“THE PROLOGUE”
CANTERBURY TALES

NOTES, TIMELINE,
CHARACTER CHART
ASSIGNMENT

THE LITERACY COACH
2012
THE PROLOGUE TO THE CANTERBURY TALES

TO THE TEACHER

I have included in this lesson everything I have ever used to teach “The Prologue” to *The Canterbury Tales*. The notes are notes I took in grad school combined with my research over the last fifteen years. I suggest you read over them as some of the content is a bit bawdy and not what you will find in the usual high school textbook. Because of this, I am suggesting that the notes for “The Prologue” not necessarily be a projectable, but that they serve you in understanding the text to a greater degree. With that said, these items have served me well over the years and have ensured that the finer nuances of the text are brought into the lives of our students. May they serve you and your students in the same manner.


COMMON CORE STANDARDS COVERED IN THIS LESSON

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.4  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.6  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.10

THIS LESSON PLAN INCLUDES


2. Author Background Notes – Chaucer – to help you, the teacher, understand the original ideas behind the complex text.

3. Discussion Points – to use for guiding daily discussion in class, to assign to groups as conversation starters, or to use as research topics.


5. Direct and Indirect Characterization Chart – for students to keep track of examples of characterization as they read. These will be used for the Character Chart Assignment (below).

6. Vocabulary Terms chart

7. Character Chart Assignment

8. Chivalry Essay Assignment

9. Rubrics for Character Chart Assignment and Chivalry Essay

Grade Level: High School (used with 12th grade)  Duration of Lesson: 3 weeks

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TIMELINE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Old English (Anglo-Saxon) = 597-1100 AD

“Beowulf,” author unknown, dates from 1000 AD

Middle English = 1100 AD – 1500 AD

Chaucer (1340 – 1400 AD) is the acknowledged literary master of this period and the Canterbury Tales is the most famous work of this period.

Example of Middle English:
At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene

Translation:
Of mortal battles he had fought fifteen

***Note: the French influence ("batailles")

There was no overnight change from Old to Middle English, but the action which triggered the greatest change was the Norman Conquest of England of 1066 AD.
AUTHOR NOTES
CHAUCER - 1340-1400 A.D.

- Involved in the court which provided a source for and audience for his works

- Most people in England were illiterate but WOULD listen

- Many poems written for his patrons (paid him)

- He was a major figure in Eng. Politics

- Lived above Key Gate of London

- Dante and Chaucer - chose to write in the vulgar (common, simple) language

- Wrote in Middle English (the native tongue of London)

- Court of England spoke French - this was considered to be very pretentious but happened because England traded Kings with France

- Middle English reflects French influence on vowels/language
DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The author is making a commentary on society at the time. By describing the characters in the manner in which he does, what is he saying about humankind?

2. How are the characters in “The Prologue” the same as or different from people in modern society?

3. Note how Chaucer places the virtuous characters in between his descriptions of the bawdy, not-so-virtuous individuals. What might be his reason for doing this? What effect does it have on the reader?

4. What was chivalry in the Middle Ages? What is chivalry today?

5. Who was Chaucer’s audience? What was their social status? What level of education did they have?

6. Which method of characterization do you find more convincing: direct or indirect? Why? What are some specific examples from the text to support your opinion?
“THE PROLOGUE” NOTES

Narration

➢ Chaucer (the writer who is on the outside) creates the narrator – the voice telling the story.

➢ As a writer you can create a person and manipulate it as Chaucer does with his narrator.

➢ Satire can be achieved in the voice the author creates.

➢ This is a poem of longing – characters show different types of longing.

Canterbury Tales

• Two part nature of existence – always in Chaucer’s work.

• Symbols represent certain moral characteristics

  The nature of life is to be unfulfilled

  $$\frac{\text{Pilgrimage}}{\text{Adventure}} = \frac{\text{Reason}}{\text{Sensuality}} = \frac{\text{Head}}{\text{Body}} = \frac{\text{Spiritual}}{\text{Physical}}$$

• He gives descriptions of moral characteristics.

• In the characters, we see a series of moral virtues & vices.

• Don’t look for logical development in characters; instead look for moral characteristics (state of souls) – he uses this to teach us lessons.

Introduction = “Prologue”

➢ Opens in spring

➢ Air, Earth, Wind, and Fire

➢ Succession of creation

➢ Booming nature (to line 11)
Humans make choices because they have free will but they get messed up.

Divided self = continued theme - whatever one does, one can’t find oneself

“That sleep away the night with open eye.” (line 10) = they sleep with one eye open in order to see a potential mate.

“Then people long to go on pilgrimages/And palmers long to seek the stranger strands/Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands…” (lines12-14) = each Spring, people want to travel, going on pilgrimages to holy/known (hallowed) lands.

“holy blissful martyr” = St. Thomas a Beckett – a saint known for going against the king and then being killed by some of his knights in the middle of Canterbury Cathedral. He became a martyr to the people who traveled to the site.

The pilgrims begin at the Tabard Inn to congregate, get to know one another, before setting out on their journey.

Tabard Inn = known as a house of prostitution in that time period.

The narrator begins The Canterbury Tales with the Prologue in which he describes each of the pilgrims with both direct and indirect characterization.

Direct Characterization = making direct statements about a character to describe him or her. Example: He was virtuous.

Indirect Characterization = describing a character through his or her dress, actions, words, etc. Example: She wore scarlet hose to church (to describe the lust and sexuality of the Wife of Bath).

We learn that...
Social rank was very important;

How each is dressed reflects their lives and their livelihood;

Wisdom is the highest form of order;

There is possible irony in character sketches.

Technique - Chaucer presents many values & vices, a gallery of characters. It’s not necessarily about people, but about a set of virtues from the time period.
The Characters:

**Knight** is worthy because he’s wise (line 8). He is a Christian warrior who follows all of the rules of chivalry. He had won many battles (as the list in this section states) which were religious – not secular – in nature.

Chaucer’s commentary: Youth fighting wrong kind of war for wrong reason

“And though so much distinguished, he was wise…” (line 70) = “distinguished” in the original was “worthy” – this is as if to say that worthy was looked down upon.

“He never yet a boorish thing had said…” (line 72) = he never bored people with his tales – an excellent quality.

There is a hint here – that not all of the other people who will be introduced to us in the Prologue will be worthy and some may be boring.

**Squire** – knight in training

“With locks as curly as if they had been pressed…” (line 83) = he paid close attention to his appearance instead of training to be a worthy knight. For someone in this time period to pay this kind of attention to their looks (pressing his hair = permed) means that he was vain.

“…in hopes to win his lady’s grace.” = he hopes to win a woman

“He loved so hotly, till dawn grew pale…” = he was into lovemaking and very sexual

**Yeoman** – servant to the knight’s squire

“…his face was brown…” (line 111) = he was tan which meant that he was in a lower class – he had to work outside
Nun, a Prioress – appearance (manners, fetish, coy) shows that she had connection with count. – Chaucer describes her this way to show that she is human. They are supposed to be in continued mourning.

“Her way of smiling very simple and coy…” (line 123) = she was flirtatious

“Her greatest oath was only “By St. Loy!” (line 124) = she essentially swore by the patron saint of goldsmiths = she was materialistic

“And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.” (line 125) = Eglantyne was the name of a clinging vine type of heroine in medieval times. Chaucer is saying that she is inappropriately into romance and men.

In the ensuing lines in which he describes her singing a service “with a fine intoning through her nose” (lines 126 – 127), speaking French “daintily” (line 128), having manners so that “no morsel from her lips did she let fall” (line 132), he is suggesting that she is too focused on her appearance and looking as though she is courtly. Nuns are to be focused on charity – not on their appearance.

“She was so charitably solicitous/ She used to weep if she but saw a mouse/caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding./And she had little dogs she would be feeding/With roasted flesh, or milk, or fine white bread./And bitterly she wept if one were dead/Or someone took a stick and made it smart. She was all sentiment and tender heart.” (lines 147 – 154) = She had strong feelings for animals. But a nun should weep for human condition not animals; she should feed the poor, not the animals.

“Her veil was gathered in a seemly way,/Her nose was elegant, her eyes glass gray;/Her mouth was very small, but soft and red…” (lines 155 – 157) = red mouth meant she was sexy

“Her forehead, certainly, was fair of spread…” (line 158) = she was LARGE

She wore a brooch “of brightest sheen/On which there first was graven a crowned A./And lower, Amor vincit omnia.” (lines 164 – 166) = Love conquers all = she focused on romantic love which was inappropriate for a nun.

She is out of order- ‘nun outside’ = this stands out because nuns are kept on the ‘inside’.
**Monk**- handsome; hunter (associated with Diana, goddess of the hunt); worldly; from the Benedictine order (very strict), but he rejects the rules of his order and seeks the outside world.

“...hunting was his sport...” (line 170) = in the original text, the word hunting is “venerie”, which is related to Venus – goddess of the hunt. Chaucer is saying that the monk is hunting women.

“Many a dainty horse he had in stable...” (line 172)

“Hi bridle, when he rode, a man might hear/Jingling in a whistling wind as clear,/Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell...” (lines 173-175) = his bells announce his arrival and call people (women) to him just as the chapel bell calls people to church.

“The Rule of good St. Benet or St. Maur/As old and strict he tended to ignore...That is to say a monk out of his cloister.” (lines 177-186) = St. Benet and St. Maur wrote the strict monastic rules. Here he is saying that the monk chose not to follow the rules because he felt he was to a modern man – something monks were NOT supposed to be.

“This monk was therefore a good man to horse;/Greyhounds he had, as swift as birds, to course./Hunting a hare or riding at a fence/Was all his fun...” (lines 193 – 196) = he was not only a good horseman, but hunting hares was a metaphor for being lustful and hunting women.

“So did his face, as if it had been greased.” (line 203) = this was a sign of sexiness

What better disguise for Satan to take than that of a monk?

He completely throws out foundation of the monastic life.

**Friar**

“So glib with gallant phrase and well-turned speech.” (line 215) = he spoke well which shows he was educated.

“He’d fixed up many a marriage, giving each/Of his young women what he could afford her.” (lines 216-217) = he conducted marriage ceremonies but the price that was paid was sex with the bride.

“Highly beloved and intimate was he/With County fold within his boundary,/And city dames of honor and possessions;/
For he was qualified to hear confessions./Or so he said, with more than priestly scope;/He had a special license from the Pope.” (lines 219-224) = he was “close” to people who had money and to the women in his order. He would hear confession even though friars did not do so. He claimed he was special and that the Pope allowed him to do so. This was just another way for him to get to know the people and to be able to take advantage of them.

“Therefore instead of weeping and of prayer/One should give silver for a poor Friar’s care…” (lines 235-236) = people only had to pay him in order to receive his services.

“He kept his tippet stuffed with pins for curls,/And pocket-knives, to give to pretty girls.” (lines 237-238) = he catered to pretty young girls – he was lecherous.

“He knew the taverns well in every town/And every innkeeper and barmaid too/Better than the lepers, beggars and that crew.” (lines 244-246) = instead of preaching to the people who really needed it (the sick), he spent his time in bars and getting to know the barmaids.

“He was the finest beggar of his batch./And, for his begging-district, payed a rent;/His brethren did no poaching where he went.” (lines 256-258) = he bribed other friars to stay out of his area. He had a good thing going and made a lot of money. He also knew the women in that area and didn’t want anyone else to have the “advantages” he had.

“He lisped a little out of wantonness…” (line 274) = lisping was a sign of lust.

**Merchant** - businessman

“…none knew he was in debt…” (line 290) = a businessman was supposed to be able to handle his money and not be in debt.

The description goes on to say that he was a good negotiator and good person.

**Oxford Cleric** – student – another virtuous character, perhaps given to us after a few not-so-virtuous people to keep us on track and recalling what virtue and integrity are.

He and his horst are thin and, most likely, poor.

He prefers books over clothes.
“The thought of moral virtue filled his speech/And he would gladly learn, and gladly teach.” (lines 317-318) = he was virtuous and good.

**Sergeant at the Law** – a person with this position had over sixteen years of experience in practicing law, was a king’s servant and acted as a judge. There were only twenty of these.

The description in lines 325 – 334 show that he was both skilled and competent.

**Franklin** – wealthy landowner

“He lived for pleasure and had always done…” (line 345) = he sought pleasure and richness.

The description goes on to say that he always drank the finest wine and ate the finest food.

**Haberdasher, Dyer, Carpenter, Weaver and Carpet-maker**

Haberdasher = dealer of wares

These men were of the “middle class.” They had money and had businesses. They were, in essence, moving upward in society.

**Cook**

The short description of the cook shows us that he is competent as a cook. He has an injury on his knee which is unfortunate but he knows food well.

**Skipper** = shipman

The Skipper was not a very nice man. He was a bit ruthless, having his prisoners after a battle walk the plank to “go back home” (line 410).

He knew the seas well and understood the tides better than anyone.
Doctor = “Doctor of Physik” in the original text which meant that he was a doctor of medicine.

He was “grounded in astronomy” (line 424) = during the Middle Ages, medicine was based largely on the stars and their position in the sky.

Line 430 describes the four humours – “dry, cold, moist or hot” – which were how people were diagnosed at that time. If one was too moist and hot, or cold and dry, etc. they were out of balance and sick.

Lines 437 – 444 list a number of well-known physicians. This tells the reader that the Doctor knew what he was doing and that he followed the examples of his predecessors.

“And he kept the gold he won in pestilences./Gold stimulates the heart, or so we’re told.” (lines 452-453) = his services were paid for in gold. Gold was known to stimulate the heart and help it heal. If he used it for his heart (because we know he kept it), it could be saying that he loved gold, that he was cheap (because he kept it and didn’t spend it), or that he kept it and used it for his patients.

Wife of Bathe – she makes cloth better than the best cloth makers of the time.

“In all the parish not a dame dared stir/Towards the altar steps in front of her./And if indeed they did, so wrath was she/As to be quite put out of charity.” (lines 459-462) = Wanted to be the 1st to give & when she couldn’t be, she didn’t feel like giving.

“Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground./I dared have sworn they weight a good ten pound…Her hose were of the finest scarlet red.” (lines 463-466) = Wears 10 pounds of red clothes. Red clothing was considered to be overtly sexual. By wearing red clothing to church, she was sending a message to the men in the church that she was very sexual and available.

“She’d had five husbands, all at the church door./Apart from other company in youth…” (lines 470-471) = she had been married in the church five times. In order to be married in the church a second (let alone fifth) time, one’s spouse had to have died; divorcees were not allowed to remarry in the church. She also had male “companions” in her youth.

“And she was skilled in wandering by the way.” (line 477) = she had been on many pilgrimages and had traveled widely. To say that she wandered by the way is a
metaphor. When one wanders off the path, they are not following the rules. She did not follow the rules – whether in life or on a religious pilgrimage.

“She had gap-teeth, set widely…” (line 478) = gap teeth were a sign of lust.

“She had a flowing mantle that concealed/Large hips, her heels spurred sharply under that…And knew the remedies for love’s mischances,/An art in which she knew the oldest dances.” (lines 482-483) = this description suggests her sexual ways. The spurs on her heels suggest that she essentially rode her male companions as if they were her horse, having the upper hand every time.

The Wife of Bath prefers reason over sensuality, and animal-like behavior over human sensibility.

Pardoner - Persoun of Town - humble, mentions his religion, not his appearance, rich in holy thought

He was poor which tells us that he took a vow of monastic life and followed the rules – he knew the Bible and preached it, never neglected the people in his parish and disliked talking payment for his services. He is the opposite of his brothers described in the story.

“This noble example to his sheep he gave,/First following the word before he taught it…” (lines 506-507) = he traveled by foot which is a reference to Christ who walked around town preaching the word of God.

“Never contemptuous of sinful men.” (line 526) = even though he was honest and true, he did not look down on others who sinned.

Plowman
A Christian man who loved his neighbor as himself.

Reeve, Miller, Manciple:

Millere - Brute; strong, warlike, cantankerous; grinds wheat; dishonest reduced to the physical absurd.

Lines 562-575 describe him as big, strong and broad. He has a red beard and red hair in his ears.
“His nostrils were as black as they were wide.” (line 573) = he is being compared to animals = he is a beast.

“He had a sword and buckler at his side...” (line 574) = he was ready for a fight.

“His mighty mouth was like a furnace door.” (line 575) = he had foul breath.

“His was a master hand at stealing grain./He felt it with his thumb and thus he knew/Its quality and took three times his due…” (lines 578-580) = He cheated.

**Manciple** – Buyer of supplies

**Reeve** – Manager of an estate

**Summoner** – Serves summonses to church courts

“For he had carbuncles. His eyes were narrow./He was as hot and lecherous as a sparrow./Black, scabby brows he had, and a thin beard./Children were afraid when he appeared.” (lines 643-646) = he had large pimples on his face – he was bloated, greasy and ugly.

“And if he found some rascal with a maid/He would instruct him not to be afraid/In such a case of the Archdeacon’s curse…For in his purse the punishment should be.” (lines 671-675) = if someone committed adultery, the person would only have to pay the summoner a fee and they could avoid excommunication.

“Archdeacon’s curse” = excommunication

“He knew their secrets…” (line 683) = he could blackmail them or threaten them with excommunication because he knew their secrets.

**Pardoner** – gives out pardons from the Pope

“This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,/Hanging down smoothly like a hank of flax.” (lines 695-696) = he had hair like a woman.
“I judge he was a gelding or a mare.” (line 711) = the narrator is comparing him to a female or castrated horse = he is very effeminate.

Lines 715 – 720 describe the religious relics he claims he had in his possession – all used to convince people to pay him more money for his services.

“Made monkeys of the priest and congregation.” (line 726) = he made so much money that he made fools out of the other church men.

**Host** – the owner of the Tabard Inn who challenges the pilgrims.

(Lines 810–829) = He asks them to tell a story that has good morals and that is interesting. The winner will get a dinner paid by all of the other pilgrims. If they don’t follow the rules, they will have to pay for the entire trip.
DIRECT AND INDIRECT CHARACTERIZATION CHART

As you read The Prologue, list examples of both direct and indirect characterization in the chart below.

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<thead>
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<th>Line</th>
<th>Quote (include speaker) or Event</th>
<th>Character Quote is About</th>
<th>Direct (D) or Indirect (I)?</th>
<th>What Does this Reveal About the Character?</th>
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# VOCABULARY TERMS

**Directions:** Fill out the chart below, first indicating if you know the term or not. Then, look for the word in the text and find a definition that matches the usage in the text.

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<th>Term</th>
<th>Know</th>
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<td>40. withal (771)</td>
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<td>41. girth (773)</td>
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<td>42. reckonings (780)</td>
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<tr>
<td>43. spry (784)</td>
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</table>
CANTERBURY TALES CHARACTER CHART

1. Take notes about the characters including both direct and indirect characterization throughout the reading of “the Prologue” of the Canterbury Tales.

2. Divide a piece of paper into eight (8) parts.

3. Choose eight characters from “The Prologue” and draw one character in each of the eight sections of your paper.

4. Under each picture or on the back of the paper, list both direct and indirect characterization traits for each character. You must have a minimum of EIGHT items for each picture/character.

RULES:

1. Lists may be written on the back OR front of the pictures.

2. Pictures MUST BE COLORED!

3. NEATNESS COUNTS!

4. Be creative!!
CHIVALRY EXPERIMENT PAPER

Write the definition of chivalry here =

What kinds of things could you do to be chivalrous in today’s society? List them here: ________________________________
____________________________________________________
________________________
____________________________________________________

Instructions:

1. Do your chivalrous acts for one week.

2. Write a two-page paper in which you discuss:
   a. What you did to be chivalrous;
   b. How people reacted to your chivalry;
   c. How it made you feel to perform acts of chivalry;

Note: Paper must be typed – double space, 12 point font (Times New Roman or Arial only), 1-inch margins all around, no extra lines between paragraphs

Due Date for Final Draft of paper: ________________
### Canterbury Tales Character Chart

#### Scoring Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum of eight characters included.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes both direct and indirect characterization.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has 8 examples/quotes per character.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses quotes appropriately with quote marks and line numbers.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates creativity.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is neatly drawn or designed.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures are colored.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL:** ________

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### Canterbury Tales Chivalry Paper

#### Scoring Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Length = minimum of 2 pages.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes chivalrous acts performed.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes the reactions of others.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details feelings after performing acts of chivalry.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper is typed, double-spaced, 12-point font.</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL:** ________

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