

English 11H- The Canterbury Tales

Terms and Concepts:

- Methods of characterization
 - Techniques include description of the character's appearance, examples of the character's speech, thoughts, and actions; responses of other characters to the character; and direct comments from the narrator
- 3 Estates
 - Feudal System: Pray, Fight, Work
 - Clergy (5%), Nobles (5%), Peasants (90%)
 - Black Death- wiped out a 1/3 of Europe → middle class (merchants)
 - **This story represents the entire spectrum of types of people in society**
- The Host's Challenge: best instruction/moral and most delightful/entertaining
 - From the "Canterbury Tales Prologue"
 - Frame: Host's Challenge → within then are the 30 pilgrims' stories, one on the way there and one on the way back= 120 stories (but he only ever wrote 22)
- Irony- a state of affairs or an event that seems deliberately contrary to what one expects and is often amusing as a result
 - Verbal- occurs when somebody states one thing but means another
 - Situational- the discrepancy between what appears to be true and what is actually true
- Satire
 - A literary technique in which ideas, customs, behaviors, or institutions are ridiculed to point out flaws in society
- Tone
 - The attitude an author takes toward a subject or character
 - Can be developed through language, images, diction, choice of details, and syntax
- Rhyming couplets
 - Every two lines rhyme with each other. In the original Middle English, the lines were also all in iambic pentameter.
- Archetypes
- Structure
 - Overarching frame story, each story's prologue, 1st person narrator, commentary between stories, etc.
- Previous poetic devices (alliteration, imagery, similes, etc.)
- Previous elements of storytelling
 - Exposition, plot development, suspense, a hook, characterization, conflict, climax, resolution, moral, entertainment

The Age of Chaucer

SKIM FOR INFO

COMMON CORE

RL1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly. **RL3** Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story. **RL4** Analyze the impact of specific word choices on tone. **RL10** Read and comprehend literature.

The Prologue

from *The Canterbury Tales*

Poem by Geoffrey Chaucer Translated by

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML12-142A

Meet the Author

Geoffrey Chaucer 1340?–1400

Geoffrey Chaucer made an enormous mark on the language and literature of England. Writing in an age when French was widely spoken in educated circles, Chaucer was among the first writers to show that English could be a respectable literary language. Today, his work is considered a cornerstone of English literature.

Befriended by Royalty Chaucer was born sometime between 1340 and 1343, probably in London, in an era when expanding commerce was helping to bring about growth in villages and cities. His family, though not noble, was well off, and his parents were able to place him in the household of the wife of Prince Lionel, a son of King Edward III, where he served as an attendant. Such a position was a vital means of advancement; the young Chaucer learned the customs of upper-class life and came into contact with influential people. It may have been during this period that Chaucer met Lionel's younger brother, John of Gaunt, who would become Chaucer's lifelong patron and a leading political figure of the day.

A Knight and a Writer Although Chaucer wrote his first

important work around 1370, writing was always a sideline; his primary career was in diplomacy. During Richard II's troubled reign (1377 to 1399), Chaucer was appointed a member of Parliament and knight of the shire. When Richard II was overthrown in 1399 by Henry Bolingbroke (who became King Henry IV), Chaucer managed to retain his political position, as Henry was the son of John of Gaunt.

Despite the turmoil of the 1380s and 1390s, the last two decades of Chaucer's life saw his finest literary achievements—the brilliant verse romance *Troilus and Criseyde* and his masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of verse and prose tales of many different kinds. At the time of his death, Chaucer had penned nearly 20,000 lines of *The Canterbury Tales*, but many more tales were planned.

Uncommon Honor When he died in 1400, Chaucer was accorded a rare honor for a commoner—burial in London's Westminster Abbey. In 1556, an admirer erected an elaborate marble monument to his memory. This was the beginning of the Abbey's famous Poets' Corner, where many of England's most distinguished writers have since been buried.

Author Online

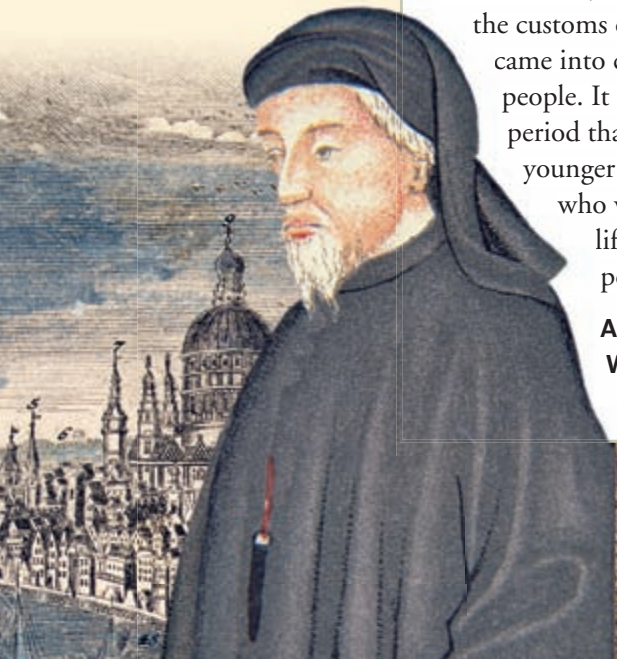
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DID YOU KNOW?

Geoffrey Chaucer ...

- was captured and held for ransom while fighting for England in the Hundred Years' War.
- held various jobs, including royal messenger, justice of the peace, and forester.
- portrayed himself as a foolish character in a number of works.



● TEXT ANALYSIS: CHARACTERIZATION

Characterization refers to the techniques a writer uses to develop characters. In “The Prologue,” the introduction to *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer offers a vivid portrait of English society during the Middle Ages. Among his 30 characters are clergy, aristocrats, and commoners. Chaucer employs a dramatic structure similar to Boccaccio’s *The Decameron*—each pilgrim tells a tale. Some of the ways Chaucer characterizes the pilgrims include

- description of a character’s appearance
- examples of a character’s speech, thoughts, and actions
- the responses of others to a character
- the narrator’s direct, or explicit, comments about a character

As you read, look for details that reveal the **character traits**, or consistent qualities, of each pilgrim.

■ READING STRATEGY: PARAPHRASE

Reading medieval texts, such as *The Canterbury Tales*, can be challenging because they often contain unfamiliar words and complex sentences. One way that you can make sense of Chaucer’s work is to **paraphrase**, or restate information in your own words. A paraphrase is usually the same length as the original text but contains simpler language. As you read, paraphrase difficult passages. Here is an example.

Chaucer’s Words	Paraphrase
“When in April the sweet showers fall/ And pierce the drought of March to the root, . . .” (lines 1–2)	When the April rains come and end the dryness of March, . . .

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The following boldfaced words are critical to understanding Chaucer’s literary masterpiece. Try to figure out the meaning of each word from its context.

1. The refined gentleman always behaved with **courtliness**.
2. She remained calm and **sedately** finished her meal.
3. The popular politician was charming and **personable**.
4. When you save money in a bank, interest will **accrue**.
5. Does she suffer from heart disease or another **malady**?
6. She made an **entreaty** to the king, asking for a pardon.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

What makes a great CHARACTER?

Creating a great character requires a sharp eye for detail, a keen understanding of people, and a brilliant imagination—all of which Chaucer possessed. Chaucer populated *The Canterbury Tales* with a colorful cast of characters whose virtues and flaws ring true even today, hundreds of years later.

QUICKWRITE Work with a partner to invent a character. Start with an intriguing name. Then come up with questions that will reveal basic information about the character, such as his or her age, physical appearance, family and friends, job, home, and personal tastes. Brainstorm possible answers for the questions. Then circle the responses that have the best potential for making a lively character.

Name: Bartholomew Throckmorton

1. What is his occupation?
duke
squire to a knight
sea captain
town doctor
grave digger
2. Where does he live?
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

The CANTERBURY TALES

Geoffrey Chaucer



The PROLOGUE

BACKGROUND In “The Prologue” of *The Canterbury Tales*, a group gathers at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, a town just south of London, to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. At the suggestion of the innkeeper, the group decides to hold a storytelling competition to pass the time as they travel. “The Prologue” introduces the “sundry folk” who will tell the stories and is followed by the tales themselves—24 in all.

When in April the sweet showers fall
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
5 When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
Exhales an air in every grove and heath
Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the *Ram* has run,
And the small fowl are making melody
10 That sleep away the night with open eye
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then people long to go on pilgrimages
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
15 And specially, from every shire’s end
Of England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick. **A**

It happened in that season that one day
20 In Southwark, at *The Tabard*, as I lay

5 Zephyrus (zěf’ər-əs): the Greek god of the west wind.

8 the Ram: Aries—the first sign of the zodiac. The time is mid-April.

13 palmers: people journeying to religious shrines; pilgrims; **strands:** shores.

14 sundry (sŭn’drē): various.

15 shire’s: county’s.

17 martyr: St. Thomas à Becket.

A PARAPHRASE

Restate lines 1–18. Why does the group make its pilgrimage in April?



Ready to go on pilgrimage and start
For Canterbury, most devout at heart,
At night there came into that hostelry
Some nine and twenty in a company
25 Of sundry folk happening then to fall
In fellowship, and they were pilgrims all
That towards Canterbury meant to ride.
The rooms and stables of the inn were wide;
They made us easy, all was of the best.
30 And, briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,
I'd spoken to them all upon the trip
And was soon one with them in fellowship,
Pledged to rise early and to take the way
To Canterbury, as you heard me say.

35 But none the less, while I have time and space,
Before my story takes a further pace,
It seems a reasonable thing to say
What their condition was, the full array
Of each of them, as it appeared to me,
40 According to profession and degree,
And what apparel they were riding in;
And at a Knight I therefore will begin. **B**
There was a *Knight*, a most distinguished man,
Who from the day on which he first began
45 To ride abroad had followed chivalry,
Truth, honor, generousness and courtesy.
He had done nobly in his sovereign's war
And ridden into battle, no man more,
As well in Christian as in heathen places,
50 And ever honored for his noble graces.

When we took Alexandria, he was there.
He often sat at table in the chair
Of honor, above all nations, when in Prussia.
In Lithuania he had ridden, and Russia,
55 No Christian man so often, of his rank.
When, in Granada, Algeciras sank
Under assault, he had been there, and in
North Africa, raiding Benamarin;
In Anatolia he had been as well
60 And fought when Ayas and Attalia fell,
For all along the Mediterranean coast
He had embarked with many a noble host.
In fifteen mortal battles he had been
And jousting for our faith at Tramissene

23 **hostelry** (hōs'tel-rē): inn.

Language Coach

Roots and Affixes The suffix *-ship* can mean “someone entitled to a specific rank of” (*lordship*), “art or skill of” (*craftsmanship*), or “state of” (*friendship*). Which meaning applies to *fellowship*? Give another example of each use of *-ship*.

B PARAPHRASE

Paraphrase lines 35–42. What does the narrator set out to accomplish in “The Prologue”?

45 **chivalry** (shīv'el-rē): the code of behavior of medieval knights, which stressed the values listed in line 46.

51 **Alexandria**: a city in Egypt, captured by European Christians in 1365. All the places named in lines 51–64 were scenes of conflicts in which medieval Christians battled Muslims and other non-Christian peoples.

64 **jousting**: fought with a lance in an arranged battle against another knight.

65 Thrice in the lists, and always killed his man.
This same distinguished knight had led the van
Once with the Bey of Balat, doing work
For him against another heathen Turk;
He was of sovereign value in all eyes.

70 And though so much distinguished, he was wise
And in his bearing modest as a maid.
He never yet a boorish thing had said
In all his life to any, come what might;
He was a true, a perfect gentle-knight. **C**

75 Speaking of his equipment, he possessed
Fine horses, but he was not gaily dressed.
He wore a fustian tunic stained and dark
With smudges where his armor had left mark;
Just home from service, he had joined our ranks
80 To do his pilgrimage and render thanks.

He had his son with him, a fine young *Squire*,
A lover and cadet, a lad of fire
With locks as curly as if they had been pressed.
He was some twenty years of age, I guessed.
85 In stature he was of a moderate length,
With wonderful agility and strength.
He'd seen some service with the cavalry
In Flanders and Artois and Picardy
And had done valiantly in little space
90 Of time, in hope to win his lady's grace.
He was embroidered like a meadow bright
And full of freshest flowers, red and white.
Singing he was, or fluting all the day;
He was as fresh as is the month of May.
95 Short was his gown, the sleeves were long and wide;
He knew the way to sit a horse and ride.
He could make songs and poems and recite,
Knew how to joust and dance, to draw and write.
He loved so hotly that till dawn grew pale
100 He slept as little as a nightingale.
Courteous he was, lowly and serviceable,
And carved to serve his father at the table.

There was a *Yeoman* with him at his side,
No other servant; so he chose to ride.
105 This Yeoman wore a coat and hood of green,
And peacock-feathered arrows, bright and keen
And neatly sheathed, hung at his belt the while

65 **thrice**: three times; **lists**: fenced areas for jousting.

66 **van**: vanguard—the troops foremost in an attack.

67 **Bey of Balat**: a Turkish ruler.

C CHARACTERIZATION

Reread lines 43–74. What do the Knight's actions on and off the battlefield reveal about his character? Cite details to support your answer.

77 **fustian** (fūs'chən): a strong cloth made of linen and cotton.

81 **Squire**: a young man attending on and receiving training from a knight.

82 **cadet**: soldier in training.

88 **Flanders and Artois** (är-twä') and **Picardy** (pĭk'ər-dē): areas in what is now Belgium and northern France.

93 **fluting**: whistling.

103 **Yeoman** (yō'mən): an attendant in a noble household; **him**: the Knight.

—For he could dress his gear in yeoman style,
His arrows never drooped their feathers low—
110 And in his hand he bore a mighty bow.
His head was like a nut, his face was brown.
He knew the whole of woodcraft up and down.
A saucy brace was on his arm to ward
It from the bow-string, and a shield and sword
115 Hung at one side, and at the other slipped
A jaunty dirk, spear-sharp and well-equipped.
A medal of St. Christopher he wore
Of shining silver on his breast, and bore
A hunting-horn, well slung and burnished clean,
120 That dangled from a baldrick of bright green.
He was a proper forester, I guess.

113 **saucy**: jaunty; stylish; **brace**: a leather arm-guard worn by archers.

116 **dirk**: small dagger.

117 **St. Christopher**: patron saint of travelers.

120 **baldrick**: shoulder strap.

There also was a *Nun*, a Prioress,
Her way of smiling very simple and coy.
Her greatest oath was only “By St. Loy!”
125 And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.
And well she sang a service, with a fine
Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly,
And she spoke daintily in French, extremely,
After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe;
130 French in the Paris style she did not know.
At meat her manners were well taught withal;
No morsel from her lips did she let fall,
Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;
But she could carry a morsel up and keep
135 The smallest drop from falling on her breast.
For **courtliness** she had a special zest,
And she would wipe her upper lip so clean
That not a trace of grease was to be seen
Upon the cup when she had drunk; to eat,
140 She reached a hand **sedately** for the meat.
She certainly was very entertaining,
Pleasant and friendly in her ways, and straining
To counterfeit a courtly kind of grace,
A stately bearing fitting to her place,
145 And to seem dignified in all her dealings. **D**
As for her sympathies and tender feelings,
She was so charitably solicitous
She used to weep if she but saw a mouse
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding.
150 And she had little dogs she would be feeding
With roasted flesh, or milk, or fine white bread.
And bitterly she wept if one were dead

122 **Prioress**: a nun ranking just below the abbess (head) of a convent.

124 **St. Loy**: St. Eligius (known as St. Éloi in France).

129 **Stratford-atte-Bowe**: a town (now part of London) near the Prioress’s convent.

131 **at meat**: when dining; **withal**: moreover.

courtliness (kôrt’lê-nÿs) *n.*
polite, elegant manners; refined behavior

sedately (sĭ-dât’lê) *adv.* in a composed, dignified manner; calmly

143 **counterfeit**: imitate.

D CHARACTERIZATION

Reread lines 122–145. Which details suggest that the Prioress may be trying to appear more sophisticated than she really is?

Or someone took a stick and made it smart;
 She was all sentiment and tender heart.
 155 Her veil was gathered in a seemly way,
 Her nose was elegant, her eyes glass-grey;
 Her mouth was very small, but soft and red,
 Her forehead, certainly, was fair of spread,
 Almost a span across the brows, I own;
 160 She was indeed by no means undergrown.
 Her cloak, I noticed, had a graceful charm.
 She wore a coral trinket on her arm,
 A set of beads, the gaudies tricked in green,
 Whence hung a golden brooch of brightest sheen
 165 On which there first was graven a crowned A,
 And lower, *Amor vincit omnia*.

Another *Nun*, the secretary at her cell,
 Was riding with her, and *three Priests* as well.

A *Monk* there was, one of the finest sort
 170 Who rode the country; hunting was his sport.
 A manly man, to be an Abbot able;
 Many a dainty horse he had in stable.
 His bridle, when he rode, a man might hear
 Jingling in a whistling wind as clear,
 175 Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell
 Where my lord Monk was Prior of the cell.
 The Rule of good St. Benet or St. Maur
 As old and strict he tended to ignore;
 He let go by the things of yesterday
 180 And took the modern world's more spacious way.
 He did not rate that text at a plucked hen
 Which says that hunters are not holy men
 And that a monk uncloistered is a mere
 Fish out of water, flapping on the pier,
 185 That is to say a monk out of his cloister.
 That was a text he held not worth an oyster;
 And I agreed and said his views were sound;
 Was he to study till his head went round
 Poring over books in cloisters? Must he toil
 190 As Austin bade and till the very soil?
 Was he to leave the world upon the shelf?
 Let Austin have his labor to himself.

This Monk was therefore a good man to horse;
 Greyhounds he had, as swift as birds, to course.
 195 Hunting a hare or riding at a fence

159 span: a unit of length equal to nine inches. A broad forehead was considered a sign of beauty in Chaucer's day.

163 gaudies: the larger beads in a set of prayer beads.

166 *Amor vincit omnia* (ä'môr wĭn'kĭt òm'nē-ə): Latin for "Love conquers all things."

171 Abbot: the head of a monastery.

172 dainty: excellent.

176 Prior of the cell: head of a subsidiary group of monks.

177 St. Benet . . . St. Maur: St. Benedict, who established a strict set of rules for monks' behavior, and his follower, St. Maurus, who introduced those rules into France.

190 Austin: St. Augustine of Hippo, who recommended that monks engage in hard agricultural labor.

194 to course: for hunting.



Was all his fun, he spared for no expense.
 I saw his sleeves were garnished at the hand
 With fine grey fur, the finest in the land,
 And on his hood, to fasten it at his chin
 200 He had a wrought-gold cunningly fashioned pin;
 Into a lover's knot it seemed to pass.
 His head was bald and shone like looking-glass;
 So did his face, as if it had been greased.
 He was a fat and **personable** priest;
 205 His prominent eyeballs never seemed to settle. **E**
 They glittered like the flames beneath a kettle;
 Supple his boots, his horse in fine condition.
 He was a prelate fit for exhibition,
 He was not pale like a tormented soul.
 210 He liked a fat swan best, and roasted whole.
 His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.

There was a *Friar*, a wanton one and merry,
 A Limiter, a very festive fellow.
 In all Four Orders there was none so mellow,
 215 So glib with gallant phrase and well-turned speech.
 He'd fixed up many a marriage, giving each
 Of his young women what he could afford her.
 He was a noble pillar to his Order.
 Highly beloved and intimate was he
 220 With County folk within his boundary,
 And city dames of honor and possessions;
 For he was qualified to hear confessions,

personable (pûr'sə-nə-bəl)
adj. pleasing in behavior and appearance

E CHARACTERIZATION
 List three **character traits** of the Monk. In what ways does the narrator appear to poke fun at him?

211 **palfrey** (pôl'frē): saddle horse.

212 **Friar**: a member of a religious group sworn to poverty and living on charitable donations; **wanton** (wôn'tən): playful; jolly.

213 **Limiter**: a friar licensed to beg for donations in a limited area.

214 **Four Orders**: the four groups of friars—Dominican, Franciscan, Carmelite, and Augustinian.

222 **confessions**: church rites in which people confess their sins to clergy members. Only certain friars were licensed to hear confessions.

Or so he said, with more than priestly scope;
 He had a special license from the Pope.
 225 Sweetly he heard his penitents at shrift
 With pleasant absolution, for a gift.
 He was an easy man in penance-giving
 Where he could hope to make a decent living;
 It's a sure sign whenever gifts are given
 230 To a poor Order that a man's well shriven,
 And should he give enough he knew in verity
 The penitent repented in sincerity.
 For many a fellow is so hard of heart
 He cannot weep, for all his inward smart.
 235 Therefore instead of weeping and of prayer
 One should give silver for a poor Friar's care.
 He kept his tippet stuffed with pins for curls,
 And pocket-knives, to give to pretty girls.
 And certainly his voice was gay and sturdy,
 240 For he sang well and played the hurdy-gurdy.
 At sing-songs he was champion of the hour.
 His neck was whiter than a lily-flower
 But strong enough to butt a bruiser down.
 He knew the taverns well in every town
 245 And every innkeeper and barmaid too
 Better than lepers, beggars and that crew, **F**
 For in so *eminent* a man as he
 It was not fitting with the dignity
 Of his position, dealing with a scum
 250 Of wretched lepers; nothing good can come
 Of commerce with such slum-and-gutter dwellers,
 But only with the rich and victual-sellers.
 But anywhere a profit might **accrue**
 Courteous he was and lowly of service too.
 255 Natural gifts like his were hard to match.
 He was the finest beggar of his batch,
 And, for his begging-district, paid a rent;
 His brethren did no poaching where he went.
 For though a widow mightn't have a shoe,
 260 So pleasant was his holy how-d'ye-do
 He got his farthing from her just the same
 Before he left, and so his income came
 To more than he laid out. And how he romped,
 Just like a puppy! He was ever prompt
 265 To arbitrate disputes on settling days
 (For a small fee) in many helpful ways,
 Not then appearing as your cloistered scholar
 With threadbare habit hardly worth a dollar,

225 **shrift**: confession.

230 **well shriven**: completely forgiven through the rite of confession.

231 **verity**: truth.

237 **tippet**: an extension of a hood or sleeve, used as a pocket.

240 **hurdy-gurdy**: a stringed musical instrument, similar to a lute, played by turning a crank while pressing down keys.

F PARAPHRASE

Restate lines 237–246. How does the Friar spend the money he earns through hearing confessions?

252 **victual** (vīt'l): food.

accrue (ə-krōō') v. to be added or gained; to accumulate

261 **farthing**: a coin of small value used in England until recent times.

265 **settling days**: days on which disputes were settled out of court. Friars often acted as arbiters in the disputes and charged for their services, though forbidden by the church to do so.

But much more like a Doctor or a Pope.
 270 Of double-worsted was the semi-cope
 Upon his shoulders, and the swelling fold
 About him, like a bell about its mold
 When it is casting, rounded out his dress.
 He lisped a little out of wantonness
 275 To make his English sweet upon his tongue.
 When he had played his harp, or having sung,
 His eyes would twinkle in his head as bright
 As any star upon a frosty night.
 This worthy's name was Hubert, it appeared.

280 There was a *Merchant* with a forking beard
 And motley dress; high on his horse he sat,
 Upon his head a Flemish beaver hat
 And on his feet daintily buckled boots.
 He told of his opinions and pursuits
 285 In solemn tones, he harped on his increase
 Of capital; there should be sea-police
 (He thought) upon the Harwich-Holland ranges;
 He was expert at dabbling in exchanges.
 This estimable Merchant so had set
 290 His wits to work, none knew he was in debt,
 He was so stately in administration,
 In loans and bargains and negotiation.
 He was an excellent fellow all the same;
 To tell the truth I do not know his name. **G**

295 An *Oxford Cleric*, still a student though,
 One who had taken logic long ago,
 Was there; his horse was thinner than a rake,
 And he was not too fat, I undertake,
 But had a hollow look, a sober stare;
 300 The thread upon his overcoat was bare.
 He had found no preferment in the church
 And he was too unworldly to make search
 For secular employment. By his bed
 He preferred having twenty books in red
 305 And black, of Aristotle's philosophy,
 Than costly clothes, fiddle or psaltery.
 Though a philosopher, as I have told,
 He had not found the stone for making gold.
 Whatever money from his friends he took
 310 He spent on learning or another book
 And prayed for them most earnestly, returning
 Thanks to them thus for paying for his learning.

270 double-worsted (wōōs'tīd): a strong, fairly costly fabric made from tightly twisted woolen yarn; **semi-cope**: a short cloak.

281 motley: multicolored.

282 Flemish: from Flanders, an area in what is now Belgium and northern France.

287 Harwich-Holland ranges: shipping routes between Harwich (hār'ij), a port on England's east coast, and the country of Holland.

288 exchanges: selling foreign currency at a profit.

G PARAPHRASE

Paraphrase lines 284–294.

Is the Merchant a successful businessman? Why or why not?

295 Cleric: a student preparing for the priesthood.

301 preferment: advancement.

305 Aristotle's philosophy: the writings of Aristotle, a famous Greek philosopher of the fourth century B.C.

306 psaltery (sōl'tə-rē): a stringed instrument.

307–308 Though a philosopher . . . gold: The "philosopher's stone" supposedly turned metals into gold.

His only care was study, and indeed
He never spoke a word more than was need,
315 Formal at that, respectful in the extreme,
Short, to the point, and lofty in his theme.
A tone of moral virtue filled his speech
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach. **H**

A Sergeant at the Law who paid his calls,
320 Wary and wise, for clients at St. Paul's
There also was, of noted excellence.
Discreet he was, a man to reverence,
Or so he seemed, his sayings were so wise.
He often had been Justice of Assize
325 By letters patent, and in full commission.
His fame and learning and his high position
Had won him many a robe and many a fee.
There was no such conveyancer as he;
All was fee-simple to his strong digestion,
330 Not one conveyance could be called in question.
Though there was nowhere one so busy as he,
He was less busy than he seemed to be.
He knew of every judgment, case and crime
Ever recorded since King William's time.
335 He could dictate defenses or draft deeds;
No one could pinch a comma from his screeds
And he knew every statute off by rote.
He wore a homely parti-colored coat,
Girt with a silken belt of pin-stripe stuff;
340 Of his appearance I have said enough.

There was a *Franklin* with him, it appeared;
White as a daisy-petal was his beard.
A sanguine man, high-colored and benign,
He loved a morning sop of cake in wine.
345 He lived for pleasure and had always done,
For he was Epicurus' very son,
In whose opinion sensual delight
Was the one true felicity in sight.
As noted as St. Julian was for bounty
350 He made his household free to all the County.
His bread, his ale were finest of the fine
And no one had a better stock of wine.
His house was never short of bake-meat pies,
Of fish and flesh, and these in such supplies
355 It positively snowed with meat and drink
And all the dainties that a man could think. **I**

H CHARACTERIZATION

Reread lines 295–318. In what ways does the Oxford Cleric differ from the Monk and the Friar? Cite details.

319 *Sergeant at the Law*: a lawyer appointed by the monarch to serve as a judge.

320 *St. Paul's*: the cathedral of London, outside which lawyers met clients when the courts were closed.

324 *Justice of Assize*: a judge who traveled about the country to hear cases.

325 *letters patent*: royal documents commissioning a judge.

328 *conveyancer*: a lawyer specializing in conveyances (deeds) and property disputes.

329 *fee-simple*: property owned without restrictions.

334 *King William's time*: the reign of William the Conqueror.

336 *screeds*: documents.

341 *Franklin*: a wealthy landowner.

343 *sanguine* (sǎng'gwĭn): cheerful and good-natured.

346 *Epicurus' very son*: someone who pursues pleasure as the chief goal in life, as the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus was supposed to have recommended.

349 *St. Julian*: the patron saint of hospitality; **bounty:** generosity.

I CHARACTERIZATION

What does the narrator state directly about the Franklin in lines 341–356?

According to the seasons of the year
Changes of dish were ordered to appear.
He kept fat partridges in coops, beyond,
360 Many a bream and pike were in his pond.
Woe to the cook unless the sauce was hot
And sharp, or if he wasn't on the spot!
And in his hall a table stood arrayed
And ready all day long, with places laid.
365 As Justice at the Sessions none stood higher;
He often had been Member for the Shire.
A dagger and a little purse of silk
Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.
As Sheriff he checked audit, every entry.
370 He was a model among landed gentry.

*A Haberdasher, a Dyer, a Carpenter,
A Weaver and a Carpet-maker* were
Among our ranks, all in the livery
Of one impressive guild-fraternity.
375 They were so trim and fresh their gear would pass
For new. Their knives were not tricked out with brass
But wrought with purest silver, which avouches
A like display on girdles and on pouches.
Each seemed a worthy burgess, fit to grace
380 A guild-hall with a seat upon the dais.
Their wisdom would have justified a plan
To make each one of them an alderman;
They had the capital and revenue,
Besides their wives declared it was their due.
385 And if they did not think so, then they ought;
To be called "*Madam*" is a glorious thought,
And so is going to church and being seen
Having your mantle carried, like a queen.

They had a *Cook* with them who stood alone
390 For boiling chicken with a marrow-bone,
Sharp flavoring-powder and a spice for savor.
He could distinguish London ale by flavor,
And he could roast and seethe and broil and fry,
Make good thick soup and bake a tasty pie.
395 But what a pity—so it seemed to me,
That he should have an ulcer on his knee.
As for *blancmange*, he made it with the best.

There was a *Skipper* hailing from far west,
He came from *Dartmouth*, so I understood.

365 Sessions: local court proceedings.

366 Member for the Shire: his county's representative in Parliament.

368 girdle: belt.

369 Sheriff: a royal tax collector.

370 landed gentry (jĕn'trē): well-born, wealthy landowners.

371 Haberdasher: a seller of hats and other clothing accessories.

373–374 livery . . . guild-fraternity: uniform of a social or religious organization.

379 burgess (bŭr'jĭs): citizen of a town.

382 alderman: town councilor.

388 mantle: cloak.

397 blancmange (blə-mānj'): a thick chicken stew with almonds.

399 Dartmouth (dārt'məth): a port in southwestern England.

And she had thrice been to Jerusalem,
Seen many strange rivers and passed over them;
475 She'd been to Rome and also to Boulogne,
St. James of Compostella and Cologne,
And she was skilled in wandering by the way.
She had gap-teeth, set widely, truth to say.
Easily on an ambling horse she sat
480 Well wimpled up and on her head a hat
As broad as is a buckler or a shield;
She had a flowing mantle that concealed
Large hips, her heels spurred sharply under that.
In company she liked to laugh and chat
485 And knew the remedies for love's mischances,
An art in which she knew the oldest dances. 1

A holy-minded man of good renown
There was, and poor, the *Parson* to a town,
Yet he was rich in holy thought and work.
490 He also was a learned man, a clerk,
Who truly knew Christ's gospel and would preach it
Devoutly to parishioners, and teach it.
Benign and wonderfully diligent,
And patient when adversity was sent
495 (For so he proved in much adversity)
He hated cursing to extort a fee,
Nay rather he preferred beyond a doubt
Giving to poor parishioners round about
Both from church offerings and his property;
500 He could in little find sufficiency.
Wide was his parish, with houses far asunder,
Yet he neglected not in rain or thunder,
In sickness or in grief, to pay a call
On the remotest, whether great or small,
505 Upon his feet, and in his hand a stave.
This noble example to his sheep he gave
That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught;
And it was from the Gospel he had caught
Those words, and he would add this figure too,
510 That if gold rust, what then will iron do?
For if a priest be foul in whom we trust
No wonder that a common man should rust;
And shame it is to see—let priests take stock—
A shitten shepherd and a snowy flock.
515 The true example that a priest should give
Is one of cleanness, how the sheep should live.

473–476 Jerusalem . . . Rome . . .
Boulogne (bōō-lōn'), St. James of
Compostella and Cologne (kə-lōn'):
popular destinations of religious
pilgrimages in the Middle Ages.

480 **wimpled**: with her hair and
neck covered by a cloth headdress.

481 **buckler**: small round shield.

1 CHARACTERIZATION

Reread lines 455–486. Which
details help define the Wife of
Bath as a worldly woman?

490 **clerk**: scholar.

500 **sufficiency**: enough to get by on.

501 **asunder**: apart.

505 **stave**: staff.

507 **wrought** (rôt): worked.

509 **figure**: figure of speech.

He did not set his benefice to hire
 And leave his sheep encumbered in the mire
 Or run to London to earn easy bread
 520 By singing masses for the wealthy dead,
 Or find some Brotherhood and get enrolled.
 He stayed at home and watched over his fold
 So that no wolf should make the sheep miscarry.
 He was a shepherd and no mercenary. **K**
 525 Holy and virtuous he was, but then
 Never contemptuous of sinful men,
 Never disdainful, never too proud or fine,
 But was discreet in teaching and benign.
 His business was to show a fair behavior
 530 And draw men thus to Heaven and their Savior,
 Unless indeed a man were obstinate;
 And such, whether of high or low estate,
 He put to sharp rebuke, to say the least.
 I think there never was a better priest.
 535 He sought no pomp or glory in his dealings,
 No scrupulosity had spiced his feelings.
 Christ and His Twelve Apostles and their lore
 He taught, but followed it himself before.

517 set his benefice (bĕn'ə-fĭs) **to hire:** pay someone to perform his parish duties for him.

K PARAPHRASE

Restate lines 515–524. In what ways does the Parson serve the members of his parish?

536 scrupulosity (skrŭō'pyə-lŏs'ĭ-tē): excessive concern with fine points of behavior.

There was a *Plowman* with him there, his brother
 540 Many a load of dung one time or other
 He must have carted through the morning dew.
 He was an honest worker, good and true,
 Living in peace and perfect charity,
 And, as the gospel bade him, so did he,
 545 Loving God best with all his heart and mind
 And then his neighbor as himself, repined
 At no misfortune, slacked for no content,
 For steadily about his work he went
 To thrash his corn, to dig or to manure
 550 Or make a ditch; and he would help the poor **L**
 For love of Christ and never take a penny
 If he could help it, and, as prompt as any,
 He paid his tithes in full when they were due
 On what he owned, and on his earnings too.
 555 He wore a tabard smock and rode a mare.

There was a *Reeve*, also a *Miller*, there,
 A *College Manciple* from the Inns of Court,
 A papal *Pardoner* and, in close consort,

L CHARACTERIZATION

Compare the Plowman with his brother, the Parson. What character traits do they seem to share?

555 tabard smock: a short loose jacket made of a heavy material.

556 Reeve: an estate manager;

557 Manciple: a servant in charge of purchasing food;

Inns of Court: London institutions for training law students;

558 Pardoner: a church official authorized to sell people pardons for their sins.



He had grown rich and had a store of treasure
Well tucked away, yet out it came to pleasure
His lord with subtle loans or gifts of goods,
630 To earn his thanks and even coats and hoods.
When young he'd learnt a useful trade and still
He was a carpenter of first-rate skill.
The stallion-cob he rode at a slow trot
Was dapple-grey and bore the name of Scot.
635 He wore an overcoat of bluish shade
And rather long; he had a rusty blade
Slung at his side. He came, as I heard tell,
From Norfolk, near a place called Baldeswell.
His coat was tucked under his belt and splayed.
640 He rode the hindmost of our cavalcade.

633 stallion-cob: a thickset, short-legged male horse.

638 Norfolk (nɒr'fɒk): a county in eastern England.

There was a *Summoner* with us at that Inn,
His face on fire, like a cherubin,
For he had carbuncles. His eyes were narrow,
He was as hot and lecherous as a sparrow.
645 Black scabby brows he had, and a thin beard.
Children were afraid when he appeared.
No quicksilver, lead ointment, tartar creams,
No brimstone, no boracic, so it seems,
Could make a salve that had the power to bite,
650 Clean up or cure his whelks of knobby white
Or purge the pimples sitting on his cheeks.
Garlic he loved, and onions too, and leeks,
And drinking strong red wine till all was hazy.
Then he would shout and jabber as if crazy,
655 And wouldn't speak a word except in Latin
When he was drunk, such tags as he was pat in;
He only had a few, say two or three,
That he had mugged up out of some decree;
No wonder, for he heard them every day.
660 And, as you know, a man can teach a jay
To call out "Walter" better than the Pope.
But had you tried to test his wits and grope
For more, you'd have found nothing in the bag.
Then "*Questio quid juris*" was his tag.
665 He was a noble varlet and a kind one,
You'd meet none better if you went to find one.
Why, he'd allow—just for a quart of wine—
Any good lad to keep a concubine
A twelvemonth and dispense him altogether!
670 And he had finches of his own to feather:
And if he found some rascal with a maid

642 cherubin (chɛr'ə-bɪn'): a type of angel—in the Middle Ages often depicted with a fiery red face.

643 carbuncles (kɑr'bʊŋ'kɔlz): big pimples, considered a sign of lechery and drunkenness in the Middle Ages.

647–648 quicksilver . . . boracic (bə-ræs'ɪk): substances used as skin medicines in medieval times.

650 whelks (hwɛlks): swellings.

656 tags: brief quotations.

658 mugged up: memorized.

660 jay: a bird that can be taught to mimic human speech without understanding it.

664 *Questio quid juris* (kwɛs'tɛ-ō kwɪd yŏr'ɪs): Latin for "The question is, What part of the law (is applicable)?"—a statement often heard in medieval courts.

He would instruct him not to be afraid
 In such a case of the Archdeacon's curse
 (Unless the rascal's soul were in his purse)
 675 For in his purse the punishment should be.
 "Purse is the good Archdeacon's Hell," said he.
 But well I know he lied in what he said;
 A curse should put a guilty man in dread,
 For curses kill, as shriving brings, salvation.
 680 We should beware of excommunication.
 Thus, as he pleased, the man could bring duress
 On any young fellow in the diocese.
 He knew their secrets, they did what he said.
 He wore a garland set upon his head
 685 Large as the holly-bush upon a stake
 Outside an ale-house, and he had a cake,
 A round one, which it was his joke to wield
 As if it were intended for a shield.

He and a gentle *Pardoner* rode together,
 690 A bird from Charing Cross of the same feather,
 Just back from visiting the Court of Rome.
 He loudly sang, "*Come hither, love, come home!*"
 The Summoner sang deep seconds to this song,
 No trumpet ever sounded half so strong.
 695 This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
 Hanging down smoothly like a hank of flax.
 In driblets fell his locks behind his head
 Down to his shoulders which they overspread;
 Thinly they fell, like rat-tails, one by one.
 700 He wore no hood upon his head, for fun;
 The hood inside his wallet had been stowed,
 He aimed at riding in the latest mode;
 But for a little cap his head was bare
 And he had bulging eye-balls, like a hare.
 705 He'd sewed a holy relic on his cap;
 His wallet lay before him on his lap,
 Brimful of pardons come from Rome, all hot.
 He had the same small voice a goat has got.
 His chin no beard had harbored, nor would harbor,
 710 Smoother than ever chin was left by barber.
 I judge he was a gelding, or a mare.
 As to his trade, from Berwick down to Ware
 There was no pardoner of equal grace,
 For in his trunk he had a pillow-case
 715 Which he asserted was Our Lady's veil.

673 Archdeacon's curse: excommunication—an official exclusion of a person from participating in the rites of the church. (An archdeacon is a high church official.)

681 duress (doo-rĕs'): compulsion by means of threats.

682 diocese (dĭ'ə-sĭs): the district under a bishop's supervision.

685–686 the holly-bush . . . ale-house: Since few people could read in the Middle Ages, many businesses identified themselves with symbols. Outside many taverns could be found wreaths of holly on stakes.

690 Charing Cross: a section of London.

696 flax: a pale grayish yellow fiber used for making linen cloth.

701 wallet: knapsack.

705 holy relic: an object revered because of its association with a holy person.

711 gelding (gĕl'dĭng): a castrated horse—here, a eunuch.

712 Berwick (bĕr'ĭk) . . . **Ware:** towns in the north and the south of England.

715 Our Lady's veil: the kerchief of the Virgin Mary.

He said he had a gobbet of the sail
 Saint Peter had the time when he made bold
 To walk the waves, till Jesu Christ took hold.
 He had a cross of metal set with stones
 720 And, in a glass, a rubble of pigs' bones.
 And with these relics, any time he found
 Some poor up-country parson to astound,
 In one short day, in money down, he drew
 More than the parson in a month or two,
 725 And by his flatteries and prevarication
 Made monkeys of the priest and congregation. **N**
 But still to do him justice first and last
 In church he was a noble ecclesiast.
 How well he read a lesson or told a story!
 730 But best of all he sang an Offertory,
 For well he knew that when that song was sung
 He'd have to preach and tune his honey-tongue
 And (well he could) win silver from the crowd.
 That's why he sang so merrily and loud.

716 **gobbet**: piece.

717–718 **when he . . . took hold**: a reference to an incident in which Jesus extended a helping hand to Peter as he tried to walk on water (Matthew 14:29–31).

N PARAPHRASE

Paraphrase the description of the Pardoner in lines 712–726. How exactly does he earn a living?

735 Now I have told you shortly, in a clause,
 The rank, the array, the number and the cause
 Of our assembly in this company
 In Southwark, at that high-class hostelry
 Known as *The Tabard*, close beside *The Bell*.
 740 And now the time has come for me to tell
 How we behaved that evening; I'll begin
 After we had alighted at the Inn,
 Then I'll report our journey, stage by stage,
 All the remainder of our pilgrimage.
 745 But first I beg of you, in courtesy,
 Not to condemn me as unmannerly
 If I speak plainly and with no concealings
 And give account of all their words and dealings,
 Using their very phrases as they fell.
 750 For certainly, as you all know so well,
 He who repeats a tale after a man
 Is bound to say, as nearly as he can,
 Each single word, if he remembers it,
 However rudely spoken or unfit,
 755 Or else the tale he tells will be untrue,
 The things pretended and the phrases new.
 He may not flinch although it were his brother,
 He may as well say one word as another.
 And Christ Himself spoke broad in Holy Writ,
 760 Yet there is no scurrility in it,

739 **The Bell**: another inn.

745–756 The narrator apologizes in advance for using the exact words of his companions.

759 **broad**: bluntly; plainly.

760 **scurrility** (skə-rĭl'ĭ-tē): vulgarity; coarseness.

Return to
 explanation
 of the frame



And Plato says, for those with power to read,
 “The word should be as cousin to the deed.”
 Further I beg you to forgive it me
 If I neglect the order and degree
 765 And what is due to rank in what I’ve planned.
 I’m short of wit as you will understand.

761 Plato (plā'tō): a famous philosopher of ancient Greece.

Our *Host* gave us great welcome; everyone
 Was given a place and supper was begun.
 He served the finest victuals you could think,
 770 The wine was strong and we were glad to drink.
 A very striking man our Host withal,
 And fit to be a marshal in a hall.
 His eyes were bright, his girth a little wide;
 There is no finer burgess in Cheapside.
 775 Bold in his speech, yet wise and full of tact,
 There was no manly attribute he lacked,
 What’s more he was a merry-hearted man.
 After our meal he jokingly began
 To talk of sport, and, among other things
 780 After we’d settled up our reckonings,
 He said as follows: “Truly, gentlemen,
 You’re very welcome and I can’t think when
 —Upon my word I’m telling you no lie—
 I’ve seen a gathering here that looked so s pry,
 785 No, not this year, as in this tavern now.
 I’d think you up some fun if I knew how.
 And, as it happens, a thought has just occurred

767 Host: the innkeeper of the Tabard.

772 marshal in a hall: an official in charge of arranging a nobleman’s banquet.

774 Cheapside: the main business district of London in Chaucer’s day.

780 settled up our reckonings: paid our bills.

To please you, costing nothing, on my word.
You're off to Canterbury—well, God speed!
790 Blessed St. Thomas answer to your need!
And I don't doubt, before the journey's done
You mean to while the time in tales and fun.
Indeed, there's little pleasure for your bones
Riding along and all as dumb as stones.
795 So let me then propose for your enjoyment,
Just as I said, a suitable employment.
And if my notion suits and you agree
And promise to submit yourselves to me
Playing your parts exactly as I say
800 Tomorrow as you ride along the way,
Then by my father's soul (and he is dead)
If you don't like it you can have my head!
Hold up your hands, and not another word.”

Well, our opinion was not long deferred,
805 It seemed not worth a serious debate;
We all agreed to it at any rate
And bade him issue what commands he would.
“My lords,” he said, “now listen for your good,
And please don't treat my notion with disdain.
810 This is the point. I'll make it short and plain.
Each one of you shall help to make things slip
By telling two stories on the outward trip
To Canterbury, that's what I intend,
And, on the homeward way to journey's end
815 Another two, tales from the days of old;
And then the man whose story is best told,
That is to say who gives the fullest measure
Of good morality and general pleasure,
He shall be given a supper, paid by all,
820 Here in this tavern, in this very hall,
When we come back again from Canterbury. ◉
And in the hope to keep you bright and merry
I'll go along with you myself and ride
All at my own expense and serve as guide.
825 I'll be the judge, and those who won't obey
Shall pay for what we spend upon the way.
Now if you all agree to what you've heard
Tell me at once without another word,
And I will make arrangements early for it.”

790 St. Thomas: St. Thomas à Becket, to whose shrine the pilgrims are traveling.

794 dumb: silent.

Language Coach

Multiple Meanings *Submit* has several meanings: (1) to yield to someone else's power, (2) to present for review, (3) to present as an opinion. Which meaning applies in line 798? Which meaning applies in this sentence? *I will submit my article to the school newspaper.*

807 bade him: asked him to.

COMMON CORE RL.4

◉ TONE

In literature, **tone** refers to the attitude a writer takes toward a subject or character. A writer can communicate tone through diction, choice of details, and direct statements of his or her opinion. Tone can be serious, playful, admiring, mocking, or objective. How would you describe Chaucer's tone toward his characters throughout “The Prologue”? Why do you think he portrays his characters this way?

830 Of course we all agreed, in fact we swore it
Delightedly, and made **entreaty** too
That he should act as he proposed to do,
Become our Governor in short, and be
Judge of our tales and general referee,
835 And set the supper at a certain price.
We promised to be ruled by his advice
Come high, come low; unanimously thus
We set him up in judgment over us.
More wine was fetched, the business being done;
840 We drank it off and up went everyone
To bed without a moment of delay. **P**

Early next morning at the spring of day
Up rose our Host and roused us like a cock,
Gathering us together in a flock,
845 And off we rode at slightly faster pace
Than walking to St. Thomas' watering-place;
And there our Host drew up, began to ease
His horse, and said, "Now, listen if you please,
My lords! Remember what you promised me.
850 If evensong and matins will agree
Let's see who shall be first to tell a tale.
And as I hope to drink good wine and ale
I'll be your judge. The rebel who disobeys,
However much the journey costs, he pays.
855 Now draw for cut and then we can depart;
The man who draws the shortest cut shall start."

entreaty (ĕn-trĕ'tĕ) *n.* a serious request or plea

P CHARACTERIZATION

Examine the way the pilgrims respond to the Host in lines 830–841. What type of person do you think would appeal to so many?

843 cock: rooster (whose cry rouses people from sleep).

846 St. Thomas' watering-place: a brook about two miles from London.

850 If evensong and matins (mă't'nz) **will agree:** if what you said last night is what you will do this morning. (Evensong and matins are evening and morning prayer services.)

855 draw for cut: draw lots.



The PARDONER'S PROLOGUE

Geoffrey Chaucer

DUE Friday- read and answer the questions on the printed sheet

BACKGROUND In the medieval church, a pardoner was a clergy member who had authority from the pope to grant indulgences—certificates of forgiveness—to people who showed great charity. In practice, however, many pardoners—such as Chaucer’s pilgrim—were unethical and sold their certificates to make money for the church or themselves.

“My lords,” he said, “in churches where I preach
I cultivate a haughty kind of speech
And ring it out as roundly as a bell;
I’ve got it all by heart, the tale I tell.
5 I have a text, it always is the same
And always has been, since I learnt the game,
Old as the hills and fresher than the grass,
Radix malorum est cupiditas. . . .

“I preach, as you have heard me say before,
10 And tell a hundred lying mockeries more.
I take great pains, and stretching out my neck
To east and west I crane about and peck
Just like a pigeon sitting on a barn.
My hands and tongue together spin the yarn
15 And all my antics are a joy to see.
The curse of **avarice** and cupidity
Is all my sermon, for it frees the pelf.
Out come the pence, and specially for myself,
For my exclusive purpose is to win
20 And not at all to **castigate** their sin.
Once dead what matter how their souls may fare?
They can go blackberrying, for all I care! . . .

“And thus I preach against the very vice
I make my living out of—avarice. **A**
25 And yet however guilty of that sin
Myself, with others I have power to win
Them from it, I can bring them to repent;
But that is not my principal intent.

Analyze Visuals ►

What details in this image reflect the Pardoner’s description of his preaching?

8 *Radix malorum est cupiditas*

(ră'dīks mā-lôr'əm ɛst' kōō-pī'd'ī-tās'): Latin for “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10).

10 **mockeries**: false tales.

avarice (ăv'ə-rīs) *n.* greed

17 **pelf**: riches.

18 **pence**: pennies.

castigate (kăs'tī-gāt') *v.* to criticize

A PREDICT

The Pardoner convinces people to buy certificates of forgiveness by reciting his moral stories. What can you predict about the characters and events of the tale he will tell?



Covetousness is both the root and stuff
30 Of all I preach. That ought to be enough.

“Well, then I give examples thick and fast
From bygone times, old stories from the past.
A yokel mind loves stories from of old,
Being the kind it can repeat and hold.
35 What! Do you think, as long as I can preach
And get their silver for the things I teach,
That I will live in poverty, from choice?
That’s not the counsel of my inner voice!
No! Let me preach and beg from kirk to kirk
40 And never do an honest job of work,
No, nor make baskets, like St. Paul, to gain
A livelihood. I do not preach in vain.
There’s no apostle I would counterfeit;
I mean to have money, wool and cheese and wheat
45 Though it were given me by the poorest lad
Or poorest village widow, though she had
A string of starving children, all agape. **B**
No, let me drink the liquor of the grape
And keep a jolly wench in every town!

50 “But listen, gentlemen; to bring things down
To a conclusion, would you like a tale?
Now as I’ve drunk a draft of corn-ripe ale,
By God it stands to reason I can strike
On some good story that you all will like.
55 For though I am a wholly vicious man
Don’t think I can’t tell moral tales. I can!
Here’s one I often preach when out for winning. . . .”

33 **yokel**: rustic.

39 **kirk**: church.

41 **St. Paul**: a follower of Jesus Christ who made baskets and tents.

43 **counterfeit**: imitate.

B IRONY

Review lines 39–47. Why does the Pardoner tell his moral stories? Explain how his motive is ironic, or different from what you might have expected.

55 **vicious**: immoral; depraved.

The PARDONER'S TALE

It's of three rioters I have to tell
Who, long before the morning service bell,
60 Were sitting in a tavern for a drink.
And as they sat, they heard the hand-bell clink
Before a coffin going to the grave;
One of them called the little tavern-knave
And said "Go and find out at once—look spy!—
65 Whose corpse is in that coffin passing by;
And see you get the name correctly too."
"Sir," said the boy, "no need, I promise you;
Two hours before you came here I was told.
He was a friend of yours in days of old,
70 And suddenly, last night, the man was slain,
Upon his bench, face up, dead drunk again.
There came a privy thief, they call him Death,
Who kills us all round here, and in a breath
He speared him through the heart, he never stirred.
75 And then Death went his way without a word.
He's killed a thousand in the present plague,
And, sir, it doesn't do to be too vague
If you should meet him; you had best be wary.
Be on your guard with such an adversary,
80 Be primed to meet him everywhere you go,
That's what my mother said. It's all I know."

The publican joined in with, "By St. Mary,
What the child says is right; you'd best be wary,
This very year he killed, in a large village
85 A mile away, man, woman, serf at tillage,
Page in the household, children—all there were.
Yes, I imagine that he lives round there.
It's well to be prepared in these alarms,
He might do you dishonor." "Huh, God's arms!" **C**
90 The rioter said, "Is he so fierce to meet?
I'll search for him, by Jesus, street by street.
God's blessed bones! I'll register a vow!

58 **rioters**: rowdy people; revelers.

61–62 **hand-bell . . . grave**: In Chaucer's time, a bell was carried beside the coffin in a funeral procession.

63 **tavern-knave** (nāv): a serving boy in an inn.

72 **privy** (prīv'ē): hidden; secretive.

76 Bubonic plague killed at least a quarter of the population of Europe in the mid-14th century.

82 **publican**: innkeeper; tavern owner.

86 **page**: boy servant.

C EXEMPLUM

Many characters in moral stories are **allegorical**—that is, they stand for abstract ideas, such as virtue and beauty. Identify the allegorical character presented in lines 72–89. Who fears him? Why?

Here, chaps! The three of us together now,
Hold up your hands, like me, and we'll be brothers
95 In this affair, and each defend the others,
And we will kill this traitor Death, I say!
Away with him as he has made away
With all our friends. God's dignity! Tonight!"

They made their bargain, swore with appetite,
100 These three, to live and die for one another
As brother-born might swear to his born brother.
And up they started in their drunken rage
And made towards this village which the page
And publican had spoken of before.
105 Many and grisly were the oaths they swore,
Tearing Christ's blessed body to a shred;
"If we can only catch him, Death is dead!" **D**

When they had gone not fully half a mile,
Just as they were about to cross a stile,
110 They came upon a very poor old man
Who humbly greeted them and thus began,
"God look to you, my lords, and give you quiet!"
To which the proudest of these men of riot
Gave back the answer, "What, old fool? Give place!
115 Why are you all wrapped up except your face?
Why live so long? Isn't it time to die?"

The old, old fellow looked him in the eye
And said, "Because I never yet have found,
Though I have walked to India, searching round
120 Village and city on my pilgrimage,
One who would change his youth to have my age.
And so my age is mine and must be still
Upon me, for such time as God may will.

"Not even Death, alas, will take my life;
125 So, like a wretched prisoner at strife
Within himself, I walk alone and wait
About the earth, which is my mother's gate,
Knock-knocking with my staff from night to noon
And crying, 'Mother, open to me soon!
130 Look at me, mother, won't you let me in?
See how I wither, flesh and blood and skin!
Alas! When will these bones be laid to rest?
Mother, I would exchange—for that were best—
The wardrobe in my chamber, standing there

D PREDICT

What qualities of the three men does Chaucer emphasize in lines 93–107? Predict what will happen to them based on these text clues.

109 stile: a stairway used to climb over a fence or wall.

129 The old man addresses the earth as his mother (recall the familiar expressions "Mother Earth" and "Mother Nature").

135 So long, for yours! Aye, for a shirt of hair
To wrap me in!' She has refused her grace,
Whence comes the pallor of my withered face.

135 **shirt of hair:** a rough shirt made of animal hair, worn to punish oneself for one's sins.

“But it dishonored you when you began
To speak so roughly, sir, to an old man,
140 Unless he had injured you in word or deed.
It says in holy writ, as you may read,
'Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head
And honor it.' And therefore be it said
'Do no more harm to an old man than you,
145 Being now young, would have another do
When you are old'—if you should live till then.
And so may God be with you, gentlemen,
For I must go whither I have to go.”

142 **hoary:** gray or white with age.



“By God,” the gambler said, “you shan’t do so,
150 You don’t get off so easy, by St. John!
I heard you mention, just a moment gone,
A certain traitor Death who singles out
And kills the fine young fellows hereabout.
And you’re his spy, by God! You wait a bit.
155 Say where he is or you shall pay for it,
By God and by the Holy Sacrament!
I say you’ve joined together by consent
To kill us younger folk, you thieving swine!” **E**

“Well, sirs,” he said, “if it be your design
160 To find out Death, turn up this crooked way
Towards that grove, I left him there today
Under a tree, and there you’ll find him waiting.
He isn’t one to hide for all your prating.
You see that oak? He won’t be far to find.
165 And God protect you that redeemed mankind,
Aye, and amend you!” Thus that ancient man.

At once the three young rioters began
To run, and reached the tree, and there they found
A pile of golden florins on the ground,
170 New-coined, eight bushels of them as they thought.
No longer was it Death those fellows sought,
For they were all so thrilled to see the sight,
The florins were so beautiful and bright,
That down they sat beside the precious pile.
175 The wickedest spoke first after a while.
“Brothers,” he said, “you listen to what I say.
I’m pretty sharp although I joke away.
It’s clear that Fortune has bestowed this treasure
To let us live in jollity and pleasure.
180 Light come, light go! We’ll spend it as we ought.
God’s precious dignity! Who would have thought
This morning was to be our lucky day?” **F**

“If one could only get the gold away,
Back to my house, or else to yours, perhaps—
185 For as you know, the gold is ours, chaps—
We’d all be at the top of fortune, hey?
But certainly it can’t be done by day.
People would call us robbers—a strong gang,
So our own property would make us hang.
190 No, we must bring this treasure back by night
Some prudent way, and keep it out of sight.

E EXEMPLUM

To best illustrate a moral point, characters in an exemplum are usually good or evil. To which category does the gambler seem to belong? Cite evidence from lines 149–158 to support your response.

169 florins: coins.

178 “Fortune” here means “fate.”

F IRONY

Reread lines 167–182. In what way is the discovery the rioters make ironic, or different from what you had anticipated?

And so as a solution I propose
We draw for lots and see the way it goes;
The one who draws the longest, lucky man,
195 Shall run to town as quickly as he can
To fetch us bread and wine—but keep things dark—
While two remain in hiding here to mark
Our heap of treasure. If there's no delay,
When night comes down we'll carry it away,
200 All three of us, wherever we have planned.” **G**

He gathered lots and hid them in his hand
Bidding them draw for where the luck should fall.
It fell upon the youngest of them all,
And off he ran at once towards the town.

205 As soon as he had gone the first sat down
And thus began a **parley** with the other:
“You know that you can trust me as a brother;
Now let me tell you where your profit lies;
You know our friend has gone to get supplies
210 And here's a lot of gold that is to be
Divided equally amongst us three.
Nevertheless, if I could shape things thus
So that we shared it out—the two of us—
Wouldn't you take it as a friendly act?”

215 “But how?” the other said. “He knows the fact
That all the gold was left with me and you;
What can we tell him? What are we to do?”

“Is it a bargain,” said the first, “or no?
For I can tell you in a word or so
220 What's to be done to bring the thing about.”
“Trust me,” the other said, “you needn't doubt
My word. I won't betray you, I'll be true.”

“Well,” said his friend, “you see that we are two,
And two are twice as powerful as one.
225 Now look; when he comes back, get up in fun
To have a wrestle; then, as you attack,
I'll up and put my dagger through his back
While you and he are struggling, as in game;
Then draw your dagger too and do the same.
230 Then all this money will be ours to spend,
Divided equally of course, dear friend.
Then we can gratify our lusts and fill

196 keep things dark: act in secret, without giving away what has happened.

G PREDICT

Reread lines 183–200. How do you think the three men will react to the challenge of sharing their treasure?

parley (pär'lē) *n.* a discussion or a conference

Language Coach

Fixed Expressions Many verbs take on a special meaning when followed by a particular preposition. An example of this type of fixed expression is *bring about*. Reread lines 219–220: “to bring the thing about” means “to cause the thing.” Use *bring about* in another sentence.

The day with dicing at our own sweet will.”
Thus these two miscreants agreed to slay
235 The third and youngest, as you heard me say.

The youngest, as he ran towards the town,
Kept turning over, rolling up and down
Within his heart the beauty of those bright
New florins, saying, “Lord, to think I might
240 Have all that treasure to myself alone!
Could there be anyone beneath the throne
Of God so happy as I then should be?” H

And so the Fiend, our common enemy,
Was given power to put it in his thought
245 That there was always poison to be bought,
And that with poison he could kill his friends.
To men in such a state the Devil sends
Thoughts of this kind, and has a full permission
To lure them on to sorrow and perdition;
250 For this young man was utterly content
To kill them both and never to repent.

And on he ran, he had no thought to tarry,
Came to the town, found an apothecary
And said, “Sell me some poison if you will,
255 I have a lot of rats I want to kill
And there’s a polecat too about my yard
That takes my chickens and it hits me hard;
But I’ll get even, as is only right,
With vermin that destroy a man by night.”

260 The chemist answered, “I’ve a preparation
Which you shall have, and by my soul’s salvation
If any living creature eat or drink
A mouthful, ere he has the time to think,
Though he took less than makes a grain of wheat,
265 You’ll see him fall down dying at your feet;
Yes, die he must, and in so short a while
You’d hardly have the time to walk a mile,
The poison is so strong, you understand.”

This cursed fellow grabbed into his hand
270 The box of poison and away he ran
Into a neighboring street, and found a man
Who lent him three large bottles. He withdrew
And deftly poured the poison into two.

233 **dicing**: gambling with dice.

234 **miscreants** (mĭs’krē-ənts):
evildoers; villains.

H EXEMPLUM

Which details in lines 236–242
tell you that greed is the subject
of this moral story?

243 **Fiend**: the Devil; Satan.

249 **perdition**: damnation; hell.

COMMON CORE RL.4

Language Coach

Multiple Meanings Usually, the suffix *-ion* turns a verb into a noun meaning “act or state of (verb + *-ing*).” But many *-ion* words also have special meanings. *Preparation* (line 260) means “something prepared” (like medicine). Give a more general meaning of *preparation*.

He kept the third one clean, as well he might,
275 For his own drink, meaning to work all night
Stacking the gold and carrying it away.
And when this rioter, this devil's clay,
Had filled his bottles up with wine, all three,
Back to rejoin his comrades sauntered he. **I**

280 Why make a sermon of it? Why waste breath?
Exactly in the way they'd planned his death
They fell on him and slew him, two to one.
Then said the first of them when this was done,
"Now for a drink. Sit down and let's be merry,
285 For later on there'll be the corpse to bury."
And, as it happened, reaching for a sup,
He took a bottle full of poison up
And drank; and his companion, nothing loth,
Drank from it also, and they perished both.

290 There is, in Avicenna's long relation
Concerning poison and its operation,
Trust me, no ghaselier section to transcend
What these two wretches suffered at their end.
Thus these two murderers received their due,
295 So did the treacherous young poisoner too. **J**

O cursed sin! O blackguardly excess!
O treacherous homicide! O wickedness!
O gluttony that lusted on and diced! . . .
Dearly beloved, God forgive your sin
300 And keep you from the vice of avarice!
My holy pardon frees you all of this,
Provided that you make the right approaches,
That is with sterling, rings, or silver brooches.
Bow down your heads under this holy bull!
305 Come on, you women, offer up your wool!
I'll write your name into my ledger; so!
Into the bliss of Heaven you shall go.
For I'll absolve you by my holy power,
You that make offering, clean as at the hour
310 When you were born. . . . That, sirs, is how I preach.
And Jesu Christ, soul's healer, aye, the leech
Of every soul, grant pardon and relieve you
Of sin, for that is best, I won't deceive you.

One thing I should have mentioned in my tale,
315 Dear people. I've some relics in my bale

I PREDICT

What do you think will happen to the three men? Support your response with clues from the text.

288 nothing loth: not at all unwilling.

290 Avicenna's (äv'ī-sēn'ez) **long relation:** a medical text written by an 11th-century Islamic physician; it includes descriptions of various poisons and their effects.

J EXEMPLUM

Moral stories usually have straightforward plots, where events happen in quick succession. In what way does the story's conclusion fit this pattern?

299 The Pardoner is now addressing his fellow pilgrims.

304 bull: an official document from the pope.

311 leech: physician.

315 relics in my bale: Relics are the remains of a saint—bones, hair, or clothing. In medieval times, many relics were counterfeit.

And pardons too, as full and fine, I hope,
As any in England, given me by the Pope.
If there be one among you that is willing
To have my absolution for a shilling
320 Devoutly given, come! and do not harden
Your hearts but kneel in humbleness for pardon;
Or else, receive my pardon as we go.
You can renew it every town or so
Always provided that you still renew
325 Each time, and in good money, what is due.
It is an honor to you to have found
A pardoner with his credentials sound
Who can absolve you as you ply the spur
In any accident that may occur.
330 For instance—we are all at Fortune's beck—
Your horse may throw you down and break your neck.
What a security it is to all
To have me here among you and at call
With pardon for the lowly and the great
335 When soul leaves body for the future state!
And I advise our Host here to begin,
The most enveloped of you all in sin.
Come forward, Host, you shall be the first to pay,
And kiss my holy relics right away.
340 Only a groat. Come on, unbuckle your purse!

319 shilling: a coin worth twelve pence.

330–331 The Pardoner reminds the other pilgrims that death may come to them at any time.

340 groat: a silver coin worth four pence.