you see, though for a while we bide,
Yet out it must; no secret can we hide.
The rest of all this tale, if you would hear,
Read Ovid: in his book does it appear.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION #5

Read the following excerpt from "The Pardoner's Prologue," paying special attention to the ways in which the Pardoner says he presents his sermon. Write a well-supported essay in which you examine "The Pardoner's Prologue" as a satire on the fourteenth-century Church.

"Masters," quoth he, "in churches, when I preach,
I am at pains that all shall hear my speech,
And ring it out as roundly as a bell,
For I know all by heart the thing I tell.
My theme is always one, and ever was:
'Radix malorum est cupiditas.'
"First I announce the place whence I have come,
And then I show my pardons, all and some.
Our liege-lord's seal on my patent perfect,
I show that first, my safety to protect,
And then no man's so bold, no priest nor clerk,
As to disturb me in Christ's holy work;
And after that my tales I marshal all.
Indulgences of pope and cardinal,
Of patriarch and bishop, these I do
Show, and in Latin speak some words, a few,
To spice therewith a bit my sermoning
And stir men to devotion, marvelling.
Then show I forth my hollow crystal-stones,
Which are crammed full of rags, aye, and of bones;
Relics are these, as they think, every one.

[….]

"By this fraud have I won me, year by year,
A hundred marks, since I've been pardoner.
I stand up like a scholar in pulpit,
And when the ignorant people all do sit,
I preach, as you have heard me say before,
And tell a hundred false japes, less or more.
I am at pains, then, to stretch forth my neck,
And east and west upon the folk I beck,
As does a dove that's sitting on a barn.
With hands and swift tongue, then, do I so yarn
That it's a joy to see my busyness.
Of avarice and of all such wickedness
Is all my preaching, thus to make them free
With offered pence, the which pence come to me.
For my intent is only pence to win,
And not at all for punishment of sin.
When they are dead, for all I think thereon
Their souls may well black-berrying have gone!
For, certainly, there's many a sermon grows
Ofttimes from evil purpose, as one knows;
Some for folks' pleasure and for flattery,
To be advanced by all hypocrisy,
And some for vainglory, and some for hate.

For, when I dare not otherwise debate,
Then do I sharpen well my tongue and sting
The man in sermons, and upon him fling
My lying defamations, if but he
Has wronged my brethren or—much worse—wronged me.
For though I mention not his proper name,
Men know whom I refer to, all the same,
By signs I make and other circumstances.
Thus I pay those who do us displeasances.
Thus spit I out my venom under hue
Of holiness, to seem both good and true.
"But briefly my intention I'll express;
I preach no sermon, save for covetousness.
For that my theme is yet, and ever was,
'Radix malorum est cupiditas.'
Thus can I preach against that self-same vice
Which I indulge, and that is avarice.
But though myself be guilty of that sin,
Yet can I cause these other folk to win
From avarice and really to repent.
But that is not my principal intent.
I preach no sermon, save for covetousness;
This should suffice of that, though, as I guess.
"Then do I cite examples, many a one,
Out of old stories and of time long gone,
For vulgar people all love stories old;
Such things they can re-tell well and can hold.
What? Think you that because I'm good at preaching
And win me gold and silver by my teaching
I'll live of my free will in poverty?
No, no, that's never been my policy!
For I will preach and beg in sundry lands;
I will not work and labour with my hands,
Nor baskets weave and try to live thereby,
Because I will not beg in vain, say I.
I will none of the apostles counterfeit;
I will have money, wool, and cheese, and wheat,
Though it be given by the poorest page,
Or by the poorest widow in village,
And though her children perish of famine.
Nay! I will drink good liquor of the vine
And have a pretty wench in every town.
But hearken, masters, to conclusion shown:
Your wish is that I tell you all a tale.
Now that I've drunk a draught of musty ale,
By God, I hope that I can tell something
That shall, in reason, be to your liking.
For though I am myself a vicious man,
Yet I would tell a moral tale, and can,
The which I'm wont to preach more gold to win.
Now hold your peace! my tale I will begin."

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION #6

Read the following passage from Chaucer's "The Nun's Priest's Tale." Then write a well-supported essay in which you analyze Chaucer's creation of humor by applying elaborate language and figures of speech to a lowly or ordinary subject.

O destiny, you cannot be eschewed!
Alas, that Chanticleer flew from the beams!
Alas, his wife recked nothing of his dreams!
And on a Friday fell all this mischance.
O Venus, who art goddess of pleasance,
Since he did serve thee well, this Chanticleer,
And to the utmost of his power here,
More for delight than cocks to multiply,
Why would'st thou suffer him that day to die?
O Gaufred, my dear master sovereign,
Who, when King Richard Lionheart was slain
By arrow, sang his death with sorrow sore,
Why have I not your faculty and lore
To chide Friday, as you did worthily?
(For truly, on a Friday slain was he).
Then would I prove how well I could complain
For Chanticleer's great fear and all his pain.
Certainly no such cry and lamentation
Were made by ladies at Troy's debolation,
When Pyrrhus with his terrible bared sword
Had taken old King Priam by the beard
And slain him (as the Aeneid tells to us),
As made then all those hens in one chorus
When they had caught a sight of Chanticleer.
But fair Dame Pertelote assailed the ear
Far louder than did Hasdrubal's good wife
When that her husband bold had lost his life,
And Roman legionaries burned Carthage;
For she so full of torment was, and rage,
She voluntarily to the fire did start
And burned herself there with a steadfast heart.
And you, O woeful hens, just so you cried
As when base Nero burned the city wide
Of Rome, and wept the senators' stern wives
Because their husbands all had lost their lives,
For though not guilty, Nero had them slain.
Now will I turn back to my tale again.
This simple widow and her daughters two
Heard these hens cry and make so great ado,
And out of doors they started on the run
And saw the fox into the grove just gone,
Bearing upon his back the cock away.
And then they cried, "Alas, and weladay!
Oh, oh, the fox!" and after him they ran,
And after them, with staves, went many a man;
Ran Coll, our dog, ran Talbot and Garland,
And Malkin with a distaff in her hand;

Ran cow and calf and even the very hogs,
So were they scared by barking of the dogs
And shouting men and women all did make,
They all ran so they thought their hearts would break.
They yelled as very fiends do down in Hell;
The ducks they cried as at the butcher fell;
The frightened geese flew up above the trees;
Out of the hive there came the swarm of bees;
So terrible was the noise, ah ben'cite!
Certainly old Jack Straw and his army
Never raised shouting half so loud and shrill
When they were chasing Flemings for to kill,
As on that day was raised upon the fox.
They brought forth trumpets made of brass, of box,
Of horn, of bone, wherein they blew and pooped,
And therewithal they screamed and shrieked and whooped;
It seemed as if the heaven itself should fall!
And now, good men, I pray you hearken all.
Behold how Fortune turns all suddenly
The hope and pride of even her enemy!

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION #7

Many works of literature examine the philosophical question of fate versus free will. In a well-organized essay, explain how this question is explored in either Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" or "The Nun's Priest's Tale" and discuss what general statement the tale makes about the human condition.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION #8

Satire is a type of comedy in which human and/or social flaws are held up to ridicule. Several of the tales in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* are satires, exploiting several of the stereotypical vices common in the clergy, the nobility, and the common people of Chaucer's day. Analyze the various ways Chaucer uses wit and humor in the text to expose and ridicule social injustice.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION #9

The feminist approach to literature examines both contemporary and classic titles for evidence of misogyny, unjust or inaccurate portrayal of women and women's interests, and the persistence of negative female stereotypes. Write a well-supported essay in which you argue how the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale from Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* either counters or supports feminist sentiments.

PRACTICE FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION #10

Even secular medieval literature was highly moralistic and employed a number of conventions to emphasize and illustrate a lesson in values and proper behavior. Among the most popular conventions were the "loathly lady," the *exemplum*, and the beast fable. Write a well-reasoned and –supported essay in which you define one of these conventions, using one of the tales from Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* as your example and support. Include a discussion of how the tale's form (convention) helps establish the tale's meaning.

The Canterbury Tales

Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1 – 5

Carefully read the following passage from Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale"; then, select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

First, in the fane of Venus, one might see,
Wrought on the wall, and piteous to behold,
The broken slumbers and the sighing cold,
The sacred tears and the lamenting dire,
The fiery throbbing of the strong desire,
That all love's servants in this life endure;
The vows that all their promises assure;
Pleasure and hope, desire, foolhardiness,
Beauty, youth, bawdiness, and riches, yes,
Charms, and all force, and lies, and flattery,
Expense, and labour; aye, and Jealousy
That wore of marigolds a great garland
And had a cuckoo sitting on her hand;
Carols and instruments and feasts and dances,
Lust and array, and all the circumstances
Of love that I may reckon or ever shall,
In order they were painted on the wall,
Aye, and more, too, than I have ever known.
For truly, all the Mount of Citheron,
Where Venus has her chief and favoured dwelling,
Was painted on that wall, beyond my telling,
With all the gardens in their loveliness.
Nor was forgot the gate-guard Idleness,
Nor fair Narcissus of the years long gone,
Nor yet the folly of King Solomon,
No, nor the giant strength of Hercules,
Nor Circe's and Medea's sorceries,
Nor Turnus with his hardy, fierce courage,
Nor the rich Croesus, captive in his age.
Thus may be seen that wisdom, nor largess,
Beauty, nor skill, nor strength, nor hardiness,
May with Queen Venus share authority;
For as she wills, so must the whole world be.
Lo, all these folk were so caught in her snare
They cried aloud in sorrow and in care.
Here let suffice examples one or two,
Though I might give a thousand more to you.
The form of Venus, glorious as could be,
Was naked, floating on the open sea,
And from the navel down all covered was
With green waves, bright as ever any glass.
A citole in her small right hand had she,

And on her head, and beautiful to see,
A garland of red roses, sweet smelling,
Above her swirled her white doves, fluttering.
Before her stood her one son, Cupido,
Whose two white wings upon his shoulders grow;
And blind he was, as it is often seen;
A bow he bore, and arrows bright and keen.

1. The word "vows" in line 7 of the passage refers to
   A. pledges of love.
   B. marriage arrangements.
   C. false promises of fidelity.
   D. oaths sworn to Venus.
   E. wishes for unnamed things.

2. On the walls of Venus's temple, love is depicted as
   A. perfunctory.
   B. transient.
   C. enlivening.
   D. malicious.
   E. overpowering.

3. The primary reason Chaucer lists the characters drawn on the walls is to
   A. support a thesis.
   B. establish the setting.
   C. foreshadow events.
   D. illustrate an idea.
   E. present a moral.

4. The description of Venus is an example of
   A. irony.
   B. symbol.
   C. satire.
   D. personification.
   E. exposition.

5. Which of the following is suggested by this passage?
   A. Life is a thoroughfare of suffering and woe.
   B. Love causes irrational and immoral behavior.
   C. Humans are bound by predestination and fate.
   D. Christianity tempers love into something beautiful and pure.
   E. Lust and love are two separate, distinct attributes.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 6 – 10

Carefully read the passage from Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale"; then, select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

Once on a time was dwelling in Oxford
A wealthy lout who took in guests to board,
And of his craft he was a carpenter.
A poor scholar was lodging with him there,
Who'd learned the arts, but all his phantasy
Was turned to study of astrology;
And knew a certain set of theorems
And could find out by various stratagems,
If men but asked of him in certain hours
When they should have a drought or else have showers,
Or if men asked of him what should befall
To anything—I cannot reckon them all.
This clerk was called the clever Nicholas;
Of secret loves he knew and their solace;
And he kept counsel, too, for he was sly
And meek as any maiden passing by.
He had a chamber in that hostelry,
And lived alone there, without company,
All garnished with sweet herbs of good repute;
And he himself sweet-smelling as the root
Of licorice, valerian, or setwall.
His *Almagest*, and books both great and small,
His astrolabe, belonging to his art,
His algorism stones- all laid apart
On shelves that ranged beside his lone bed's head;
His press was covered with a cloth of red.
And over all there lay a psaltery
Whereon he made an evening's melody,
Playing so sweetly that the chamber rang;
And *Angelus ad virginem* he sang;
And after that he warbled the *King's Note*:
Often in good voice was his merry throat.
And thus this gentle clerk his leisure spends
Supported by some income and his friends.
This carpenter had lately wed a wife
Whom he loved better than he loved his life;
And she was come to eighteen years of age.
Jealous he was and held her close in cage.
For she was wild and young and he was old,
And deemed himself as like to be cuckold.
He knew not Cato, for his lore was rude:
That vulgar man should wed similitude.
A man should wed according to estate,
For youth and age are often in debate.
But now, since he had fallen in the snare,
He must endure, like other folk, his care.
Fair was this youthful wife, and therewithal
As weasel's was her body slim and small.

A girdle wore she, barred and striped, of silk.
An apron, too, as white as morning milk
About her loins, and full of many a gore;
White was her smock, embroidered all before
And even behind, her collar round about,
Of coal-black silk, on both sides, in and out;
The strings of the white cap upon her head
Were, like her collar, black silk worked with thread,
Her fillet was of wide silk worn full high:
And certainly she had a lickerish eye.
She'd thinned out carefully her eyebrows two,
And they were arched and black as any sloe.
She was a far more pleasant thing to see
Than is the newly budded young pear-tree;
And softer than the wool is on a wether.
Down from her girdle hung a purse of leather,
Tasselled with silk, with latten beading sown.
In all this world, searching it up and down,
So gay a little doll, I well believe,
Or such a wench, there's no man can conceive.
Far brighter was the brilliance of her hue
Than in the Tower the gold coins minted new.
And songs came shrilling from her pretty head
As from a swallow's sitting on a shed.
Therewith she'd dance too, and could play and sham
Like any kid or calf about its dam.
Her mouth was sweet as bragget or as mead
Or hoard of apples laid in hay or weed.
Skittish she was as is a pretty colt,
Tall as a staff and straight as cross-bow bolt.
A brooch she wore upon her collar low,
As broad as boss of buckler did it show;
Her shoes laced up to where a girl's legs thicken.
She was a primrose, and a tender chicken
For any lord to lay upon his bed,
Or yet for any good yeoman to wed.

6. In lines 17 – 32, the Miller links cleverness with
   A. nobility.
   B. diligence.
   C. effeminacy.
   D. holiness.
   E. poverty.

7. The problems between John and Alison are a result of John's
   A. receiving no formal education.
   B. granting his wife sovereignty in their marriage.
   C. having less energy than Alison.
   D. being so different in age from Alison.
   E. courting a woman above his social status.

8. The Miller compares John's wife to different animals and plants in order to
   A. suggest her manipulative behavior.
   B. describe her natural beauty.
   C. convey her sexual promiscuity.
   D. emphasize her agile movements.
   E. reveal her lack of moral constraints.

9. The Miller suggests that love is a(n)
   A. avoidable hazard.
   B. confusing paradox.
   C. priceless treasure.
   D. inevitable trap.
   E. cruel illusion.

10. The Miller's language in this passage could mainly be called
    A. abstract.
    B. opinionated.
    C. persuasive.
    D. sarcastic.
    E. descriptive.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 11 – 15

Carefully read the following passage, in which the Wife of Bath gives advice to other wives; then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

Thus shall you speak and wrongfully demand;
For half so brazenfacedly can no man
Swear to his lying as a woman can.
I say not this to wives who may be wise,
Except when they themselves do misadvise.
A wise wife, if she knows what's for her good,
Will swear the crow is mad, and in this mood
Call up for witness to it her own maid;
But hear me now, for this is what I said.

"Sir Dotard, is it thus you stand today?
Why is my neighbour's wife so fine and gay?
She's honoured over all where'er she goes;
I sit at home, I have no decent clo'es.
What do you do there at my neighbour's house?
Is she so fair? Are you so amorous?
Why whisper to our maid? Benedicite!
Sir Lecher old, let your seductions be!
And if I have a gossip or a friend,
Innocently, you blame me like a fiend
If I but walk, for company, to his house!
You come home here as drunken as a mouse,
And preach there on your bench, a curse on you!
You tell me it's a great misfortune, too,
To wed a girl who costs more than she's worth;
And if she's rich and of a higher birth,
You say it's torment to abide her folly
And put up with her pride and melancholy.
And if she be right fair, you utter knave,
You say that every lecher will her have;
She may no while in chastity abide
That is assailed by all and on each side.

"You say, some men desire us for our gold,
Some for our shape and some for fairness told:
And some, that she can either sing or dance,
And some, for courtesy and dalliance;
Some for her hands and for her arms so small;
Thus all goes to the devil in your tale.
You say men cannot keep a castle wall
That's long assailed on all sides, and by all.

"And if that she be foul, you say that she
Hankers for every man that she may see;
For like a spaniel will she leap on him
Until she finds a man to be victim;
And not a grey goose swims there in the lake
But finds a gander willing her to take.

You say, it is a hard thing to enfold
Her whom no man will in his own arms hold.
This say you, worthless, when you go to bed;
And that no wise man needs thus to be wed,
No, nor a man that hearkens unto Heaven.
With furious thunder-claps and fiery levin
May your thin, withered, wrinkled neck be broke:

"You say that dripping eaves, and also smoke,
And wives contentious, will make men to flee
Out of their houses; ah, benedicite!
What ails such an old fellow so to chide?

"You say that all we wives our vices hide
Till we are married, then we show them well;
That is a scoundrel's proverb, let me tell!

"You say that oxen, asses, horses, hounds
Are tried out variously, and on good grounds;
Basins and bowls, before men will them buy,
And spoons and stools and all such goods you try.
And so with pots and clothes and all array;
But of their wives men get no trial, you say,
Till they are married, base old dotard you!
And then we show what evil we can do.

"You say also that it displeases me
Unless you praise and flatter my beauty,
And save you gaze always upon my face
And call me "lovely lady" every place;
And save you make a feast upon that day
When I was born, and give me garments gay;
And save due honour to my nurse is paid
As well as to my faithful chambermaid,
And to my father's folk and his allies-
Thus you go on, old barrel full of lies!"

11. The Wife of Bath advises any woman who wants power over her husband to
    A. accuse her husband of being lecherous.
    B. lie to her husband and have a servant vouch that what she says is true.
    C. have her maid spread rumors about the husband's immoral behavior.
    D. hide her faults and vices until she is married.
    E. compare her attire to that of the neighbors' wives' and demand new clothes.

12. The Wife of Bath uses the castle as a symbol of
    A. women.
    B. marriage.
    C. strength.
    D. chastity.
    E. beauty.

13. The word "levin" (line 54) most likely means
    A. hypocrisy.
    B. thunder.
    C. vehemence.
    D. lightning.
    E. scandal.

14. The Wife of Bath accuses her husband of stereotyping women as all of the following except
    A. unfaithful.
    B. argumentative.
    C. nosy.
    D. self-absorbed.
    E. neurotic.

15. The purpose of the dialogue in this passage is to
    A. present a detailed characterization of the Wife's husband.
    B. prove that women are more artful liars than men.
    C. expose and refute several pernicious stereotypes of women.
    D. provide an example of the way a woman should lie to her husband.
    E. reveal a theme that will be supported in the Wife's tale.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 16 – 20

Carefully read the following passage from Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Pardoner's Tale"; then, select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

In Flanders, once, there was a company
Of young companions given to folly,
Riot and gambling, brothels and taverns;
And, to the music of harps, lutes, gitterns,
They danced and played at dice both day and night.
And ate also and drank beyond their might,
Whereby they made the devil's sacrifice
Within that devil's temple, wicked wise,
By superfluity both vile and vain.
So damnable their oaths and so profane
That it was terrible to hear them swear;
Our Blessed Saviour's Body did they tear;
They thought the Jews had rent Him not enough;
And each of them at others' sins would laugh.
Then entered dancing-girls of ill repute,
Graceful and slim, and girls who peddled fruit,
Harpers and bawds and women selling cake,
Who do their office for the Devil's sake,
To kindle and blow the fire of lechery,
Which is so closely joined with gluttony;
I call on holy writ, now, to witness
That lust is in all wine and drunkenness.
Lo, how the drunken Lot unnaturally
Lay with his daughters two, unwittingly;
So drunk he was he knew not what he wrought.
Herod, as in his story's clearly taught,
When full of wine and merry at a feast,
Sitting at table idly gave behest
To slay John Baptist, who was all guiltless.
Seneca says a good word too, doubtless;
He says there is no difference he can find
Between a man that's quite out of his mind
And one that's drunken, save perhaps in this
That when a wretch in madness fallen is,
The state lasts longer than does drunkenness.
O gluttony, full of all wickedness,
O first cause of confusion to us all,
Beginning of damnation and our fall,
Till Christ redeemed us with His blood again!
Behold how dearly, to be brief and plain,
Was purchased this accursed villainy;
Corrupt was all this world with gluttony!
Adam our father, and his wife also,
From Paradise to labour and to woe
Were driven for that vice, no doubt; indeed
The while that Adam fasted, as I read,
He was in Paradise; but then when he
Ate of the fruit forbidden of the tree,

Anon he was cast out to woe and pain.
O gluttony, of you we may complain!
Oh, knew a man how many maladies
Follow on excess and on gluttonies,
Surely he would be then more moderate
In diet, and at table more sedate.
Alas! The throat so short, the tender mouth,
Causing that east and west and north and south,
In earth, in air, in water men shall swink
To get a glutton dainty meat and drink!
Of this same matter Paul does wisely treat:
"Meat for the belly and belly for the meat:
And both shall God destroy," as Paul does say.
Alas! A foul thing is it, by my fay,
To speak this word, and fouler is the deed,
When man so guzzles of the white and red
That of his own throat makes he his privy,
Because of this cursed superfluity.
The apostle, weeping, says most piteously:
"For many walk, of whom I've told you, aye,
Weeping I tell you once again they're dross,
For they are foes of Christ and of the Cross,
Whose end is death, whose belly is their god."
O gut! O belly! O you stinking cod,
Filled full of dung, with all corruption found!
At either end of you foul is the sound.
With how great cost and labour do they find
Your food! These cooks, they pound and strain and grind;
Substance to accident they turn with fire,
All to fulfill your gluttonous desire!
Out of the hard and riven bones knock they
The marrow, for they throw nothing away
That may go through the gullet soft and sweet;
With spicery, with leaf, bark, root, replete
Shall be the sauces made for your delight,
To furnish you a sharper appetite.
But truly, he that such delights entice
Is dead while yet he wallows in this vice.
A lecherous thing is wine, and drunkenness
Is full of striving and of wretchedness.

16. The Pardoner's claiming, "Our Blessed Savior's Body did they tear," suggests that
    A. all sin causes Christ to suffer.
    B. sin disappoints and upsets God.
    C. the revelers are not Christian, but Jewish.
    D. Christ is an abstract concept, not a person.
    E. the revelers are amused by their sins.

17. How does the Pardoner draw a connection between lust and gluttony?
    A. Both lust and gluttony are mortal sins.
    B. Sinners desire all earthly things, both food and sexual gratification.
    C. Lust and gluttony are both cultivated in brothels and taverns.
    D. Drunkenness, a form of gluttony, promotes lust.
    E. The Bible addresses the dangers of lust and gluttony.

18. The "beginning of damnation and our fall" most likely refers to when
    A. "Herod… When full of wine… idly gave behest/ To slay John the Baptist…"
    B. "… he/ Ate of the fruit forbidden of the tree…"
    C. "Christ redeemed us with his blood again!"
    D. "They danced and played at dice both day and night."
    E. "the drunken Lot unnaturally/ Lay with his daughters two…"

19. The personification and address of the stomach serves which of the following purposes for the Pardoner?
    A. It shows his anger about the fixed class system in medieval England.
    B. It establishes the tale as a tragedy.
    C. It sets up the primary symbolism and imagery of the story.
    D. It makes his message more dramatic and takes the blame away from gluttons themselves.
    E. It foreshadows that Gluttony, as an allegorical figure, will appear in the tale.

20. The Pardoner's tone in this passage can best be described as
    A. indifferent.
    B. disparaging.
    C. conclusive.
    D. comforting.
    E. satirical.

The Canterbury Tales

Multiple-Choice Answers with Explanations

1. The word "vows" and the statement containing it are a continuation of the list of features common to lovers, including their suffering and typical behaviors. All lovers are tormented; all lovers make vows to stay true. Therefore, "vows" refers to **(A), pledges of love**. (B), marriage, is not once mentioned in this passage. (C), "false promises of fidelity," is not in keeping with the other things attributed to the lovers, who seem painfully sincere, and whose suffering is real. Even though the images are drawn on the walls of Venus's temple and the tears of the lovers are called "sacred," there is not enough textual evidence to support that the vow is (D), an actual oath sworn to Venus. Finally, the vows are a separate item from the long list that follows (E).

2. All of the images on the temple of Venus depict people **overpowered by love**, **(E)**, suffering because their feelings are unrequited. "Love's servants" are shown as passionate and deliberate (they take vows to assure their love to one another), so love is not (A), a perfunctory act performed with careless indifference. Furthermore, since time is not a subject addressed in this passage, it is not suggested that love is (B), transient; and because the people are chiefly crying and languishing in despair, (C), enlivening, is incorrect. Love is depicted as a force that overpowers people and makes them suffer, but not as something inherently evil; thus, (D), malicious, is an incorrect answer.

3. Dramatic irony occurs when the audience knows something a character does not. Dramatic irony is not established in this passage, which consists entirely of description, so (A) is incorrect. Neither does the list of characters (B) clearly establish the setting. (C), "foreshadow future events," cannot be supported by the rest of this passage, which only completes the description, and since no moral conclusion is drawn, (E) is incorrect. The correct answer is **(D)**, "**illustrate an idea.**" Love and the trust that accompanies it led to the downfall of all the figures depicted, and the mention of their tales supports the central idea.

4. The description of Venus is an example of **(A)**, **irony**, because although the lovers are in despair and torment, Venus is depicted as a lovely, innocent goddess; her appearance does not betray the pain she causes. Venus does not represent anything but herself, making (B), symbol, untrue; and since the primary purpose of the description is not to mock anything, (C), satire, is also incorrect. Furthermore, while Venus is love in the form of a goddess, she would have been perceived and worshipped as a deity in Ancient Greece. Venus, although a goddess, is shown in human form, so (D), personification, is incorrect. The description of Venus is part of the larger description of the temple walls, which does not appear, at least within this passage, to be background information for a story (E).

5. The walls of the temple of Venus depict individuals under love's thrall, tormented by love; its powerful influence makes them lie, flatter, and become jealous. **(B), "Love causes irrational and immoral behavior,"** therefore, is the correct answer. (A), "Life is a thoroughfare of suffering and woe," and (C), "Humans are bound by predestination and fate," are incorrect because the statements they make are too broad; this passage addresses only the subject of love, not life in general. (D), "Christianity tempers love into something beautiful and pure," is incorrect not only because the figures depicted are both biblical and pagan, but because courtly love does not, if the wall is any evidence, transform love into something moral and good. Furthermore, lust is one of the things love can lead to; it is not specifically set opposite love. Therefore, (E) is incorrect.

6. Although the Miller calls Nicholas "gentle," the rest of the description reveals that he is using the word negatively. The Miller suggests that Nicholas, unlike the manly carpenter, is too refined and too clever. Nicholas smells sweet and sings prettily, and he studies strange things that allow him to gain access to people's private information. (A), therefore, is incorrect. (B), labor, is John the carpenter's specialty; Nicholas, by contrast, lives off his friends. Although Nicholas can sing parts of the church liturgy very well, the Miller does not say this makes him especially "holy" (D); in fact, his occult activity, by the Miller's telling, allows him access to things humans should not know, making him rather unholy. Finally, although Nicholas is poor (E), it is not because he is clever, but because he does not engage in real men's work. **(C), effeminacy**, is the best answer.

7. Cato, the narrator says in the subsequent lines, advised men to marry women who are about their same age. If John had read Cato, it is likely he would not have **married a woman much younger than he is (D)**. Based upon John's social rank, it is probable that he received no formal education (A), and therefore did not read Cato, but this is not the direct cause of his problems. (B), "grants his wife sovereignty in their marriage," is not true, seeing as how John maintains control over his wife by locking her up. (C) may be true—we learn that Alison is highly energetic—but is not directly stated in the passage. Since the narrator does not dwell upon Alison's social class, (E) cannot be the correct answer.

8. While John's wife is (A) manipulative, in that she tricks Absalom and secretly sleeps with Nicholas, deceptiveness is not a characteristic ascribed to her here. The Miller does describe her natural beauty (B), but more than that, he uses the animal similes to show that her beauty originated with her youth, sweetness, and wildness. Like a young animal or plant in spring, she suggests unbridled fertility and sexuality. She has a "lickerish eye," and John keeps her locked up all day so she does not make him a cuckold; these things, along with the animal comparisons, hint at her tendency to sexual promiscuity. **(C), to convey her sexual promiscuity,** is therefore the best answer. Alison is able to caper and dance, but her agility (D) is just one part of her appeal. (E), to reveal her lack of moral constraints, is not the best choice because the Miller does not dwell upon morality in this passage.

9. The Miller says that John could have saved himself pain if he had done more reading, but once he was in love, ("the snare"), he had to go through the pain. **(A)**, "**avoidable hazard**," is therefore the best answer. This is all that the Miller says about love; he does not go into whether it is confusing (B) or a trick (E). We know he does not think that love is a treasure (C) because he calls it "the snare." He thinks it is painful, but not inevitable (D); John could have married someone closer to his own age.

10. Although the Miller's purpose may be to mock certain types of people, he displays a surprisingly detailed knowledge of their habits and dress. Nicholas's books and possessions and Alison's clothes are both described in detail, so (A), abstract, is not correct. The Miller has a few editorial comments, but he does not explicitly state his opinions (B) or try to persuade (C); instead, we are left to deduce his purpose from the way he sets the story up. Nor is he openly sarcastic (D); he seems to be simply giving descriptive details for his story. **(E)**, **descriptive**, is therefore the best answer.

11. The Wife of Bath advises wives to "swear the crow is mad, and in this mood/ Call up for witness to it [their] own maid[s]." In other words, they should **(B), lie to their husbands, and have a servant vouch that what they say is true.** While the Wife of Bath accuses her husband of being lecherous (A) and compares her attire to the neighbor's wives' (E), these are both examples of ways that she lied to her husband to gain control. (D), "Hide your faults and vices until you are married," is not a piece of advice that the Wife gives to women; it is a behavior that the Wife of Bath accuses her husband of attributing to women. (C), "Have your maid spread rumors about your husband's immoral behavior," is also not a piece of advice in the text given to wives.

12. The Wife of Bath, pretending to quote her husband, dwells on a particular disadvantage of beautiful women: their desirability makes them prey to all men. She first says that the chastity of these women is "assailed on all sides." (C), Strength, is immediately tempting, but the rest of the metaphor doe not support this interpretation. A few lines later, she repeats the same sentiment, but imagines chastity as a castle. **(D)**, **chastity**, is therefore the best answer. The woman herself (A), since chastity is one of her traits, is being assailed like the castle, but because of the earlier phrase about chastity, (D) is more specifically correct than (A). (B), marriage, is what the husband is (supposedly) complaining about when he comes up with the argument about chastity. (E), beauty, is what puts the chastity in danger.

13. The word "levin" means **(D)**, **lightning**. The clue to the words' meaning is in the context of the paragraph, because lightning accompanies "thunder-claps" and may be described as "fiery." (B), Thunder, is not "fiery" in any respect, lacking any physical form, and (A) hypocrisy, (C), vehemence, and (E), scandal, are incorrect because they are all abstract; the word "levin" refers to something which can break the old man's neck.

14. The Wife of Bath accuses her husband of stereotyping as (A), unfaithful, in the statement, "And if she be right fair…She may no while in chastity abide; (B), argumentative, when she says, "You say that dripping eaves, and also smoke,/ and wives contentious, will make men to flee;" self-absorbed (D) in the lines, "You say it's torment to abide her folly/ And put up with her pride and melancholy; and (E), materialistic, when she says, "You say also that it displeases me/ Unless you... make a feast upon that day/ When I was born, and give me garments gay." However, the Wife never says that her husband stereotyped women as **(C), nosy**. The reader may initially mistakenly interpret the phrase "You say that dripping eaves… will make men flee" to mean that women are eavesdroppers, but in fact, "dripping eaves" translates to "leaky roofs;" thus, (C) is the best answer.

15. The key word in this question is "intended," and the focus is on the Wife of Bath, not Chaucer and his rhetorical technique. While it may initially appear to the reader that the Wife is trying to present a detailed characterization to her husband (A), she openly admits that the sentiments and ideas that she accuses her husband of having are lies, so the monologue does not reveal anything about her late husband's character. (B), "Prove a point that women are more artful liars than men," is incorrect, for the Wife never states or shows the ways in which a man prevaricates. While women are exposed as being vain, materialistic, and unfaithful in the monologue, (C) is incorrect because the Wife does not prove these stereotypes incorrect. Even though (E), "reveal a theme that will be supported in 'The Tale of the Wife of Bath,'" is Chaucer's intended purpose of the monologue, it is not the Wife of Bath's. The correct answer is **(D), Provide an example of the way a woman should lie to her husband.** The Wife is trying to show how a woman can "swear the crow is mad, and in this mood/ Call up for witness to it her own maid."

16. **(A), When the Pardoner says that the revelers' drinking and swearing tears the body of the savior, he is likening their current sinning to participating in the actual Crucifixion.** (B), Human sins disappoint and upset God, this statement is too general to be correct. The reference to Jews in the subsequent line alludes specifically to the Jews at Christ's crucifixion, but in no way suggests that the revelers, by swearing and "tearing" Christ's body (C) are not Christian, but Jewish. (D), "Christ is an abstract figure and was never a real person," is not an idea supported anywhere in the text, and even though the revelers are amused by their sins (E), there is no direct connection between the dissection of Christ and the men's pleasure.

17. While answers (A) – (C) and (E) are all true, they are too general to be the correct answer and would make the Pardoner's allusions to Lot unnecessary. The correct answer is **(D)**, "**Drunkenness, a form of gluttony, promotes lust.**" The Pardoner specifically says, "lust is all in wine and drunkenness"; drunkenness, being the overconsumption of alcohol, is a form of gluttony. He uses the example of Lot to prove this point. When Lot got drunk, he unknowingly slept with his daughters; thus, drunkenness (gluttony) led to lust.

18. The Pardoner says that gluttony is the worst of human sins. He equates Adam's tasting of the forbidden fruit with gluttony. **(B)**, "…**when he/ Ate of the fruit forbidden of the tree**…", is therefore the best answer. (A) focuses on Herod's drunkenness, which the Pardoner connects to lust and gluttony, but which is not his main target. Similarly, gambling (D) and lust (E) are tied up with gluttony, but not the same thing. (C) is juxtaposed with the fall of man, not equated with it; Christ's blood redeemed humanity from the fall, which has been caused by gluttony.

19. The personification and address of the stomach **(D), makes the Pardoner's message more dramatic while shifting the blame from the gluttons themselves.** The Pardoner directs his anger at the belly itself, not at gluttons, just as he would in a sermon in which he were trying not to directly offend the listeners. While (A), "It shows his anger about the fixed class system in medieval England," is suggested in the comment that "men shall swink/ To get a glutton dainty meat and drink!" the text does not overtly state that the poor labor to provide food for the rich. (B) is incorrect; whether the tale will be a tragedy or not is not clear from this section alone. (C) may be correct, but cannot be definitely proved from this excerpt. Similarly, (E) cannot be proved or disproved by this passage alone; all we know is that Gluttony does not appear as an allegorical figure in this section.

20. The Pardoner speaks out against the sins of gluttony and drunkenness in a **disparaging** and reproachful tone **(B)**. His speech is not (A), indifferent, but impassioned. (C), conclusive, is not the best answer because the Pardoner seems to want to go on and on in his rant. His language cannot be called (E) satirical: he is not mocking anything, but loudly inveighing against something. (D), comforting, is an obviously wrong answer, for the Pardoner does not console gluttons and drunkards, but suggests that they will be damned to Hell.

The Canterbury Tales

The General Prologue

1. Why might the time of year during which this collection is set be significant?

   It is the month of April, when west wind "quicken[s] again" (6) and "many little birds make melody / that sleep through all the night with open eye"(9 – 10). This is a time of warmth, energy, and awakening for both people and the Earth. Just as the natural world is ready for growth and reproduction, human beings are brought back to health and vitality—including the sexual kind. A few lines later, Chaucer tells us that the pilgrims are on their way to the shrine of Thomas Becket, the martyr who helped them when they were sick. Not only are they recovering from the winter, they are rejoicing in their recovery from or survival of the plague (see "The Black Death" in the Introduction).

2. Recall from the Introduction that medieval philosophy saw the universe as a carefully ordered hierarchy, with God (unmoving and unchanging) at the highest level, and nature (the world of change, movement, and birth and death) at the bottom. How are people and nature connected in these opening lines?

   In these opening lines, human beings are getting ready to go on a journey, and animals are beginning new cycles of birth. It is a time of change and regeneration. In addition, the narrator says he will tell us about each of the pilgrims—their "degree," "array," etc. We will learn about the social order into which society has sorted the pilgrims, and we will see if they stay in their places.

3. What might be Chaucer's intent in comparing humankind and nature?

   Spring is a season of rebirth and renewal. When men and women make pilgrimages to holy sites, they go to show their devotion, be blessed by God, and be absolved of their sins. Spring is reviving the spirit of man, just as it is reviving nature.

4. From what point of view is *The Canterbury Tales* told? What effect will this have on the tales themselves?

   The Canterbury Tales *is told from the first-person point of view. The narrator is a persona of Chaucer and a pilgrim on the journey to Canterbury. While he is able to voice his own opinions and judgments of the other characters, often providing background information about them, he does not know their thoughts unless they vocalize them.*

5. How does Chaucer describe the Knight?

The Knight lives by the code of chivalry; he loves honor and courtesy. He fought in the Crusades and "won sovereign fame for prize" (24), and although he is a member of the upper class, he is humble and meek rather than proud and boastful. He does not dress in fine attire, choosing instead to wear "simple fustian"(32) that has been discolored by his armor. Furthermore, while his horse is sufficient, it is not the best, nor is it elaborately dressed. The Knight is respected for his virtue and his military service, not because of the way he dresses. The Knight has not even changed out of his battle gear before setting out on the pilgrimage. Clearly, he is a devout man as well as a brave fighter.

6. How does the Squire compare to his father, the Knight?

Unlike the Knight, the Squire is portrayed as interested in romance; he could have come straight out of a ballad about courtly love. Chaucer describes him in terms of his hobbies and dress instead of his service. The Squire has "locks well curled" (3) and is "[e]mbroidered…like a meadow bed / [a]ll full of freshest flowers, white and red" (11 – 12). Although he has participated in battles, such as "[i]n Flanders, in Artois, and Picardy" (8), he fought not for God, his king, or his nation, but "in hope to win thereby his lady's grace"(10). Furthermore, instead of fighting or training, the Squire spends almost all of his time singing, dancing, playing the flute, and writing poetry, in addition to making love to one or multiple women as implied by the phrase "[h]e slept no more than does a nightingale"(20). Although he does do his duty, "[carving] before his father at the table"(22), the Squire is romantic rather than humble and pragmatic.

7. What do we learn from the physical description of the Yeoman?

A yeoman may be either a freeborn man who holds property or a servant in a noble household. The knight's yeoman has "peacock arrows bright and keen" (4), and "his arrows had no draggled feathers low" (7). His dagger is also "[w]ell sheathed and sharp as spear point in the light" (14). The narrator guesses that he is a forester—someone who patrols the lands of an estate to keep poachers away. The presence of the yeomen—although Chaucer says he is the only servant—is evidence of the estate the Knight belongs to and his wealth. Other of the pilgrims do not have yeoman because they do not have lands that need to be guarded.

8. How is Chaucer's description of the Prioress satirical, and what is the point of the satire?

The Prioress aspires to be a member of the upper class. She speaks fluent French, as a member of the upper class would, but she speaks the less-regarded Norman French, not the French of the court in Paris; she has impeccable table manners. In addition, her cloak is very fashionable, and she has a "brooch of golden sheen" (43), suggesting that she is wealthy. The narrator seems impressed by the Prioress's fancy jewelry and excellent manners, but we know how incongruous they are. She is supposed to be living a simple, humble life as a servant of Christ and leader of the other nuns, but she is unabashedly self-serving and vain.

9. What is ironic about the juxtaposition of the lines "[The Prioress] was so charitable and piteous" (26) and "That she would weep if she but saw a mouse [c]aught in a trap, though it were dead or bled" (28)?

   The juxtaposition reveals a surprising aspect of the Prioress'ss character. The reader would expect the Prioress to be "charitable and piteous" toward people, but this is not the case. She, who should be in the service of mankind, cares more for animals than for human beings.

10. What are the Prioress'ss primary concerns in life? How does this contrast to what would be expected of a prioress?

    A prioress should be concerned with maintaining the abbey (the home for nuns that she manages), doing charitable works, and helping to spread the word of God; however, this Prioress'ss concerns are quite different. "Madam Eglantine" likes to "put on cheer [of] court, and very dignified appear"(23) and she is very involved with the protection and keeping of animals. The text says the following:

    She had some little dogs, too, that she fed
    On roasted flesh, or milk and fine white bread.
    But sore she'd weep if one of them were dead,
    Or if men smote it with a rod to smart:
    For pity ruled her, and her tender heart (29 – 33)

    Not only does the Prioress love her animals, but she feeds them expensive, fine foods, most likely using the money of church members.

11. What does the statement "when he rode men might his bridle hear / A-jingling in the whistling wind as clear, / Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell" (5 – 7) suggest about the Monk? How is this suggestion confirmed by the rest of the General Prologue?

    This phrase conveys that the Monk's worldliness and materialism are greater than his devotion to God. He does not follow the rules of his order: instead of studying in his cloister and practicing temperance and self-denial, he prefers to hunt and ride. What's more, he dresses extravagantly; his coat is lined with fur, and he wears a pin of gold. His boots, unlike those of most monks, are soft, and he rides a fine horse. Like the Prioress, the Monk abuses his position as a holy figure to get more out of the world.

12. How are monks and friars supposed to be different from one another? How are these two different or the same?

    Monks are supposed to live lives of solitude and quiet prayer; friars take a vow of poverty and do good works among people, living on whatever alms they receive. This monk and this friar both violate these rules: the Monk dresses richly and spends his time hunting (a pursuit of the leisure class), while the Friar takes advantage of the young women in his care.

13. What do innocent-sounding phrases about the Friar like, "a wanton one and merry," "[he] had arranged full many a marriage [o]f young women at his own cost," "Well loved he was, a most familiar Friar [...] to the worthy women of the town"; "He kept his cape all packed with pins and knives / That he would give away to pretty wives," and "he could be as wanton as a pup" suggest about this cleric?

    The double entendre of much of the text and the Friar's familiarity with women suggest that he might be lecherous.

14. How do the Friar's relationships with other people help characterize him?

    The Friar never associates with the poor, only with rich people and those who work in bars. Chaucer says that the Friar is close to several franklins, "rich and big victuallers"(38), as well as "every host and gay barmaid also" (31). He does not befriend the beggars or the diseased because they cannot afford to offer him "donations." The relationships the Friar has with other people show that he is greedy and a drunkard.

15. How is Chaucer's statement about the Friar, "He lived by pickings, it is evident" an example of irony?

    When one reads that the Friar lived by pickings, he or she would expect the Friar to be relatively poor. However, this is not the case. Chaucer writes the following:

    [The Friar] was not like a cloisterer,
    With threadbare cope as the poor scholar,
    But he was like a lord or like a pope.
    Of double worsted was his semi-cope,
    That rounded as a bell, as you may guess (51 – 55)

    The discrepancy between the reader's expectations about the way a beggar should live and the Friar's manner of dress emphasizes that the Friar, like the Monk, is taking advantage of other people's generosity and selling the Lord's grace for money.

16. In what ways are the Prioress, the Monk, and the Friar similar?

    All three are more worldly, more socially and materially conscious than one would expect of "men and women of God."

17. What opinion does Chaucer apparently have about the Church of his age?

    The Church seems to be failing in its function. If the clergy are so ill-suited to their callings, how can the institution they supposedly serve actually do what it is supposed to do?

18. According to the description, is the Merchant good at his occupation? How do you know?

Even though the narrator does not appear to like the Merchant and believes the man is pompous and boastful, the text reveals that the Merchant is good at what he does. He handles all of his own business affairs, is very wise about trading and shares, and is not in debt.

19. What kind of character is the Clerk? How does the narrator view him?

In the Clerk's life, the pursuit of knowledge is what matters most. He spends his money on books rather than clothing and food, and this is not only outwardly expressed in the narrative, but is apparent by the Clerk's physical description: his horse is "as meagre… as a rake… nor he himself too fat" (3 – 4). In addition, his overcoat is "threadbare" (6). The Clerk also diligently performs another practice done by all good clerks: in exchange for an individual's patronage, he shows appreciation for the gift by praying for his patron's soul. He is also reticent, unwilling to speak unless he has something important to say, but he does enjoy teaching. Unlike the descriptions of the Prioress, Friar, and Monk, the description of the Clerk is not satirical. The Clerk is a typical starving student; he spends all his money on books and is eager both to teach and to learn. Perhaps the description of the Clerk is less satirical than previous character sketches because the Clerk is a scholar and a reader, like Chaucer himself. The Clerk is definitely not presented as taking advantage of people the way some other characters do.

20. In what ways are the Clerk and the Lawyer different?

While the Clerk uses his knowledge to better himself and to teach others, the Lawyer uses his knowledge for personal gain. According to the text, the Lawyer "took large fees and many robes could own. / So great a purchaser was never known"(9 – 10). From what the narrator says about the Clerk ("gladly would he learn and gladly teach" [25]) it seems as though the Clerk teaches not for money, but to promote education and learning. The Lawyer is also materialistic, for he spends his money on extravagant clothing and views everything in terms of its monetary value. The Clerk is completely indifferent to style and dress, letting his coat go to rags and spending his money on books and education.

21. What can readers infer about the narrator's opinion of the Franklin?

Upon analyzing the narrator's word choice, it appears that he likes the Franklin. It is true that the Franklin is rich, and the narrator tends to criticize the pilgrims who are wealthy. However, the narrator says that the Franklin is a "worthy vavasour"(30), a great "householder"(9), and a person "of sanguine temperament" (3). It does not appear that the narrator is being sarcastic because all of these compliments are supported with evidence: the Franklin has an abundance of good food and wines, but he shares it with all of his guests. The narrator compares him to Saint Julian, the patron saint of hospitality, a great compliment.

22. In what ways has the formation of the guild benefitted the tradesmen and their wives?

The tradesmen have risen in status, increased their wealth, and become part of the emerging middle class. Due to their increased wages, the men have acquired new equipment, silver weapons, and nicer clothing. In addition, their wives enjoy their new status and the fact that they are addressed as "Madam" in church.

23. What information do we get from the description of the Cook?

The Cook is a servant of the Five Guildsmen and is most likely of the lower class. The two lines regarding the Cook's sore and its resemblance to blanc-mange remind us that the plague is still around.

24. Is the narrator sincere when he says that "[The Sailor] was a good fellow" (8)?

The narrator is being sarcastic; the sailor is a man without many scruples. He drinks his trader's wine without permission and feels no guilt. He is, however, a skilled sailor with experience and knowledge of his profession.

25. What makes the Physician a good doctor?

Like many medieval doctors, the Physician is familiar with astronomy, the four humours, and medicinal drugs. He has also read medicinal treatises written by many of history's greatest scientists and physicians.

26. What does Chaucer say about the relationship between doctors and druggists?

The narrator writes, "By mutual aid much gold they'd always won— / Their friendship was a thing not new begun"(25 – 26). The apothecaries and doctors conspire to get as much gold as they can out of each patient.

27. What lines in the text suggest that the Physician uses his position for personal gain?

The text says, "[The Physician] kept the gold he gained from pestilence, / For gold in physic is a good cordial, / And therefore loved he gold exceedingly of all"(40 – 42), blatantly stating that the Physician loves money more than anything else, including his own profession.

28. How is the Wife of Bath's claim of religious devotion contradicted by her behavior?

The Wife of Bath has been on several pilgrimages, including three to Jerusalem, and she gets upset when other women of her church make an offering before her. Despite this, the Wife of Bath dresses richly and extravagantly, showing that she is vain and worldly and would rather spend money on her clothing than donate it to the church or charity. Furthermore, she is an ardent lover, having had five husbands, in addition to several male companions when she was younger. The Wife of Bath likes the external trappings of religion, but does not bother with excessive piety or self-deprivation.

29. In what ways does Chaucer use color to help characterize the Wife of Bath?

The color red, in the theory of the four humors, is associated with the sanguine temperament; it indicates that the Wife of Bath is passionate, sometimes aggressive, because she has too much red blood. The text says, "Her hose were of the choicest scarlet red" (12), and "Bold was her face, and fair, and red of hue"(14). She has had not one, but five husbands, in addition to the men with whom she had relationships when she was younger. Furthermore, says the text, "The remedies of love she knew, perchance, / For of that art she'd learned the old, old dance"(31 – 32).

30. How does the Parson compare to the other members of the clergy previously mentioned in the General Prologue?

Unlike the Prioress, the Monk, and the Friar, the Parson practices what he preaches and lives his life as a religious leader should, teaching moral living by setting a good example. The Parson is entirely selfless, dedicates all of his time to doing God's work, and has cast off all worldly possessions and pleasures, living only on the meager sum that he is given by his parishioners. Even though the Parson is poor, he always gives money and goods to those poorer than he. The other clergy members on the pilgrimage, however, do not live according to religious doctrine, and they act only in self-interest. The Prioress is more concerned with appearing proper and elegant and taking care of animals than she is with maintaining her abbey; the Monk refuses to stay within his cloister, and instead goes hunting; the Friar associates only with wealthy landowners who buy indulgences, and he seduces young women. Of all the clergy members described thus far, the lowly Parson is the only one who behaves the way he should.

31. What Biblical allusion does Chaucer use in the description of the Parson?

Chaucer describes the Parson as a good shepherd taking care of his sheep. This metaphor is the one commonly used in the Bible to describe the relationship between Christ (the shepherd) and the members of the Church (the sheep). The Parson is a leader and teacher of the members of his congregation, and they look to him for guidance on how to live. By acting morally—being selfless, giving to the poor, and placing greater importance on spiritual, rather than material, matters—the Parson sets a good example and, like a shepherd, effectively leads the members of his congregation, the sheep in the metaphor.

32. How does the Plowman's profession help emphasize his moral character?

The Plowman is a commoner with a dirty job, digging in the earth and spreading manure. However, his soul is clean and unsullied, and the contrast between the Plowman's job and his character help accentuate his virtues. He does hard and honest work, loves God and his fellow humans, and is completely indifferent to material wealth.

33. Describe the Miller. What humor seems to be dominant in him?

The Miller, like the Wife of Bath, seems to be primarily sanguine. He has a red beard and a somewhat violent temperament, but he also seems to enjoy music and dirty rhymes.

34. How does the Miller in *The Canterbury Tales* fit the medieval stereotype?

In the medieval period, it was common for Millers to cheat their customers by stealing some of the whole grain given to them to mill. They also put their fingers on the scales when weighing grain, charging their customers for more produce than they were actually receiving. The Miller on the pilgrimage is no different. The narrator writes, "He could steal corn and full thrice charge his fees; / And yet he had a thumb of gold, begad"(18 – 19).

35. What does Chaucer mean when, regarding the Manciple, he says, "Now is it not of God a full fair grace / That such a vulgar man has wit to pace / The wisdom of a crowd of learned men" (6 – 9)? How is the Manciple's wit a miracle?

Chaucer is asking whether it is a miracle that men who are unschooled have the ability to outsmart those who have received a formal education. The Manciple's abilities and wisdom are miraculous because they are greater than that of educated men. The Manciple is a very good businessman, and he knows how to take advantage of the market. The only schooling the Manciple had was his training at the inns of court.

36. How does the narrator view the Reeve? What humor is dominant in the Reeve?

The Reeve is a smart man who has learned how to use the system to his own advantage. He is not characterized as dishonest, but the laborers fear him because he is intelligent and impossible to deceive. While the narrator does not outwardly comment on the Reeve's moral character, he does say that the Reeve is experienced in overseeing estates and manages the land well. "Yet no man has found him in arrears"(16), the narrator remarks. In addition, while the Reeve is wealthy, he is a self-made man who earned his money by honest means. Before he became a Reeve, he was a carpenter, and he was gradually elevated in situation because of his skill. The Reeve is called a "slender, choleric man"; the primary humor in his complexion is choler, or yellow bile.

37. Compare the Summoner and the Pardoner in terms of outward appearance, positions, and personalities.

The Summoner is so ugly that children fear him, for he has a face covered in boils, as well as dark scabby brows over narrow eyes. His breath smells of garlic, onions, and leeks, and he is frequently drunk. In many ways, his outward appearance enhances the horror of his profession, which is summoning people to the Church court. Anyone seeing the Summoner approaching would immediately become afraid, not only because of the summons he brings, but because of his frightening visage. Furthermore, the Summoner's personality is not admirable. He is lecherous, a drunkard, and often irritable. In addition, he is not qualified for his position: he is not fluent in Latin, but he repeats the few phrases that he knows, such as "Questio quid juris," in order to appear educated. The Summoner's outward appearance reflects his position and personality accurately. Similarly, the Pardoner's physical appearance reflects his character. The Pardoner is described as having long, blonde hair, but it hangs limp and stringy down his back. His voice also sounds like the bleating of the sheep. The Pardoner has the power to give people absolution for their sins, but he sells God's grace, manipulating poor people into giving him money by convincing them that the stones and pig bones in his box are relics.

38. What is the game that the Host suggests the pilgrims play?

The Host suggests that the pilgrims have a storytelling competition. Each person on the pilgrimage will tell two stories going to Canterbury and two stories coming back. The Host will judge all of the tales, and the person who tells the best tale will get a free dinner at the others' expense when they return to the Tabard Inn.

The Knight's Tale: Part One

1. What kind of people is this story about? What does this tell us about the storyteller?

The Knight's Tale begins with a duke, a "lord and governor" who is also a great warrior. Clearly, the Knight will be speaking of people like himself—people from the knightly, landowning class. We might guess from this that the Knight has not had much experience outside his own estate.

2. Where is the story set? Why is this significant?

The story is set in ancient Greece. The characters from ancient mythology suit the Knight's personality and tastes. He transposes them to his own time, making them knights and warriors and turning the story into a romance.

3. How does Chaucer's diction when talking about Theseus reinforce the idea that Theseus won Hippolyta in a battle?

When referring to Theseus and his military conquests, Chaucer explicitly mentions that Theseus conquered Scythia, the land of the Amazons, married Hippolyta, and took her home with him to Athens. However, the preponderance of terms relating to war remind the reader that Hippolyta did not wed Theseus by choice. Theseus "gained the realm of Femininity"(8) just as he gained Hippolyta as a war prize. She was brought back to Athens with "glory"(12) and "in victory" (14). Furthermore, Chaucer says that Hippolyta was "wooed and won"(23) and describes her as a "hardy queen of Scythia"(24), suggesting that she was a great warrior in her land.

4. How does the relationship between Hippolyta and Theseus differ from courtly love?

In courtly love, the woman has dominance and control over the man. He pines for her, worships her, and becomes lovesick, but she does not give in to his advances. The way in which Theseus and Hippolyta were wed is quite different from courtly love. Theseus held and maintained the power, and instead of a rhetorical "Battle of the Sexes," a literal battle occurred: Theseus attacked and conquered Scythia, taking Hippolyta by force and against her will.

5. What characteristics of Theseus are presented in the following quotation?

> Do you so much as envy
> My honour that you thus complain and cry?
> Or who has wronged you now, or who offended?
> Come, tell me whether it may be amended;
> And tell me, why are you clothed thus in black? (49 – 53)

Initially, Theseus suspects that the women are crying because they envy him and his victory, and his reaction shows that he is a proud man who easily takes offense. However, Theseus then believes that the women have been wronged, and he offers to defend them. This shows that Theseus is a noble, honorable knight who lives by the code of chivalry.

6. Whom do the widows blame for their husbands' deaths? What theme does this establish?

The women do not blame Theseus or the Athenians for the death of their husbands, but instead, attribute the negative outcome of the battle to Fortune. "Thanks be to Fortune and her treacherous wheel," they say, "There's none can rest assured of constant weal" (67-68). This remark establishes one of the major themes of this story: all events and actions are predestined.

7. Why, in particular, are the women distressed?

The women are distressed because Creon, the ruler of Thebes, will not allow them to bury the bodies of their husbands, but has piled all of the corpses and left them out in the open.

8. Which god is invoked by the duke's red banner? Why does the Knight mention this?

Mars, the Roman god of war, is ruling when the duke rides into battle. The mention of the god clues us in to the cosmology the Knight will be using in the story: the Roman gods, along with the alignment of the stars and fate, will affect the way the story turns out.

9. What can the reader infer about medieval warfare from the way Theseus attacks Thebes?

- *People fly banners, display their coatd of arms, and wear ornate armor.*
- *Women are sent away to safety.*
- *The battles take place in open fields; there is no guerilla warfare.*
- *When the battle is over, the victorious army plunders the armor and weapons of the dead men.*

10. Where is Emily when Palamon and Arcita first see her, and what time of year is it? Why is the setting significant?

It is May, and Emily is walking in the garden:

> *Thus passed by year by year and day by day,*
> *Till it fell out, upon a morn in May,*
> *That Emily, far fairer to be seen*
> *Than is the lily on its stalk of green,*
> *And fresher than is May with flowers new*
> *(For with the rose's colour strove her hue,*
> *I know not which was fairer of the two)… (176 – 182)*

Emily is the stereotypical female lead in a courtly romance, so the Knight emphasizes her physical and spiritual purity. She sings like an angel, and she is "sweeter than any flower that blows" (191). She is shown making a garland of red and white flowers for her hair.

11. How does the garden setting help portray Emily as a goddess, as Palamon believes her to be?

The description of Emily contains references to flowers, and her beauty is said to surpass that of nature. In a sense, this makes her super*natural:*

> *Thus passed by year by year and day by day,*
> *Till it fell out, upon a morn in May,*
> *That Emily, far fairer to be seen*
> *Than is the lily on its stalk of green,*
> *And fresher than is May with flowers new*
> *(For with the rose's colour strove her hue,*
> *I know not which was fairer of the two)… (176 – 182)*

The narrator also says Emily is "sweeter than any flower that blows" (191), and mentions that she is making a garland of red and white flowers for her hair. The distinction between Emily and the garden is rhetorically and literally blurred, and Palamon perceives her as a goddess or spirit of the garden rather than a woman.

12. How do the contrasting images of the garden and the tower emphasize the agony of Palamon and Arcita?

The garden is described as an earthly paradise, green and full of flowers. According to the description, "[b]right was the sun and clear that morn" (205) and "the garden [was] full of branches green" (210). By contrast, the tower is described as "tall… thick and strong" (199), very unlike the beautiful delicate garden, and it had "many a bar of iron, strong and square as any spar" (216 – 219). All of the descriptions of the tower suggest that it is plain, hard, cold place, and above all else, its walls are impenetrable: Arcita and Palamon have little chance of escape. The garden landscape, which is juxtaposed to the tower, is a depiction of ideal freedom, which both knights are prevented from obtaining.

13. Explain how dramatic irony is used in the scene in which Palamon cries out.

Although Palamon cries out because Emily's beauty is literally breathtaking, Arcita believes that Palamon cries because he is breaking from the torture and hopelessness of imprisonment.

14. How is courtly love presented in lines 236 – 265?

Palamon and Arcita both describe their love for Emily not as something pleasant and joyful, but in terms of battle, pain, and torment. In tales of courtly love, the man's admiration for the woman is unrequited, and he suffers in great agony, feeling unworthy of her affection, but still plots ways to win her. Emily is "the cause of all [Palamon's] crying and…woe" (243), and she causes him to be "wounded sore" (258). As for Arcita, he is "deeply hurt, and more" (259), claims that her beauty "slays [him] suddenly" (261) and makes him want to kill himself if he cannot see her every day. In addition, Palamon thinks of Emily as a goddess instead of a mortal woman. In courtly love, a man worships a woman as if she were a goddess; Palamon, however, actually believes that Emily is a manifestation of Venus.

15. Explain Palamon's and Arcita's respective reasons for feeling entitled to Emily.

Palamon claims that Emily is his to love because he became infatuated by her first; he says that by trying to take Emily as his own and hindering Palamon's love, Arcita is breaking a vow of kinship. Arcita and Palamon are cousins, and they once swore to never fight or be parted. Palamon says that Arcita is betraying him. On the other hand, Arcita accuses Palamon of being delusional: Palamon does not view Emily as a woman, but as a goddess. Palamon cannot love Emily properly if he is deifying and worshipping her. Additionally, Arcita says that love transcends all laws and vows, so he is not breaking any oath to Palamon.

16. What might the following lines foreshadow?

> We strive but as those dogs did for the bone
> They fought all day, and yet their gain was none.
> Till came a kite while they were still so wroth
> And bore the bone away from them both.
> And therefore, at the king's court, O my brother,
> It's each man for himself and not for other.
> Love if you like; for I love and aye shall;
> And certainly, dear brother, that is all.
> Here in this prison cell must we remain
> And each endure whatever fate ordain. (320 – 330)

Arcita realizes that there will be no triumph for either man as it stands now; no matter how much they fight, neither of them will get Emily. Beyond that, there is no avoiding whatever fate has in store. Arcita's tone foreshadows a tragic, unavoidable end to the fighting for one or both men.

17. How is Arcita's freedom at the end of Section One an example of cosmic irony?

Pirithous recognizes Arcita and convinces Theseus to release the Theban knight from prison. However, once free, Arcita is not happy, as would be expected. Instead, he is miserable because he is being exiled from Athens and will never have the opportunity to see Emily again. Fate seems to have given Arcita a twisted version of exactly what he asked for.

18. What does Arcita say about fate and free will in his speech, lines 393 – 416? What might be the reason behind this monologue?

Arcita believes that God's omniscience makes his will greater than man's, for a person cannot know the future and the outcome of his or her prayers. Arcita's situation is a good example of how prayers and wishes go awry: he wished he could escape prison, but now he is in greater torment knowing that he can never see Emily again. It is possible that Arcita is giving this monologue to show that he is resigning himself to the fact that he is ignorant and powerless. In effect, he completely gives up on winning Emily.

19. How is the comparison of men to beasts an example of allusion? What is the purpose of the allusion?

The phrase "sheep that huddle in the fold" is an allusion to a biblical metaphor in which Jesus (and the priests that follow his example) act as shepherds leading their congregation, their sheep, to God. Just as the sheep are herded, human beings are directed by God and do not have free will.

20. Why, according to Palamon, are animals more fortunate than men? What kind of worldview does this reveal?

Beasts can do whatever they please; they are not repressed by secular or moral laws. Furthermore, when animals die, they are relieved of their suffering; humans, on the other hand, must sometimes suffer in the afterlife.

The Knight's Tale: Part Two

1. Why does Chaucer go into detail about Arcita's physical transformation?

The change in Arcita's appearance reflects his inner turmoil and emphasizes his suffering. Because he is prevented from seeing Emily, he becomes thin and "dry as a shaft," his skin becomes pale and cold, and his eyes become hollow (506 – 508). An excess of black bile results in a melancholy temperament; clearly, Arcita's situation has pushed him toward this condition.

2. What is significant about Mercury's appearance in Arcita's dream?

Mercury is the divine messenger and god of travel. In ancient myths, he is often sent by the gods to tell someone to go on a journey. His appearance to Arcita shows that the Knight's story is in the same lofty tradition of other mythological and epic journeys.

3. What is Arcita's plan for returning to Athens?

Since woe and misery have transformed Arcita's appearance, he can return to Athens unrecognized. He plans to dress as a laborer and apply for work as a page in Emily's household. Although Arcita must conceal his identity and accept that social class will distance him from his love, he can still see Emily every day. A character's disguising himself or herself as a poor beggar in order to gain access to a forbidden person or place is another motif that dates back to classical literature.

4. What is Palamon's "two-fold heaviness"?

Palamon is still a prisoner in Athens, and after spending seven years imprisoned, he has little hope of release. Furthermore, he is suffering from his love for Emily.

5. What happens to "Philostrates" at court, and what beliefs of the Knight's does this reveal?

Philostrates (Arcita) cannot help but show his "gentle nature," and he is quickly promoted in the court. The Knight believes that a person's station cannot be altered by birth, since it is part of the natural order of things: a highborn person will always end up high in the social hierarchy.

6. How does Palamon escape from prison?

Palamon, with the help of a friend, gets the guard to drink a sweet wine containing opiates and sleeping powder. While the jailor sleeps, Palamon makes his escape from the prison and runs to a grove nearby, planning to return to Thebes. Drugging a prison guard is yet another trope common in classical literature.

7. In what ways does the description of morning in the grove highlight the contrast between Arcita's and Palamon's positions?

When the narrator discusses Arcita's revel in the grove, he uses lighthearted, joyful, poetic imagery to describe the morning. He says,

> *The busy lark, the herald of the day,*
> *Salutes now in her song the morning grey;*
> *And fiery Phoebus rises up so bright*
> *That all the east is laughing with the light*
> *And with his streamers dries, among the greves,*
> *The silver droplets hanging on the leaves (636 – 640)*

When speaking about Palamon, the narrator does not describe the morning, but says, "The night was short and it was nearly day, / Wherefore he needs must find a place to hide"(620 – 621). The two different views of morning are consistent with Arcita's and Palamon's emotional states. Arcita is happy now that he can see Emily every day, and his ecstasy is conveyed in the setting description; Palamon, a fugitive with a terrible plan in mind, does not view morning as something beautiful and positive, but a hindrance. He will have to find cover and hide from the Athenians while the sun is out. The narrator does not use poetic language to describe the morning when Palamon is the focus.

8. What is significant about the date Palamon breaks out of prison?

Palamon escapes seven years after his original imprisonment, on the third day of May. Both seven and three are important numbers in Western literature, so the Knight's giving this date makes the event seem significant, even predestined, rather than random. The Knight also follows this information by saying that the old books give this date, and implying that destiny, rather than chance, is at work.

9. For what possible reason does the narrator refer to Arcita's actions in the grove as a "reverence of May" (644)?

The narrator's words tie Arcita's revels to the natural world. Arcita is celebrating the beginning of the spring through a revel, a traditional ritual involving song and praise. Like the time of year, he seems fresh and full of vitality; the Knight says he sings "lustily."

10. What dramatic irony arises in this scene in the grove, and what purpose does it serve?

Arcita is oblivious to the fact that Palamon is hiding in the grove, watching him and listening to him sing. The audience is aware that both knights are near each other and suspects that they will meet. The "coincidental" meeting of the two men shows again that this is a formal, stylized tale using elements common to other romances, and it conveys the idea that all the events in the story have been predecided by fate.

11. Why is it relevant that Arcita's revel takes place on a Friday?

In the fields, Arcita expresses his love for Emily. Friday is the day dedicated to Venus, the goddess of love.

12. What identities and corresponding ideas does Arcita associate with the names Arcita and Philostrates?

Arcita is a name that represents Arcita's pride, as well as his suffering. As Arcita, he is descended from nobility and has great power and worth in society. The knight is descended from Cadmus and Amphion, who built and founded Thebes. However, because of his Theban heritage, he is an enemy to Theseus and the Athenians. While he is proud of his royal ancestry, Arcita's true identity prevents him from gaining Emily. Philostrates, on the other hand, is the name associated with his alter-ego, a poor, humble man who is liked, but not respected. Both names are detrimental to Arcita.

13. What are the main points of Arcita's speech of mourning, and how do they echo some of the main themes and ideas of the Knight's Tale?

Arcita bemoans the neverending war that has made him an enemy to Thebes. He is upset that because of the gods' anger, he has been forced to take on the identity of a poor, lowly man. And he is in pain because of a love that cannot be fulfilled. His speech reinforces the idea that human beings are pawns of the gods and of fate; that people have natural stations in life, although fate and fortune may upset the balance; and that love is a destructive, overwhelming force.

14. Arcita tells Palamon, once again, that bonds, laws, and oaths may be broken for the sake of love. Arcita says something similar in lines 305 – 315. What might be the dramatic purpose for Arcita's reiteration of this idea?

When Arcita says "love's free to choose and do" (750), the reader should remember Arcita's speech in prison before he was freed. The connection between these lines shows that, although seven years have passed, the competition between Palamon and Arcita over Emily has not changed.

15. What does Arcita do that demonstrates he is a chivalrous knight?

When Arcita meets his cousin in the field, Palamon is completely unarmed. Arcita suspends the fight, telling him that he will steal two suits of armor and weapons from Emily's house and bring them to the grove. Then, he will give Palamon the choice of which he would like to use. Arcita is chivalrous for two reasons: first, rather than kill Palamon dishonorably and without giving him a chance to fight, Arcita waits until another day when Palamon is not at a great disadvantage. Second, Arcita allows Palamon to take the best suit of armor; thus, giving Palamon the upper hand in the battle.

16. What is the purpose of the use of apostrophe in lines 767 – 771?

The address and derision of Cupido not only makes the statement that love, as a concept, is a terrible thing that drives men and women to do foolish things, but it also blames a deity for Palamon and Arcita's actions. This contributes to the theme of predestination, reminding the reader that people do not create their own destinies, nor do they have control over their own actions.

17. What simile does the Knight use to describe Arcita and Palamon in battle?

The narrator compares the two knights to wild animals, including boars, a tiger, and a lion. These extended similes are common to epic poetry, again showing that the Knight's Tale is in the formal, classical tradition. Unlike animals, humans behavior and action is limited by strict rules; however, both knights are now so jealous of each other that they have lost their human qualities and are fighting like animals. Dueling without a judge violates the rules laid down for human beings.

18. Summarize the Knight's digression about free will and destiny. How does he back up his claim?

The Knight says that destiny, which is based on God's foreknowledge, is such a powerful force that nothing in the world can counteract it; a predetermined event will take place on some day, no matter what. This applies to extremely coincidental events, which might be very uncommon, but can still take place because of fate. All things that human beings do are predetermined. This is why, according to the Knight, Theseus happens to come across Arcita and Palamon, who happened to come across one another the day before.

19. What does the narrator mean when he says, "For after Mars, [Theseus] serves Diana's reign" (825)?

When Theseus is not engaged in battle, he prefers to hunt. In effect, Theseus moves from serving the god of war, Mars, to serving the goddess of the hunt, Diana.

20. What does Palamon ask of Theseus? Why does he make this request?

Palamon confesses his own identity and reveals Arcita's. He acknowledges that both he and Arcita deserve death; the "charity" he asks is to be executed first. He also says he will be glad to be killed as long as he is near Emily. This is the classic language of courtly love, which places mere proximity to the beloved above all else, even life.

21. What techniques does Palamon use to evoke sympathy in Theseus?

Palamon appeals to Theseus' pride, belittles both himself and Arcita, and uses reverse psychology. Palamon refers to Theseus as "Sire" (857) as well as the "rightful lord and judge" (861), while calling himself and Arcita "two woeful wretches" (859) who are "encumbered by [their] own sad lives" (860). By acting submissively and acknowledging the dominance and superiority of Theseus, Palamon makes himself and Arcita appear less a threat and more to be pitied. Palamon also says, "We [have] deserved our death at hands of you [Theseus]" (859) and begs the duke to slay both himself and Arcita. Once again, Palamon makes himself and Arcita appear less threatening, and as a result, less likely to be attacked and punished.

22. Read the passage between lines 903 and 923. How is Theseus characterized as a wise ruler?

Although the discovery of Palamon and Arcita in his land after they had been exiled angers Theseus and injures his pride, he is able to put aside his emotions and rule as an objective and just ruler. He identifies and analyzes the reason behind their battle and is able to empathize with them, for "every man / Will help himself in love, if he but can,/ And will himself deliver from prison" (909 – 911). As a good ruler should, Theseus balances his power to condemn "proud and pitiless" criminals (919) with his mercy to pardon the "repentant" ones (918).

23. Summarize Theseus's speech in the passage between lines 927 and 967. How does the speech contribute to a major theme in the novel?

The god of love manipulates the actions of human beings. Love brought Palamon and Arcita from safety in Thebes to danger in Athens, even though the knights knew that if they were discovered, they would be killed. Love makes fools of the wisest men, including Theseus himself. Poor Emily is just as surprised as Theseus at Palamon's and Arcita's actions. As long as the Theban knights do not make war on Athens, the duke plans to forgive them for their offense. This speech connects to the theme of predestination and the way fate governs the actions of mankind. Arcita and Palamon are acting against their reason—which would have told them to stay in Thebes—because of their love for Emily. Furthermore, neither Palamon nor Arcita are voluntarily in love: they are being manipulated by the power of a deity. The two knights have absolutely no control over their own emotions and behavior.

24. What does Theseus propose the knights do to decide who will marry Emily?

Theseus proposes that Arcita and Palamon fight a battle. After fifty weeks, they should return to Athens with one hundred knights each. Whichever of the Theban knights wins the tournament, according to God's will, will marry Emily.

25. Summarize what has happened in the story so far. Why does the Knight choose to end the second section of the story here? What might we expect in the next sections?

The first section described the imprisonment of the two men, then the escape of Palamon; it ended with a question about who was better off. The second section has described Arcita's journey to Athens and work in the court, and the private battle between Arcita and Palamon that was stopped by Theseus. We have seen how fate works in the lives of Palamon and Arcita, sometimes with ironic consequences (Palamon is a prisoner who can see Emily; Arcita is a free man who cannot see her). We have seen it bring the two men together to fight to the death, only to be stopped because they are not fighting by the rules. The next sections will likely describe the public, officially-sanctioned battle, especially the way its outcome is influenced by fate. If the previous chapters are a clue, fate may have something interesting, perhaps ironic, in store.

The Knight's Tale: Part Three

1. How is the amphitheater where Palamon and Arcita are to battle laid out?

The amphitheater is a mile around, and its borders are enclosed by stone walls, with a moat outside. There are tiers of seats sixty paces high, and three temples dedicated to Roman gods. The gate in the East is the temple of Venus, the gate in the West belongs to Mars, and the northern gate honors Diana.

2. Which aspects of love do the images in the temple of Venus illustrate? How is this interpretation of love significant to the story?

All of the images in the temple of Venus depict a negative view of love, in which people suffer in agony under love's thrall. The walls of the temple limn the characters in classical mythology whose infatuation had horrible, even deadly, effects. Some examples of the people represented are Turnus, Medea, Croesus, and Hercules. This interpretation of love is similar to Arcita and Palamon's experience. Their love for Emily not only severed the kinship tie between them, but it also drove them to risk their lives and will lead to a fight to the death. Regardless of the outcome of the battle, one of the men, either Arcita or Palamon, will die for love.

3. Which of war's qualities are represented in the temple of Mars? How does this depiction of war contrast with the chivalrous warfare?

The images on the walls of Mars' temple reveal a negative aspect of warfare. Unlike the honor, valor, and glory that the code of chivalry promises knights who fight in battle, the war depicted on Mars' temple is a destructive force that is evil, dishonest, and deceptive. The pictures do not show valiant knights marching onto the field in full armor, but thieves and pickpurses, farmlands burning, men being murdered in their beds, and battlefields filled with corpses. Furthermore, all of the characters represented—Nero, Julius Caesar, and Mark Anthony–were either tyrants or traitors.

4. What idea unites the characters depicted on the walls of Diana's temple, and how is the theme relevant in the context of the tale?

All of the characters represented on the walls of Diana's temple undergo a transformation: Callisto is transformed into the Great Bear (Ursa Major), Daphne changes into a laurel tree, and Acteon becomes a stag. The depiction of transformation is also supported by the reference to the phase changes of the moon, a symbol of Diana, in lines 1221 – 1222: "Beneath her perfect feet there was a moon, / Waxing it was, but it should wane full soon." As revealed to Emily when she makes a sacrifice, nothing can remain stagnant and fixed in time. Everything must evolve and change. Although Emily prays that her chastity will be preserved for the rest of her life, Diana informs her that she must marry. The reader would expect Diana, who is a defender of virginity and maidenhood, to protect Emily, but Diana is also a fertility goddess. Just as the moon waxes and wanes, maidens must become mothers, and mothers must become crones. Emily's marriage to either Arcita or Palamon is inevitable, and she must go through the phases of life.

5. How does the description of King Lycurgus make him appear a formidable warrior?

Lycurgus is depicted as a warrior who is both physically and materially powerful. His eyes are orange, and his glare is compared to that of a griffon. In addition, the text says that his "limbs [are] large, his muscles hard and strong. / His shoulders broad, his arms both big and long" (1279 – 1280), showing that he is a man of great size and strength. He wears a bearskin, suggesting that he is a great hunter, and instead of four horses pulling his chariot, it is drawn by four white bulls. Not only are white bulls and hounds rare, indicating that Lycurgus is very rich and can afford exotic animals, but bulls are harder to tame than horses, and most likely, the enormous dogs are too. Lycurgus's selection of dangerous animals suggests that he is fierce enough to control even the wildest beasts. The wreath upon his head is "gold, arm-thick, of heavy weight … and set with jewels great, / Of rubies fine and perfect diamonds" (1289 – 1291), showing that Lycurgus is very wealthy. It appears that if Lycurgus cannot defeat a person through battle, he can use his wealth either to buy off an opponent or hire mercenaries to kill him.

6. How is King Emetreus characterized?

Like King Lycurgus, King Emetreus is portrayed as a very wealthy man; however, he is younger and more finely dressed than Lycurgus. His "coat-of-arms [is made from the] cloth of the Tartars, / Begemmed with pearls" (1304 – 1305). His mantle is "close-set with rubies red" (1308). His horse is covered with a "cloth of gold" (1302), and his saddle is "of beaten gold" (1306). In addition, Emetreus also has wild and exotic animals as pets, such as "many tame lions and leopards in their pride" (1330), also demonstrating that he is wealthy and fierce enough to control dangerous animals. However, Emetreus is "five-and-twenty years," (1316) so young that "his beard was well beginning" (1317). He wears a "laurel green" garland upon his brow, suggesting springtime and youth, and to add to Emetreus's innocent and youthful appearance, "his lips [are] full, his colouring sanguine…And a few freckles on his face were seen" (1312 – 1313).

7. What is the tone in lines 1365 – 1404, and how does Chaucer establish it?

The tone of Palamon's speech to Venus is humble and pleading. Chaucer initiates the speech by having Palamon praise Venus and acknowledge her dominance through formal address, calling her "Fairest of fair, O lady mine, Venus, / Daughter of Jove and spouse to Vulcanus, / Thou gladdener of the Mount of Citheron, / By that great love though borest to Adon" (1365-1368). He also tells Venus that she is greater than the god of war, saying, "For thou Mars is the god of war's alarms, / Thy power is so great in Heaven above, / That if it be thy will, I'll have my love" (1392-1394). He then debases himself and openly exposes his vulnerability by asking for pity and for her to hear his "humble prayer" (1370), in the hopes that she will relieve him of his "heavy heart" (1373) and "bitter tears that smart" (1368). Palamon also makes an outrageous and impossible oath in exchange for Venus' favor, saying that he will "wage a war henceforth on chastity" (1380). All of these techniques of appealing to Venus establish the pleading tone of the speech.

8. How do Diana's fires foretell the outcome of the tale?

Of the two fires on Venus's altar, one goes faint, but blazes again; the other dies out all together. The first fire represents Palamon: while he loses the battle and it appears that he has lost Emily too, he eventually gains her in the end. Arcita, the second fire, continues to blaze, showing that he wins the battle, but it dies out at the end, revealing that Arcita dies as well.

9. What reason does Diana give Emily for not granting her request? What does this suggest about the power of the Roman gods?

Diana informs Emily that she will have to marry either Arcita or Palamon because the outcome of the battle and the marriage have already been preordained. Even though it appears that Palamon's request has been granted by Venus, the fact that Diana cannot give Emily her will shows that the Roman gods cannot act contrarily to fate.

10. Why might Mars sympathize with Arcita?

Mars, like Arcita, has experienced the torment and suffering caused by unrequited love. He loved Venus and tried to woo her, but Vulcan, Venus's husband, discovered them. For this reason, Mars is more likely to understand Arcita's plight and have pity on him.

11. What words and phrases in Arcita's speech to Mars reflect ideas of courtly love?

Arcita says that love has left him "much more broken now, / Than ever living creature was" (1537 – 1538), and he accepts that "she who makes me all this woe endure, / Cares not whether I sink or float in this" (1539 – 1540). Arcita is acting like a typical knight in a story of courtly love by pining and tormenting himself over a woman he knows does not love him in return.

12. How does the repetition of the word "mine" in lines 1603 – 1605 function? What is Saturn's tone?

The repetition of the word "mine" shows not only that Saturn takes the blame for occurrences of destruction, but he also takes pride in them. His manner of speech, especially in this section, is authoritative: Saturn is the grandfather of Venus and Mars, and the other gods turn to him for advice.

The Knight's Tale: Part Four

1. What is significant about the day on which the battle takes place?

The battle between Arcita and Palamon takes place on a Tuesday, the day dedicated to Mars, the god of war.

2. What images are presented in the opening lines of Part Four and why?

The imagery in line four shows lords and knights getting ready for battle, dressing themselves and their horses in fine armor. They are "bestriding steeds and…palfreys" (1644), and

> *There could you see the adjusting of harness*
> *So curious and rich, and wroght so well*
> *Of goldsmiths' work, embroidery, and of steel;*
> *The shields, the helmets bright, the gay trappings,*
> *The gold-hewn casques, the coats-of-arms, the rings,*
> *The lords in vestments rich, on their coursers…" (1645 – 1650)*

Chaucer is using this imagery in the beginning of this section to show that the battle between Arcita and Palamon is an honorable, chivalrous one, very different from the type of warfare depicted on the temple of Mars. The decoration and armor are intended to show that the knights in Palamon's and Arcita's retinues are proper medieval knights and that the cloth and steel that they wear is as refined as their honor.

3. What modification does Theseus make to the rules of the battle?

Rather than have the knights fight to the death, Theseus asks that nobody be killed in the battle. If one knight defeats his opponent, the opponent should not be harmed, but brought to a stake on the knight's side of the field. The moment either Palamon or Arcita is killed or taken captive, the tournament is to end.

4. How is the amendment received? Provide some details.

The herald and everyone present at the tournament thinks that Theseus's decision is a wise one, and the diction in this section conveys that idea. His command is called one "of sapience" (1681), and Theseus is referred to as a man "full wise and full discrete" (1686). Furthermore, the herald's announcement is followed by fanfare and jubilation, and the people cry out, "Now God save such a lord, who is so good / He will not have destruction of men's blood" (1713 – 1715), indicating that they approve of the amendment.

5. What techniques does Chaucer use to emphasize the division between Palamon's and Arcita's retinue?

Chaucer writes the following about the knights' arrival on the battlefield:

> *And westward, through the gate of Mars, right hearty,*
> *Arcita and the hundred of his party*
> *With banner red is entering anon;*
> *And in the self-same moment, Palamon,*
> *under Venus, eastward in that place,*
> *With manner white, and resolute of face. (1730 – 1735)*

Three things in this passage help emphasize the division. First, the knights enter on two opposite sides of the amphitheater—Arcita from the west and Palamon from the east. Next, the link between Arcita and Mars and Palamon and Venus is presented once more, referring back to the prayers they said to their chosen deities in Part Three. Finally, the men march in under two different colored flags—white for Palamon and red for Arcita. All of these things show that the knights in the amphitheater are divided into two separate factions.

6. What is the outcome of the battle?

King Emetreus captures Palamon, and even though King Lycurgus tries to rescue the knight, Palamon is brought to the stake. The battle ends and Arcita is the victor. However, Saturn had asked Pluto to create an earthquake, and the earthquake scares Arcita's horse and tosses him. Arcita falls on his head and is critically injured by the saddlebow.

7. How does the outcome of the battle reflect the following statement made by Arcita in Part One?

> We know not what it is we pray for here.
> We fare as he that's drunken as a mouse;
> A drunk man knows right well he has a house,
> But he knows not the way leading thither. (402 – 405)

Palamon and Arcita tried to manipulate their fates by asking for the assistance of the Roman gods, but they did not fully comprehend what they were asking for and the means it would take to reach those ends. Arcita asked to win the battle, but his unexpected death prevents him from winning Emily; Palamon wanted to win Emily's affections, but he does not know that success would mean the death of his cousin and friend. Additionally, the Roman gods are governed by fate. Venus wanted to protect Palamon and have him and Emily fall in love, while Mars wanted Arcita to win the battle. While initially, it appeared as though the two forces would be in opposition forever and nothing would be resolved, even the conflict was part of fate's greater plan. Mars would help Arcita win the battle, but Venus would help Palamon gain Emily's love.

8. What purpose does the repetition of the word "*alas*" serve in lines 1915 – 1919?

The word "alas" is used to show that Arcita is not only suffering and about to die, but is also deeply grieved. These lines are meant to evoke pity in the reader for Arcita.

9. What are two ways in which Chaucer's description of Arcita's death evokes pathos?

Chaucer uses indirect description to evoke pathos. Rather than blatantly state that Arcita is dying, the author shows the reader how Arcita's health is rapidly declining. Arcita's "speech [begins] to fail" (1942), "his feet up to his breast [have] come," (1943), "the cold of death make[s] his body numb" (1944), and "from his two arms the strength/ Was gone out" (1945 – 1946). In addition, Chaucer writes the following about Arcita:

> *Only the intellect, and nothing more*
> *Which dwelt within his heart so sick and sore,*
> *Began to fail now, when the heart felt death,*
> *And his eyes darkened, and he failed of breath. (1947 – 1950)*

By showing how Arcita dies incrementally, emphasizing every symptom of his decline, Chaucer establishes a depressing mood. Furthermore, Chaucer evokes pathos through the reactions of the other characters. He writes, "Shrieked Emily and howled Palamon, / Till Theseus his sister took, anon, / And bore her, swooning for the corpse, away" (1961 – 1963) and lines 1971 – 1980 show that the entire city of Athens is grieved by Arcita's passing. Even if the imagery in the first part of the passage does not make the reader feel sorry for Arcita, the reader may pity the other characters in the play, who have a negative reaction to the death.

10. What words of wisdom does Aegeus give Theseus and the Athenians?

Aegeus reminds Theseus and the Athenians that death is inevitable. Additionally, life is full of suffering and pain, and death is a welcome release.

11. Why does Duke Theseus set Arcita's funeral pyre in the grove?

Arcita died for love, and Duke Theseus thinks it is fitting to set Arcita's funeral pyre in the grove where the knight expressed his love for Emily and where he fought the first battle with Palamon.

12. What does Theseus mean when he says the following?

> The same First Cause and Mover...
> Has stablished in this world, up and down,
> A certain length of days to call their own
> For all that are engendered in this place,
> Beyond the which not one day may they pace,
> Though yet all may that certain time abridge. (2137 – 2142)

The message that Theseus is trying to communicate is that God gave all things on earth, living and non-living, a period of time to live or exist. While those beings and objects cannot defy God by escaping death and destruction, they can choose to shorten their lives.

13. What purpose do lines 2160 – 2169 serve?

Theseus is trying to support his argument that all things are destined to be destroyed. He is referring to human beings in particular. Theseus mentions the oak, the stone, the river, and towns because those objects and places appear to be durable and long lasting; however, they inevitably decay and disappear over time. If things such as rivers and oak trees can be destroyed, fragile human beings are extremely vulnerable to destruction.

14. What does Theseus advise?

Theseus tells the Athenians not to grieve for Arcita because death is both fated and inevitable: the battle could not have turned out differently. Instead, the people should feel glad for the knight because he died at the pinnacle of his fame and will never grow old and forgotten. Theseus tells Emily to marry Palamon, for he has loved her a long time, is of respectable birth, and has suffered enough in love to deserve her merciful affection.

15. Ultimately, what does the Knight's Tale suggest about the knight's character? How does this reflect what the narrator told us about the knight in the General Prologue?

The Knight's Tale is long and a serious Romance, full of classical and mythological allusions and complete with an "important lesson." The teller of such a tale is probably a person of integrity with some education, but largely humorless. He takes the story challenge very seriously but, not being "fun" himself, has great difficulty in being amusing or entertaining for others. In the General Prologue, we were told that the knight was indeed chivalrous, had fought bravely in many key battles, and was so devout in his faith that he had not even taken the time to change his clothes between returning safely from war and embarking on this pilgrimage. Chaucer presented him as good but potentially dull, and the story he tells supports this interpretation.

The Miller's Prologue

1. Who are the speakers in this prologue? What kind of relationships seem to exist between them, and how are they affected by social class?

Everyone is impressed by the Knight's long, weighty tale, with its lofty subject matter. The Host, who is able to converse with all social classes, senses that such a story will be answered with very different kinds of tales. He tries to do the right thing and let a clergyperson (of however dubious quality) go next, but the Miller, a lowborn man, interrupts. The Host seems to understand, if not exactly approve, the rude interruption. The Reeve, though, who is in the Miller's class, but has a very different outlook and appearance, is openly offended, especially by the Miller's insinuation about carpenters. The drunken Miller acquits himself in a mock-gentlemanly fashion, saying he does not see any reason for the Reeve to be angry. Finally, Chaucer finishes writing the whole conversation with an apology to his readers, as if he were a neutral party in the whole affair.

2. Who—Chaucer the author or the pilgrim / narrator—is speaking the apology for the Miller's words? Should we believe that it is sincere?

The pilgrim Chaucer professes to be shocked at the coarse language and subject matter of the Miller's Tale; he says he is only repeating it out of a desire to be accurate. Of course, Chaucer, the author, is the one writing the tale in the first place, so there is a humorous false modesty here.

3. Why does the Host ask the Monk to tell the next tale and tell the Miller to let "some better man first tell [them] another" (22)?

The Host is trying to be deferential and respectful of social class. After the Knight, the Monk is of the next highest degree. The Miller, on the other hand, is a commoner and, as such, should not tell his tale until much later on the journey.

4. What is the Miller's physical and mental condition? What does this suggest about the tale he is about to tell?

   The Miller is drunk. He begins with a disclaimer that, being drunk, he cannot be held responsible for his story or his language. The reader is cued to expect a bawdy and coarse tale, very different from the knight's lofty tale.

5. Why does the Reeve take offense to the subject matter of the Miller's story?

   The Miller says that his tale is going to be about a carpenter, who is made a cuckold when his wife sleeps with a clerk. The subject offends the Reeve because he considers it a personal affront, as if the Miller is calling him a cuckold. The Reeve used to be a carpenter. While the Reeve argues that it is improper to slander a man and his innocent wife, the Miller suspects the real reason the Reeve is angry and protests, "My dearest brother Osewold, / A man who has no wife is no cuckold. / But I say not that therefore you are one" (43 – 45).

6. Why and how does Chaucer distance himself from the tale? In what way is the narrator similar to the Miller whom he apparently condemns?

   Chaucer suspects that "The Miller's Tale" is going to be bawdy and inappropriate, so in the conclusion of "The Miller's Prologue," he says the followings:

   What have I more to say, but that this miller
   Would not his words for any man defer,
   But told his boorish tale in his own style.
   I feel regret repeating it at this while.

   [….]

   do not take what I say
   As meant in evil, for I must rehearse
   All of their tales, be they better or worse.
   For if I don't, I'm false to my subject. (59 – 67)

   Chaucer distances himself from the tale by stating that no man, presumably himself included, could prevent the Miller from telling his story. The narrator acknowledges that the tale is crude, but since he has taken on the task of recording all of the tales told on the pilgrimage, he is under obligation to reiterate "The Miller's Tale." This disclaimer—that the narrator cannot be held responsible for relating an offensive tale—is quite similar to the Miller's own disclaimer that he cannot be responsible for his tale since it is the Host who served the ale that intoxicated the Miller.

The Miller's Tale

1. What are the character types the Miller sets up in the beginning of the story? How do the character types influence what the reader expects of the story?

   There is a rich, but oblivious man; a sneaky intellectual; and a young wife who can barely control her own sexuality. It is pretty clear that the rich man will be cheated on by the other two, but the Miller enjoys adding details to the character descriptions. Perhaps he even got some of these details from the pilgrims around him.

2. What objects in Nicholas's room does Chaucer mention, and what do you think his purpose is for listing them?

   Chaucer writes that Nicholas had a copy of the Almagest *(a book on astrology), several other books, an astrolabe, algorism stones, and a psaltery. It is most likely that Chaucer mentions these items to reinforce the idea that Nicholas is very interested in astrology and music.*

3. What is ironic about Nicholas's hobbies?

   Nicholas is a clerk, and thus, a member of the clergy. Clerks' learning should be centered on Christian doctrine. However, Nicholas is more interested in astrology, music, and secret love than anything else, and two of these hobbies are sinful and contrary to church doctrine. By studying astrology, Nicholas demonstrates that he is a proud man: rather than humbly accepting God's will, he attempts to become as knowledgeable as God and use what he learns to manipulate nature and other people. Through his interest in secret love, Nicholas commits the sins of lust and adultery, not only coveting his neighbors' wives, but sleeping with them too.

4. How does the age difference between John and his wife affect their relationship?

   John is significantly older than his wife. While he is old and no longer vivacious, his wife is young, wild, and beautiful. Because of the age difference between the spouses, John does not trust his wife and thinks that she would be unfaithful to him if given the opportunity. He confines her in their home, afraid that if she were allowed to be free, she would make him a cuckold.

5. How might John's life have been different if he had read Cato?

   Cato advised his readers to "wed similitude" and "according to estate, / For youth and age are often in debate" (42 – 44). If John had read Cato, there is a good chance he would not have married someone so young.

6. How and why does Chaucer describe John's wife in terms of animals?

Chaucer says that John's wife's body is "slim and small" "as [a] weasel's" (48), her skin is "softer than the wool is on a wether" (63), and she plays "like any kid or calf about its dam" (74). Additionally, "[s]kittish she was as is a pretty colt" (77), and she is called "a tender chicken." The animal imagery suggests that John's wife is wild, dominated more by her desires and instinct than her reason. As such, she probably does not follow the strict moral code of Christian doctrine, and this might lead the reader to suspect that she has no qualms about violating her marriage oath by sleeping with Nicholas.

7. Why is the metaphor in lines 69 – 70 significant?

John's wife is compared to gold coins that are kept in the Tower of London. Not only does the metaphor emphasize the wife's value, but it reminds the reader that John has locked her up to prevent him from becoming a cuckold.

8. What causes the carpenter's wife to give in to Nicholas? What does this show about the Miller's opinion of both women and words?

Women can be talked into adultery, the Miller judges; enough persuading and pressure, and they will give in. Her giving in also shows the Miller's suspicion of words, which can be used to persuade a person of anything. From people like the Pardoner, we know that the Miller has good reason to be suspicious.

9. On what condition does John's wife agree to have an affair with Nicholas?

John's wife allows Nicholas to love her only if they keep the affair secret and her husband does not find out.

10. How does Absalom's clothing emphasize his hypocrisy?

Absalom is a parish clerk, and he should live a moral and devout life; however, he lives a licentious, decadent lifestyle. He prefers music over scripture, and he looks lustfully at the beautiful wives in his congregation. The clerk's clothing is representative of his behavior. Absalom wears "red hose fitting famously" (133), and "a coat of blue, in which were let / Holes for the lacings, which were fairly set" (135 – 136). The concealed clothing underneath the surplice represents Absalom's secret, lustful nature, hidden behind a "fine surplice" (137).

11. What, according to the Miller, is the main fault of Absalom?

Absalom is squeamish about farting and haughty about language. It is clear that he, too, will get his comeuppance in this story, just like all the readers who are too good or pure for such matters.

12. What statement about clerks in general is the Miller making through the characters of Absalom and Nicholas?

The Miller is trying to show that clerks, contrary to accepted belief, are not pious, nor do they devote all of their time to learning. They are lecherous and epicurean, valuing sensual pleasure over the pursuit of knowledge.

13. How is the picture of Absalom's wooing Alison a parody of courtly love?

Absalom, being a clerk, knows the "right" way to woo a lady: he appears beneath her window and sings sweet love songs, sends her gifts, and swears loyalty to her forever. But she is an ordinary town girl, and thinks little of these gestures.

14. How does John react to Absalom's serenade?

John appears indifferent to the fact that Absalom is singing to Alison. He asks her whether she hears the singing, and when she replies that she does, he ends the conversation as if he is content with her answer. From that moment on, he does not pay any attention to Absalom's serenading.

15. When Nicholas does not come out of his room, what makes John suspect that he is dead?

In response to Nicholas's absence, John makes the following remark:

> *God send he be not dead so suddenly!*
> *This world is most unstable, certainly;*
> *I saw, today, the corpse being bourne to kirk*
> *Of one who, but last Monday, was at work. (240 – 243)*

John bases his thought that Nicholas is dead on a past experience. He knows that life is fragile, and even people who are in good health can pass away suddenly.

16. How does the answer to the previous question compare to Theseus's speech in "The Knight's Tale"?

The sentiment behind John's statement is almost identical to Theseus's speech. After the death of Arcita, Theseus tells the Athenians that everything is given a limited time in which to exist or live. Even the strongest, most stable things fall to destruction, such as a river and an oak tree. John acknowledges that "the world is most unstable" (241), and even healthy, strong individuals, like the oak tree, can die.

17. What role does astrology play in Nicholas' plot?

In fact, astrology does not affect anything, but Nicholas, with his "secret" knowledge, can pretend that it does. The Miller shows that, although he may not have such esoteric understanding, he knows how it may be abused.

18. In what way does John defend ignorance and attack knowledge?

John says, "Aye, blessed always be the ignorant man, / Whose creed is all he ever has to scan!" (288 – 289). According to him, the only thing that a man needs to know is religious doctrine, for everything else makes him susceptible to damnation. John believes that Nicholas's state supports his opinion: Nicholas studied astrology and learned more than God intended him to know, and that is the reason why he fell into a comatose state.

19. What motive does Nicholas have for telling John not to disclose the secret to Robin and Jill?

While Nicholas knows that John is foolish and gullible, it is possible that his servants are more intelligent. John might be able to be manipulated into believing that the second flood is coming, but other, smarter people might see it for the ruse it is.

20. What does Nicholas command John to do?

Nicholas tells John to go into town and procure three kneading-vats, or any buoyant tubs. He is then to stock the tubs with enough provisions for one day, and hang them from the rafters, remembering to put an axe inside the boats to cut the rope when the flood comes. He is also to cut a hole in the roof so they can leave when the storm has passed.

21. What is John's first response when Nicholas tells him about the flood? What might this say about him?

John is upset not about his own death, but the prospect of losing Alison. This may be because he is jealous, and she is his dearest possession, but he may also be genuinely concerned about her. Either way, the Miller portrays him as made more foolish by love.

22. In the chronology of events, does the exchange between Absalom and the monk take place before or after Nicholas and Alison sleep together? How do you know?

The conversation between Absalom and the monk occurs before Nicholas and Alison sleep together. According to the text, Absalom is in Osney talking to the monk on Monday (472), the same day that the second flood is supposed to occur (446). After Absalom learns that John is out of town and makes plans to kiss Alison, he goes home, sleeps for two hours, and wakes "when time of the first cock-crow was come" (500), around the same time that "the bells for lauds beg[in] to ring" (468) while Alison and Nicholas are in bed together.

23. What techniques does Chaucer use to make Absalom's speech to Alison in lines 511 – 520 comical?

Chaucer makes Absalom's speech comical by using an abundance of ridiculous metaphors. Absalom compares Alison to a "honeycomb" (511), "cinnamon" (512), and a "fair bird" (512), and compares himself to "the lamb [longing] for [its] mother's teat"(517) and a maid without an appetite (520). The metaphors play off ones found in tales and poems of courtly love, but they are unique and inappropriate enough to mock the style.

24. What happens when Absalom goes to kiss Alison?

At the time Absalom goes to kiss Alison, when it is still dark outside and he cannot see, Alison sticks her rear out the window, and Absalom kisses it. When he figures out what happened, he scrubs his lips clean with almost anything he can find.

25. What does Chaucer mean when he says that Absalom was "healed of all his malady" (570)?

Absalom has fallen out of love with Alison; now he wants to get revenge on her for the crude trick she played.

26. In Absalom's second speech to Alison, lines 605 – 609, what shows that his feelings toward her have altered?

Absalom's second speech lacks all of the doggerel and ridiculous metaphors that were present in the previous one. He uses only one adequate metaphor, comparing Alison to a "sweet rose-leaf" (605). Instead of professing his love for her in a long speech, he gets straight to the point and tells her that he has brought her a ring, which he will give her in exchange for a kiss.

27. What happens at the end of the tale?

When Absalom asks for another kiss, Nicholas puts his rear out the window. Instead of kissing it, Absalom scorches Nicholas's backside with the hot coulter. In alarm, Nicholas screams, "Help! Water! Water! Help!" (628) and John, thinking that the second flood has come, cuts the rope of his tub and falls to the ground.

28. Do the neighbors feel sorry for John? Should they?

John's neighbors laugh at him and call him crazy, showing him absolutely no sympathy. Since "The Miller's Tale" is a fabliau and one of the common messages presented in this genre is that old men should not marry young women, the reader is expected to feel as though John got what he deserved.

29. In what key ways are the Knight's and Miller's tales similar? In what key ways are they different?

The two tales are similar in that they are both romances about rivals in love. They are different in that, while the Knight's tale is a lofty, idealistic, chivalric Romance, the Miller's tale is bawdy, its theme almost parodying the Knight's.

The Wife of Bath's Prologue

1. What are the reader's first impressions of the Wife of Bath? How might this character imply Chaucer's feminist sympathies?

The Wife of Bath at first appears loud, crass, and uncouth—certainly not at all "lady-like." She is also bold and opinionated. Although, as a woman, she does not have access to books or positions of power, she insists that she can use her own experience and mind to assert her autonomy. That Chaucer gives her this boldness shows that he considers women able to think for themselves and defy authority.

2. How are the Wife of Bath's religious claims humorous? Why has Chaucer placed her in the context of the other characters?

The Wife of Bath believes she is a religious woman and claims extensive knowledge of the Bible. All of her knowledge, however, is just a little "off," either factually inaccurate or interpreted in unorthodox manners. For all that, however, she is a sincere person of integrity, a strong contrast to the hypocritical clergy men and women Chaucer includes among the pilgrims.

3. What does the Wife of Bath say that reveals she has at least an elementary knowledge of scripture?

In her argument about why a woman should be allowed to marry more than one husband, the Wife of Bath makes several allusions to the Bible. She cites the Book of Genesis when she says, "God bade us to increase and multiply" (26), and she mentions several men in the Bible who had more than one wife: King Solomon, Lamech, Abraham, and Jacob. She does, however, misquote scripture and misstate various stories' intended lessons. Chaucer leaves it ambiguous whether she truly does not understand or simply chooses to ignore the actual meaning of the verses she cites.

4. Why would the Wife of Bath cite scripture so much when she has claimed that her expertise is based on "experience"?

The Wife of Bath is quite possibly appealing to her fellow pilgrims, especially the clergy, who have (or at least claim) extensive knowledge of the Bible and Church doctrine.

5. What argument did someone once give the Wife of Bath about why individuals should not marry more than once? Where is the humor in her response?

   The person interpreted the fact that Jesus only went to one wedding (the wedding at Cana; John 2:1 – 11) to mean that a person should only marry once. In another story (from John 4:18), Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the man she is with is not her husband; he also knows that she has had five previous husbands. The humor in this passage arises from the Wife's confusion over what, exactly, the "rules" prescribed by the Bible are, and by her lawyerly attempt to get around them.

6. What, according to the Wife of Bath, is the value of having been married multiple times?

   The Wife of Bath says that she, like a craftsman, has gained skill at marriage from being a wife to so many husbands:

   > *Different schools make divers perfect clerks,*
   > *Different methods learned in sundry works*
   > *Make the good workman perfect, certainly.*
   > *Of five full husband tutoring am I. (45 – 48)*

   As a woman, she does not have the opportunity to learn a trade, so she becomes good at the only thing available to her: marriage.

7. Explain the Wife of Bath's views on chastity and virtue. How do they fit in with her views on authority / experience?

   The Wife of Bath says that chastity is a virtue that only the most perfect and devout people can maintain. Though some people are intended to remain virgins all of their lives, others must get married and procreate; otherwise, there would be no reproduction and subsequent generations of men. Again, the Wife is presuming to argue with or interpret the words handed down from high sources of authority, though she is "only" a woman. She is also questioning the traditional assumption that chastity is the most important virtue for a woman.

8. Explain the Wife of Bath's metaphor involving cups.

   A house needs different kinds of cups—some wood, some gold. The Wife of Bath considers wifehood (as opposed to virginity) the equivalent of a wooden cup—not perfect or refined, but useful and necessary.

9. Similarly, how does the Wife of Bath compare women to bread?

   Maids are like bread made from "white wheat-seed" (147), while wives are like barley bread. Although the white bread is preferred, barley bread is also refreshing and enjoyable. The Wife of Bath is saying that while the Bible promotes chastity, it does not prohibit marriage.

10. How does the wife use the metaphor of cups and bread to justify her behavior?

Both metaphors suggest that a woman is either a virgin or wife because God made her that way; she could not have avoided the fate. Just as the cup is made of wood or gold and the bread is made of white wheat seed or barley, the Wife of Bath is, by nature, not a virgin. She is not responsible for her behavior and her actions, but acts according to her pre-assigned role.

11. What argument involving the body does the Wife make for a fully sexual marriage?

The Wife plays on the idea that all things, including parts of the body, have a purpose. The genitals keep a person healthy by allowing waste to leave the body, and they also distinguish men from women. But they have another purpose: they give people pleasure. They are "blessed instrument[s]" of this purpose.

12. What is humorous about the Wife's interpretation of Jesus's words?

The Wife says that Christ's words about what to do to get to heaven do not apply to everyone—only people who want to live perfect lives. Since she does not want *to be perfect, she can disregard his teaching.*

13. In lines 158 – 159, the Wife of Bath says, "a husband I will get / Who shall be my debtor and my thrall." How does a husband become indebted to his wife?

The Wife of Bath says, "I have the power during all my life/ Over [my husband's] own good body, and not he" (162 – 163). The reason she gives for her owning his body is that the Apostle Paul commands husbands to love their wives. Furthermore, according to marriage conventions, every woman should have a dowry, a sum of money that is given to her spouse when he and she are married. The Wife feels that with the dowry she purchases a husband, and he must repay her through sexual intercourse.

14. Why does Chaucer include the exchange between the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath?

When the Wife of Bath announces, "a husband I will get / Who shall be my debtor and my thrall," the Pardoner interjects that he was about to marry, but now, knowing that a man's body becomes his wife's debtor, he will not. The Wife of Bath tells him to wait: she has worse news about marriage in store. In the General Prologue, Chaucer describes the Pardoner as slight, with a reedy voice. He carries a bag of fake relics that he uses to trick people out of money. The Wife of Bath, on the other hand, is an overwhelming presence: she is a large woman, dressed in rich, bright clothing, who talks and laughs loudly. From these descriptions, we can assume that the Pardoner, who we know is only interested in enriching himself, is sincerely upset to learn that marriage is a bad deal for the husband. The Wife may be mocking him in a subtle way by taking his distress at face value and warning him that it gets even worse.

15. Analyze the structure of the relationship between men and women as the Wife of Bath understands it. How is it like other systems of debt and obligation?

If a man is unable to please his wife sexually (because, for instance, he is too old), he has not paid his "debt" to her. Like a banker or a feudal lord, she can use this debt to control him. The Wife of Bath, knowing her husbands had little stamina, made them "swink" (sweat in labor, just as a peasant in a lord's "thrall" would in a field).

16. The Wife of Bath says, "Now hearken how I bore me properly, / All you wise wives that well can understand" (228 – 229). How many audiences are there here, and how many storytellers?

Chaucer, the author, is speaking to us, the audience, through his persona (also called Chaucer), who is recounting the stories of each pilgrim (another reason for the interruption by the Pardoner—to remind us of all these levels). Within these two enfolding narratives is the narrative of the Wife of Bath, who is addressing her audience, the other pilgrims on the journey, but also "all…wise wives." Within this narrative is the voice of her imagined younger self, who is, in turn, both taking on the voice of the husband she is addressing and responding to his imaginary accusations.

17. Why does the Wife of Bath quote what she said to her husband?

She wants to give other wives an example of how they should "swear the crow is mad, and in this mood/ Call up for witness" (236 – 237). In order to gain control over their husbands, women should use the talents that God has given them—lying and deception—to accuse their husbands of wrongdoings they did not commit.

18. What accusations does the Wife of Bath make against Jenkin? How do these accusations reappear in the tale itself?

The Wife of Bath accused her old husbands of believing all women were guilty. Some of the beliefs she attributes to them could be summarized as follows:

- *A rich and beautiful woman is coveted by several men, and may be tempted into being unfaithful to her husband; ugly women desire every man they see, and are also unfaithful because no one will satisfy them.*

- *All women are argumentative, proud, and desirous of praise.*

- *Unlike livestock and material goods, women cannot be "tested" before marriage. They reveal their hidden vices only after they become wives.*

"The Tale of the Wife of Bath" is an exemplum, illustrating themes and concepts addressed in the preceding sermon. For instance, she complained that a husband would find fault with his wife whether she was ugly or beautiful. In "The Tale of the Wife of Bath," the knight is manipulated into marrying a hideous old hag, and he is made to choose whether he would have her be pretty and coveted by all men, or ugly and faithful to her husband. Like Jenkin, though, the knight eventually gives his wife total freedom.

19. What are some of the Wife of Bath's preoccupations? What is the significance of this portrayal of her character in the context of these tales?

The Wife of Bath cares about money, clothes, sex, and young men. These are actually the same, or similar, to the concerns of most of the other characters—especially members of the clergy. Chaucer is developing the outrageously unrepentant Wife of Bath as a foil for the hypocritical Church persons.

20. According to the Wife of Bath, what are women's natural strengths? Do they suggest that women are naturally dominant or naturally submissive?

The Wife of Bath says that women's natural strengths are "deceit, weeping, and spinning" (405). These qualities make a woman naturally submissive, for they are all passive behaviors. Instead of aggressively pursuing an interest or righting a wrong, women must act passively and deceive their husbands into doing their will. They openly weep, demonstrating their weakness, in order to get men to pity them. Last but not least, spinning is stereotypically a woman's work, for a woman is supposed to remain in the private sphere of influence, tend the household, and not participate in public life. Historically, women's work was considered less important than men's.

21. How does Chaucer create pathos in lines 473 – 484?

Chaucer has, up to this point, presented the Wife of Bath as a jolly figure who regrets very little. This glimpse of her more introspective side is more poignant because of contrast with the rest of her words. It also lends some gravity to her warning to the Pardoner about the dangers of marriage. Clearly, marriage was something forced upon her at first, and something that she soon realized was her only means of survival. But she spent her youth with old men she did not love, and it is now gone.

22. What does the Wife of Bath mean when she says, "I made, of the same wood, a staff most gross" (488).

The Wife of Bath means to say that she used the way her fourth husband tortured her to torment him in return. He had several mistresses and made her feel jealous, so she pretended to have secret lovers.

23. Summarize the view of love that the Wife of Bath has developed through her experiences. What are its main points? Overall, is it positive or negative? How does Jenkin fit into the pattern?

The Wife of Bath does not believe in the kind of love described by the Knight. To her, love is a game in which two partners each try to get something—usually sex or money. Women only love men who mistreat or ignore them. Because women are naturally disadvantaged in love and marriage, they should use whatever tricks they have to get the best out of a situation. The Wife of Bath did not marry Jenkin for money, but because he was young and attractive. She regretted it when he became abusive, but also says she loved him most of all.

24. What does the Wife of Bath admit is at the root of her outward show of piety? What hints of this trait were given in the General Prologue? Again, how is Chaucer developing her as a foil for some of the other characters?

The Wife of Bath unabashedly admits that she attended pageants and other religious festivities in order to flaunt her red skirt. Thus, when we remember that the Wife rushed to be the first in church in line to give her offering, we realize that she might have been more eager to be seen than to present her offering. We are also reminded of the Monk and the Nun, who were both more concerned with physical appearance than in internal morality. This key difference is that the Wife of Bath does not really claim to be better.

25. In what ways does the Wife of Bath exemplify the "wicked woman" of medieval morality plays? How is Chaucer's use of this conventional character humorous or ironic?

The medieval wicked woman was an unabashed sinner, sexually voracious, a temptress. She often introduced herself with a confession—the story of her life focusing her many sins. The Wife of Bath's prologue is just such a confession, and the Wife's many sins clearly suggest this medieval stock character. The humorous aspect of Chaucer's "wicked woman" is that she is clearly a comic character and someone with whom the reader sympathizes and whom the reader likes.

26. In lines 607 – 624, how does the text address the motif of fate and predestination?

The Wife of Bath does not take responsibility for her lustful behavior but argues that she is passionate by nature and fate. Her physiognomy makes her lecherous, since all gap-toothed people are ardent lovers, and since she was born under the sign of Taurus, which is dominated by Venus, she is more inclined to be romantic. In addition, since Mars was in the constellation Taurus at the time of her birth, the Wife's "brain is Martian," (614) and it gives her "sturdy hardiness" (614), making her bold and aggressive.

27. What is the primary way Jenkin differed from the Wife of Bath's previous husbands?

Instead of being manipulated by the Wife of Bath and falling under her control, Jenkin manipulated her. In fact, he used some of the Wife's own techniques against her by accusing her of being wicked, as well as telling her stories of women who disobeyed their husbands and were punished.

28. What is the connection between sex and books, according to the Wife of Bath?

The Wife of Bath says that scholars are represented by the god Mercury, while lovers (especially women) are under the sign of Venus. When they are too old to perform sexually, the clerks write books attacking the "labors of Venus."

29. What unites all of the stories within Jenkin's book? Could Jenkin's view of women be said to be the same as Chaucer's?

The women in the stories all acted out of uncontrolled lust, appetite, or greed, or used their sexual powers to get their way. For instance, Eve ate and tempted Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge, damning all of mankind until they were redeemed by Christ's crucifixion; Delilah, for money, cut Samson's hair and destroyed all of his strength; Deianira, trying to win Hercules's love back, caused him to set himself on fire; and Clytemnestra, with her lover, murdered Agamemnon, her husband. The Wife of Bath could be said to have all these qualities, and yet Chaucer, unlike Jenkin, does not view her in a negative way.

30. What is the purpose of the angry exchange between the Friar and the Summoner?

By allowing these two characters to intrude in the Wife of Bath's tale, Chaucer again reminds his audience of the conceit of this collection. The tale is not to be read at face value as one story in an anthology; rather, this is a story-within-a-story told by a fictional persona.

31. Why does the Wife of Bath remain an ambiguous character? What are some of the possible interpretations of her persona?

The Wife of Bath remains difficult to interpret with absolute certainty because she is a humorous character—at times almost a parody. But there are instances in which she is emotionally complex and sympathetic. She contradicts some typical female stereotypes while reinforcing others. Also, she admits several times to being a liar, so it is impossible to take anything she says—even whether or not she has truly been married five times—at face value. Interpretations of her character range from her being the first feminist in English literature to her being a misogynist satire of woman's fickleness and infidelity.

"The Tale of the Wife of Bath"

1. What is the significance of the setting of this tale?

The story takes place during the reign of King Arthur, and Christianity is still in its infancy. Faeries still wander the earth, and magic still exists. This time and place properly set the tale, for it is familiar to the Britons, whose kings supposedly descend from Arthur, and the setting is understood to be mythical. Therefore, the "loathly lady" plot would not seem out of place and unrealistic, since stories set in this period frequently contained supernatural elements.

2. How does the Wife of Bath use hyperbole for humor in the opening to her tale?

   She says that limiters and friars are so common that they are "thick as motes…in a bright sunbeam," then goes on to list every place these men can be found: "halls, chambers, kitchens, ladies' bowers, / cities and towns and castles and high towers, / Villages, barns, cowsheds, and dairies…" That the list takes up three lines underscores the commonness of the opportunistic clergy. In addition, they are in "ladies' bowers," comically suggesting that clerics are as sexually licentious as were pagan beings.

3. How does King Arthur's character compare to Duke Theseus's, and what do the similarities between the two rulers say about ideal leadership?

   Both King Arthur and Duke Theseus are wise and just rulers. While they forcefully defend the helpless and punish criminals, they are also able to take advice from others, listen to reason, and exercise mercy.

4. What does the interaction between King Arthur and the ladies, in addition to the interaction between Duke Theseus and the women, say about the correlation between gender and how well a person can sympathize with others?

   While Duke Theseus wanted to kill Arcita and Palamon, and King Arthur wanted to execute the knight, the women pitied the criminals and asked their leaders to be merciful. Based upon events in "The Knight's Tale" and "The Tale of the Wife of Bath," it appears that women are more sympathetic than men.

5. How do the wrong answers to the queen's question introduce stereotypes about women? Does the Wife of Bath agree or disagree with these stereotypes?

   The wrong answers that the knight receives, all suggesting things that women want, suggest that women are vain, deceitful, and lustful. Some of the answers given are "riches" (69), "fair fame" (70), "prettiness" (70) and "lust abed" (71), in addition to flattery, freedom, and the ability to win every argument, regardless of whether a woman is right or wrong. The Wife does not disagree that women want these things, but suggests that there is something of greater importance that women desire more.

6. What comic trait does the Wife of Bath's digression about King Midas illustrate?

   Just as, earlier, the Wife of Bath inaccurately cited and interpreted scripture, here she completely misstates the Midas tale to "prove" that women cannot be discreet. In the actual tale, it is Midas's barber *who alone knows the king's secret. Thus, it is a man who cannot keep the secret.*

7. Why does Chaucer juxtapose the image of ladies dancing with the appearance of the old hag?

   The fact that the women magically vanish when the knight approaches suggests that they are faeries, and the appearance of the old woman right after they vanish hints that she, too, is magical and might even be a faerie herself.

8. When the old woman makes the deal with the knight, she tells him, "Plight me your troth here, hand in hand" (152). Why does she appeal to the knight in this manner?

   The old woman knows that according to the code of chivalry, a knight may never break an oath. If she gets the knight to swear an oath to her, he will be sure to keep it. For this same reason, the main character of this story plans to return to the queen, even though he has no answer for her and will be executed.

9. What truth about gentility does the metaphor in lines 282 – 289 reveal? What irony is there in Chaucer's giving this observation to the Wife of Bath?

   When a fire is lit in a home, and the home's doors and windows are shut, even though the fire cannot be seen by an observer outside the house, it still burns. Virtuous living, when people are truly noble, is like the fire inside the house. True "nobles" do not expect praise and recognition for their good deeds: they do good things because it is God's will. They would even do them secretly. The Wife of Bath is actually the opposite *of the person she is describing. She has an outward appearance of piety—her pilgrimages, her church attendance—but her inner life is very different.*

10. According to the text in lines 356 – 359, why would old age and ugliness be more desirable than youth and beauty? Where have similar sentiments been uttered in the text before, and what is the relevance of this connection?

    The old woman argues that ugliness is a virtue, for an ugly woman is less likely to be unfaithful to her husband. A similar sentiment appeared in the Wife of Bath's Prologue, and was the moral of the Miller's tale.

11. In what ways is the Tale of the Wife of Bath feminist? In what ways does it reinforce misogynist stereotypes?

    Not only does the tale illustrate women's control over men—the knight finds his marital happiness in yielding to his wife's control. Likewise, when the knight is arrested for his rape of the beautiful woman, it is the Queen who sentences him, and it is through women that he is educated and redeemed. The tale might be read as ultimately misogynist, however, because it emphasizes the stereotype of the woman's value being connected to her beauty and obedience.

"The Pardoner's Prologue"

1. How is the moral of the Pardoner's Tale ironic?

   The Pardoner preaches, "Radix malorum est cupiditas*," or "Greed is the root of all evils." The Pardoner himself is greedy and commits much fraud in pursuit of his own personal wealth.*

2. How does the Pardoner use Latin to take advantage of the common people?

   The commoners do not know any Latin, but the Pardoner knows a few odd phrases and uses them to make his sermon appear legitimate. In pre-Reformation Europe, the mass and all rites and rituals were delivered in Latin. The Bible had been translated into Latin, but not into any vernacular language. The average, uneducated person had no way of knowing what any of it meant. The common people do not understand the Latin phrases the Pardoner uses, but because he is able to convince them that he knows Latin, he gains a position of dignity and respect.

3. If it were not already known that the Pardoner preaches to commoners, what about the Pardoner's relics would suggest this fact?

   The miracles that the Pardoner's false relics supposedly perform all have to do with farming and husbandry. The sheep's shoulder bone, when put into well water that is then given to the livestock to drink, cures the animals of "pox and scab and every other sore" (30). Furthermore, if the farmer drinks this well water "every week, and that before cock-crow, / And before breakfast" (34 – 35), "[h]is beasts and all his store shall multiply" (37). The mitten the pardoner has guarantees the person who puts his hand in it "increased harvest of his grain, / After he's sown, be it of wheat or oats" (46 – 47). All of these miracles show that the Pardoner preaches to the commoners, the working class freemen who live off the land.

4. According to the Pardoner, what seems to be the most common sin committed by humans, after avarice? How is this revealed in the text?

   Judging by two appeals he makes in his sermons, the Pardoner believes that female adultery is common. He claims that the sheep's shoulder bone, when soaked in well water, creates a drink that cures a man of jealousy. He also says that any woman in his audience who has "made her husband into a cuckold… shall have no power and no grace/ To offer to [his] relics" (54 – 56).

5. How is the simile in lines 68 – 69, "upon the folk I beck, / As does a dove that's sitting on a barn," relevant in establishing the Pardoner's character?

   The simile comparing the Pardoner to a dove is ironic, and it helps to emphasize the Pardoner's hypocrisy. A dove is considered a holy bird. According to the Old Testament, Noah sent out a dove after the flood, and when it did not return, Noah knew that the water had subsided and the dove had found land. The dove also symbolizes the Holy Spirit, for when Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came down to him in the form of a dove. The dove simile helps to amplify the Pardoner's hypocritical behavior and show that he presents himself as a holy man when, in fact, he is not. He is just as sinful—if not more so—than the people to whom he preaches, and he uses his authority as low-ranking member of the clergy to trick people into giving him money.

6. How does the Pardoner compare to the Wife of Bath when it comes to piety? Are they equally hypocritical? Explain your answer.

   The Wife of Bath's sins have not hurt as many people as the Pardoner's. The Pardoner actually tricks people out of money; the Wife of Bath threw fits around her husbands to get them to do what she wanted.

7. Why, in particular, does the Pardoner preach against avarice?

   Ironically, the Pardoner preaches against avarice because such preaching encourages people to give him money. In order to prove that they are not greedy, these people give their money to the Church. As the Pardoner says, "Of avarice and of all such wickedness / Is all my preaching, thus to make them free/ With offered pence, the which pence come to me" (72 – 74).

8. How does the Pardoner suppress opposition to himself and others in his trade?

   In lines 84 – 94, the Pardoner says that when anyone opposes him and his profession, he insults the opposition in his sermons. While the Pardoner never directly states the offender's name, he suggests the person's identity through clues, then insults him or her before the entire congregation.

9. What type of stories does the Pardoner say his listeners prefer? What might this say about Chaucer's selection of stories in *The Canterbury Tales*?

   The Pardoner's listeners like to hear old stories. They are easy to remember, and common people love to retell them. Incidentally, almost all of the tales told in The Canterbury Tales *are adapted from pre-existing texts, themes, and genres. It is possible that Chaucer chose these particular stories because, like the laypeople the Pardoner refers to, his audience will remember and repeat them.*

10. What is the Pardoner's tone throughout his prologue?

    The Pardoner's tone is proud and boastful. He admits that he is a sinner and that he deceives unsuspecting laymen into giving him money; however, he does not apologize for his actions. On the contrary, the Pardoner is proud of himself for being able to take advantage of others, and he brags about the rhetorical and theatrical techniques he uses in his sermons that prompt people to give him money even though they are starving.

"The Pardoner's Tale"

1. What is ironic about the way in which the Pardoner begins his tale?

   The Pardoner begins his tale by swearing to the love of Christ after he has delivered a 200-line diatribe against sins, culminating in a condemnation of swearing, which, according to the Pardoner, is a more severe sin than even murder.

2. To what effect does Chaucer use biblical allusion in the beginning of the tale?

   The Pardoner is trying to convince his audience that drunkenness leads to evil, and he uses biblical allusions to support his argument. Because he was drunk, King Lot unknowingly slept with his daughters. Herod, who got drunk on wine at a feast, absentmindedly ordered his men to kill John the Baptist. Most of the tales already told have used biblical allusions in one way or another, each, however, with a slightly different view and interpretation of the text(s) cited.

3. How does the Pardoner blame gluttony for the fall of man?

   The Pardoner, whether honestly mistaken or intentionally misleading his audience, argues that since Adam and Eve's sin involved eating, it was gluttony that led to their downfall.

4. How does the passage between lines 258 and 276 emphasize the different ways the young and the old view Death?

   Up to this point in the story, Death has been presented as an "unseen thief" (213), a horrible villain who murders the youth and needs to be stopped. However, until line 258, the reader has been able to understand Death only through the perspective of the young revelers. The old man presents an opposing view of Death, a being who can relieve the old and infirm of their suffering. The old man says that "restless [he his] wretched way must make" (266); while he actively seeks Death, he cannot find him.

5. In what way is the old man's directive to go up the "crooked way" (299) an example of a pun?

   The word "crooked," in addition to literally describing the path, also means "sinful" or "wretched," suggesting that the revelers, if they take that particular path, will only meet their destruction.

6. How do the following lines compare to the paraphrase of Juvenal in "The Pardoner's Prologue"?

   For men would say that we were robbers strong,
   And we'd, for our own treasure, hang ere long.
   This treasure must be carried home by night
   All prudently and slyly, out of sight. (327 – 330)

   Juvenal said that rich men have everything to fear, while poor men fear nothing. People without money or anything for thieves to covet may be carefree, but those who are wealthy must always fear that someone will steal their possessions or cause them harm. The revelers are aware of this point, and they are paranoid that if they are seen with the treasure, harm will come to them; thus, they must wait until nightfall to carry their gold home.

7. How does dramatic irony raise the suspense at the end of the story?

The reader, though not the characters, knows that the two men staying with the gold are planning to murder the third, and that the third man has poisoned the wine that he will give to his two friends. The reader anxiously waits to see how the end of the story will play out, suspecting that at least one person will die.

8. How do situational and verbal irony conclude the tale?

In the beginning of the tale, the revelers set out to find and kill Death, who stands accused of murdering the young men and women in town. The three main characters search for Death as if he were a real person, and the old man directs them up the "crooked way" (299), where he says they can find Death under a tree. However, the revelers do not find a character or an allegorical figure, but their own deaths.

9. How does the epilogue negate the message presented in the Pardoner's sermon?

Before telling his story, the Pardoner confesses to the other pilgrims that his relics are fake, and the only reason he preaches against the evils of avarice is that it makes the listeners prove that they are generous by giving money to him. However, because the Pardoner's sermon is memorized and rehearsed, he automatically concludes his tale by telling his listeners that they are sinful and need to make an offering to be absolved. He forgets that he has already told the other pilgrims that he, himself, is extremely greedy and deceitful; thus, the message of the tale—that "Greed is the root of all evils"—is completely negated, for the narrator is avaricious, and if he *does not trust the veracity of the moral, how can the reader/listener be expected to?*

10. Why is the Knight the one who breaks up the argument between the Host and the Pardoner?

The Knight is the highest-ranking person on the pilgrimage, and the other pilgrims show deference to him and accept his authority. He is also the most moral and just.

11. What, according to the Pardoner, is sometimes an unintended result of his sermons?

Although he himself only cares about money, he sometimes accidentally saves people from a life of sin and avarice.

"The Nun's Priest's Prologue"

1. What has been the nature of "The Monk's Tale"? Upon what can we base our inference?

The pilgrims' reaction to the tale, and the Host's instructions to the Nun's Priest suggest that the Monk has told a devastating and tragic tale about people in high places who lost everything.

2. What is the significance of the phrase "but for the clinking of the bells / That from [the Monk's] bridle hang on either side" (28 – 29).

   These lines refer to the description of the Monk in "The General Prologue":

   And when he rode men might his bridle hear
   A-jingling in the whistling wind as clear,
   Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell
   Where this brave monk was master of the cell. (5 – 8)

   One of the key points the Monk's profile makes is that the Monk is very worldly, and rather than practicing self-denial, as his order dictates, the Monk dresses elaborately and frequently goes hunting. In the context of "The Nun's Priest's Prologue," this comment by the Host is intended to remind the reader of the Monk's hypocritical nature. While it appears that he has told a tale about the insecurity of wealth and the ability of all people to fall from fortune, the Monk is not in the position to teach a moral lesson on greed. It is also no coincidence that the Host asks the Monk to tell a tale of hunting, which once again alludes to the Monk's hypocrisy.

3. What might the Nun's Priest's horse suggest about the man's character?

   The Nun's Priest's horse is "both foul and lean" (47), but he serves the priest well. The fact that the priest's horse is thin suggests that, unlike the Monk, the priest lives, as Church doctrine dictates, a life of humility and self-denial. He is also most likely kind to the animal, since the horse serves him well.

"The Nun's Priest's Tale"

1. From the opening of the Nun's Priest's Tale, what kind of story does it seem to be? What kind of characters does it have, and are they like the characters in the previous stories?

   It has a poor widow who lives on a small farm—the people and places are those familiar to the Nun's Priest and others from daily village life. Unlike the Knight's Tale and the Wife of Bath's Tale, it has no legendary figures (Theseus, King Arthur), so it seems less likely that this will be an epic or a romance.

2. What is the most likely motivation for the Priest to begin his tale with a description of the widow and her home? What type of story does the Priest's audience most likely expect?

   The Host has said he wants a story that is the opposite *of a tragedy—a story about someone who has nothing and rises in station. This is the most likely reason the Priest begins his story with a description of the worthy widow, who is content with the little that she has. Because of the Host's instructions and this beginning, the other pilgrims probably expect a fairy-tale-type story about the widow's rise in fortune.*

3. Given the Priest's description of Chanticleer, what vice might we suspect the rooster will posses?

   Because Chanticleer is so beautiful and talented, the reader may well expect him to be vain.

4. As the Priest develops the relationship between Chanticleer and Pertelote, what common theme emerges?

   Once again Chaucer returns to the theme of what makes a good husband and/or a good wife.

5. How does the narrator create humor in Chanticleer and Pertelote's conversation about the dream?

   Although Chanticleer and Pertelote are chickens, their conversation is high-flown, with references to theology and medical theories. Chanticleer does not just say he dreamed of a fox; he goes into a detailed description of what the "beast" looked like. Pertelote can quote Cato on dreams, and Chanticleer can refute her.

6. What logical fallacy does Pertelote resort to in order to assuage Chanticleer's fear?

   Pertelote uses Ad Verecundium *(an appeal to authority) to diminish Chanticleer's fear. This fallacy is the argument that relies on a third party—presumably an expert—for support. Pertelote tries to convince Chanticleer that his nightmare does not foretell his death because Cato says that people should not be troubled by their dreams.*

7. What links the two stories that Chanticleer tells Pertelote?

   In both of Chanticleer's stories, a person has a dream of death—either the dreamer's own or a friend's.

8. In lines 406 – 409, how does the allusion reveal an aspect of Russel the fox's character?

   All of the people mentioned in these four lines—Judas Iscariot, Ganelon, and Sinon—were traitors who deceived a person or group of people, resulting in their demise. This allusion suggests that Russel is an artful, treacherous individual who means to hurt Chanticleer by means of cunning and trickery. The text also says that he has formed "a fine premeditated plot" (397) and is "[w]aiting his chance on Chanticleer to fall" (403).

9. What is it that the great clerks in lines 414 – 430 debate, and how does this passage solidify a theme in the tale?

The great clerks mentioned in this passage (Augustine, Boethius, and Bradwardine) debate whether human actions and their outcomes are predestined, or whether humans have free will and can control their future. Earlier in the tale, Chanticleer had a dream that he would be eaten by a fox, and although Pertelote belittled her husband for believing that his nightmare foretold his death, it appears to be coming true: Russel the fox is plotting an attack on the rooster. The passage broadens the theme of this tale from how dreams can reveal the future to how all events in life are predestined. Prophesies obtained from dreams are only an effect of predestination, for if humans have free will, their future would not be determined; hence, nothing could be revealed in dream or prophesy.

10. Why does the narrator go into the discussion between Augustine, Boethius, and Brawardine?

Again, the Nun's Priest (or Chaucer himself) may be making fun of the heady theological arguments that preoccupy many Church scholars. It is really unimportant to a chicken being eaten by a fox whether the event was predestined or not.

11. What does the narrator say about the counsel of women, and how is the statement relevant in the tale?

The Nun's Priest says that the counsel of women leads men astray, for it was Eve who convinced Adam to eat from the forbidden tree, resulting in their banishment from the Garden of Eden. In the context of this tale, Chanticleer was wrong to listen to Pertelote and suppose that his dream was merely a nightmare. Because he was ill-advised, Chanticleer will not be wary of Russel the fox.

12. What is humorous about Chanticleer's actions immediately after the discussion with Pertelote?

At the conclusion of the discussion, Chanticleer flies down and pecks at some corn. Although he has been speaking of lofty and erudite matters, he is still a chicken. We know that this story comes after the interrupted Monk's Tale, which was about the tragic downfall of great men. The Nun's Priest may be implying that a person can recite many stories upon a theme, but still be no smarter than a chicken.

13. Which of Chanticleer's shortcomings does Russel take advantage of?

Russel knows that Chanticleer is vain, so the fox uses excessive flattery to make the rooster vulnerable.

14. What is ironic about Chanticleer's escape?

Just as Russel used Chanticleer's vanity to catch him, Chanticleer now uses Russel's vanity to free himself.

15. How does the Nun's Priest follow his comparison of the hens to the wives of the senators killed by Nero, and why is this funny?

After he makes this lofty reference, the Nun's Priest describes the widow and her daughters chasing the fox with the chicken in his mouth. We are reminded that Chanticleer and Pertelote are actually chickens on a lowly farm, not characters in an ancient tragedy.

16. What is the moral lesson of this beast fable?

There are two lessons to be learned from this fable. First, as Russel demonstrates, even though one may be a wonderful speaker, there are some times when he or she should remain silent. Furthermore, as revealed by Chanticleer, people should be humble instead of proud, and they should be wary of anyone who flatters them.

17. What type of tale was the Priest instructed to tell? What type of tale did he end up telling? What does this suggest about his character?

The Host instructs the Priest to tell a tale that will be the opposite of a tragedy, in which some lowly person rises in fortune. Instead, the Priest tells a fable—one with a happy ending, but with a moral nonetheless. This suggests the Priest's integrity. To be an instructor and a moral guide is in his nature.

The Canterbury Tales

The General Prologue

1. Why might the time of year during which this collection is set be significant?

2. Recall from the Introduction that medieval philosophy saw the universe as a carefully ordered hierarchy, with God (unmoving and unchanging) at the highest level, and nature (the world of change, movement, and birth and death) at the bottom. How are people and nature connected in these opening lines?

3. What might be Chaucer's intent in comparing humankind and nature?

4. From what point of view is *The Canterbury Tales* told? What effect will this have on the tales themselves?

5. How does Chaucer describe the Knight?

6. How does the Squire compare to his father, the Knight?

7. What do we learn from the physical description of the Yeoman?

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8. How is Chaucer's description of the Prioress satirical, and what is the point of the satire?

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9. What is ironic about the juxtaposition of the lines "[The Prioress] was so charitable and piteous" (26) and "That she would weep if she but saw a mouse [c]aught in a trap, though it were dead or bled" (28)?

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10. What are the Prioress'ss primary concerns in life? How does this contrast to what would be expected of a prioress?

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11. What does the statement "when he rode men might his bridle hear / A-jingling in the whistling wind as clear, / Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell" (5 – 7) suggest about the Monk? How is this suggestion confirmed by the rest of the General Prologue?

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12. How are monks and friars supposed to be different from one another? How are these two different or the same?

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13. What do innocent-sounding phrases about the Friar like, "a wanton one and merry," "[he] had arranged full many a marriage [o]f young women at his own cost," "Well loved he was, a most familiar Friar [...] to the worthy women of the town"; "He kept his cape all packed with pins and knives / That he would give away to pretty wives," and "he could be as wanton as a pup" suggest about this cleric?

14. How do the Friar's relationships with other people help characterize him?

15. How is Chaucer's statement about the Friar, "He lived by pickings, it is evident" an example of irony?

16. In what ways are the Prioress, the Monk, and the Friar similar?

17. What opinion does Chaucer apparently have about the Church of his age?

18. According to the description, is the Merchant good at his occupation? How do you know?

19. What kind of character is the Clerk? How does the narrator view him?

20. In what ways are the Clerk and the Lawyer different?

21. What can readers infer about the narrator's opinion of the Franklin?

22. In what ways has the formation of the guild benefitted the tradesmen and their wives?

23. What information do we get from the description of the Cook?

24. Is the narrator sincere when he says that "[The Sailor] was a good fellow" (8)?

25. What makes the Physician a good doctor?

26. What does Chaucer say about the relationship between doctors and druggists?

27. What lines in the text suggest that the Physician uses his position for personal gain?

28. How is the Wife of Bath's claim of religious devotion contradicted by her behavior?

29. In what ways does Chaucer use color to help characterize the Wife of Bath?

30. How does the Parson compare to the other members of the clergy previously mentioned in the General Prologue?

31. What Biblical allusion does Chaucer use in the description of the Parson?

32. How does the Plowman's profession help emphasize his moral character?

33. Describe the Miller. What humor seems to be dominant in him?

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34. How does the Miller in *The Canterbury Tales* fit the medieval stereotype?

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35. What does Chaucer mean when, regarding the Manciple, he says, "Now is it not of God a full fair grace / That such a vulgar man has wit to pace / The wisdom of a crowd of learned men" (6 – 9)? How is the Manciple's wit a miracle?

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36. How does the narrator view the Reeve? What humor is dominant in the Reeve?

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37. Compare the Summoner and the Pardoner in terms of outward appearance, positions, and personalities.

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38. What is the game that the Host suggests the pilgrims play?

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The Knight's Tale: Part One

1. What kind of people is this story about? What does this tell us about the storyteller?

2. Where is the story set? Why is this significant?

3. How does Chaucer's diction when talking about Theseus reinforce the idea that Theseus won Hippolyta in a battle?

4. How does the relationship between Hippolyta and Theseus differ from courtly love?

5. What characteristics of Theseus are presented in the following quotation?

> Do you so much as envy
> My honour that you thus complain and cry?
> Or who has wronged you now, or who offended?
> Come, tell me whether it may be amended;
> And tell me, why are you clothed thus in black? (49 – 53)

6. Whom do the widows blame for their husbands' deaths? What theme does this establish?

7. Why, in particular, are the women distressed?

8. Which god is invoked by the duke's red banner? Why does the Knight mention this?

9. What can the reader infer about medieval warfare from the way Theseus attacks Thebes?

10. Where is Emily when Palamon and Arcita first see her, and what time of year is it? Why is the setting significant?

11. How does the garden setting help portray Emily as a goddess, as Palamon believes her to be?

12. How do the contrasting images of the garden and the tower emphasize the agony of Palamon and Arcita?

13. Explain how dramatic irony is used in the scene in which Palamon cries out.

14. How is courtly love presented in lines 236 – 265?

15. Explain Palamon's and Arcita's respective reasons for feeling entitled to Emily.

16. What might the following lines foreshadow?

> We strive but as those dogs did for the bone
> They fought all day, and yet their gain was none.
> Till came a kite while they were still so wroth
> And bore the bone away from them both.
> And therefore, at the king's court, O my brother,
> It's each man for himself and not for other.
> Love if you like; for I love and aye shall;
> And certainly, dear brother, that is all.
> Here in this prison cell must we remain
> And each endure whatever fate ordain. (320 – 330)

17. How is Arcita's freedom at the end of Section One an example of cosmic irony?

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18. What does Arcita say about fate and free will in his speech, lines 393 – 416? What might be the reason behind this monologue?

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19. How is the comparison of men to beasts an example of allusion? What is the purpose of the allusion?

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20. Why, according to Palamon, are animals more fortunate than men? What kind of worldview does this reveal?

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The Knight's Tale: Part Two

1. Why does Chaucer go into detail about Arcita's physical transformation?

2. What is significant about Mercury's appearance in Arcita's dream?

3. What is Arcita's plan for returning to Athens?

4. What is Palamon's "two-fold heaviness"?

5. What happens to "Philostrates" at court, and what beliefs of the Knight's does this reveal?

6. How does Palamon escape from prison?

7. In what ways does the description of morning in the grove highlight the contrast between Arcita's and Palamon's positions?

8. What is significant about the date Palamon breaks out of prison?

9. For what possible reason does the narrator refer to Arcita's actions in the grove as a "reverence of May" (644)?

10. What dramatic irony arises in this scene in the grove, and what purpose does it serve?

11. Why is it relevant that Arcita's revel takes place on a Friday?

12. What identities and corresponding ideas does Arcita associate with the names Arcita and Philostrates?

13. What are the main points of Arcita's speech of mourning, and how do they echo some of the main themes and ideas of the Knight's Tale?

14. Arcita tells Palamon, once again, that bonds, laws, and oaths may be broken for the sake of love. Arcita says something similar in lines 305 – 315. What might be the dramatic purpose for Arcita's reiteration of this idea?

15. What does Arcita do that demonstrates he is a chivalrous knight?

16. What is the purpose of the use of apostrophe in lines 767 – 771?

17. What simile does the Knight use to describe Arcita and Palamon in battle?

18. Summarize the Knight's digression about free will and destiny. How does he back up his claim?

19. What does the narrator mean when he says, "For after Mars, [Theseus] serves Diana's reign" (825)?

20. What does Palamon ask of Theseus? Why does he make this request?

21. What techniques does Palamon use to evoke sympathy in Theseus?

22. Read the passage between lines 903 and 923. How is Theseus characterized as a wise ruler?

23. Summarize Theseus's speech in the passage between lines 927 and 967. How does the speech contribute to a major theme in the novel?

24. What does Theseus propose the knights do to decide who will marry Emily?

25. Summarize what has happened in the story so far. Why does the Knight choose to end the second section of the story here? What might we expect in the next sections?

The Knight's Tale: Part Three

1. How is the amphitheater where Palamon and Arcita are to battle laid out?

2. Which aspects of love do the images in the temple of Venus illustrate? How is this interpretation of love significant to the story?

3. Which of war's qualities are represented in the temple of Mars? How does this depiction of war contrast with the chivalrous warfare?

4. What idea unites the characters depicted on the walls of Diana's temple, and how is the theme relevant in the context of the tale?

5. How does the description of King Lycurgus make him appear a formidable warrior?

6. How is King Emetreus characterized?

7. What is the tone in lines 1365 – 1404, and how does Chaucer establish it?

8. How do Diana's fires foretell the outcome of the tale?

9. What reason does Diana give Emily for not granting her request? What does this suggest about the power of the Roman gods?

10. Why might Mars sympathize with Arcita?

11. What words and phrases in Arcita's speech to Mars reflect ideas of courtly love?

12. How does the repetition of the word "mine" in lines 1603 – 1605 function? What is Saturn's tone?

The Knight's Tale: Part Four

1. What is significant about the day on which the battle takes place?

2. What images are presented in the opening lines of Part Four and why?

3. What modification does Theseus make to the rules of the battle?

4. How is the amendment received? Provide some details.

5. What techniques does Chaucer use to emphasize the division between Palamon's and Arcita's retinue?

6. What is the outcome of the battle?

7. How does the outcome of the battle reflect the following statement made by Arcita in Part One?

> We know not what it is we pray for here.
> We fare as he that's drunken as a mouse;
> A drunk man knows right well he has a house,
> But he knows not the way leading thither. (402 – 405)

8. What purpose does the repetition of the word "*alas*" serve in lines 1915 – 1919?

9. What are two ways in which Chaucer's description of Arcita's death evokes pathos?

10. What words of wisdom does Aegeus give Theseus and the Athenians?

11. Why does Duke Theseus set Arcita's funeral pyre in the grove?

12. What does Theseus mean when he says the following?

> The same First Cause and Mover...
> Has stablished in this world, up and down,
> A certain length of days to call their own
> For all that are engendered in this place,
> Beyond the which not one day may they pace,
> Though yet all may that certain time abridge. (2137 – 2142)

13. What purpose do lines 2160 – 2169 serve?

14. What does Theseus advise?

15. Ultimately, what does the Knight's Tale suggest about the knight's character? How does this reflect what the narrator told us about the knight in the General Prologue?

The Miller's Prologue

1. Who are the speakers in this prologue? What kind of relationships seem to exist between them, and how are they affected by social class?

2. Who—Chaucer the author or the pilgrim / narrator—is speaking the apology for the Miller's words? Should we believe that it is sincere?

3. Why does the Host ask the Monk to tell the next tale and tell the Miller to let "some better man first tell [them] another" (22)?

4. What is the Miller's physical and mental condition? What does this suggest about the tale he is about to tell?

5. Why does the Reeve take offense to the subject matter of the Miller's story?

6. Why and how does Chaucer distance himself from the tale? In what way is the narrator similar to the Miller whom he apparently condemns?

The Miller's Tale

1. What are the character types the Miller sets up in the beginning of the story? How do the character types influence what the reader expects of the story?

2. What objects in Nicholas's room does Chaucer mention, and what do you think his purpose is for listing them?

3. What is ironic about Nicholas's hobbies?

4. How does the age difference between John and his wife affect their relationship?

5. How might John's life have been different if he had read Cato?

6. How and why does Chaucer describe John's wife in terms of animals?

7. Why is the metaphor in lines 69 – 70 significant?

8. What causes the carpenter's wife to give in to Nicholas? What does this show about the Miller's opinion of both women and words?

9. On what condition does John's wife agree to have an affair with Nicholas?

10. How does Absalom's clothing emphasize his hypocrisy?

11. What, according to the Miller, is the main fault of Absalom?

12. What statement about clerks in general is the Miller making through the characters of Absalom and Nicholas?

13. How is the picture of Absalom's wooing Alison a parody of courtly love?

14. How does John react to Absalom's serenade?

15. When Nicholas does not come out of his room, what makes John suspect that he is dead?

16. How does the answer to the previous question compare to Theseus's speech in "The Knight's Tale"?

17. What role does astrology play in Nicholas' plot?

18. In what way does John defend ignorance and attack knowledge?

19. What motive does Nicholas have for telling John not to disclose the secret to Robin and Jill?

20. What does Nicholas command John to do?

21. What is John's first response when Nicholas tells him about the flood? What might this say about him?

22. In the chronology of events, does the exchange between Absalom and the monk take place before or after Nicholas and Alison sleep together? How do you know?

23. What techniques does Chaucer use to make Absalom's speech to Alison in lines 511 – 520 comical?

24. What happens when Absalom goes to kiss Alison?

25. What does Chaucer mean when he says that Absalom was "healed of all his malady" (570)?

26. In Absalom's second speech to Alison, lines 605 – 609, what shows that his feelings toward her have altered?

27. What happens at the end of the tale?

28. Do the neighbors feel sorry for John? Should they?

29. In what key ways are the Knight's and Miller's tales similar? In what key ways are they different?

The Wife of Bath's Prologue

1. What are the reader's first impressions of the Wife of Bath? How might this character imply Chaucer's feminist sympathies?

2. How are the Wife of Bath's religious claims humorous? Why has Chaucer placed her in the context of the other characters?

3. What does the Wife of Bath say that reveals she has at least an elementary knowledge of scripture?

4. Why would the Wife of Bath cite scripture so much when she has claimed that her expertise is based on "experience"?

5. What argument did someone once give the Wife of Bath about why individuals should not marry more than once? Where is the humor in her response?

6. What, according to the Wife of Bath, is the value of having been married multiple times?

7. Explain the Wife of Bath's views on chastity and virtue. How do they fit in with her views on authority / experience?

8. Explain the Wife of Bath's metaphor involving cups.

9. Similarly, how does the Wife of Bath compare women to bread?

10. How does the wife use the metaphor of cups and bread to justify her behavior?

11. What argument involving the body does the Wife make for a fully sexual marriage?

12. What is humorous about the Wife's interpretation of Jesus's words?

13. In lines 158 – 159, the Wife of Bath says, "a husband I will get / Who shall be my debtor and my thrall." How does a husband become indebted to his wife?

14. Why does Chaucer include the exchange between the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath?

15. Analyze the structure of the relationship between men and women as the Wife of Bath understands it. How is it like other systems of debt and obligation?

16. The Wife of Bath says, "Now hearken how I bore me properly, / All you wise wives that well can understand" (228 – 229). How many audiences are there here, and how many storytellers?

17. Why does the Wife of Bath quote what she said to her husband?

18. What accusations does the Wife of Bath make against Jenkin? How do these accusations reappear in the tale itself?

19. What are some of the Wife of Bath's preoccupations? What is the significance of this portrayal of her character in the context of these tales?

20. According to the Wife of Bath, what are women's natural strengths? Do they suggest that women are naturally dominant or naturally submissive?

21. How does Chaucer create pathos in lines 473 – 484?

22. What does the Wife of Bath mean when she says, "I made, of the same wood, a staff most gross" (488).

23. Summarize the view of love that the Wife of Bath has developed through her experiences. What are its main points? Overall, is it positive or negative? How does Jenkin fit into the pattern?

24. What does the Wife of Bath admit is at the root of her outward show of piety? What hints of this trait were given in the General Prologue? Again, how is Chaucer developing her as a foil for some of the other characters?

25. In what ways does the Wife of Bath exemplify the "wicked woman" of medieval morality plays? How is Chaucer's use of this conventional character humorous or ironic?

26. In lines 607 – 624, how does the text address the motif of fate and predestination?

27. What is the primary way Jenkin differed from the Wife of Bath's previous husbands?

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28. What is the connection between sex and books, according to the Wife of Bath?

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29. What unites all of the stories within Jenkin's book? Could Jenkin's view of women be said to be the same as Chaucer's?

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30. What is the purpose of the angry exchange between the Friar and the Summoner?

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31. Why does the Wife of Bath remain an ambiguous character? What are some of the possible interpretations of her persona?

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"The Tale of the Wife of Bath"

1. What is the significance of the setting of this tale?

2. How does the Wife of Bath use hyperbole for humor in the opening to her tale?

3. How does King Arthur's character compare to Duke Theseus's, and what do the similarities between the two rulers say about ideal leadership?

4. What does the interaction between King Arthur and the ladies, in addition to the interaction between Duke Theseus and the women, say about the correlation between gender and how well a person can sympathize with others?

5. How do the wrong answers to the queen's question introduce stereotypes about women? Does the Wife of Bath agree or disagree with these stereotypes?

6. What comic trait does the Wife of Bath's digression about King Midas illustrate?

7. Why does Chaucer juxtapose the image of ladies dancing with the appearance of the old hag?

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8. When the old woman makes the deal with the knight, she tells him, "Plight me your troth here, hand in hand" (152). Why does she appeal to the knight in this manner?

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9. What truth about gentility does the metaphor in lines 282 – 289 reveal? What irony is there in Chaucer's giving this observation to the Wife of Bath?

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10. According to the text in lines 356 – 359, why would old age and ugliness be more desirable than youth and beauty? Where have similar sentiments been uttered in the text before, and what is the relevance of this connection?

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11. In what ways is the Tale of the Wife of Bath feminist? In what ways does it reinforce misogynist stereotypes?

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"The Pardoner's Prologue"

1. How is the moral of the Pardoner's Tale ironic?

2. How does the Pardoner use Latin to take advantage of the common people?

3. If it were not already known that the Pardoner preaches to commoners, what about the Pardoner's relics would suggest this fact?

4. According to the Pardoner, what seems to be the most common sin committed by humans, after avarice? How is this revealed in the text?

5. How is the simile in lines 68 – 69, "upon the folk I beck, / As does a dove that's sitting on a barn," relevant in establishing the Pardoner's character?

6. How does the Pardoner compare to the Wife of Bath when it comes to piety? Are they equally hypocritical? Explain your answer.

7. Why, in particular, does the Pardoner preach against avarice?

8. How does the Pardoner suppress opposition to himself and others in his trade?

9. What type of stories does the Pardoner say his listeners prefer? What might this say about Chaucer's selection of stories in *The Canterbury Tales*?

10. What is the Pardoner's tone throughout his prologue?

"The Pardoner's Tale"

1. What is ironic about the way in which the Pardoner begins his tale?

2. To what effect does Chaucer use biblical allusion in the beginning of the tale?

3. How does the Pardoner blame gluttony for the fall of man?

4. How does the passage between lines 258 and 276 emphasize the different ways the young and the old view Death?

5. In what way is the old man's directive to go up the "crooked way" (299) an example of a pun?

6. How do the following lines compare to the paraphrase of Juvenal in "The Pardoner's Prologue"?

> For men would say that we were robbers strong,
> And we'd, for our own treasure, hang ere long.
> This treasure must be carried home by night
> All prudently and slyly, out of sight. (327 – 330)

7. How does dramatic irony raise the suspense at the end of the story?

8. How do situational and verbal irony conclude the tale?

9. How does the epilogue negate the message presented in the Pardoner's sermon?

10. Why is the Knight the one who breaks up the argument between the Host and the Pardoner?

11. What, according to the Pardoner, is sometimes an unintended result of his sermons?

"The Nun's Priest's Prologue"

1. What has been the nature of "The Monk's Tale"? Upon what can we base our inference?

2. What is the significance of the phrase "but for the clinking of the bells / That from [the Monk's] bridle hang on either side" (28 – 29).

3. What might the Nun's Priest's horse suggest about the man's character?

"The Nun's Priest's Tale"

1. From the opening of the Nun's Priest's Tale, what kind of story does it seem to be? What kind of characters does it have, and are they like the characters in the previous stories?

2. What is the most likely motivation for the Priest to begin his tale with a description of the widow and her home? What type of story does the Priest's audience most likely expect?

3. Given the Priest's description of Chanticleer, what vice might we suspect the rooster will posses?

4. As the Priest develops the relationship between Chanticleer and Pertelote, what common theme emerges?

5. How does the narrator create humor in Chanticleer and Pertelote's conversation about the dream?

6. What logical fallacy does Pertelote resort to in order to assuage Chanticleer's fear?

7. What links the two stories that Chanticleer tells Pertelote?

8. In lines 406 – 409, how does the allusion reveal an aspect of Russel the fox's character?

9. What is it that the great clerks in lines 414 – 430 debate, and how does this passage solidify a theme in the tale?

10. Why does the narrator go into the discussion between Augustine, Boethius, and Brawardine?

11. What does the narrator say about the counsel of women, and how is the statement relevant in the tale?

12. What is humorous about Chanticleer's actions immediately after the discussion with Pertelote?

13. Which of Chanticleer's shortcomings does Russel take advantage of?

14. What is ironic about Chanticleer's escape?

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15. How does the Nun's Priest follow his comparison of the hens to the wives of the senators killed by Nero, and why is this funny?

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16. What is the moral lesson of this beast fable?

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17. What type of tale was the Priest instructed to tell? What type of tale did he end up telling? What does this suggest about his character?

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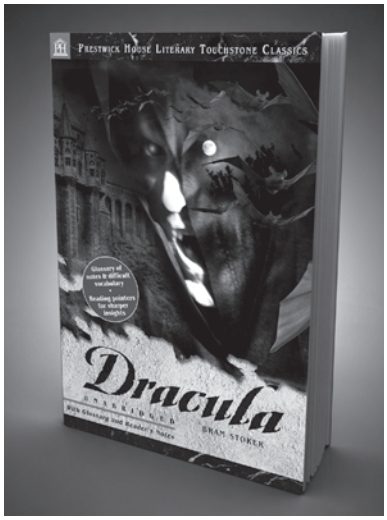

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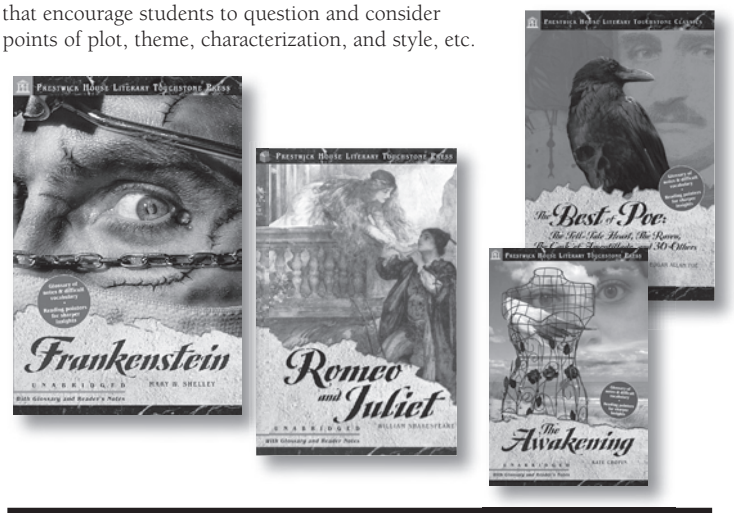

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