

The Second Read: Close Reading

Directions: Go back and re-read the story closely. Make notes about the areas that will help you to better understand the text as a whole. Use the questions to guide you. **Type your annotations.**

Annotation in literature is a bit different from non-fiction. In literature we are looking for the elements of the story that help you create an interpretation of the story as a whole. The areas in which a person should make notes fall into several different categories including:

- Characterization
- Narration
- Setting
- Structure
- Diction/Syntax
- Theme

Characterization: Think back to the activity from the Prologue. A writer develops characters in many ways. Often the characterization is indirect, readers must infer from a variety of sources information about the character. Sparingly, authors provide direct characterization, telling the reader exactly who or what the character is.

Narration: Several things are important when thinking about the narration. Who is the narrator? What perspective or person is the story told in? Why did the author choose this narrator to tell this story? Is the narrator an external observer or part of the story? Is the narrator reliable?


Setting: Setting goes beyond where and when. When considering setting one needs to consider the political, historical, and cultural atmosphere of the story. Consider, is the setting symbolic? How does the setting add to the theme of the whole?

Structure: Remember this is part of a frame story. While the Prologues for each of the tales is explicitly part of the frame story, sometimes the storytellers delve into personal views based on the external influence of the frame story. Several times throughout the narrative, she will insert her opinions into the story which then serves two purposes: 1. The structure of the story will aid the reader in understanding different aspects of the story. 2. You may note shifts in the story at these interjections.

Diction/Syntax: This element considers how the literary devices, figurative language, word choice, and sentence structures relate to the meaning of the text. Consider how a specific literary device or sound device is effective for the specific location. Why might the author/ translator have chosen that specific word instead of a different one? What connotative meanings does the word have?

Theme: This is the overarching idea that the writer of the story wants the reader to understand. All other literary concepts are used to create themes. The theme is the author's commentary on a subject. In order to define a theme, first identify the subject (s) of the story

1. **Structure**—lines 39-56—Think back to the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales, what did the narrator feel about friars? What is the Wife of Bath's attitude towards friars? Hint: consider [verbal irony](#)
2. **Diction**—line 59—lustly liver: break this into its parts to better understand it and consider the different meanings of the words. What is the most likely meaning in this context?
3. **Narration**—lines 56-74—What indirect characterization can be made about the Wife of Bath based on her storytelling style in these lines? What inferences can be drawn about her character based on how she tells the story? In other words: What aspects about the wife's style appear in the first part of her tale? What do these elements suggest about her character?
4. **Theme**—lines 65-74—What punishment do the king and the law demand? To whom does the king grant the final sentencing power?
5. **Structure**—line 81—In the prologue to the entire narrative it described the Wife of Bath as knowing "the remedies for love's mischances, / An art in which she knew the oldest dances." Consider the queen's demands of the knight. What does this line suggest about the Wife's tale?
6. **Diction**—line 85—Intertextuality is the idea that texts throughout time "talk" to one another. They carry on similar themes, topics, and ideas responding and adding to the previous texts. How does giving the knight one year and one day talk to another text (and likely a greater tradition of Arthurian legends)?
7. **Theme**—lines 1-89—What bias does the beginning of the Wife's tale reveal? How do both friars and knights exploit their status to get what they want? What idea about medieval church is brought out by the Wife's accusation that some friars take women's virtue?

 **liver**¹

/ˈlɪvər/

noun

noun: **liver**; plural noun: **livers**


a large lobed glandular organ in the abdomen of vertebrates, "cholesterol may accumulate in the liver"

- an organ similar to the liver in other animals.
- the flesh of an animal's liver as food. "liver pâté"
- a dark reddish brown. noun: **liver color**; noun: **liver colour**

Origin



Old English *lifer*, of Germanic origin; related to German *Leber*, C

 **liver**²

/ˈlɪvər/

noun

noun: **liver**; plural noun: **livers**

a person who lives in a specified way. "a clean liver"

8. **Theme**—lines 98-100—What is the conflict established in these lines?
9. **Characterization/Narration**—lines 101-132—A narrator selects the details to share in the story. What inferences can be drawn about the Wife of Bath based on the details she included in this passage?
10. **Characterization/Narration**—lines 128-159—During this time women outside the middle class were not typically educated. It is clear that the Wife is educated. Why would Chaucer have given the Wife of Bath this characteristic?
11. **Characterization**—lines 155-159—The Wife's direct comments provide insight into her character too. What do these lines reveal about her character and value to the group?
12. **Diction**—lines 165-177—Intertextuality is the idea that texts throughout time "talk" to one another. They carry on similar themes, topics, and ideas responding and adding to the previous texts. Keeping that in mind the forest has been long established as a place untouched by civilization and was the home of spirits or other untamed forces of nature. This piece of the tale connects back to lines 33-51. How might this passage of the poem be an insult to the friar?
13. **Structure**—lines 81-99—Look for elements of foreshadowing. How does the Wife use foreshadowing here? What effect does the foreshadowing have on the Wife's story?
14. **Diction**—line 214—Sovereignty—look up this word at Merriam Webster dictionary. How does the additional definitions of this word add meaning to the line than just the one provided in the text?
15. **Theme**—line 214—Because of the use of the word sovereignty, this line may have been interpreted as quite controversial during the time period. Explain why.
16. **Theme**—lines 213-218—The knight responds here. How does the knight's answer respond to a universal truth about humanity?
17. **Theme**—lines 222-248—Review the lines 181-189. What was the knight's attitude in those lines? Contrast his attitude in those lines with his attitude in lines 222-248. What does this contrast suggest about human nature?
18. **Diction**—line 237—Irony—How does this line reveal irony from the situation early on in the text?
19. **Structure/Narration**—lines 249-258—The Wife of Bath is speaking directly to the audience again. What is the purpose of her digression from the story to speaking to the audience?
20. **Narration**—lines 259-273—Based on the Prologue of the entirety of the tales and the Wife of Bath's tale specifically it can be inferred that she is of the middle class but acquired some wealth through her marriages and is renowned for her weaving of cloth. Keeping that in mind, what is revealed about her attitudes towards the aristocracy/ noble class?
21. **Theme**—lines 274-287—Irony—How does this line reveal irony? How does that irony lead to a universal idea about human nature? Hint: He calls her "low-bred" but again has multiple meanings. What else does low mean, and how can it apply to the story as a whole?
22. **Theme**—lines 285-300—Paraphrase this section. The paraphrase will reveal its meaning and help you identify a theme explicitly stated by the woman. What theme is directly stated?
23. **Diction**—lines 315-321—Analogy—A comparison of two ideas that reveals some aspect of similarity. What two things are being compared and what is the result of the comparison?/ What can you infer due to the comparison?
24. **Setting/Diction**—lines 333-334—Irony—based on culture of the time, how are these two lines ironic?
25. **Narrator/Diction**—lines 383-394—Identify the irony in line 383-386. Then also consider: Why would the narrator focus solely on the old woman rather than the knight for so long? What does this reveal about her agenda and the interpretation of some that the Wife of Bath was the first feminist* character in all literature. *—a person who advocates for the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes
26. **Theme**—line 411—How does the knight's statement relate to the lesson learned about "the thing that women most desire"?
27. **Theme**—lines 426-432—What is the message the story is sending when she transforms after he offers her the ability to choose to be in the state she wishes?
28. **Characterization/Narration**—lines 433-440—What does the last stanza of the poem reveal about the Wife of Bath?
29. **Syntax**—entire text—Inverted sentences— An inverted sentence is a complete thought expressed in reverse order (verb then subject). Yoda, legendary *Star Wars* Jedi Master, is famous for speaking in inverted sentence structure. One example of an inverted sentence spoken by Yoda is, "When nine hundred years old you reach, look as good you will not." **Identify three inverted sentences** in "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and then rewrite them in a normal syntax. Why might Chaucer have chosen to write those sentences inverted? Hint: look at the ends of the lines.