Chaucer's Guided Tour of
Medieval Life and Literature

Rich people, poor people, stock brokers, artists, farmers, street vendors... with all of the different lifestyles in our culture, you may wonder what single event could gather together people from all parts of society. Geoffrey Chaucer found in his own society an orderly, even joyous event that gathered people from diverse backgrounds and occupations—a pilgrimage, or journey to a sacred spot. It is such a pilgrimage that gathers together the diverse characters in his masterpiece, The Canterbury Tales.

The Journey Begins Like modern travelers, medieval pilgrims must have been eager to while away their time traveling. Chaucer uses this fact to set his story in motion. The Canterbury Tales begins with a Prologue, in which the Narrator, presumably Chaucer himself, meets 29 other pilgrims at the Tabard Inn, located in a suburb of London. As the pilgrims prepare for their journey, the host of the Inn, Harry Bailey, sets a challenge. To make the journey more entertaining, he suggests that each pilgrim tell two stories on the way to Canterbury and two stories on the return trip. The person who tells the best tale will be treated to a feast hosted by the other pilgrims. The pilgrims accept the challenge, and Bailey himself decides to join them and judge the competition.

"Canterbury Tales is actually a story about stories..."

Each of the following sections of the work consists of one of the pilgrim's tales. Brief transitions, as one storyteller finishes and another begins, link the stories. In this way, the work is actually a story about stories, twenty-four different tales set within the overarching tale of the pilgrimage.

Snapshots of an Era In the Prologue, Chaucer sketches a brief but vivid portrait of each pilgrim, creating a lively sense of medieval life. In itself, the Prologue is a great literary achievement. As critic Vincent Hopper notes,

The description of the various pilgrims turn in rapid sequence from an article of clothing to a point of character and back again with no apparent organization or desire for it. Yet so effective is this artful artlessness that each pilgrim stands out sharply as a type of medieval personality and also as a highly individualized character...

Chaucer begins his survey of medieval society with the courtly world, which centered around the nobility. Medieval nobles such as Chaucer's Knight held land granted them by a lord or king, for whom they fought in times of war. In the middle ranks of medieval society were learned professionals, such as Chaucer’s Doctor, and wealthy businessmen. The lower
orders included craftsmen, storekeepers, and minor administrators, such as the Reeve and the Manciple. The various ranks of the Church, a cornerstone of medieval society, are represented by characters from the Prioress to the Summoner.

However, as Chaucer writes about character ranks and types, he presents them as real people, individuals who defy categorizing. For example, though all outward appearances suggest that the Merchant is wealthy, he is, in fact, deeply in debt—a secret he keeps from some of his fellow travelers. Such breaks in stereotype provide readers with an even greater insight into the daily lives of medieval people.

A Literary Tour The popular genres in Chaucer’s day included romances (tales of chivalry), fabliaux (short, bawdy, humorous stories), the stories of saint’s lives, sermons, and allegories (narratives in which characters represent abstractions such as Pride or Honor). Each pilgrim chooses to tell a type of tale consistent with his or her character, and each of the major forms of medieval literature is represented. Chaucer wrote much of the Tales using his own form, the heroic couplet, a pair of rhyming lines with five stressed syllables each. For this important innovation, along with his other achievements, he is known as the father of English poetry.

The Endless Road Traveling with Chaucer’s pilgrims, a reader may feel that the world is a big place but that, somehow, all of its pieces fit together. The Canterbury Tales reminds us that every journey from here to there is filled with stories, waiting to be told.

Activity

Modern Day Travelers
Imagine taking a long bus or plane trip. With a group, discuss the types of people traveling with you. Come up with your own cast of characters for a modern-day version of The Canterbury Tales. Use these questions to guide your discussion:
• What different kinds of people make up our society today? Identify six types and build a character that matches each.
• In what ways might many of these individuals break the stereotype they outwardly appear to fit?
• What kind of tale might each character tell? Choose a point person to share your ideas with the class.
Build Skills  
Poem

from The Canterbury Tales: The Prologue

Geoffrey Chaucer  
(1343?–1400)

Son of a merchant, page in a royal house, soldier, diplomat, and royal clerk, Geoffrey Chaucer saw quite a bit of the medieval world. His varied experiences helped prepare him to write *The Canterbury Tales*. This masterpiece provides the best contemporary picture we have of fourteenth-century England. Gathering characters from different walks of life, Chaucer takes the reader on a journey through medieval society.

**The Poet’s Beginning** The exact date of Geoffrey Chaucer’s birth is unknown, but official records furnish many details of his active life. Born into a middle-class family, Chaucer was sent in his early teens to work as page to the wife of Lionel of Antwerp, a son of the reigning monarch, Edward III. Through this position, middle-class Chaucer was introduced to the aristocratic society of England. In 1359, while serving in the English Army in France, Chaucer was captured and held prisoner. King Edward paid a £16 (sixteen-pound) ransom for his release—a sum that was eight times what a simple laborer might make in a year. In 1366, Chaucer married Philippa Pan, a lady-in-waiting to the queen. Their eldest child, Thomas, continued his father’s rise in the world, marrying a noblewoman and acquiring great wealth.

**The Poet Matures** Chaucer began writing in his twenties, practicing and honing his skills as a poet as he rose through the ranks of medieval society. His early poems were based on the works of European poets. These were followed by various translations of French poetry. His first major work, *The Book of the Duchess*, was probably completed in early 1369, almost one year after the death of Blanche of Lancaster, for whose grieving husband, John of Gaunt, he wrote the poem. As Chaucer grew older, he developed a mature style of his own. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, a later poem drawn from the Greek legend of the Trojan War, Chaucer displays penetrating insight into human character.

*The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* in his later years. No one knows for certain what prompted him to begin this work. Chaucer’s inspiration may have come from his own participation in the pilgrimage to Canterbury. A pilgrimage is a long journey to a shrine or holy site, taken by people who wish to express their devotion. Chaucer certainly had the opportunity to observe many pilgrims starting their journeys—a window of his London home overlooked the pilgrim road that led to Canterbury.

In this masterwork, each character tells a tale on the way to Canterbury. Just as the tellers of *The Canterbury Tales* come from the length and breadth of medieval society, the tales encompass medieval literature—from romance to comedy, from rhyme to prose, from crude humor to religious mysteries. Only 24 of the projected 120 tales were finished, but they stand together as a complete work.

**The Father of English Poetry** In his own lifetime, Geoffrey Chaucer was considered the greatest English poet. Recognized as a shrewd storyteller, he was also praised by a contemporary as the first to “rain the gold dewdrops of speech and eloquence” into English literature. Throughout history, new generations of poets writing in English have studied his work for inspiration and insight.

Chaucer lies buried in Westminster Abbey. In recognition of his unique position in England’s literary tradition, Westminster’s honorary burial area for distinguished writers, the Poets’ Corner, was established around his tomb.
Preview

Connecting to the Literature
It may have been a class trip you took to a museum or a visit to a famous person’s birthplace. Trips taken for inspiration or renewal, even if they are not religious, can loosely be termed pilgrimages. The pilgrims who gather in the Prologue are about to depart on such a journey.

Literary Analysis

Characterization
As you read the Prologue, look for these forms of characterization—techniques of revealing character:

- **Direct characterization** presents direct statements about a character, such as Chaucer’s statement that the Knight “followed chivalry, / Truth, honor. . .”

- **Indirect characterization** uses actions, thoughts, and dialogue to reveal a character’s personality. By saying “he was not gaily dressed,” for instance, Chaucer suggests that the Knight is not vain and perhaps takes the pilgrimage seriously enough to rush to join it straight from battle.

Connecting Literary Elements
Each character in *The Canterbury Tales* represents a different segment of society in Chaucer’s time. By noting the virtues and faults of each, Chaucer provides social commentary, writing that offers insight into society, its values, and its customs. While reading, draw conclusions from the characters about Chaucer’s views on English society.

Reading Strategy

Analyzing Difficult Sentences
Chaucer’s Prologue begins with an eighteen-line sentence. To analyze difficult sentences such as this one, use the questions when, who, where, what, and how to identify the essential information each conveys. Use a chart like the one shown to finish analyzing Chaucer’s first sentence.

Vocabulary Builder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>solicitous</td>
<td>(sə li'təs) adj. showing care or concern (p. 102)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>garnished</td>
<td>(gär' nisht) adj. decorated; trimmed (p. 103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absolution</td>
<td>(ab' su lə' shen) n. act of freeing someone of a sin or criminal charge (p. 104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commission</td>
<td>(ka mish' an) n. authorization; act of giving authority to an individual (p. 106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sanguine</td>
<td>(sən' jərōo) adj. confident; cheerful (p. 107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avouches</td>
<td>(ə vou查' ez) v. asserts positively; affirms (p. 108)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prevarication</td>
<td>(pri vər' a shen) n. evasion of truth (p. 116)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

from *The Canterbury Tales: The Prologue* ▲ 97
Background  In medieval Christianity, pilgrimages—long, annual trips to holy places—were a popular way to express religious devotion. Canterbury, a town 55 miles southeast of London, was a major destination for English pilgrims. The cathedral in Canterbury was the site of Archbishop Thomas à Becket's murder in 1170. Days after the murder and three years before Becket was made a saint, people began flocking to the cathedral to pay their respects.

The first eighteen lines of the Prologue are presented here in Chaucer's original Middle English, followed by the entire Prologue in a modern translation.

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soothe
The droghte of March hath perced to the rootes,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;

5  Whan Zephirus eek with his sweetness breath
Inspirèd hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppès, and the yonge sonnè
Hath in the Ram his halvè cours yronnè,
And smalè fowelès maken melodyè,

10  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 strange strondès,
To fernè halwès, kowthe in sondry londès;

15  And specially from every shirè endè
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wendè,
The hooily blissful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seekè.
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\(^1\) with his sweet breath
Exhales an air in every grove and heath
Upon tender shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the Ram\(^2\) 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\(^3\) long to seek the stranger strands\(^4\)
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,

15 And specially, from every shire's end
In England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr,\(^5\) quick
To give his help to them when they were sick.

It happened in that season that one day

20 In Southwark,\(^6\) at The Tabard,\(^7\) as I lay
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 shortly, when the sun had gone to rest,
By speaking to them all upon the trip
I soon was one of them in fellowship
And promised to rise early and take the way
To Canterbury, as you heard me say.

35 But nonetheless, 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.

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1. Zephyrus (ze´f r as) the west wind.
2. Ram Aries, the first sign of the zodiac. The pilgrimage began on April 11, 1387.
3. palmers pilgrims who wore two crossed palm leaves to show that they had visited the Holy Land.
4. strands shores.
5. martyr St. Thomas à Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170.
6. Southwark (suth’ ark) suburb of London at the time.
7. The Tabard (ta´ bard) an inn.

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Literary Analysis
Characterization In these lines, what does the narrator suggest about the pilgrims' motives for going to Canterbury?

Reading Strategy
Analyzing Difficult Sentences What does Chaucer say he will do in lines 35–42? How, or in what manner, will he do it?

✓ Reading Check
Who have gathered at The Tabard?
And what apparel they were riding in;
And at a Knight I therefore will begin.
There was a Knight, a most distinguished man,
Who from the day on which he first began
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 heathen places.
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,
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
And fought when Ayas and Attalla fell.
For all along the Mediterranean coast
He had embarked with many a noble host.
In fifteen mortal battles he had been
And jousted for our faith at Tramissene
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.

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.

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
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

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8. Alexandria site of one of the campaigns fought by Christians against groups who posed a threat to Europe during the fourteenth century. The place names that follow refer to other battle sites in these campaigns, or crusades.
9. van part of the army that goes before the rest (short for vanguard).
11. fustian (fus’ chan) n. coarse cloth of cotton and linen.
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\textsuperscript{12}
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
He slept as little as a nightingale.
Courteous he was, lowly and serviceable,
And carved to serve his father at the table.
100 There was a Yeoman\textsuperscript{13} with him at his side,
No other servant; so he chose to ride.
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
—For he could dress his gear in yeoman style,
His arrows never drooped their feathers low—
105 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\textsuperscript{14} was on his arm to ward
It from the bow-string, and a shield and sword
Hung at one side, and at the other slipped
A jaunty dirk,\textsuperscript{15} spear-sharp and well-equipped.
A medal of St. Christopher\textsuperscript{16} he wore
Of shining silver on his breast, and bore
A hunting-horn, well slung and burnished clean,
110 That dangled from a baldric\textsuperscript{17} of bright green.
He was a proper forester I guess.
There also was a Nun, a Prioress\textsuperscript{18}
Her way of smiling very simple and coy.

\textsuperscript{12} Flanders ... Picardy regions in Belgium and France.
\textsuperscript{13} Yeoman (yō' man) n. attendant.
\textsuperscript{14} brace bracelet.
\textsuperscript{15} dirk n. dagger.
\textsuperscript{16} St. Christopher patron saint of travelers.
\textsuperscript{17} baldric n. belt worn over one shoulder and across the chest to support a sword.
\textsuperscript{18} Prioress n. in an abbey, the nun ranking just below the abbess.
Her greatest oath was only "By St. Loy!"\textsuperscript{19}
And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.
And well she sang a service,\textsuperscript{20} 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;\textsuperscript{21}
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
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,
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,
And to seem dignified in all her dealings.
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.
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
Or someone took a stick and made it smart;
She was all sentiment and tender heart.

Her veil was gathered in a seemly way,
Her nose was elegant, her eyes glass-gray;
Her mouth was very small, but soft and red,
Her forehead, certainly, was fair of spread.
Almost a span\textsuperscript{22} across the brows, I own;
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\textsuperscript{23} tricked in green,
Whence hung a golden brooch of brightest sheen
On which there first was graven a crowned A.

\textbf{Reading Strategy}
\textbf{Analyzing Difficult Sentences} What two basic qualities does the sentence in lines 141–145 attribute to the Nun?

\textbf{Vocabulary Builder}
\textit{solicitous} (sə lī' ə təs) adj., showing care or concern

\textbf{Literary Analysis}
\textbf{Characterization} What can you infer about the Prioress based on this detailed description of her jewelry?

\textit{St. Loy} St. Eligius, patron saint of goldsmiths and courtiers.
\textit{service} daily prayer.
\textit{Stratford-atte-Bowe} nunnery near London.
\textit{span} nine inches.
\textit{gaudies} large green beads that marked certain prayers on a set of prayer beads.
And lower, *Amor vincit omnia.*

Another Nun, the chaplain at her cell,
Was riding with her, and three Priests as well.
A Monk there was, one of the finest sort
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.
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
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 unclostered is a mere
Fish out of water, flapping on the pier.
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
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.
Hunting a hare or riding at a fence
Was all his fun, he spared for no expense.
I saw his sleeves were garnished at the hand
With fine gray fur, the finest in the land.
And on his hood, to fasten it at his chin
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;
His prominent eyeballs never seemed to settle.
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.

24. *Amor vincit omnia* (әмәˈ rɪnˈ kɪt әʊˈ mɪ әˈ ðэˈ nэ ә́) "love conquers all" (Latin).
26. Austin English version of St. Augustine, who criticized lazy monks.
210 He liked a fat swan best, and roasted whole.
His palfrey27 was as brown as is a berry.
            There was a Friar, a wanton28 one and merry
A Limiter,29 a very festive fellow.
In all Four Orders30 there was none so mellow
215 So gibb 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 folk31 within his boundary,
            And city dames of honor and possessions;
            For he was qualified 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 shrift32
            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,33
            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 tippet34 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.35
    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,
    For in so eminent a man as he
    It was not fitting with the dignity

27. palfrey n. saddle horse.
28. wanton adj. jolly.
29. Limiter friar who is given begging rights for a certain limited area.
30. Four Orders There were four orders of friars who supported themselves by begging: Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, and Augustinians.
31. County folk The phrase refers to rich landowners.
32. shrift n. confession.
33. well shriven adj. absolved of his sins.
34. tippet n. hood.
35. hurdy-gurdy stringed instrument played by cranking a wheel.
Of his position, dealing with a scum
Of wretched lepers; nothing good can come
Of dealings with the 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.
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,
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
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,
But much more like a Doctor or a Pope.

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
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.

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
In solemn tones, and how he never lost.
The sea should be kept free at any cost
(He thought) upon the Harwich-Holland range.
He was expert at currency exchange.
This estimable Merchant so had set
His wits to work, none knew he was in debt.
He was so stately in negotiation,
Loan, bargain and commercial obligation.

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36. semi-cope: cape.
37. Flemish: from Flanders.

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from The Canterbury Tales: The Prologue ■ 105
He was an excellent fellow all the same;
To tell the truth I do not know his name.

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;

The thread upon his overcoat was bare.
He had found no preferment in the church
And he was too unworliday to make search
For secular employment. By his bed
He preferred having twenty books in red
And black, of Aristotle's philosophy,
To having fine clothes, fiddle or psaltery.¹⁰
Though a philosopher, as I have told,
He had not found the stone for making gold.⁴¹
Whatever money from his friends he took
He spent on learning or another book
And prayed for them most earnestly, returning
Thanks to them thus for paying for his learning.
His only care was study, and indeed
He never spoke a word more than was need.

Formal at that, respectful in the extreme,
Short, to the point, and lofty in his theme.
The thought of moral virtue filled his speech
And he would gladly learn, and gladly teach.

A Sergeant at the Law who paid his calls,
Wary and wise, for clients at St. Paul's¹²
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

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 conveyancer⁴³ as he;
All was fee-simple⁴⁴ to his strong digestion,

Not one conveyance could be called in question.
Nowhere there was so busy a man as he;
But was less busy than he seemed to be.
He knew of every judgment, case and crime
Recorded, ever since King William's time.

He could dictate defenses or draft deeds;
No one could pinch a comma from his screeds, 45
And he knew every statute off by rote.
He wore a homely parti-colored coat
Girt with a silken belt of pin-stripe stuff;

Of his appearance I have said enough.
There was a Franklin 46 with him. it appeared:
White as a daisy-petal was his beard.
A sanguine man, high-colored and benign.
He loved a morning sop 47 of cake in wine.

He lived for pleasure and had always done,
For he was Epicurus' 48 very son,
In whose opinion sensual delight
Was the one true felicity in sight.
As noted as St. Julian 49 was for bounty
He made his household free to all the County.
His bread, his ale were the 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

It positively snowed with meat and drink
And all the dainties that a man could think.
According to the seasons of the year
Changes of dish were ordered to appear.
He kept fat partridges in coops, beyond,
Many a bream and pike were in his pond.
Woe to the cook whose sauces had no sting
Or who was unprepared in anything!
And in his hall a table stood arrayed
And ready all day long, with places laid.

As Justice at the Sessions 50 none stood higher:
He often had been Member for the Shire. 51
A dagger and a little purse of silk
Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.
As Sheriff he checked audit, every entry.

He was a model among landed gentry.
A Haberdasher, a Dyer, a Carpenter,
A Weaver and a Carpet-maker were

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45. screeds long, boring speeches or pieces of writing.
46. Franklin wealthy landowner.
47. sop piece.
48. Epicurus' (ep' i kyoor' as) referring to a Greek philosopher (341–270 B.C.) who believed
   that happiness is the most important goal in life.
49. St. Julian patron saint of hospitality.
50. Sessions court sessions.
51. Member . . . Shire Parliamentary representative for the county.

---

Vocabulary Builder
sanguine (san' gwin) adj. confident; cheerful

Reading Strategy
Analyzing Difficult Sentences What question do lines 346-348 answer about the main idea in line 345?

Literary Analysis
Characterization What are the Franklin’s interests?

---

Reading Check
What are the Cleric’s interests?

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from The Canterbury Tales: The Prologue ■ 107
Among our ranks, all in the livery
Of one impressive guild-fraternity. 52

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, 53 fit to grace

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.

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
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.

But what a pity—so it seemed to me,
That he should have an ulcer on his knee.
As for blancmange, 54 he made it with the best.

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

He rode a farmer's horse as best he could,
In a woolen gown that reached his knee.
A dagger on a lanyard 55 falling free
Hung from his neck under his arm and down.
The summer heat had tanned his color brown,

And certainly he was an excellent fellow.
Many a draught of vintage, red and yellow.
He'd drawn at Bordeaux, while the trader snored.
The nicer rules of conscience he ignored.
If, when he fought, the enemy vessel sank,

He sent his prisoners home; they walked the plank.
As for his skill in reckoning his tides,
Currents and many another risk besides.
Moons, harbors, pilots, he had such dispatch
That none from Hull to Carthage was his match.

---

52. guild-fraternity: In the Middle Ages, associations of men practicing the same craft or trade, called guilds, set standards for workmanship and protected their members by controlling competition.
53. burgess: member of a legislative body.
54. blancmange: (bleh-mahnj) at the time, the name of a creamy chicken dish.
55. lanyard: loose rope around the neck.
Hardy he was, prudent in undertaking;
His beard in many a tempest had its shaking,
And he knew all the havens as they were
From Gottland to the Cape of Finisterre,
And every creek in Brittany and Spain;
The barge he owned was called *The Maudeflayne*.
A doctor too emerged as we proceeded;
No one alive could talk as well as he did
On points of medicine and of surgery,
For, being grounded in astronomy,
He watched his patient’s favorable star
And, by his Natural Magic, knew what are
The lucky hours and planetary degrees
For making charms and magic effigies.
The cause of every malady you’d got
He knew, and whether dry, cold, moist or hot, 56
He knew their seat, their humor and condition.
He was a perfect practicing physician.
These causes being known for what they were,
He gave the man his medicine then and there.
All his apothecaries in a tribe
Were ready with the drugs he would prescribe,
And each made money from the other’s guile;
They had been friendly for a goodish while.
He was well-versed in Aesculapius 58 too
And what Hippocrates and Rufus knew
And Dioscorides, now dead and gone,
Galen and Rhazes, Hall, Serapion,
Averroes, Avicenna, Constantine,
Scotch Bernard, John of Gaddesden, Gilbertine. 59
In his own diet he observed some measure;
There were no superfluities for pleasure,
Only digestives, nutritives and such.
He did not read the Bible very much.
In blood-red garments, slashed with bluish-gray
And lined with taffeta, 50 he rode his way;
Yet he was rather close as to expenses
And kept the gold he won in pestilences.
Gold stimulates the heart, or so we’re told.
He therefore had a special love of gold.
A worthy woman from beside Bath 61 city

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56. The cause . . . hot It was believed that the body was composed of four “humors” (cold and dry, hot and moist, hot and dry, cold and moist) and that diseases resulted from a disturbance of one of these “humors.”
57. apothecaries (əˈpəthēˌkrēz) persons who prepared medicines.
58. Aesculapius (əˈeskəōˌläpəs) in Roman mythology, the god of medicine and healing.
60. taffeta (tafˈˌi tə) fine silk fabric.
61. Bath English resort city.

---

Reading Strategy
Analyzing Difficult Sentences In the sentence in lines 421–428, what is said about how the Doctor practices medicine?

Reading Check
What are two characteristics of the Skipper?

from *The Canterbury Tales: The Prologue* 109
Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity.
In making cloth she showed so great a bent
She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent.\textsuperscript{62}
In all the parish not a dame dared stir
Towards the altar steps in front of her,
And if indeed they did, so wrath was she
As to be quite put out of charity.
Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground;\textsuperscript{63}
I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,
The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.
Her hose were of the finest scarlet red
And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.
Bold was her face, handsome, and red in hue.
A worthy woman all her life, what’s more
She’d had five husbands, all at the church door,
Apart from other company in youth;
No need just now to speak of that, forsooth.
And she had thrice been to Jerusalem,
Seen many strange rivers and passed over them;
She’d been to Rome and also to Boulogne,
St. James of Compostella and Cologne,\textsuperscript{64}
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
Well wimpled\textsuperscript{65} up, and on her head a hat
As broad as is a buckler\textsuperscript{66} 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
And knew the remedies for love’s mischances,
An art in which she knew the oldest dances.
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.
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
(For so he proved in great adversity)
He much disliked extorting tithe\textsuperscript{67} or fee.

\begin{footnotes}
\item 62. Ypres (fr. pre) and of Ghent (gent) Flemish cities known for wool making.
\item 63. ground composite fabric.
\item 64. Jerusalem ... Rome ... Boulogne ... St. James of Compostella ... Cologne
\item 65. wimpled wearing a scarf covering the head, neck, and chin.
\item 66. buckler small round shield.
\item 67. tithe (tith) one tenth of a person’s income, paid as a tax to support the church.
\end{footnotes}
Nay rather he preferred beyond a doubt
Giving to poor parishioners round about
From his own goods and Easter offerings
He found sufficiency in little things.
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.

Upon his feet, and in his hand a stave.
This noble example to his sheep he gave,
First following the word before he taught it.
And it was from the gospel he had caught it.
This little proverb he would add thereto
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 soiled shepherd and a snowy flock.

The true example that a priest should give
Is one of cleanness, how the sheep should live.
He did not set his benefice to hire
And leave his sheep encumbered in the mire
Or run to London to earn easy bread
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.

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
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.

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.
There was a Plowman with him there, his brother.

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.

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68. *set... hire* pay someone else to perform his parish duties.

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Literary Analysis
Characterization and Social Commentary
How does Chaucer use his characterization of the Parson to comment on the way priests ought to behave?

Reading Check
What is the Parson's main characteristic?

from *The Canterbury Tales: The Prologue* ■ 111
Living in peace and perfect charity,  
And, as the gospel bade him, so did he.  
Loving God best with all his heart and mind  
And then his neighbor as himself, repined  
At no misfortune, slack'd for no content,  
For steadily about his work he went  
To thrash his corn, to dig or to manure  
Or make a ditch; and he would help the poor  
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.  
He wore a tabard⁶⁹ smock and rode a mare.  
There was a Reeve,⁷⁰ also a Miller, there,  
A College Manciple⁷¹ from the Inns of Court,  
A papal Pardonner⁷² and, in close consort,  
A Church-Court Summoner⁷³ riding at a trot,  
And finally myself—that was the lot.  
The Miller was a chap of sixteen stone.⁷⁴  
A great stout fellow big in brawn and bone.  
He did well out of them, for he could go  
And win the ram at any wrestling show.  
Broad, knotty and short-shouldered, he would boast  
He could heave any door off hinge and post,  
Or take a run and break it with his head.  
His beard, like any sow or fox, was red  
And broad as well, as though it were a spade;  
And, at its very tip, his nose displayed  
A wart on which there stood a tuft of hair.  
Red as the bristles in an old sow's ear.  
His nostrils were as black as they were wide.  
He had a sword and buckler at his side.  
His mighty mouth was like a furnace door.  
A wrangler and buffoon, he had a store  
Of tavern stories, filthy in the main.  
His was a master-hand at stealing grain.  
He felt it with his thumb and thus he knew  
Its quality and took three times his due—  
A thumb of gold, by God, to gauge an oat!  
He wore a hood of blue and a white coat.  
He liked to play his bagpipes up and down  
And that was how he brought us out of town.

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69. tabard loose jacket.  
70. Reeve estate manager.  
71. Manciple buyer of provisions.  
72. Pardonner one who dispenses papal pardons.  
73. Summoner one who serves summonses to church courts.  
74. sixteen stone 224 pounds. A stone equals 14 pounds.
The Manciple came from the Inner Temple;  
All caterers might follow his example  
In buying victuals; he was never rash  
Whether he bought on credit or paid cash.  
He used to watch the market most precisely  
And go in first, and so he did quite nicely.  
Now isn’t it a marvel of God’s grace  
That an illiterate fellow can outpace  
The wisdom of a heap of learned men?  
His masters—he had more than thirty then—  
All versed in the abstrusest legal knowledge,  
Could have produced a dozen from their College  
Fit to be stewards in land and rents and game  
To any Peer in England you could name,  
And show him how to live on what he had  
Debt-free (unless of course the Peer were mad)  
Or be as frugal as he might desire,  
And they were fit to help about the Shire  
In any legal case there was to try;  
And yet this Manciple could wipe their eye.

The Reeve was old and choleric and thin;  
His beard was shaven closely to the skin,  
His shorn hair came abruptly to a stop  
Above his ears, and he was docked on top  
Just like a priest in front; his legs were lean,  
Like sticks they were, no calf was to be seen.  
He kept his bins and garnerers very trim;  
No auditor could gain a point on him.  
And he could judge by watching drought and rain  
The yield he might expect from seed and grain.

His master’s sheep, his animals and hens,  
Pigs, horses, dairies, stores and cattle-pens  
Were wholly trusted to his government.  
And he was under contract to present  
The accounts, right from his master’s earliest years.  
No one had ever caught him in arrears.  
No bailiff, serf or herdsman dared to kick,  
He knew their dodges, knew their every trick;  
Feared like the plague he was, by those beneath.  
He had a lovely dwelling on a heath,  
Shadowed in green by trees above the sward.  
A better hand at bargains than his lord,  
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.

Reading Strategy
Analyzing Difficult Sentences What are the two subjects of the comparison in lines 594–604?

Reading Check
What is the Miller like?

from The Canterbury Tales: The Prologue  113

75. garner n. buildings for storing grain.
76. sward n. turf.
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-gray and bore the name of Scot.

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.

He rode the hindmost of our cavalcade.

There was a Summoner with us in the place
Who had a fire-red cherubinish face,77
For he had carbuncles.78 His eyes were narrow,
He was as hot and lecherous as a sparrow.
Black, scabby brows he had, and a thin beard.
Children were afraid when he appeared.
No quicksilver, lead ointments, tartar creams,
Boracic, no, nor brimstone,79 so it seems,
Could make a salve that had the power to bite,
Clean up or cure his whelks80 of knobby white.
Or purge the pimples sitting on his cheeks.
Garlic he loved, and onions too, and leeks,
And drinking strong wine till all was hazy.
Then he would shout and jabber as if crazy,
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.

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"81 was his tag.

He was a gentle varlet and a kind one,
No better fellow if you went to find one.
He would allow—just for a quart of wine—
Any good lad to keep a concubine
A twelvemonth and dispense it altogether!
Yet he could pluck a finch to leave no feather:

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77. fire-red . . . face In the art of the Middle Ages, the faces of cherubs, or angels, were often painted red.
78. carbuncles (kär' bun' kaiz) n. pus-filled boils resulting from a bacterial infection under the skin.
79. quicksilver . . . brimstone various chemicals and chemical compounds, used as remedies. Quicksilver is a name for mercury. Brimstone is a name for sulfur.
80. whelks n. pustules; pimples.
81. "Questio quid juris" "The question is, What is the point of law?" (Latin).
And if he found some rascal with a maid
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)
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.
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
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,
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.

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 shoulder which they overspread;
Thiny they fell, like rat-tails, one by one.

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 eyeballs, like a hare.

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,
Smother 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 pillowcase
Which he asserted was Our Lady's veil.
He said he had a gobbet\(^2\) of the sail

\(^2\) gobbet piece.

from *The Canterbury Tales: The Prologue*
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
And, in a glass, a rubble of pigs' bones.
And with these relics, any time he found
Some poor up-country parson to astound,
On one short day, in money down, he drew
More than the parson in a month or two,
And by his flatteries and prevarication
Made monkeys of the priest and congregation.
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!
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.

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.
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.

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.

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,
Or else the tale he tells will be untrue,
The things invented and the phrases new.
He may not flinch although it were his brother,
If he says one word he must say the other.
And Christ Himself spoke broad in Holy Writ.

And as you know there’s nothing there unfit,
And Plato says, for those with power to read.

83. Offertory: song that accompanies the collection of the offering at a church service.
84. broad: bluntly.
85. Plato: Greek philosopher (427?-347? B.C.)

116 From Legend to History (449-1485)
"The word should be as cousin to the deed."
Further I beg you to forgive it me
If I neglect the order and degree
And what is due to rank in what I've planned.
I'm short of wit as you will understand.

Our Host gave us great welcome; everyone
Was given a place and supper was begun.
He served the finest victuals you could think,
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.\(^{86}\)

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
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 spry.

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
And it will cost you nothing, on my word.
You're off to Canterbury—well, God speed!

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.

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

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 consent of course was not deferred,

It seemed not worth a serious debate;
We all agreed to it at any rate
And bade him issue what commands he would.

---

\(^{86}\) Cheapside district in London.
“My lords,” he said, “now listen for your good, 
And please don’t treat my notion with disdain.

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

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,

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.

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.”

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,

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:

We drank it off and up went everyone 
To bed without a moment of delay. 
Early next morning at the spring of day 
Up rose our Host and roused us like a cock, 
Gathering us together in a flock,

And off we rode at slightly faster pace 
Than walking to St. Thomas’ watering-place;67 
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.

If evensong and matins will agree68

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67. St. Thomas’ watering-place a brook two miles from the inn.
68. If evensong . . . agree “if what you said last night holds true this morning.”
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.

Now draw for cut⁸⁹ and then we can depart;
The man who draws the shortest cut shall start."

⁸⁹. draw for cut: draw lots, as when pulling straws from a bunch; the person who pulls the short straw is "it."

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**Critical Reading**

1. **Respond:** Which of the pilgrims would you most like to meet? Why?
2. (a) **Recall:** List three characteristics of the Nun. (b) **Deduce:** What details does Chaucer include in his description of the Nun to make gentle fun of her? Explain.
3. (a) **Recall:** Identify two of the main characteristics of the Friar and the Parson. (b) **Compare and Contrast:** What are some of the ways in which the Friar and the Parson differ?
4. **Infer:** Judging from the descriptions of the two, what does Chaucer think can cause a religious person to fail in his or her duty?
5. **Compare and Contrast:** How does Chaucer's attitude towards the Monk differ, if at all, from his attitude towards the Friar? Explain.
6. (a) **Infer:** What does Chaucer seem to dislike about the Skipper? (b) **Infer:** What does he seem to admire about this character? (c) **Draw Conclusions:** Describe Chaucer's overall attitude toward him.
7. **Draw Conclusions:** Judging from his pilgrims, do you think Chaucer believes people are basically good, basically evil, or often a mix of the two? Give examples to support your answer.
8. (a) **Apply:** What modern character types match the characters in the Prologue? (b) **Apply:** What types would Chaucer not have anticipated?
9. (a) **Analyze:** From what segments of medieval society do the pilgrims come? (b) **Draw Conclusions:** What does their participation in a common pilgrimage suggest about the times?
10. **Evaluate:** Do you think Chaucer’s view of people is justified? Explain.

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