

Chaucerian Miscellany

Most medieval books, including the *Canterbury Tales*, themselves, are miscellanies, or commonplace books—books composed of a variety of individual texts and images grouped together according to the writer's or patron's desires or needs. In keeping with this very medieval—dare we say, Chaucerian—tradition, students in this course are required to keep a notebook. In addition to general class notes and reading notes, you should include entries distributed across a variety of written and multimodal genres, as explained below. You will work on these notebooks at your own pace, but you are advised to set a goal of 2-3 entries per week to achieve the full requirements by the end of the term. Notebooks will be turned in for review every two weeks beginning week 3, as outlined in the course syllabus. These notebooks are the primary means by which you will develop the critical and creative thinking skills that make reading Chaucer easier and more profitable for modern readers, and should be completed with attention and care. The organization of your notebook is entirely up to you, as long as all required components are present and accounted for. It is fine for material in your notebook to also appear elsewhere in your work for the class, for instance, something you remark upon in a 3-2-1 preparation may serve as the foundation for a Canvas posting, material you research for the notebook may show up in your research presentation or essay, & so on. (20% of your final course grade)

Required components: All of the following must be present in your notebook.

1. **3-2-1 preparations** for class. For each Chaucerian text we read, students should prepare 3 points they would like to discuss about the reading, 2 questions they have about the reading, and one passage they found particularly important, beautiful, or frustrating. These notes will serve as the backbone for our class discussions, and I will respond to any not discussed in class during my reviews of your notebooks.
2. A **weekly response** of approximately 1 page to either the text(s) or some aspect of the class that interests or perplexes you.
3. **Close reading:** choosing a passage of up to 15 lines, perform a close reading that first, summarizes where in the narrative the passage occurs, second, explains what the passage means in terms of the language/phrasing used, and third, how the passage relates to, informs, or affects the rest of the narrative.
4. **“track a word”**—choose a word from the following list. First, look it up in the Oxford English Dictionary (available online through Butler Library's databases) and provide its full etymology and definition (you may print it out and tape it into your notebook if you wish.) Then, look it up in the Middle English Dictionary (<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>) Note in particular any obvious differences between how the word is listed in the OED and the MED, remembering that Chaucer writes in Middle English, so the MED takes precedence in terms of meaning. Then, track each time the word appears in Chaucer's texts, noting how it is being used on each occasion. Note in particular when the word seems to be used differently than usual. Possible words to choose from: curteisie, sovereyn/sovereynetee, vileynye, benygne/ benignitee, reverence, subtil/ subtilly, aventure, solemptytee, gentil/gentillesse, entente, sondry

5. **Summative reflection:** The final entry in your notebook should be a critical reflection that discusses how keeping this notebook aided you in meeting the course objectives, including any specific insights or points of interest it helped you gain about Chaucer and his world and writing, literary studies, critical studies, and which assignments/activities were especially important for you as a learner. This final reflection should represent the best writing that you are able to do by the end of the course—don't try to do it in one sitting an hour before it is due. Take the time to carefully consider what you want to say and how you want to say it, remembering that together with the final examination, this is the final impression you are leaving with me concerning your work in the course. Make it count! Aim for between 1500-2000 words in this essay. This essay should be typed, printed out, and pasted or folded into the final pages of your notebook.

Elective components. You should choose a minimum of 10 elective notebook entries to include in your notebook, spread across the following categories. At least two items from each category I-IV must be included.

Category I: Literary study/analysis

Allusions. Keep an ongoing list of allusions to Classical mythological, historical, and biblical figures that you notice occurring throughout Chaucer's texts—who is being alluded to? How do the allusions affect the text you are reading? Which figures are alluded to in multiple texts? Are they used the same way, or do they appear for different reasons?

Annotations. Choose a passage from one of Chaucer's narratives and annotate it, including in particular information and explanations that are not present in the Broadview or Norton annotations.

Character interactions. Keep a list of which characters talk to whom, and when, in order to better understand how the pilgrims interact with one another throughout their storytelling.

Character analysis. Choosing either one of the pilgrims, or one of the characters in the stories they tell, explain who that figure is in terms of how s/he is presented, how others interact with him/her, what s/he does, etc. and why paying attention to these aspects of the character is important to understanding either the character, the narrative, or both.

Thematic analysis. Choose a theme and discuss its presence and how it affects any one of the narratives we read in class.

Thematic tracking. Choose a theme that interests you (e.g. chivalry, women, masculinity, feminism, gender, religion, violence, marriage, race, youth, old age, beauty, relationships.....) and follow its presence/development/iterations through the *Canterbury Tales* in a series of brief entries.

Problem paper. Identify a textual issue or concern that affects your understanding of the narrative dependent upon how you interpret it. Quote the passage, identify the problem, and explain why it matters to your interpretation of the story (the goal is not actually to solve the problem, unless you want to; it's more about identifying issues of interpretation.)

Literary elements. Identify one or more literary element you notice Chaucer making use of (figurative language, hyperbole, puns, rhyme, etc.) and discuss its presence in Chaucer's work, with examples from several different texts to support your observations.

Category II: Research-based work

Biographical sketch. Research Chaucer's life in at least 3 sources that are NOT the textbook for this class, and write a brief biographical sketch of his life. Make sure to include documentation of where the information came from in correct MLA formatting.

Spotlight literary form or genre. Choosing one of the literary forms or genres present in Chaucer's texts (romance, fabliau, dream vision, saint's life, beast fable, exemplum, etc. etc.), conduct research using at least 3 sources, at least one of which must be NOT electronic (*i.e.* a book or other physical medium), and write a carefully-crafted short essay on a specific point or set of points about your topic. Make sure to include a correctly-formatted Works Cited to show where you got your research from.

Spotlight literary work. Choose one of the *Canterbury Tales*, or one of the dream visions, and research it in at least 3 sources. Write a brief report on what you learned about the tale, making sure to include a correctly-formatted Works Cited to show where you got your research from.

Spotlight language. Research Chaucer's use of language in the *Canterbury Tales*, focusing either on his multilingual aspect or on the words he is credited with having created. Write a brief report of your findings, including documentation for where the information came from.

Spotlight historical era. Research Ricardian England (England in the 14th century, during Chaucer's lifetime.) Write a brief report of your findings, including documentation for where the information came from.

Chaucer in the 21st century. Keep a list of Chaucerian allusions in modern life—mentions of him or his works in television or film, other books and poems, pop culture, merchandise, and so forth. Make sure to include documentation of where the information came from.

Source study. Choose one of Chaucer's texts that is adapted from another work. Read the original work, and write an entry describing how Chaucer alters it/ makes it his own. You might deepen this assignment by reading the sources and also analogues or historical documents that provide insight into the subject matter of a given tale; these are readily available in *Sources and Analogues to the Canterbury Tales*, volumes 1 & 2, eds. Correale and Hamel.

Medieval subject research. Choose a subject or topic in medieval literature or culture, either from class or from your own interest, to research, and write a brief report of your findings; make sure to include documentation of where the information came from.

Historical and literary figures. Choose one of the women in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* and research her historical and literary presence; then write a brief summary of your findings and whether or not they correspond to what Chaucer wrote.

Category III: Creative writing

Personal/creative poems: Original poetic work written by the student, either based on class activities or of the student's own devising, and based on Chaucerian poetic forms. (No word limit).

Chaucerian fan fiction. Original poetic or fictional work in response to one or more of the texts or their tellers. You might, for instance, write about how the Wife of Bath's husbands died, or turn the pilgrimage into a murder-mystery, or write about one of the squire's flings while he was abroad, or write about something that happened to the Pardoner in his youth that led to his being so unethical, or write about the Clerk at Oxford as a student, or write a story from the perspective of one of the Prioress's dogs.....

Character's Journal. Write a travel journal of at least 10 entries describing one of the characters' journey to Canterbury. Make it as realistic as you can, including comments about the other pilgrims, the contest, and so forth. You might consider consulting other medieval travel books, such as Marco Polo's Travels or the Travels of Sir John Mandeville, to help shape the style of your writing and give it an added dose of medieval flair.

Dramatization. Choose one of the CT narratives (or a scene from one of the narratives) and turn it into a play or script for a film or television show.

Adaptation. Take one of the narratives and adapt it into a modern story. Alternately, take one of the narratives and change it from one form/genre to another (e.g., a romance into a fabliau, a beast fable into a saint's life, a poem into prose, etc.)

Add-a-Pilgrim. Create a new pilgrim for the Canterbury Tales. Provide a description and backstory, and explain why s/he is on pilgrimage. Draw the new pilgrim, if you wish.

Found poem. Take a page of Chaucer's work, and remove words to create your own poem derived from one of his tales. The poem you create does not have to be about the subject matter of Chaucer's narrative.

Social Media Chaucer. Create a Facebook or Twitter feed with at least 10 posts, or an Instagram account of at least 5 images, for Chaucer, or one of his characters. (you can do this digitally and print it out and paste it into your notebook, if you wish.)

Category IV: Artistic interpretation and manuscript culture

Illustrate-a-tale. Create illustrations either digitally or by hand using any medium to accompany one of the *Canterbury Tales*.

Graphic Chaucer. Turn one of the *Canterbury Tales* into a cartoon/ graphic novel.

Meme play. Re-tell one of the *Canterbury Tales* using only memes. (you may print them out and paste them into your notebook.)

Illuminated class notes. Select two weeks' worth of class notes to rewrite as illuminated class notes, similar to the illuminated manuscripts in medieval culture (you may choose notes from any point in the term; you might, for instance, choose the notes from the lessons you enjoyed most, or from those that most confused you and which you might benefit from reviewing in a slower mode). You will need to determine what page layout/ design, information retrieval system(s) and lettering you feel will best help you to recall the information while providing a pleasant aesthetic experience. You should also include at least two images and some marginalia—will it be silly figures doing silly things? Cartoon commentary on the main text? Reminders of what to focus on? Images completely unrelated to the main text of your notes? Beautiful plants and animalia? Block or bubble lettering, tagging, or other more modern illustration styles? Your illuminated class notes are limited only by your imagination.

Annotate-a-tale. Choose one of the tales we read, and photocopy a clean copy to paste into your notebook. Then, annotate it by creating margin notes and drawings that support, underscore, draw attention to, or otherwise interact with the tale.

Tweet-a-Tale. Choose one of the Tales and reimagine it as a storified Tweeting session (140 characters per Tweet!).

Character sketch. Choose one of the pilgrims and draw what you think s/he would look like.

Character archive. Create an image bank with at least 8 photos or other images for one of the characters in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

Map the Journey. Create a map of the pilgrim's journey to Canterbury Cathedral, with at least three possible landmarks on it.

Create a pilgrimage brochure. Design a brochure intended to lure people to go on this pilgrimage, including quotes from at least two of the CT pilgrims.

V. Other. If you have a good idea for something to include in your notebook that is not listed here, feel free to include it!