

Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer

1. I-SEARCH: What can you find out about the HISTORICAL and CULTURAL backgrounds? When, where, and by whom was the *Canterbury Tales* written?

Make a list of five significant 14th century historical events.

Make a list of five significant dates in Chaucer's life.

2. What important THEMES are introduced in the opening 18 lines of "The Prologue"? Listen to a reading of these lines on the internet. We will practice reading aloud in class.

3. What is a NARRATOR ? Who is narrating "The Prologue"? Who is the "I"? Is he reliable or unreliable as an observer of human nature?

4. How many pilgrims are described in "The Prologue"? What SOCIAL CLASSES do they represent?

5. Why does the narrator begin with the Knight? In what ways is his portrait echoed in subsequent portraits?

6. What is SATIRE? What specific faults does the narrator find in each pilgrim? Are there any ideal pilgrims?

7. What techniques does Chaucer use to reveal his ironic or satirical view of the human condition? What is a PUN or DOUBLE ENTENDRE ?

8. What is a FABLIAU? Apply the definition to "The Miller's Tale" and "The Merchant's Tale."

9. What is MISOGNY? How does the Wife of Bath attempt to refute centuries of clerical anti-feminism? Is she successful ?

10. Trace the Wife of Bath's five marriages. Does she turn out to be exactly what male clerics accuse women of ? Does she have any admirable qualities?

11. Does her tale support the argument of her prologue? Or does it contradict it?