

The Canterbury Tales – The Prologue – Group Work

If this is done in a shortened period – go over question 1 in class – make arrangements to copy each others charts before leaving school today.



1. Compare the charts that you have brought in today. Pay special attention to the columns on the “representative sentences,” “irony,” and “positive or negative portrayal of profession.” Don’t be afraid to argue for your point of view.
2. Why do you think that the story begins in the spring? Can you see a literal, practical reason for the beginning of such a pilgrimage? Now, how about a metaphorical reason(s)?
3. Why does the tale begin with the knight? How might this give us a false impression of what the other characters are going to be like?
4. The description of the nun is filled with irony. Name some of the “un-nun” like things that she does or has. Later in the book, she tells her tale that is filled with gory details of killing Jewish residents of a town. She describes it in cold, unsympathetic terms. Use the specifics of her description in the prologue and document how is ironic.
5. The Wife of Bath is often described as the first feminist character in English literature. Name 3 specific facts from the prologue that might lead you to this conclusion. Remember this when you read her prologue.

6. Who is the only clergy member portrayed in an entirely flattering light? Who are the other clergy members mentioned here? Contrast this positive character by writing down one of his/her positive attributes and contrast it with a corresponding negative attribute from one of the other clergy (be sure to note which clergy person you are talking about).
7. On page 125 you will find a quote that would be very at home in *Beowulf*, what is that quote?
8. DEEP THOUGHT: If the travelers to Canterbury are all pilgrims, are **they all pilgrims seeking the same thing**? Think about this. In other words, are they all going to pray at the shrine of Thomas à Becket? On your charts, squeeze in a short phrase or sentence next to each pilgrim that speculates on why your group thinks they are going to Canterbury (your reasons can be as short as *piety* or *greed*). As you answer this, think about what you’ve learned about Thomas Becket and his appeal to the common people, but also consider what you’ve just read about some of the pilgrims and their lifestyle.
9. How does what Chaucer does here – undermine (deconstruct) Grendel’s view of the Shaper? Remember how upset Grendel was with what the Shaper did with history (the history he saw) – and yet, he came back time and time again.... Do you think (especially after your group work yesterday) that Chaucer is changing and molding what happened around him as much as he is trying to accurately portray what is going on around him? Make sure your group understands the question and find 2 quotes to support your answer.



Chaucer got in a lot of trouble for his frank and honest portrayal of his pilgrims – in fact, on his deathbed – he retracted all of his negative and offensive writings (especially this book). What kind of story do you think that we want to hear? What the Shaper does (taking the negative and turning it into something positive – with purpose) or what Chaucer does (think about the trouble he got into)...

8b Answer this tougher question related to question 8: Are we, you, in any way pilgrims (think figuratively if literally does not work)? Discuss this, toss it around, and put down what each group member thinks.

Homework

Thursday: The Pardoner’s Prologue (handout) & “The Pardoner’s Tale” (132-138), **Friday:** Wife of Bath’s Prologue (handout NOT text book) – Grade Book closes, **Monday:** Bring your ghost stories **Tuesday:** The Wife of Bath’s Tale (141-150), **Wednesday:** A Guest Reader **Thursday:** watch a movie

