

The Canterbury Tales

Match the texts with the headings.

A. Chaucer's plans

C. Introduction to The Canterbury Tales

E. The Prologue

B. The Tales

D. The masterpiece of English literature.

F. Medieval poetry

1. At the Tabard Inn, a tavern in Southwark, near London, the narrator joins a company of pilgrims. The pilgrims, like the narrator, are travelling to Canterbury to visit the grave of St. Thomas Becket, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury. The narrator gives a descriptive account of these pilgrims, including a Knight, Squire, Yeoman, Prioress, Monk, Friar, Merchant, Clerk, Man of Law, Franklin, Haberdasher, Carpenter, Weaver, Dyer, Tapestry-Weaver, Cook, Shipman, Physician, Wife, Parson, Plowman, Miller, Manciple, Reeve, Summoner, Pardoner, and Host. The Host, Harry Bailey, asks each pilgrim to tell two stories on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. The person who tells the best tale will have a free dinner on his or her return to London.

2. The pilgrims are described in the General Prologue; together they represent a wide cross-section of 14th century English life, although the nobility and the poor are missing as they would not have taken part in this kind of group pilgrimage. Chaucer writes a pen-picture of each of the pilgrims.

3. The tales are structured as a series of interlinked stories. Each tale is preceded by a prologue in which a storyteller speaks about himself. The themes of the tales vary from the spiritual up to the earthy and humorous. The pilgrims are often ill-mannered and quarrelsome and frequently interrupt and criticize each other. The tales permit open dialogue between people from different levels of society.

4. Chaucer originally planned that the work should contain 120 tales, four for each pilgrim, but at the time of his death he had written only 24 tales and some of them were incomplete. The pilgrims' tales include a variety of medieval genres that range from humorous beast fables to the serious homily or sermon.

5. The Canterbury Tales is a masterpiece of English literature. It is written in English in a period when it was a forgone that all serious writing had to be done in Latin. It is a valuable social document as it gives us an insight into a cross-section of 14th –century English society. The Canterbury Tales contains a cast of memorable characters that are brought to life by Chaucer's superb powers of characterization. Experimentations with rhyme and rhythm patterns used in the Tales greatly influenced the literature that followed.

Match the words with their meanings.

1. friar	a) a member of any of certain religious orders of men
2. plowman	b) a landowner of free but not noble birth in the 14th and 15th centuries in England.
3. parson	c) a person whose trade is the dyeing of cloth or other material
4. physician	d) a person in charge of buying provisions for a college, an Inn of Court, or a monastery.
5. pardoner	e) a person licensed to sell papal pardons or indulgences.
6. tapestry-weaver	f) ording officially to come somewhere
7. carpenter	g) An English law officer
8. miller	h) a person who owns or works in a corn mill
9. franklin	i) a person who uses a plough.

10. reeve	j) a person who makes and repairs wooden objects and structures
11. haberdasher	k) a dealer in small items used in sewing, such as buttons, zips, and thread.
12. manciple	l) a person qualified to practice medicine, especially one who specializes in diagnosis and medical treatment as distinct from surgery:
13. dyer	m) a beneficed member of the clergy; a rector or a vicar.
14. summoner	n) a person whose job is to form threads into material by drawing one thread at a time under and over a set of longer threads stretched out on a loom
15. prioress	o) a woman who is head of a house of certain orders of nuns

Analysis

Irony

Irony can be defined as saying something while you really mean something else. It is widely used in literature. Writers usually use it to criticize a subject indirectly.

The Prioress	
Chaucer gives the impression that he is charmed by the lady like manners and sophisticated appearance of the Prioress	Chaucer includes details which he knows the reader will find unfitting for a woman of her position
Write out words or phrases that suggest that Chaucer admires the Prioress	Make the list of aspects of the Prioress that you find inappropriate for a nun

The physiognomists

In the middle ages, a science called physiognomy became popular. It was based on the idea that the mental and emotional characteristics of an individual could be determined from physical characteristics like physique, hair, and voice quality. Chaucer, like his readers, must have been familiar with these ideas.

Try yourself in medieval physiognomy and match physical features with the descriptions of people's characters:

1. lore, sparse yellow hair, soft and long	a) shameless effrontery, gluttony and drunkenness
2. hare-eyes that bulge and glitter	b) an envious, irreverent, bold, deceitful person
3. goat voice and beardlessness	c) Quick temper, sharp wit, wantonness
4. gapped teeth	d) lack of manhood and implied craftiness and treachery
5. thin body and calfless legs	e) a token of effeminacy, cunning and deceptiveness