

The Canterbury Tales

A Reading Guide

For the book by G. MacCraughean

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How to Use This Book

This book is part of the Logos Press 5th grade curriculum. The chapters are all fairly short, though they vary in length.

It's quite common for students to memorize the first few lines of the Prologue in the original Middle English. Happily, there are many audio recordings on the internet to assist you with the pronunciation. If you're feeling adventurous, go ahead and give it a go!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-xpzfsY4bU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QE0MtENfOMU>

Five Elements of the Story

The Canterbury Tales were originally written by Geoffrey Chaucer at the end of the 14th century, during the time of the Hundred Years' War. They are a collected of stories that are presented as being told by a group of travelers on a pilgrimage to Canterbury.

Chaucer himself is a character in this tale. He is travelling to Canterbury and meets up with a group of travelers also going to Canterbury. The travelers tell stories as a sort of competition and a way to pass the time. Each one of their tales has its own characters, but the main characters of the Tales are the travelers themselves.

The pilgrimage takes place near Canterbury in England during the 14th century. The tales themselves range in time and place from being in England contemporary with the tellers to the time of King Arthur to ancient Thebes.

The plots of the stories also vary with the tellers – some have morals, some don't; some are funny, some are tragic.

The main conflict of the Tales is that between the travelers. They are all from very different occupations and walks of life. They bicker amongst themselves and disagree over what makes a good story. This is reflected in the stories they tell.

Some questions ask as you read would be:

- What makes a good story?
- Are morals necessary to a good story or not?
- How do the personalities of the travelers come out in their stories?

Author Biographies

Geoffrey Chaucer
1342-1400

Geoffrey Chaucer was a public figure as well as a writer and poet. He served as a page, diplomat, and spy for the British crown. He was made Controller of the Customs of Wools, Skins, and Hides in 1374 and did very well. In 1386, he gave up that post and became Justice of the Peace in Kent as well as a representative in Parliament. He wrote a number of famous poems that were unique because he wrote them in English when the language of poetry at the time was French. He had meant to write 120 tales for the Canterbury Tales, but died after writing only twenty. He is buried in the Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey.

Geraldine McCaughrean
1951 –

Geraldine McCaughrean is a British children's novelist. She has written more than 150 books, many of which are retellings of classic children's stories. She may be known best for writing the authorized sequel to Peter Pan in 2006.

Comprehension Questions

Prologue

1. What is the name of the innkeeper where Geoffrey stops?
2. Why is the inn so busy? In other words, why are there so many travelers?
3. How many people will be travelling in the group in the morning?
4. Harry Bailey suggests a competition to make the journey go more quickly. What competition does he suggest?

What does the winner get?

Who is the judge of the competition?

5. Name three of the travelers (their names are their occupations).

Answers to the Comprehension Questions

Prologue

1. Harry Bailey.
2. It is spring and there are many people making the pilgrimage to Canterbury.
3. 30.
4. A story-telling competition. A free dinner bought by the rest of the travelers. Harry Bailey himself.
5. The Knight, the Miller, the Ploughman, the Parson, the Pardoner, the Summoner, the Cook, the Ship's Captain...

The Knight's Tale

1. Thebes. Theseus and Creon.
2. Palamon and Arcite.
3. The Duke Theseus' sister-in-law, Emily.
4. One of Arcite's friends manages to obtain a pardon for him as long as he leaves Athens forever. They are not sad to be separated (they're both fighting over Emily) but Arcite does not want to leave Athens.
5. He has them compete in the jousting tournament the next day and the winner will be pardoned and marry Emily. Palamon kills Arcite.

The Miller's Tale

1. Alison. Nicholas.
2. That the end of the world was coming, and it would happen as in Noah's day – by flood.
3. Absalom, a man who loves Alison.
4. He gives Absalom a kiss instead of Alison. Absalom knows it wasn't Alison (because of Nicholas' beard), and the second time he brings a brand from the blacksmith and sets fire to Nicholas' trousers.
5. She thinks the story is coarse, and about low people (as opposed to nobility).

The Nun's Priest's Tale

1. Chanticleer.
2. Madame Pertelote.
3. He dreamed that a monster with a "tail like a firebrand" attacked him.
4. The fox flatters the rooster and asks him to sing for him. While the rooster sings, the fox grabs him around the neck and runs off with him.
5. The rooster praises the foxes escape, causing the fox to turn to stick out his tongue to taunt his pursuers and so he opens his mouth, allowing the rooster to escape.