

Canterbury Tales Understanding Historical Context Assignment

Directions: Review the following timeline (from the British Library's website) of historical events in Britain leading up to the publication of *The Canterbury Tales*. Based on these events, cite three (3) of the most important events that help describe what England was like during the Middle Ages.

Historical Timeline--Middle Ages in England

7 July 1307--*Edward I dies and is succeeded by his son Edward II*

In 1306, Robert the Bruce was crowned king of Scotland in defiance of Edward I, who died while on his way north to reassert his authority. Edward II was very different from his father, more interested in entertainment than warfare and dependent upon favourites like Piers Gaveston. Two years after Edward's accession, he married Isabella, daughter of the French king.

24 June 1314--*Robert the Bruce defeats Edward II at Bannockburn*

Since the death of Edward I, Robert the Bruce had consolidated his hold on Scotland and reclaimed lost territory. The English governor of Stirling was besieged. Edward II led a 20,000-strong relief force, but it was heavily defeated at nearby Bannockburn by a Scottish force half its size. The victory ensured Scotland's survival as an independent country, with Bruce as its king.

1315 to 1322--*Millions die in the Great European Famine*

The famine was the product of a cooler and damper climate, coupled with the medieval inability to dry and store grain effectively. Colder winters and wet summers severely affected the harvest. Millions died of starvation. Cannibalism was widely reported from Poland to Ireland and many were trampled to death in bread queues in London.

1316--*Edward Bruce leads an expedition to Ireland*

At the height of the Great European Famine, Edward Bruce, Robert the Bruce's brother, led an expedition in Ireland to discomfort English interests and to raise a grand 'Celtic' alliance. His timing was unfortunate. The alliance came to nothing and the expedition only succeeded in making the effects of the famine still worse.

6 April 1320--*Scottish barons send the Declaration of Arbroath to the pope*

In the Declaration of Arbroath, a letter to Pope John XXII, Scottish barons complained of English invasions and praised their king, Robert the Bruce, but threatened to depose him if he ever subjected Scotland to the English. The declaration can be seen as the founding document of the Scottish nation, or as a clever diplomatic move to explain why Scotland was still fighting its Christian neighbour at the time of the crusades. The pope was unmoved and Scotland remained excommunicated.

September 1326--*Isabella invades England and overthrows Edward II*

Edward II's wife, Isabella, had left England for France in 1325 on the pretext of helping to settle a dispute over territory. But she had been badly treated by Edward's favourites, the Despensers, and declined to return. Instead, she remained in Paris, where she found a lover, Roger Mortimer. In 1326, she returned to England with a large force, whereupon the king's supporters deserted him. Edward was captured, as were the Despensers who were executed in the autumn of the same year.

20 January 1327--*Edward II is murdered and Edward III becomes king*

Following the invasion led by his wife, Isabella, Edward II abdicated in favour of his son. He was later murdered at Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire on the orders of Isabella and her lover, Roger Mortimer. They ruled the country in the name of Edward II and Isabella's son, now Edward III, who was 14.

1330--*Edward III seizes control of the throne from his mother, Isabella*

Edward III was just 14 when he became king. His father, Edward II, was forced to abdicate by his mother, Isabella, and her lover Roger Mortimer. In 1330, Edward seized control, executing Mortimer and forcing Isabella to retire. He would go on to rule for 50 years.

24 May 1337--*Hundred Years' War between England and France begins*

The 'Hundred Years' War' is the name historians have given to a series of related conflicts fought over the course of more than a century between England and France. The causes were complex and varied, but included English territorial and dynastic ambitions in France. The war began with Philip VI's confiscation of Gascony, which led Edward III of England to declare himself the rightful heir to the French throne.

24 June 1340--*English defeat a FrancoCastilian fleet at Sluys off Flanders*

A crusading fleet assembled in the Mediterranean became redundant after cancellation of the crusade in 1336. The Franco-Castilian elements of the fleet moved to threaten England after the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War in 1337. A much smaller English fleet took advantage of a brisk wind to attack the French-led force in port at Sluys (modern Vlissingen) off Flanders. The French fleet was largely destroyed, and the ensuing war was fought on French and not English soil.

26 August 1346--*English defeat the French at the Battle of Crécy*

In July 1346, Edward III invaded Normandy. He marched north, but was unable to outmanoeuvre a large force under Philip VI of France. The two armies met near Crécy. The much larger French force failed to make its numbers count and its piecemeal attacks were repelled with heavy losses by the English and Welsh archers. Crécy was the first great English victory of the Hundred Years' War, the others being Poitiers (1356) and Agincourt (1415).

7 July 1348--*'Black Death' enters Britain*

The disease later known as the 'Black Death' arrived in Europe in 1347. After the first chronicled outbreak on British soil at Melcombe Regis in Dorset, the plague appeared at various points along England's south coast in the summer of 1348, spreading inland. On

average, between 30% and 45% of the general populace died, but in some villages 80-90% of the population succumbed. The plague recurred regularly, if less severely, through the second half of the 14th century and into the 15th century.

19 September 1356--*Edward the 'Black Prince' defeats and captures John II, King of France*

Edward the 'Black Prince' (Edward III's son) invaded France from Gascony in 1356. French and English forces met at Poitiers. Although the French had vastly superior forces, they were humiliatingly defeated by superior English tactics and by the failure of all sections of their army to engage. The French king, John II, was captured. Poitiers was the second of the three great English victories of the Hundred Years' War, the others being Crécy (1346) and Agincourt (1415).

22 June 1377--*Edward III dies and is succeeded by Richard II*

Edward III's eldest son, Edward the 'Black Prince', had died in 1376, so the succession passed to Edward's grandson, Richard II, who was only 10 years old. His uncle, John of Gaunt, was the most powerful noble during his minority, but the English nobility was by no means united and was riven by internal factions.

15 June 1381--*Peasants' Revolt is dispersed by Richard II at Smithfield, London*

In the aftermath of the catastrophic Black Death, agricultural workers were in demand but landlords were reluctant to pay higher wages or allow migration for work. Coupled with heavy taxation and an unpopular government, it caused an uprising. The rebels converged on London. The Tower of London was stormed and prominent individuals were executed. After rebel leader Wat Tyler was killed, Richard II successfully defused the situation by promising concessions. Reprisals followed instead.

1382--*Winchester College is founded*

William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester and chancellor of England, had conceived the idea of establishing a school and university college under the same foundation so scholars could pass easily from one to the other. The aim was to provide an educated clergy to replace the large numbers lost to plague. New College, Oxford, was founded in 1379, and Winchester College three years later.

December 1384--*Church reformer John Wyclif dies*

John Wyclif believed the bible was the only true religious authority and encouraged its translation into English at a time when only Latin was permitted. He was condemned as a heretic by Pope Urban VI and an English church council. After his death, his books were burned and his body was removed from consecrated ground by order of Pope Martin V. Increasing persecution of the Lollards (as his followers were known) nonetheless showed that his ideas continued to spread in a popular form.

1387--*Geoffrey Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales' appear*

Geoffrey Chaucer was the first great poet of the English language. Before him, most writers used either French or Latin in preference to the more plebeian English. His best-known work is the unfinished 'Canterbury Tales' in which a diverse group of people recount stories to pass the time on a pilgrimage to Canterbury.

Historical Context Chart

In the chart below, choose the three events from the Middle Ages timeline which you feel best reflect the tone/culture/society of the medieval period in England. After identifying the event, in the subsequent column, briefly discuss what you feel we can learn about England--and the medieval period--from the selected event.

Event	What can we learn about England?
1.	
2.	
3.	

The Canterbury Tales Prologue Summary Writing Activity

Directions: Read the following passage from *The Canterbury Tales Prologue*. Using line numbers to refer to the text, write a summary of the passage. Be sure to include the host's assessment of the pilgrims as well as his preface about the content of the stories that will be told on the journey. Your summary should be one paragraph (8-10 sentences); use standard American English, correct spelling, as well as proper grammar and punctuation.

1 Now have I told you briefly, in a clause,
 The state, the array, the number, and the cause
 Of the assembling of this company
 In Southwark, at this noble hostelry
5 Known as the Tabard Inn, hard by the Bell.
 But now the time is come wherein to tell
 How all we bore ourselves that very night
 When at the hostelry we did alight.
 And afterward the story I engage
10 To tell you of our common pilgrimage.
 But first, I pray you, of your courtesy,
 You'll not ascribe it to vulgarity
 Though I speak plainly of this matter here,
 Retailing you their words and means of cheer;
15 Nor though I use their very terms, nor lie.
 For this thing do you know as well as I:
 When one repeats a tale told by a man,
 He must report, as nearly as he can,
 Every least word, if he remember it,
20 However rude it be, or how unfit;
 Or else he may be telling what's untrue,
 Embellishing and fictionizing too.
 He may not spare, although it were his brother;
 He must as well say one word as another.
25 Christ spoke right broadly out, in holy writ,
 And, you know well, there's nothing low in it.
 And Plato says, to those able to read:
 "The word should be the cousin to the deed."
 Also, I pray that you'll forgive it me
30 If I have not set folk, in their degree
 Here in this tale, by rank as they should stand.
 My wits are not the best, you'll understand.

Summary Grading Rubric

	Points Possible	Points Earned
Adherence to Assignment Guidelines	20	
Selection of Appropriate Details for Summary	40	
Paragraph Unity, Coherence, & Development	20	
Grammar, Spelling, & Punctuation	20	

Canterbury Tales General Prologue
Comparison/Contrast Character Analysis Activity

Directions: Compare and contrast the Nun to the Monk by using their descriptions in the *Prologue*. Write adjectives or short phrases to describe each of the characters; be sure to provide line numbers to support your descriptions. You should come up with a minimum of five descriptions (with line numbers) for each character. Try and find at least one way in which the characters are similar in your adjectives/phrases.

1 There was also a nun, a prioress,
 Who, in her smiling, modest was and coy;
 Her greatest oath was but "By Saint Eloy!"
 And she was known as Madam Eglantine.

5 Full well she sang the services divine,
 Intoning through her nose, becomingly;
 And fair she spoke her French, and fluently,
 After the school of StratfordattheBow,
 For French of Paris was not hers to know.

10 At table she had been well taught withal,
 And never from her lips let morsels fall,
 Nor dipped her fingers deep in sauce, but ate
 With so much care the food upon her plate
 That never driblet fell upon her breast.

15 In courtesy she had delight and zest.
 Her upper lip was always wiped so clean
 That in her cup was no iota seen
 Of grease, when she had drunk her draught of wine.
 Becomingly she reached for meat to dine.

20 And certainly delighting in good sport,
 She was right pleasant, amiable in short.
 She was at pains to counterfeit the look
 Of courtliness, and stately manners took,
 And would be held worthy of reverence.

25 But, to say something of her moral sense,
 She was so charitable and piteous
 That she would weep if she but saw a mouse
 Caught in a trap, though it were dead or bled.
 She had some little dogs, too, that she fed

30 On roasted flesh, or milk and fine white bread.
 But sore she'd weep if one of them were dead,
 Or if men smote it with a rod to smart:
 For pity ruled her, and her tender heart.
 Right decorous her pleated wimple was;

35 Her nose was fine; her eyes were blue as glass;
Her mouth was small and therewith soft and red;
But certainly she had a fair forehead;
It was almost a full span broad, I own,
For, truth to tell, she was not undergrown.
40 Neat was her cloak, as I was well aware.
Of coral small about her arm she'd bear
A string of beads and gauded all with green;
And therefrom hung a brooch of golden sheen
Whereon there was first written a crowned "A,"
45 And under, Amor Vincit Omnia.
Another little nun with her had she,
Who was her chaplain; and of priests she'd three.
A monk there was, one made for mastery,
An outrider, who loved his venery;
50 A manly man, to be an abbot able.
Full many a blooded horse had he in stable:
And when he rode men might his bridle hear
Ajingling in the whistling wind as clear,
Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell
55 Where this brave monk was of the cell.
The rule of Maurus or Saint Benedict,
By reason it was old and somewhat strict,
This said monk let such old things slowly pace
And followed newworld manners in their place.
60 He cared not for that text a cleanplucked hen
Which holds that hunters are not holy men;
Nor that a monk, when he is cloisterless,
Is like unto a fish that's waterless;
That is to say, a monk out of his cloister.
65 But this same text he held not worth an oyster;
And I said his opinion was right good.
What? Should he study as a madman would
Upon a book in cloister cell? Or yet
Go labour with his hands and swink and sweat,
70 As Austin bids? How shall the world be served?
Let Austin have his toil to him reserved.
Therefore he was a rider day and night;
Greyhounds he had, as swift as bird in flight.
Since riding and the hunting of the hare
75 Were all his love, for no cost would he spare.
I saw his sleeves were purfled at the hand
With fur of grey, the finest in the land;
Also, to fasten hood beneath his chin,
He had of good wrought gold a curious pin:

80 A loveknot in the larger end there was.
 His head was bald and shone like any glass,
 And smooth as one anointed was his face.
 Fat was this lord, he stood in goodly case.
 His bulging eyes he rolled about, and hot
 85 They gleamed and red, like fire beneath a pot;
 His boots were soft; his horse of great estate.
 Now certainly he was a fine prelate:
 He was not pale as some poor wasted ghost.
 A fat swan loved he best of any roast.
 90 His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.

<u>Nun</u>	<u>Monk</u>
1. Line # reference:	1. Line # reference:
2. Line # reference:	2. Line # reference:
3. Line # reference:	3. Line # reference:
4. Line # reference:	4. Line # reference:
5. Line # reference:	5. Line # reference:

Module II: Medieval Literature

**Canterbury Tales Self-Narrative Assignment
Exploring Style, Form, and Voice**

Directions: Write an introduction as if you were a pilgrim on the road to Canterbury. Follow the style Chaucer used including end rhyme and cover all the aspects of your interests and character in 20-30 lines. Be sure that you employ end rhyme; also, make sure your character has a minimum of 5 defining characteristics (These can be physical descriptions, emotional traits, things he/she likes to do, etc.) and be sure to identify why he/she is on the journey to Canterbury.

Example:

There was a boy who liked to play
basketball, some would say.
His name was Rick, and one could tell
he never was one to yell.
He was so quiet, shy in fact,
but none of quickness did he lack...

Grading Rubric

	Points Possible	Points Earned
Adherence to Overall Assignment Guidelines	25	
Consistent Use of End Rhyme	25	
5 Defining Characteristics of Character	25	
Overall Creativity & Presentation of the Character	25	

Module II: Medieval Literature

The Pardoner's Tale Plot Diagram/Storyboard Activity

Directions: As you read *The Pardoner's Tale*, complete the plot diagram/storyboard by sequencing the major events in the plot. You have nine blocks, so you may choose up to nine events to feature in your storyboard, so make sure you select the most pivotal plot details to include in your storyboard.

When you are finished, your completed storyboard will highlight the major events of the story's plot. You should be able to use your completed storyboard to construct a short summary of the story.

1st	2nd	3rd
4th	5th	6th
7th	8th	The End

Module II: Medieval Literature

The Pardoner's Tale Cause and Effect Activity

Directions: After reading *The Pardoner's Tale*, complete the chart of causes and effects throughout the tale. On the left, identify an event (that could be regarded as a cause), and on the right identify something that transpired as a result of what is on the left. See if you can identify at least five cause-effect events/scenarios in *The Pardoner's Tale*.

When you are finished, share your responses with a classmate and compare your answers. At the end, we will debrief as a whole class.

Cause	Effect
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

Culminating Assignment: Comparison/Contrast Short Essay

Directions: Choose a character from the *Prologue* or from *The Pardoner's Tale* and compare and contrast your selected character with a modern public figure. Your response should be 2-3 paragraphs and should possess a thesis statement; paragraphs should begin with topic sentences and provide ample support for your comparison.

In your response, you are to compare a character from *The Canterbury Tales* with a figure from contemporary society. This may be a political figure, a celebrity, a cultural icon of some sort, or a local hero. The key to the assignment is that you examine thoroughly ways in which your selected modern figure is comparable and different from your chosen character from *Canterbury Tales*. Be sure that you address several ways in which your characters are both alike and different; use ample support to substantiate your claims.

As always, make sure you proofread your work. Use transitions in your writing; follow conventions of standard American English. Use proper grammar, correct spelling, punctuation, and mechanics.

Example to Get Things Started...

Wife of Bath	Elizabeth Taylor
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Married 5 times● Brazen, sassy● Gapped teeth● _____● _____● _____	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Married many times (more than 5)● Brazen, sassy● Considered to be a supreme beauty in her time● _____● _____● _____

Culminating Assignment Rubric

	Points Possible	Points Earned
Adherence to Assignment Guidelines	10	
Thesis Statement	15	
Topic Sentences	10	
Use of Sufficient Evidence and Examples	30	
Paragraph Unity & Coherence	10	
Grammar, Spelling, & Punctuation	15	
Effectiveness of Comparison	10	

Study Guide/Questions for "A Knight's Tale"
Connecting the film to "The Canterbury Tales"

Characters – Fill in the appropriate boxes

The Knight

AKA (Also Known As)

Sir Ulrich von Lichtenstein from Geldeland

His Squires

and

His Lady

His Enemy

His Liege Lord

AKA

The "Black Prince of Wales"

His father

I. Plot

1. How does William become a "knight?"
2. According to the rules of feudalism, why would William *never* be allowed to be a knight?
3. What does William mean when he says "A man can change his stars" after his first joust posing as Sir Ector?
4. As William is convincing Wat and Roland to go along with his scheme, he mentions the unfairness of the system that only allows nobility to be knights. What is his argument?
5. Other than the fact that he is naked, what is a clear difference between Geoffrey Chaucer and William, Wat, and Roland?
6. Why is it not surprising that the three had not heard of Chaucer or his book "The Book of the Duchess?"

7. When Chaucer says “Oh well, it was allegorical” and Wat replies, “Well, we won’t hold that against you. That’s for each man to decide for himself!” what is the basis of the misunderstanding?
8. When William asks her to speak, Jocelyn replies “But sir, my sex are marred by their silence” when William asks her to speak. Also, when Kate is asking about Williams’ armor, she says “Do they say I can’t do it because I’m a woman?” What does this show you about the role of women in the Middle Ages?
9. Two characters from the Prologue are responsible for Chaucer’s troubles early in the film. Which two are they?
 _____ and _____ Even
 though this is not a part of *The Canterbury Tales*, why is it believable?
10. When Chaucer tells them later “I will eviscerate you in fiction – every last pimple, every last character flaw. I was naked for a day. You will be naked for eternity” what does he mean? Even though this movie is not based on fact, why would the film’s writer have had the character say that?
11. Chaucer serves as William’s *herald*, introducing him to the crowd before a joust. Why is this appropriate to what you know about Chaucer?
12. When William is knocked unconscious briefly, his mind returns to his childhood and a conversation with his father. What do you learn about him?

14. In his third joust, William defeats his opponent after he is told, "His people starve while he sits at banquet." Why does this inspire William to fight harder?
15. William jousts Sir Thomas Colville in Rouen, but instead of defeating him after Colville is injured, William honors his request to keep his honor in tact.
A. What does this show about William?

b. How does this pay off for William later in the story when the true identity of Colville is revealed?
16. Who did Sir Thomas Colville turn out to be? _____ Why did he disguise himself?
17. In what country do the jousting tournaments take place? What nationality are William and his knights?
18. William and his knights speak English, as do Chaucer and Jocelyn. Given the location of their tournaments and the level of society each represents what language *should* each character speak?
William: _____ Wat & Roland: _____
Jocelyn: _____ Count Adhemar: _____
Chaucer: _____
19. Why doesn't William write his own letter to Jocelyn? Explain your answer.
20. William has a flashback on the barge traveling back to England of when he was first placed in service to Sir Ector. For how long was his commitment and why would his father send him away?

23. After William is found out to be a phony, Jocelyn says she is willing to run away with him, even if it means living in a hovel with pigs because the poor can marry for love. Why is this a true statement of life in the Middle Ages?
24. "He that strives to touch a star oft stumbles on a simple straw. You have been weighed; you have been measured, and you have been found wanting. In what world would you have ever beaten me?" Who says these words to William; when are they said, and what do they mean?
25. Prince Edward knights William after William has been in the stockade. Why does he do this and does it fit with what you know about the rules of chivalry and knighthood?
26. William continues to fight in the final joust even after he is seriously injured. Why does he do this?
27. Did watching this movie help you understand the Middle Ages and *The Canterbury Tales*? If so, how? If not, why not?
- b. Did you enjoy "A Knight's Tale?" Would you recommend it to a friend or watch it again? What makes it a good story (use literary elements like plot, character, setting, theme in your answer)