

QUICK CARD: *THE CANTERBURY TALES*



Reference	<i>The Canterbury Tales</i> , by Geoffrey Chaucer. ISBN: 978-0140424386
Plot	A group of fourteenth century Medieval travelers make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Thomas a Becket in Canterbury, England, passing the time along their way by telling each other stories. Their host proposes the group treat the person with the best story to a free dinner upon their return to Southwark. With this as the frame, the tales themselves represent the stories each pilgrim told, their prologues identifying the narrator and providing character development. Although Chaucer's work remains unfinished, the insights it provides into the inner workings and personalities of inhabitants of the Medieval period, and more generally of humanity, are invaluable.
Setting	Medieval England The month of April Pilgrimage from Southwark to Canterbury On the road At the Tabard Inn in Southwark
Characters	There are thirty-two characters in the Tales, all but three of whom are introduced in the General Prologue. They include: The Knight , a "perfect, gentle knight" The Squire , 20 years old, strong and lusty The Yeoman , a farmer in a coat and hood of green, adorned with peacock arrows and carrying a sword and dagger. The Prioress , simple, coy, and preoccupied with worldly manners The Second Nun The Nun's Priest The Monk The Canon's Yeoman The Friar, named Hubard , wanton and merry. He is the best beggar in his monastery. He wears a nice coat and deals only with rich people who can give him something. The Merchant The Clerk of Oxford The Sergeant of Law The Franklin The Haberdasher The Carpenter The Weaver The Dyer The Tapestry Maker

	<p>The Cook, named Roger The Shipman The Doctor of Physick (sic.) The Wife of Bath, named Dame Alice The Parson, a good and honest man. Takes care of his flock to his own hurt. The Plowman The Miller The Reeve The Manciple The Summoner The Pardoner, depicted as a kind of snake oil salesman type, dishonest and lascivious. The Host, named Harry Bailey The Narrator, Geoffrey Chaucer, also on pilgrimage The Canon</p> <p>Chaucer completed only twenty-four of the proposed 120 tales. The characters who appear in bold type narrate the finished stories.</p>
Conflict	<p>The overarching narrative is driven by the storytelling contest (Man vs. Man/Man vs. Society). Individual tales within the collection vary in content and kind, running the gamut of conflicts.</p>
Theme	<p>Individual tales vary in their thematic content, although some critics suggest romantic/chivalric love (see The Nun’s Priest’s Tale and The Knight’s Tale) or the sovereignty of women (see The Wife of Bath’s Tale) as dominant. The Nature of Man, however, takes center stage as Chaucer’s overriding theme. With his honest Parson on one hand and his vicious Pardoner on the other, Chaucer depicts the best and the worst of humanity with signature warmth and wit, suggesting that man is a multifaceted creature, equally capable of greatness and basity.</p>
Literary Devices	<p>Chaucer’s Tales employ several genres:</p> <p>Courtly or Chivalric Romance – legends such as those of King Arthur that center around themes of courtly love, gentillesse, and courtesy. Consider The Knight’s Tale.</p> <p>Fairy Tale – a supernatural story. Consider The Wife of Bath’s Tale.</p> <p>Fabliau – a farcical or bawdy story. The Miller’s Tale is maybe the bawdiest story of the lot. This is why most high schools don’t assign the tales in their totality.</p> <p>Sermonizing or Moralizing Tale – didactic narrative. Consider The Pardoner’s Tale.</p> <p>Beast Fable – like Aesop’s Fables, a moral story whose main characters are animals. Consider The Nun’s Priest’s Tale.</p> <p>Saint’s Legend – a story about a real person that has been overstated or fictionalized. Consider The Second Nun’s Tale of St. Cecilia and The Man of Law’s Tale of Constance.</p>

Mock Heroic or Mock Epic – utilizes the tropes and devices of the epic while narrating a low subject or theme. Consider *The Nun's Priest's Tale*.

Satire—the tone makes light of a serious matter to underscore its gravity. Consider the *Pardoner's Tale*, in which the Pardoner, a corrupt churchman, fleeces his listeners with a moral tale about money, the root of all evil.

Verbal Irony: a satirical device that utilizes Understatement (aka Litotes) or Overstatement (aka Hyperbole)

Imagery –

Chaucer's description of characters are virtually unparalleled. Below, he employs similes, metaphors, allusions, descriptive adjectives and strong nouns to depict his Pardoner:

“With him there rode a *gentle* Pardoner
Of Rouncival, his friend and his compeer
That straight was comen from the court of Rome.
Full loud *he sang* ‘Come hither love to me.’
... This pardoner had *hair as yellow as wax*
But smooth *it hung as does a strike of flax*.
By ounces hung his lockès that he had,
And therewith he his shoulders overspread.
But thin it lay, by colpons, one by one,
But hood, for jollity, wearèd he none,
For it was trussèd up in his wallet:
Him thought he rode all of the *newè* jet,
Dishevelled; save his cap he rode all bare.
Such *glaring eyen had he as a hare*.
A *vernicle* had he sewed upon his cap.
His wallet lay before him in his lap
Bretfull of pardons, come from Rome all **hot**.
A voice he had as small as hath a goat.
No beard had he nor never should he have;
As smooth it was as it were late y-shave.
I trow he were a gelding or a mare.”

Allusions – In the Prologue alone, Chaucer references literature, philosophy, medicine, and religion. In *The Nun's Priest's Tale* (commonly referred to as *Chanticleer and the Fox*), Chanticleer references the Roman statesman Cato, the Roman orator Cicero, Roman author Macrobius, the biblical accounts of Joseph and Judas, the myth of Ceres, and Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Symbolism – Chaucer's artistic depiction of individual characters provides symbolic commentary on their profession or types. For example, he depicts the pardoner's vulgarity and the nun's worldly affectations to expose the vice of the pre-Reformation Catholic church. He portrays the Knight's poor attire to symbolize the decline of chivalry.

Poetry – The Tales are written in iambic pentameter and open or riding heroic couplets. Couplets reference the rhyme of every two syllables, and open/riding refers to the fact that the thought doesn't necessarily end at the end of the couplet.

